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**REVIEW OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS UNDER THE PLAN OF ACTION FOR
SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE
ASIAN AND PACIFIC REGION (1999-2005)**

(Item 4 of the provisional agenda)

Note by the secretariat

SUMMARY

The Plan of Action for Sustainable Tourism Development in the Asian and Pacific Region (1999-2005) provided a framework for action at the national and regional levels to strengthen national capabilities and encourage regional cooperation in order to increase the contribution of tourism to national development. Actions were recommended in six theme areas for addressing the wide range of issues of sustainable tourism development.

This document presents recent action at the national level based on reports from 18 Governments. Supporting action taken by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the South Pacific Tourism Organization and the World Tourism Organization is presented. Supporting action by ESCAP is reviewed.

The present document discusses the accomplishments and lessons learned. National capabilities were strengthened and regional cooperation was encouraged in ways that increased the contribution of tourism to development in many parts of Asia and the Pacific. The ongoing nature of these goals and the potential for tourism to continue making contributions to development could be considered in the light of the changing international and regional context, as well as new issues about sustainable tourism development.

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Introduction

1. The Plan of Action for Sustainable Tourism Development in the Asian and Pacific Region (1999-2005) aimed to assist long-term prosperity in the region by increasing the contribution of tourism to development. Action by Governments and stakeholders at the national level, with supporting action at the regional level, was designed to reach the goals of strengthening national capabilities and encouraging regional cooperation in the framework of six theme areas.
2. The present document reports on the major accomplishments under the Plan of Action. Information about recent national action was provided by 18 Governments which sent reports at the request of the secretariat. Regional action taken by specialized agencies, intergovernmental organizations and ESCAP is outlined and the accomplishments and lessons learned are discussed.

I. ACTION TAKEN BY COUNTRIES AND AREAS

A. Human resources development in the tourism sector

3. Within the framework of establishing Shahdag National Park, Azerbaijan planned to organize training for guides on ecotourism routes and establish a training centre.
4. In Bangladesh, the National Hotel and Tourism Training Institute has been developing human resources in the tourism industry. A two-year diploma course in hotel management began in 2002, and national certificate courses on hotel and tourism-related subjects have been conducted regularly.
5. The Ministry of Tourism of Cambodia has recognized people as the most important resource in the tourism industry. Its strategy was based on the existing human resources development plan of the private and public sectors. The quality of academic professionals needed improvement to strengthen the administration of professional tourism colleges.
6. In Hong Kong, China, courses and training programmes have received funding from the government and the private sector. The government included tourism as a targeted sector when setting up a Continuing Education Fund in 2001 to promote lifelong learning and encourage skill improvement. The government regularly analyses human resource requirements and supply projections for the tourism industry. The Hong Kong Tourism Board has received government support to give practical training for people interested in career in tourism.
7. The Government of Indonesia has formulated national competency standards and established a tourism certification institute. Within Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Indonesia has been working on a long-term project to establish common standards known as APEC Tourism Occupational Skill Standards. Indonesia has acted as the lead country to establish Association of Southeast Asian Nations Common Competency Standards for Tourism Professionals.
8. In Kyrgyzstan, preparing qualified human resources and experts has helped to integrate the country into the international tourism industry. High schools were established to specialize in

professional tourism training, and by 2004, 15 high schools provided such training. A number of Kyrgyz students went abroad for training, including to China and Turkey.

9. One priority issue in the Lao People's Democratic Republic has been developing and implementing training courses to meet the demand for a skilled tourism industry workforce. Government officials, host communities and tour operators have received skills and awareness training to support ecotourism.

10. Both public and private institutions in Macao, China, provide higher educational courses to train human resources in the tourism sector. There are 10 higher educational institutions dedicated to the full range of tourism training. The Institute for Tourism Studies has become the first WTO-TedQual (a quality audit developed by the World Tourism Organization) certified institution. The mission of the Institute has been to serve as a regional destination for tourism and hospitality studies.

11. The Nepal Tourism Board has been providing small-scale skill development training covering most areas of the tourism industry for local stakeholders to strengthen their capacity. The Government established the Nepal Academy of Tourism and Hotel Management and there are four private sector training institutes in Kathmandu and two in Pokhara.

12. When the Plan of Action began, Niue already had a National Training Development Council and tourism educational and awareness programmes and initiatives. One initiative in 2001 was the input on human resources in tourism, in the form of a report to the Niue Human Resource Development Planning Framework. Some individual recommendations of the report were accepted when national human resources development policies were being formulated.

13. The priority in Pakistan has been to prepare more people to be trainers in order to produce trained staff to meet market demands. There are four tourism training institutes in Pakistan, besides the hotels offering in-house training.

14. In Palau, a revised Sustainable Tourism Policies and Action Plan was presented in September 2001. The National Tourism Unit was created and its six strategic objectives included capacity-building for human resources development. The Ministry of Commerce and Trade was entrusted with the mission of empowering local human resources and improving local skill capacity to ensure continued growth by strengthening local cottage industries and tourism.

