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**MANAGEMENT ISSUES: IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMISSION
RESOLUTION 58/1 ON RESTRUCTURING THE CONFERENCE
STRUCTURE OF THE COMMISSION**

(Item 6 (a) of the provisional agenda)

Report by the Executive Secretary

SUMMARY

This document consists of two parts. The first part presents a brief general report on the implementation of Commission resolution 58/1 prepared in compliance with paragraph 6 of the resolution. In consultation with the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission (ACPR), it was decided that the first sessions of the new thematic committees would be convened in the second half of 2003 after the fifty-ninth session of the Commission. In the meantime, the secretariat has been reorganized in line with the revised conference and programme structures. It was reported that the revision of the intergovernmental structure subsidiary to the Commission had no additional staffing and financial implications. The Commission is invited to take note of this part of the report.

The second part of this document contains a report prepared in compliance with paragraph 4 of the resolution, in which the Executive Secretary is requested to explore innovative ways to bring about greater ministerial participation and more active exchanges among representatives at Commission sessions. The recommendations of the secretariat, which have been prepared in consultation with ACPR, are highlighted in bold. The Commission is requested to endorse the secretariat's recommendations.

I. IMPLEMENTATION OF RESOLUTION 58/1

1. In paragraph 6 of resolution 58/1 of 22 May 2002 on restructuring the conference structure of the Commission, the Executive Secretary was requested to report to the Commission at subsequent sessions on the implementation of the resolution. This part of the present document has been prepared in response to that request.

2. The annex to this document shows the subsidiary structure of the Commission, as set up by resolution 58/1, and the subsidiary structure in effect prior to the adoption of that resolution. There are 13 intergovernmental subsidiary bodies under the new conference structure, namely, (a) three thematic committees, (b) eight sectoral subcommittees and (c) two special bodies, one on least developed and landlocked developing countries and the other on Pacific island developing countries. The new subsidiary structure provides the Commission with a conference structure focused on addressing both sectoral and thematic issues related to the three themes adopted by the Commission at its fifty-eighth session, namely, (a) poverty reduction, (b) managing globalization and (c) addressing emerging social issues.

Meeting arrangements for the new thematic committees

3. Since the new conference structure only came into effect in 2003, meetings of the following subsidiary bodies of the Commission under the previous conference structure were held in 2002, as scheduled:

- Committee on Transport, Communications, Tourism and Infrastructure Development (fourth session), Bangkok, 13-15 November 2002
- Committee on Environment and Natural Resources Development (fourth session), Bangkok, 19-21 November 2002
- Committee on Statistics (thirteenth session), Bangkok, 27-29 November 2002
- Steering Group of the Committee on Regional Economic Cooperation (fourteenth meeting), Bangkok, 2-4 December 2002

The reports of these meetings are submitted to the Commission at its present session.

4. With regard to arrangements for the first sessions of the three thematic committees under the new conference structure, at its two hundred and sixty-sixth session, the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission (ACPR) considered various options proposed by the secretariat. Based upon consideration of the anticipated advantages and disadvantages of the proposed options, ACPR endorsed the secretariat's suggestion that the first sessions of the three thematic committees be convened in the second half of the year 2003 after the present session of the Commission and that their reports be presented to the Commission at its sixtieth session, in 2004.

5. Pursuant to this plan, the first sessions of the three thematic committees are scheduled to be held as follows:

- Committee on Emerging Social Issues, Bangkok, 26-28 August 2003
- Committee on Poverty Reduction, Bangkok, 29 September-1 October 2003
- Committee on Managing Globalization, Bangkok, 5-7 November 2003

The secretariat has already started the preparations for these meetings, including their agendas and formats, to secure a high level of participation from members and associate members and active discussions among representatives at the meetings.

Reorganization of the secretariat

6. As invited by the Commission in paragraph 2 of resolution 58/1, the Executive Secretary initiated and completed the reorganization of the secretariat. The new secretariat structure is in line with the revised programme structure, as approved by the Commission under the framework of the revised medium-term plan for 2002-2005. It is designed to ensure more effective delivery of the Commission's programme of work and to service more effectively the subsidiary structure of the Commission. One new division was created (the Information, Communication and Space Technology Division) and two existing divisions were merged into one division. Four substantive divisions were renamed. The following table shows the three theme areas and their corresponding divisions under the new structure.