15. Sri Lanka has a hotel school that accommodates 1,000 students for tourism training at all levels. Foreign language courses have been taught, and there are plans to teach Mandarin and Japanese, since the priority market has been tourists from East Asia. The Tourism Development Fund has been provided by the Government to meet the operational costs of the hotel school.

16. Singapore has a National Skills Recognition System to establish work performance standards, identify competency and certify skills in several tourism sectors. In 2003, a competency framework

was developed to build an integrated continuing education system to facilitate adult learning, improve access to improved skills and provide clear career pathways. In January 2005, Singapore announced “Tourism 2015” as the future vision.

17. Thailand has focused on recovery from the tsunami and its impact on human resources in affected southern provinces along the Andaman coast. The World Tourism Organization assisted the Government in identifying how to help people operating tourism small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Basic skill training in hospitality services had been organized for personnel in the affected areas shortly after the tsunami.

18. Timor-Leste was not an original participant in the Plan of Action because it became an independent State and member of the United Nations in 2002. The Timor-Leste Government Tourism Office reported that it was a new agency at the initial stages of addressing issues related to sustainable tourism development. Some tourism staff received training overseas, including two officials from the Tourism Office who received on-the-job training for five months at the Macao, China, Government Tourist Office.

19. In 2003, the Tonga Visitors Bureau surveyed and analysed the training needs of the tourism industry. This was followed by the training of employees working in small and medium-sized tourism businesses. The Community Development and Training Centre under the Ministry of Education has provided a one-year certificate course intended for school leavers and staff already working in the tourism industry. Diploma courses in hospitality offered at one technical college have been intended mainly for girls. The Eighth Strategic Development Plan (2006-2009) would make tourism a priority sector and emphasize human resources development.

B. Economic impact of tourism

20. Tourism in Azerbaijan has made considerable progress owing mainly to links with the oil boom and its location at the junction of the Euro-Asian transport corridor. As more foreign business people entered the country, the quality and quantity of tourism services have also increased. The number of foreign visitors has also been increasing steadily, to reach about 1.35 million in 2004. Outbound tourism has also been growing. The rising demand for tourism services has led to an increase in the number of companies involved in the tourism sector.

21. Bangladesh has sought greater contributions from the service sector in order to diversify the economy. Tourism has helped the sector contribute to gross domestic product (GDP). It has been estimated that tourism contributed about 0.3 per cent to GDP while the hotel and restaurant subsectors accounted for only 0.67 per cent of service sector output in 2002-2003. Direct employment in tourism was estimated to be just over 100,000 people and indirect employment could be over 200,000 people. Tourism has been considered important for poverty alleviation and Bangladesh strives for the optimal use of tourism resources to benefit local communities.

22. Tourist spending in Cambodia amounted to approximately US\$ 526 million in 2003, which contributed 12 per cent to GDP and generated employment for 100,000 people. In 2004, the estimated income from tourism was US\$ 777 million, which generated employment for about 180,000 people. Leakage from tourism income was mainly through the imported goods needed for the tourism industry. In order to reduce the leakage, the Government has been encouraging people to plant crops and flowers and raise animals of high quality for the tourism industry. This approach has also been part of the plan for poverty alleviation.

23. Hong Kong, China, considers tourism a major economic pillar and source of foreign exchange earnings. Despite the negative impact of SARS in 2003, tourist arrivals grew by about 40 per cent in 2003-2004. Total tourism expenditure by 21.8 million visitors in 2004 amounted to US\$ 11.8 billion.

24. Indonesia recorded a total of 5.3 million international arrivals in 2004, an increase of 16 per cent over 2003. Revenues totalled US\$ 4.7 billion and tourism ranked second as a source of foreign exchange earnings. According to the tourism satellite account for 2003, tourism contributed 5.55 per cent to total output, 5.49 per cent to total salaries and 8.28 per cent of the workforce. Most international visitors came from other Asian countries, including Australia. An increase in the number of tourists from China, India and countries of the Middle East was expected to help reach the target of 6 million arrivals in 2005. However, arrivals declined during the first half of the year and the tourism industry faced a possible negative impact from the bombings in Bali on 1 October 2005.

25. Japan has recognized the major economic effects of tourism as well as its potential for the twenty-first century. Tourist consumption was estimated to have contributed 5.6 per cent of total domestic production value added and accounted for 5.7 per cent of GDP in 2003. Tourism accounted for about 4.42 million jobs, about 6.8 per cent of the total employed population. The number of international tourists in 2004 was 6.14 million, an increase of 17.8 per cent over the previous year. Most tourists were from other East Asian countries and areas and the United States of America. More than 16.8 million Japanese people travelled abroad in 2004.

26. Tourism has been the top foreign exchange earner for the Lao People's Democratic Republic, and the Government has made tourism one of eight priority sectors for national socio-economic development and poverty alleviation. The number of tourist arrivals had been increasing continuously up to 1999, but began to fluctuate and decrease slightly from 2000 to 2003, largely owing to international events and regional factors. Tourism revenue also decreased, from US\$ 113.4 million in 2002 to US\$ 87.3 million in 2003. Tourism recovered in 2004, showing a 41 per cent increase in arrivals and US\$ 118.9 million in foreign exchange earnings. Estimates of the overall leakage for imported goods and services provided to international tourists were about 56 per cent in 2003, which means that for each US\$ 100 spent by a tourist, about US\$ 44 stayed in the economy.

27. Macao, China, has reported a strong economic impact from tourism during the last few years. Increased tourist arrivals in 2005 helped the economy and improved consumer and business

confidence. Total visitor receipts amounted to US\$ 7.34 billion, growing by 43.7 per cent compared with 2003. Visitor spending per capita in 2004 grew by 7.58 per cent compared with 2003. In addition, total visitor receipts amounted to US\$1.93 billion in the second quarter of 2005.

28. The economic importance of tourism in Nepal has been due to economic linkages, foreign exchange earnings, employment and improved socio-economic conditions in remote rural areas. In 2004, foreign exchange earned from tourism amounted to US\$ 180 million, which contributed 3-4 per cent of GDP. A broad qualitative picture suggests that the merits of tourism outweigh any negative impact.

29. In Niue, tourism has been one of three main industries to generate economic benefits for national development and help reduce dependence on development assistance. In 2003, the Niue Tourism Office worked with other departments to formally introduce expenditure questions into immigration documentation forms. In 2003, public consultation contributed to formulating the National Integrated Strategic Plan for 2003-2008 and the economic impact of the tourism industry featured very prominently. Research has started on establishing the tourism satellite accounting system.

30. Pakistan has been making annual updates of data on the economic impact of tourism in order to help establish the appropriate role for tourism in the economy. The tourism industry has been relatively small compared with other industries, but its role in the economy is noteworthy. Tourism declined for three years as Pakistan faced negative travel advisories in some source countries after 11 September 2001. By 2004, the number of arrivals had recovered and there were 648,000 visitors, an increase of 29.4 per cent over 2003. Foreign exchange earnings were valued at US\$ 185.6 million in 2004, an annual increase of 36.9 per cent. Tourism receipts accounted for about 0.2 per cent of gross national product (GNP) in 2003-2004. About 500,000 people were directly employed in tourism and about 1.5 million indirectly employed.

31. Singapore welcomed 8.3 million international visitors, with tourism receipts of about S\$ 9.6 billion, in 2004. Tourism contributed 3 per cent to the GDP of Singapore and accounted for 150,000 jobs.

32. Tourism in Sri Lanka generated an annual average value of US\$ 317 million from 2000 to 2003, while creating more than 175,000 direct and indirect jobs. In 2003, a tourism development fund was set up to support tourism education and international marketing with revenue from a 1 per cent tax on the turnover of businesses registered with the Sri Lanka Tourist Board. One third of airport tax collections have also been channelled to the development fund. Revenue earned from entrance fees at parks and heritage sites has helped to meet maintenance and preservation costs.

33. The economic importance of the industry for Thailand was underscored by the impact of several shocks to tourism and macroeconomic growth since 2003. Strong growth returned due to

increased public investment and the recovery of tourism growth in 2004 after the SARS crisis of early 2003. Tourism receipts for 2004 increased by about US\$ 2 billion to a total of almost US\$ 9.8 billion. The most recent shock was the tsunami at the end of 2004, which killed many international tourists and Thai people and destroyed tourist facilities along beaches in Phuket, Pang Nga and Krabi provinces. It was expected that GDP would lose about US\$ 1.2 billion of the tourism contribution for 2005. The loss represented about 16.7 per cent of GDP and almost 95,000 jobs in the affected provinces.

34. Timor-Leste began tourism development in 2003, when a tourism forum was held in Dili. The purpose was to gain the attention of policymakers and possible stakeholders as to the role that tourism could play in national development. By October 2005, however, Timor-Leste still needed a tourism policy, a legal framework, statistics and assessment of human resources needs. Research and recommendations were still needed in order to ascertain the net contribution of tourism. Tourist arrivals had to be measured accurately and decisions were needed about adopting the tourism satellite account approach.

35. The Government of Tonga has emphasized the foreign exchange earnings generated by tourism and maintained that benefits from tourism should be distributed equitably. Over the four-year period 2000-2004 there was strong, steady growth in foreign exchange earnings, while the number of visitors grew by 17 per cent in 2001-2002 and by 5 per cent in 2003, declining slightly (-0.47 per cent) in 2004. By 2003 and 2004, tourism accounted for 6 per cent of GNP and employment increased steadily from 1,128 people in 2001 to 1,543 in 2004.

C. Environmental management of tourism

36. Azerbaijan has 15 natural and historical reserves, 20 sanctuaries and hunting areas, as well as 7 rest zones along the Caspian Sea that serve as the basis for establishing national parks. Tourism has made it possible to rationalize that preserving and developing such natural resources and parks could create profitable tourism centres. In 2003, the first five national parks were established, including one for ecotourism and one ethnographic park for preserving the national heritage.