Theme area	Old structure	New structure
Poverty reduction	Development Research and Policy Analysis	Poverty and Development (merged division)
	Population and Rural and Urban Development	
	Statistics	Statistics
Managing globalization	International Trade and Industry	Trade and Investment
	Transport, Communications, Tourism and Infrastructure Development	Transport and Tourism
	Environment and Natural Resources Development	Environment and Sustainable Development
		Information, Communication and Space Technology
Emerging social issues	Social Development	Emerging Social Issues

In addition to these structural changes, the thrust of the work of all divisions has been realigned with the three theme areas approved by the Commission, namely, poverty reduction, managing globalization and addressing emerging social issues, as well as the priorities of members and associate members as shown in the outcomes of recent major global conferences.

Staffing and financial implications of the revision of the conference and secretariat structures

7. The Executive Secretary reported to ACPR at its two hundred and seventieth session on his assessment of the organizational, staffing and financial implications of the revision of the intergovernmental structure subsidiary to the Commission, as requested by the Commission in paragraph 3 of the resolution. While a maximum six more days of subsidiary body meetings were envisaged, the secretariat was in a position to absorb the costs of those additional days in the programme budget. With regard to the restructured secretariat, there were no additional financial implications in terms of staffing as all changes had been effected through internal redeployment within the existing staff resources. It was concluded that there were no additional staffing and financial implications for the Commission resulting from the adoption of the new subsidiary structure of the Commission.

II. IMPROVEMENT OF COMMISSION SESSIONS

8. By resolution 58/1, the Commission also requested the Executive Secretary to explore in close consultation with the members and associate members, including through ACPR, innovative ways, including possible changes to the format of the Commission session, to bring about greater ministerial participation and more active exchanges among representatives at Commission sessions and to submit his recommendations to the Commission at its fifty-ninth session. This part of the present document responds to this request.

9. As a result of intensive deliberations within the secretariat, the Executive Secretary has come up with five sets of recommendations. At its two hundred and seventieth session, he consulted ACPR on these recommendations. The recommendations as presented in this document fully incorporate the views expressed by ACPR members. The recommendations of the secretariat are highlighted in bold.

10. At the Ministerial Round Table during the fifty-eighth session of the Commission, the Executive Secretary placed particular emphasis on devising ways to make Commission sessions more interesting and attractive to the members and associate members. The following were among the suggestions made: (a) holding Commission sessions outside Bangkok every two years; however, this should not be institutionalized and should be left to the initiative of individual host countries; (b) changing the format of Commission sessions, including the possibility of inviting eminent persons from Asia and the Pacific to make presentations on particular issues, as well as holding side events and involving non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the media; and (c) maintaining the current format of the plenary sessions, which allowed ESCAP members and associate members,

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particularly the smaller countries, to make prepared statements on specific issues under discussion or issues of special national or regional concern. The Round Table agreed that there was scope for improvement and requested the secretariat to present concrete proposals to the Commission at its next session through ACPR.

Objective

11. The purpose of this exercise was to examine various possible ways to improve Commission sessions in order to: (a) bring about greater ministerial participation; (b) encourage more active exchanges among representatives; (c) make the sessions a venue for taking major decisions affecting the region; (d) increase public interest and awareness with regard to the work of the Commission; and (e) promote greater efficiency in the conduct of the sessions.

Possible changes and recommendations

(a) Agenda, annual theme, venue and schedule

12. The Commission has always adopted a theme for its annual sessions. These themes generally reflect current economic and social issues of interest to countries in the region. Following the decision at the fifty-eighth session, the work of the Commission now focuses on three main themes: poverty reduction, managing globalization and addressing emerging social issues. In line with the annual theme, the agenda of the Commission session could give greater emphasis to significant current issues of direct relevance to countries in the region to attract high-level participation and provoke stimulating and fruitful debate. The annual Commission sessions could be a forum for Governments to come together to exchange views, compare, assess and consolidate regional and country experiences and decide on new or innovative regional approaches to addressing significant current and emerging economic and social issues. It is suggested that Governments also consider innovations in terms of the presentation of their country statements, placing greater emphasis on issues and possible approaches for dealing with them and describing the economic and social developments in their respective countries during the preceding year.

13. Since the completion of the United Nations Conference Centre, Commission sessions have mainly been held at Bangkok. However, to increase the visibility of the Commission and create greater awareness of the work of ESCAP in countries of the region, as well as enhance the sense of ownership by various stakeholders in the region, the idea of having Commission sessions outside Bangkok periodically could be further considered. To some extent, this could have a positive impact on the economy of the host country and, in the long term, enhance overall familiarity with countries of the region. Such sessions held outside Bangkok have additional financial implications that would need to be borne by the host Government. They should be held on the initiative of the host country and could preferably be rotated among the five subregions. In consultation with the host Government, sessions held outside Bangkok could focus on important global or regional issues, for example, follow-up to major global conferences.