37. Bangladesh has given high priority to conserving the ecosystem in the coastal zone and islands while simultaneously developing ecotourism. The world's largest mangrove forest located in Bangladesh has been designated only for ecotourism since the protection of biodiversity is crucial. Bangladesh has also formed a task force which has identified five objectives for the sustainable development of tourism.

38. Cambodia has given priority to the conservation of natural and cultural resources. The Government has enacted laws to ensure a pollution-free environment. The Ministry of Tourism has set up agencies to implement and enforce laws and policies to ensure sustainability. The Ministry has emphasized sustainable tourism development using a rectangular development strategy for Phnom

Penh, the coastal zone, ecotourism sites along the Mekong River and the north-eastern provinces. The Ministry provides well-trained tour guides to give tourists accurate information about biological diversity, conservation and techniques for tourists so as to help sustain the environment.

39. Hong Kong, China, has recognized the importance of sustainable tourism development and observes the principles and guidelines of the World Tourism Organization. Tourism infrastructure projects must follow rules and regulations contained in ordinances on town planning, country parks, marine parks, and submit an environmental impact assessment. Tourism projects must take into account the appropriate conservation of cultural, natural and heritage resources.

40. Indonesia has incorporated sociocultural and environmental management at the national and provincial levels into the National Tourism Master Plan 2003. The Plan provides an overall policy framework for sustainable tourism development and sets guidelines for priority areas, the types of products suitable to each area and control of investment. The Government has adopted the concept of balanced development of tourism through the *Tri Hita Karana* Tourism Awards Programme.

41. Since 2003, the Government of Japan has been collaborating with the private sector to promote tourism with the Visit Japan Campaign, which has included elements of environmental management. The Government has collaborated with local governments and tourist companies to prepare spaces for tourism. The Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport has been working with local authorities on the Tourism Plus One Strategy to help local people identify and restore attractions in their regions. A major goal has been to achieve “One Tourism Attraction for Every Community” and the Ministry has selected 100 “Tourism Charisma” pioneer communities.

42. The importance of natural resources for tourism has been recognized in Kyrgyzstan since the country’s geography provides opportunities for tourism development. Ecological tourism represents a new approach with great prospects, especially in protected territories such as reserves and natural parks.

43. One Asian Development Bank (ADB) tourism project in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic assists local communities with distinctive rural lifestyles or living in areas with pristine ecosystems in managing, and determine the limits to, tourism growth and distributing the benefits from tourism equitably. ADB has been supporting pilot ecotourism and village-based tourism projects to foster the conservation and protection of the cultural and environmental heritage in four provinces.

44. The government of Macao, China, has emphasized protection of the environment while enhancing tourism development, especially through increased public awareness. In 2003, the government commissioned the Institute for Tourism Studies to make a report on tourism-carrying capacity.

45. Environment has been a major pillar of sustainable tourism development, since ecotourism forms about 90 per cent of tourism in Niue. In July 2003, the Department of Environment and the Niue Tourism Office collaborated to produce an accreditation standards programme that includes environmental management practices. The Office has a media programme on sustainable tourism development as part of overall tourism awareness.

46. Pakistan identified environmental management as a key component in its Tourism Development Plan prepared in 2000. Protected areas require managing, conservation and monitoring because the wealth and variety of cultural and natural resources are fragile. The impact of tourism activities and related facilities has received the greatest attention as some tourism development has caused significant degradation.

47. The first Sustainable Tourism Policies and Action Plan for Palau was submitted to the President in September 2001. One significant recommendation was the establishment of a Sustainable Tourism Unit to work directly with the President's office. As a result, the National Tourism Unit was established to help overcome impediments to the effective implementation of tourism development plans. The work programme was still being designed to enable the National Tourism Unit to implement the Plan.

48. In Singapore, the National Environment Agency was formed under the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources in July 2002. Its primary responsibility has been the implementation of environmental policies on a nationwide basis, which would include the tourism industry.

49. Environmental policies in Sri Lanka have been implemented by the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources and the Central Environmental Authority. Environmental impact assessments must be made before any hotel or recreational project is approved. Environmental groups led by the private sector have the opportunity to express their views about tourism development projects at the preliminary stage. Environmental protection and preservation must be a coordinated effort through an Environmental Council representing all stakeholders, including the Ministry of Industry, Tourism and Investment Promotion. The Government started a project in 2002 under which a team of experts would formulate an ecotourism policy, regulations, guidelines and a development strategy and action plan for ecotourism development in the southern part of the country. The private sector has been guided by the ecotourism policy to ensure sustainable tourism development.

50. Thailand has shifted attention to the sustainable redevelopment of areas affected by the tsunami. Green belt redevelopment has been proposed for Phuket and outlying areas. A tourism development master plan has also been considered for coastal tourism in Phuket and outlying areas based on sustainable tourism practices, including guidelines for zoning and coastal tourism management.