14. It would be helpful if the dates of Commission sessions could be fixed in advance, preferably during the second half of April each year. In this manner, ministers could plan their schedule taking into consideration the dates of the next Commission session. At the same time, prominent persons to be invited to a Commission session could plan other engagements ahead of time, thus providing a better chance to make themselves available to attend the session.

Recommendation 1: The secretariat suggests that: (a) the themes of Commission sessions put even greater focus on significant current and emerging economic and social issues of great relevance to countries in the region; (b) the agenda of Commission sessions be more issue-oriented, aimed at stimulating fruitful debate and meaningful recommendations; (c) sessions be held periodically at a venue outside Bangkok on the initiative of individual host countries, preferably rotating among the five subregions; and (d) the dates of Commission sessions be fixed in the second half of April each year.

(b) Ministerial Segment

15. It has been observed that, in general, there is greater ministerial participation in meetings where the ministers are more acquainted with each other, where they have other roles or tasks in addition to just making a statement or where there are decisions to be made that are of great interest to their Governments.

16. An informal function to welcome all the heads of delegations, which could be hosted by the Executive Secretary prior to the start of the Ministerial Segment or at another appropriate time, could provide an occasion for the ministers to get to know and interact with each other. The nature of such informal functions could vary from year to year, but the purpose would be to provide an occasion for the ministers to get to know each other better, develop friendships and allow informal consultations on matters of mutual interest.

17. The current arrangement for Commission sessions, comprising a Ministerial Segment preceded by a Senior Officials Segment, should be maintained, with appropriate adjustments, if necessary. The plenary meetings of the Ministerial Segment should be maintained since they provide an opportunity for all ESCAP members and associate members to make formal statements on specific issues under discussion or on issues of national or regional concern, including the theme topic for the particular session. The plenary meetings could be further enhanced if a prominent person (e.g., a head of State or Government, noted professor, author or statesman, or head of an international or regional organization) could be invited to make a keynote presentation on a topic related to the theme of the Commission session. Such keynote presentations by a prominent person could be a member's contribution to the Commission session. High-level participation could be greatly encouraged if such prominent persons were carefully selected and presentations of the highest quality were consistently delivered.

18. The practice of holding a Ministerial Round Table should continue. Ample time should be provided to allow ministers to speak on a given subject and various formats could be explored to make this possible. For example, if deemed appropriate during some Commission sessions, the Round Table could initially meet in separate smaller round tables corresponding to the five subregions or according to subtopics related to the main topic, before meeting in the main Round Table. Alternatively, the time allocated to the Round Table could be increased. In this way, ministers would have more time to discuss and exchange views on the subject at hand.

19. Commission sessions could also serve as a venue for informal meetings of ministers from countries belonging to subregional organizations, in much the same way as United Nations General Assembly sessions are used, for example, by ASEAN foreign ministers and other subregional groupings, as an opportunity to meet informally and discuss issues of particular interest to the subregions. This possibility will give more ministers an incentive to attend Commission sessions. At present, it seems that many ministers find Commission sessions useful for bilateral meetings. Since the ESCAP region comprises several subregional groups, notably, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, the Economic Cooperation Organization and the Pacific Islands Forum, ministers could also take advantage of their presence at Commission sessions to participate in informal meetings among ministers from countries belonging to their subregional organizations at the periphery of the sessions. For this purpose, secretaries-general of subregional organizations could be invited to participate and the secretariat could provide appropriate facilities.

20. Since Commission resolutions have generally been technical in nature, the Commission could consider, from time to time, adopting a major declaration on current and significant issues of great interest to countries of the region. With appropriate publicity, such major declarations could help to give Commission sessions greater prominence. The sessions could also be a venue for formulating and adopting strategies and action plans of importance to the region. At present, such major declarations are generally produced through ad hoc ministerial meetings in specific sectors, but in fact Commission sessions would be better able to address cross-sectoral issues affecting the region.

Recommendation 2: The secretariat suggests that the Ministerial Segment could include some or all of the following activities: (a) an informal function to welcome the ministers attending and provide an occasion for interaction and consultation; (b) keynote presentations, from time to time, on topics of interest by a prominent person during the plenary session; (c) an informal round table among ministers; and (d) informal meetings or round tables among ministers from countries belonging to subregional organizations, with the possible participation of the respective secretaries-general, as appropriate, or informal round tables on various related subtopics.

Recommendation 3: The secretariat suggests that, occasionally, the Commission could consider adopting a major declaration on significant issues of great interest to the region and giving it wide publicity.