51. Ecotourism has become a major focus in Tonga. The growth in marine-based tourist activities has raised concern about the potential harm to the marine environment. Marine-based operators have been licensed and must follow specific environmental protection guidelines. Community-level beautification activities have been organized by women's groups. The Tonga Visitors Bureau and the Department of Environment worked together to support clean-up and awareness campaigns. The Bureau visited schools and colleges focusing on the economic contribution of tourism and the need for local action to keep the environment clean. NGOs have promoted beautification competitions in villages throughout the islands by involving women and youth groups.

D. Infrastructure development and investment for the tourism sector

52. The favourable geographic location of Azerbaijan at the heart of the Transcaucasian transport corridor has been one resource for developing the tourism infrastructure. Investment related to tourism has been influenced by other market factors, including the "Contract of the Century" for production sharing in the oil industry and the multilateral agreement to develop the Transport Corridor Europe Caucasus Asia (TRACECA) as a transcontinental integrated transport corridor. A new airport meeting international standards serves 20 airlines. The number of four- and five-star hotels, including major international hotel chains, has increased in the capital.

53. The Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, the national tourism organization, has been responsible for developing tourist facilities nationwide. At the same time, the private sector has developed tourism businesses. The Government has encouraged foreign investment in tourism, either as a joint venture or with 100 per cent foreign ownership. A set of 10 incentives were designed to encourage local and foreign investment.

54. The Five-year Plan for Infrastructure Rehabilitation and Reconstruction (1996-2000) of Cambodia contained elements related to tourism development, including tourism infrastructure, recreation centres, ecotourism sites and related tourism development covering access to historical, cultural and natural tourist sites. Airports and other infrastructure still need to be prioritized in order to maximize the tourism potential of Cambodia's coastal zone.

55. In Hong Kong, China, the government and private sector have made major investments in new tourist sites in order to create a diversity of attractions and maintain destination popularity. The government has continued to facilitate an open economy in order to encourage private sector investment initiatives in the tourism industry.

56. Tourism activities in Indonesia should be enhanced by the commitment to implement the New Delhi Action Plan on Infrastructure Development in Asia and the Pacific. The Government has been in the process of ratifying the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network and identifying follow-up action to contribute to tourism development.

57. Various projects implemented by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport promote international and domestic tourism in Japan. Local communities have been supported in the creation of tourism exchange spaces. The Ministry has supported tourism through revitalizing cities, special structural reform districts and local communities.

58. Kyrgyzstan has increased the construction and reconstruction of tourist facilities and infrastructure. Fixed capital investment in tourist facilities and infrastructure in 2004 increased by 40.2 per cent compared with 2003, along with an increase in foreign investment. Work was completed to rehabilitate the Bishkek-Osh road and the Bishkek-Kordoy and Jalalabad-Yzgen roads were repaired.

59. The government policy in the Lao People's Democratic Republic has supported foreign investment in large-scale tourism projects and local investment in small- to medium-sized tourism-related enterprises. One part of the ADB-financed Mekong tourism development project would upgrade tourism-related infrastructure to facilitate access and improve the environmental situation at three locations.

60. The private and public sectors have carried out recent infrastructure development and investment for the tourism sector in Macao, China. The government supported recent infrastructure development for hosting the Fourth East Asian Games. A new border gate and checkpoint has been built since travel to and from China has increased. A third bridge has been built between the Macao peninsula and Taipa Island. There has also been large-scale private investment in casino operations since the government liberalized gaming concessions.

61. The Niue National Integrated Strategic Plan for 2003-2008 has included both the Government and the private sector. Under programmes of the European Investment Bank, Niue has applied for assistance with the development of tourism infrastructure.

62. The Government of Pakistan has invested in tourism infrastructure in remote areas, which has attracted additional private sector investment. Incentives and concessions have been available to local and foreign investors for tourism infrastructure projects. The Ministry of Tourism can issue a certificate for projects in the hotel sector, since tourism has been categorized under the national investment policy.

63. The Ministry of Commerce and Trade in Palau has been the authoritative body concerning tourism infrastructure. This includes responsibility for airport infrastructure and the creation of the Airport Authority and the Seaport Authority.

64. In January 2005, the Government of Singapore announced "Tourism 2015", a vision to transform the country into the leading convention and exhibition city in Asia, provide visitors with the "Uniquely Singapore" experience and become the service centre of Asia. The Cabinet approved S\$ 2 billion for a Tourism Development Fund in November 2004 to develop world-class tourism

infrastructure and products with a variety of incentives for private sector investment. Significant investment in infrastructure over the past few years has helped to increase air services connecting Singapore to the region as the key regional hub based on air travel. In aviation, Singapore has supported low-cost carriers owing to their positive impact on liberalizing aviation connectivity and increasing market accessibility.

65. Sri Lanka developed a comprehensive master plan in 2001 to augment tourism infrastructure facilities along its south-west coast. At first, no development assistance funds were available, but the Government of Japan then agreed to fund a small-scale infrastructure component beginning in 2006. The tsunami on 26 December 2004 damaged the basic infrastructure network along the south and south-west coasts and the east coast of Sri Lanka. The Government declared a 100-metre buffer zone as a no-build area in order to regulate reconstruction and new construction in the coastal area. The World Tourism Organization has been assisting the Ministry of Tourism in rebuilding tourism infrastructure under the theme “Green belt redevelopment of tourism infrastructure along the coastal line”.

66. The Tonga Visitors Bureau had a tourism investment adviser from 2002 to 2004 to help develop investment strategies. The Bureau has drawn up a Tourism Coordination Plan highlighting the need for coordinated government action to overcome constraints. The Plan has been endorsed by the Tonga Tourist Board as the advisory body to the Minister of Tourism.

E. Facilitation of travel

67. The Government of Azerbaijan has supported tourism through laws and regulations to encourage local and foreign investors, provide tax incentives, simplify entry for tourists and improve laws already in force.

68. Bangladesh has improved accessibility and linkages by road to make connections easier. A network of railways connects major cities with Dhaka. The inland waterway system facilitates easy, low-cost transport and has great potential for tourism development. The Government has created international airports at Chittagong and Cox’s Bazar to facilitate travel.

69. The Cambodian Ministry of Tourism has requested other relevant government institutions to help facilitate procedures and greet tourists more appropriately. The visa on arrival is valid for a 30-day stay and can be issued at the international airports in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap and at international land border checkpoints. The visa can be extended at the Immigration Department in Phnom Penh. Cambodia has approved the open-sky policy for direct commercial flights to Siem Reap airport.

70. Hong Kong, China, allows visa on arrival for nationals from more than 170 countries for periods from seven days to six months. Special arrangements for visitors from China have been liberalized. The Hong Kong Tourism Board helps to facilitate visits by providing information and

linkages on the Internet, visitor information and assistance at the airport, downtown centres and a telephone hotline.

71. Indonesia provides visa-free entry for nationals from 11 countries and visa on arrival for a 30-day stay to nationals from 36 countries. Action to liberalize border formalities, including immigration procedures, has been taken according to established international standards and norms. Cross-sectoral regulations and the administrative framework have been adjusted to better manage tourism flows through designated ports of entry and borders, especially with other ASEAN member countries.

72. Kyrgyzstan has simplified visa procedures and created favourable conditions for tourists from many countries to receive entry visas directly on arrival. The Government has approved a plan for gradually implementing visa-free entry from some countries. The obligatory registration of foreign citizens has been cancelled and an arrangement to use certificates of entry has been accepted by some organizations. Procedures have been simplified for international tourists to register for an entry visa when crossing through land borders.

73. The Lao People's Democratic Republic has made border formalities and visa procedures more convenient, with visa on arrival for most long-haul travellers. Facilities for this have been set up at land border crossings with China, Thailand and Viet Nam, and at three airports. Most regional tourists can cross the border over land from Thailand at four different locations. The Government has agreed to grant visa exemptions for citizens of Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore and Viet Nam since July 2005, following a similar arrangement for citizens of Thailand since December 2004. Visa exemptions should be extended according to the ASEAN Tourism Agreement of 2002.

74. Macao, China, has various policies to facilitate travel, including agreements with many countries to allow visa-free entry. In addition, residents of Hong Kong, China, can enter Macao, China, using identification cards with no need to provide passports. Residents of Macao, China, can enter Hong Kong, China, under similar arrangements. The governments of Macao, China and the regional government of Guangdong Province have agreed to issue a time-bound tourist visa for international tourists to travel throughout the Pearl River delta. Group entry visas covering a minimum of three people can be obtained quickly at minimal cost. Since August 2003, China has relaxed its outbound travel policy to allow residents of certain provinces to visit Macao, China, using an individual visa.

75. The Nepal Tourism Board has established tourist information centres at the airport, as well as at locations in Kathmandu and other tourist centres to provide complete information for incoming tourists. The Board also has a website that provides complete information about visiting Nepal.

76. The major facilitation issue for Niue has been the lack of consistent and secure access to international air and sea services, which has affected tourism development. Matters of aviation are handled by the Premier's Department in consultation with other relevant departments.

77. Singapore has joined Visa-free ASEAN, which makes travel to other ASEAN member countries easier and promotes regional tourism. Singapore has established a “Visa-for-Visa” programme to facilitate visa applications for nationals from China who qualify according to specific criteria. A special Visa Free Transit Facility for nationals from India and China has helped to promote Singapore’s air hub status and global connectivity. A wide range of visa options have been designed to promote Singapore as a transit and tourism destination.

78. Sri Lanka facilitates travel within the South Asian region since the Government initiated an open-sky policy. For several years, the national carrier has been expanding operations to connect almost every country in the South Asian region. Sri Lanka offers visa on arrival for all countries members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Outbound travel from Sri Lanka to India has been facilitated since India offered visa-free travel to groups travelling on pilgrimage.