(c) Senior Officials Segment

21. Under the new conference structure, three thematic committees will meet biennially for a maximum duration of three days. To enhance further the participation of senior officials from the respective capitals and reduce the number of meetings, the possibility of the three thematic committees meeting in parallel just prior to the Senior Officials Segment could be considered. In other words, the meetings of the thematic committee could be immediately followed by the Senior Officials Segment of the Commission session to consider and adopt the reports of the thematic committees and consider management issues, such as programme planning and evaluation and ACPR reports. This arrangement may pose some difficulty to small delegations in effectively participating in the three thematic committee sessions that would be held simultaneously. However, the meeting arrangements could be made in such a way that they would not be more burdensome for delegations than the current practice of holding simultaneous meetings of the three committees of the whole during the Senior Officials Segment of the Commission session. This arrangement may also have logistical implications in terms of interpretation and other requirements. With careful planning and scheduling, however, it might be possible to reduce the total number of meeting days from 12 (3 days for each of the thematic committees meeting separately and 3 days for the Senior Officials Segment) to only 4 or 5 days.

22. During years when there are no meetings of the thematic committees, and therefore no committee reports to be considered by the Commission, the possibility of reducing the number of meeting days during the Senior Officials Segment could also be considered.

Recommendation 4: The secretariat suggests that meetings of the three thematic committees be convened close to the Senior Officials Segment of the Commission session, taking into consideration the possible logistical implications.

(d) Side events, NGOs, the business sector and the media

23. In order to generate greater interest in the work of the Commission and foster wider public awareness, side events, NGO forums, business forums and/or media forums could be held during Commission sessions, focusing on the theme of the session. Some ministers could be invited to participate in these side events and forums to deliver statements or participate as members of discussion panels. Such side events and forums could be scheduled during the lunch break, at the end of the day's meetings or in parallel with the plenary meetings, taking into consideration the schedule for the delivery of the statements of the invited ministers. In certain years, some of the side events and/or NGO forums could focus on specific subregions and the secretaries-general of the relevant

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subregional organizations could be invited. Meetings or seminars involving representatives of the business sector, for example, regional chambers of commerce and industry, and various media events could also be organized with the participation of invited ministers. Such side events and forums would not only promote greater awareness of the work of the Commission but would also provide an opportunity for ministers to share their ideas and inform various stakeholders of important policies, programmes and initiatives of their respective Governments. It should be stressed that all these arrangements are intended to be side events and in no way to be integrated into the Commission sessions per se.

Recommendation 5: The secretariat suggests that appropriate side events involving NGOs, the business sector, the media and other relevant civil society organizations be organized during Commission sessions, with the participation of some ministers, as appropriate.

Annex
CONFERENCE STRUCTURE

Resolution 53/1		Resolution 58/1		
Committees/subsidiary body	Periodicity and maximum duration	Committees	Subcommittees	Periodicity and maximum duration
Regional Economic Cooperation	Biennial (3 meeting days)	Poverty Reduction		Biennial (3 meeting days)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Steering Group of the Committee on Regional Economic Cooperation 	Annual (3 meeting days)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poverty Reduction Practices Statistics 	Biennial (3 meeting days) Either biennial or annual (3 meeting days) ^a
Socio-economic Measures to Alleviate Poverty in Rural and Urban Areas	Annual (3 meeting days)	Managing Globalization		Biennial (3 meeting days)
Environment and Natural Resources Development	Annual (3 meeting days)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> International Trade and Investment 	Biennial (3 meeting days)
Transport, Communications, Tourism and Infrastructure Development	Annual (3 meeting days)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transport Infrastructure and Facilitation and Tourism 	Biennial (3 meeting days)
Statistics	Biennial (3 meeting days)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environment and Sustainable Development Information, Communications and Space Technology 	Biennial (3 meeting days) Biennial (3 meeting days)
Special bodies		Emerging Social Issues		Biennial (3 meeting days)
Least Developed and Landlocked Developing Countries	Maximum of 2 meeting days biennially, one each in alternate years, back to back with the annual sessions of the Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Socially Vulnerable Groups Health and Development 		Biennial (3 meeting days) Biennial (3 meeting days)
Pacific Island Developing Countries	Maximum of 2 meeting days biennially, one each in alternate years, back to back with the annual sessions of the Commission	Special bodies		
		Least Developed and Landlocked Developing Countries		Maximum of 2 meeting days biennially, one each in alternate years, back to back with the annual sessions of the Commission
		Pacific Island Developing Countries		Maximum of 2 meeting days biennially, one each in alternate years, back to back with the annual sessions of the Commission

^a The Committee on Poverty Reduction, at its first session, will determine whether the Subcommittee on Statistics should meet annually or biennially.