79. Tonga has sought more effective air access to link with major market countries and other Pacific island countries. Over the past four years, there has been a significant improvement in accessibility, with direct weekly flights to Australia, New Zealand and the United States. Better links have been established with other Pacific island countries. Visitors from most countries are automatically granted a one-month stay upon arrival. The Government has been working with the China National Tourism Administration under a memorandum of understanding to facilitate the granting of visas and flights from major cities of China to Tonga via Australia.

F. Regional and subregional cooperation in tourism development

80. Bangladesh has supported the Action Plan on Tourism of 1991 as a member of the SAARC Technical Committee on Tourism, which identified tourism as one of six important sectors with scope for multilateral and bilateral cooperation. In 2004, members of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multisectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) recognized that strategies such as joint marketing and exchange of visits and information could enhance interregional tourism. Members also agreed to facilitate business travel, exchange programmes and tourism by introducing a BIMSTEC business travel card/visa. Bangladesh is a member of South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation.

81. Cambodia supports cooperation among neighbouring countries based on shared potential for tourism growth, similar environments and the potential for mutual benefit from a regional tourism framework. One cooperative project is the Emerald Triangle development. Cambodia has been participating in the Greater Mekong Subregion development schemes, which include the Mekong tourism development project. The importance of ASEAN cooperation in tourism was acknowledged when the leaders signed a landmark ASEAN Tourism Agreement at the Eighth ASEAN Summit, held in Phnom Penh in November 2002. They agreed to further promote tourism and enhance intraregional travel among the member countries, based on six objectives.

82. Hong Kong, China has supported cooperation through membership in the World Tourism Organization, the APEC Tourism Working Group and the Pacific Asia Travel Association. In addition, travel throughout the Pearl River delta has been promoted through cooperation with the Guangdong Province Tourism Administration and the Macao, China, Government Tourist Office at trade shows and travel expositions worldwide, as well as through the Internet. Bilateral shared promotion with Singapore and Thailand has helped to promote multi-destination itineraries for long-haul tourists.

83. Indonesia has strongly supported regional and subregional cooperation to promote tourism. Indonesia has hosted seminars and consultations organized by ESCAP and the World Tourism Organization.

84. Since February 2001, Kyrgyzstan has been cooperating within the Commonwealth of Independent States in an interstate project covering biodiversity in the region of western Tyan-Shan. There is potential for regional ecotourism involving protected territories in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Social and economic development is expected in specific buffer zones around the protected territories.

85. The Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic has been supporting regional cooperation by promoting ASEAN as a single destination. In addition, the ADB Mekong tourism development project has aimed at pro-poor, community-based sustainable tourism development in the lower Mekong basin. One part of the project covers subregional cooperation for sustainable tourism in the Greater Mekong Subregion.

86. A protocol on closer tourism cooperation was signed between China and Macao, China, in 2003. The Pan-Pearl River Delta Regional Cooperation Framework Agreement, signed in June 2004, has given Macao, China, a role in regional tourism as a leisure centre and business service platform. The Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement signed between China and Macao, China, in October 2003 would support development and economic diversification through trade and tourism.

87. Niue has supported cooperation through the South Pacific Tourism Organization (SPTO). The Organization has been proactive in strengthening national capabilities for sustainable tourism development, especially since few resources are available to destinations such as Niue. The sustainable tourism development strategies and plans of Niue have been supported by SPTO when it submits funding proposals to international organizations.

88. Singapore has developed government-to-government relations that promote tourism development. It has participated in regional and international tourism meetings to explore opportunities for regional and subregional cooperation in tourism.

89. Sri Lanka has actively promoted cooperation related to tourism development within SAARC. Since 2003, Sri Lanka has chaired the official working group on tourism. It has served as the lead

country on tourism within BIMSTEC. Agreements were reached to implement several tourism projects when Sri Lanka hosted BIMSTEC meetings in 1999 and 2000.

90. Thailand has worked to support tourism cooperation with neighbouring countries in the Greater Mekong Subregion and plans to set up the Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office. A new arrangement for tourism cooperation supported by Thailand is the Ayeyawady–Chao Phraya–Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS). The Second ACMECS summit held in Bangkok in early November 2005 focused on encouraging sustainable tourism destinations through a number of joint efforts. Thailand has supported the ASEAN Tourism Agreement as chairperson of four tourism task forces aiming at promoting ASEAN as a quality tourism destination.

91. Tonga has been an active member of SPTO, which meets annually to discuss tourism-related issues. Over the past two years, experts from Pacific island countries have created networking opportunities in order to develop a regional ecotourism industry.

II. SUPPORTING ACTION TAKEN BY SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

92. Three intergovernmental organizations have made reports about their recent activities in support of strengthening national capacity and promoting regional cooperation in several of the theme areas of the Plan of Action.

A. Association of Southeast Asian Nations

93. ASEAN has undertaken a number of activities in support of regional cooperation among its 10 member countries. ASEAN activities to strengthen human resources development includes the following approaches to cooperation: develop minimum common competency standards for ASEAN tourism professionals; develop an intra-ASEAN curriculum exchange programme with cross-training and cross-certification; prepare the ASEAN Tourism Training and Education Network Directory; and publish the *ASEAN Tourism Journal*.

94. ASEAN cooperation in tourism infrastructure development and investment has included publishing the *ASEAN Tourism Investment Guide* and providing relevant investment information on the ASEANWEB. Recent ASEAN cooperative activities to facilitate regional travel include publishing *Wonders of Southeast Asia – An Official Guide to Thematic Tour Packaging*; implementing the Visit ASEAN Campaign; publishing the *ASEAN Map* with general information on major tourism destinations; and drafting the framework agreement on visa exemption for Nationals of ASEAN Member States.

B. South Pacific Tourism Organization

95. The activities of SPTO aim to promote the region as a tourist destination and facilitate regional cooperation in tourism development. Recent activities cover the following five main areas.

- (1) The 10-year Regional Tourism Strategy for the South and Central Pacific (2003-2013), which provides a regional policy framework to promote sustainable tourism and sets the future direction for tourism growth in the region.
- (2) Human resources development, which involves organizing training workshops in various member countries and cooperating with other international organizations, such as ESCAP and conducting a primary needs assessment of smaller island countries and SMEs.
- (3) An assessment of the economic impact of tourism by providing a comprehensive source for regional tourism statistics and reporting on trends in visitor flows from source markets and their distribution to destinations in the South Pacific.
- (4) Helping countries to manage the environment by forming a regional ecotourism association, organizing a series of training workshops and co-sponsoring workshops and seminars with ESCAP.
- (5) Developing and upgrading websites and Internet marketing, and training people in member countries to use the Internet for tourism promotion.

C. World Tourism Organization

96. The World Tourism Organization, through its Department of Sustainable Development of Tourism and Technical Cooperation Service, has undertaken various activities to benefit countries in Asia and the Pacific.

97. Sustainable tourism development has been promoted by activities that include: publishing the guidebook, *Indicators of Sustainable Development for Tourism Destinations*, in October 2004 with follow-up regional and national seminars; organizing a regional workshop in Phuket, Thailand in May 2005, focusing on the sustainable redevelopment of destinations affected by the tsunami; assisting member States through ad hoc missions and training seminars upon request; and coordinating with other United Nations agencies and NGOs to take joint action.

98. Addressing special issues related to sustainable tourism development such as coastal destinations have included several activities, such as creating the International Network for the Sustainable Development of Coastal Tourism Destinations in January 2003 and holding a national seminar in Indonesia in 2001.

99. A comprehensive analysis was launched in September 2004, in *Making Tourism More Sustainable: A Guide for Policy Makers*, to be followed up by regional seminars.

100. The World Tourism Organization definition of sustainable tourism was revised at the 4th meeting of the Committee on Sustainable Development of Tourism, held in Thailand in March 2004.

101. A special report entitled “Making tourism work for small island developing States” was presented at the United Nations Intergovernmental Meeting to Review the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, held in Port Louis, Mauritius, in January 2005.

102. Activities that advocate understanding the relationship between tourism and poverty alleviation in order to take appropriate action as part of sustainable development include the following:

- (1) The publications, *Tourism and Micro-credits* (May 2005) and *Tourism and Poverty Alleviation: Recommendations for Action* (2004).
- (2) The Sustainable Tourism-Eliminating Poverty (ST-EP) Initiative launched in 2002; a multi-donor trust fund set up in December 2004 in collaboration with the SNV Netherlands Development Organization to support ST-EP projects through technical assistance; and approval given by the General Assembly of the World Tourism Organization in November 2005 to operate the ST-EP Foundation in Seoul.
- (3) Conferences, workshops and training seminars in a number of ESCAP member countries on approaches for ensuring that tourism contributes to poverty alleviation.

103. A number of countries in Asia and the Pacific have received assistance in developing tourism master plan projects.

104. The Technical Cooperation Service acts on requests from member States to carry out a wide range of development projects, long-term as well as short-term, aimed at the promotion and development of tourism in developing and transition countries.

III. SUPPORTING ACTION TAKEN BY ESCAP

105. Capacity-building to achieve sustainable tourism development has been the focus of the secretariat’s work on tourism. A series of regional, subregional and national seminars and meetings have been organized within the framework of the Plan of Action. The principal aim is to assist countries in achieving sustainable growth in tourism by strengthening policymaking capabilities and enhancing regional cooperation. Since the launching of the Plan in 1999, 22 regional seminars and training programmes have been organized by ESCAP and hosted by 12 countries on issues related to human resources development, poverty alleviation and tourism, ecotourism, community tourism initiatives, tourism and air transport, cruise tourism, public-private partnerships, tourism investment, tourism statistics, Buddhist tourism circuits and crisis management. These programmes were designed to provide opportunities to share experiences and good practices. In addition, the secretariat delivered 16 national-level seminars in Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Mongolia, Myanmar, Republic of Korea, Thailand and Viet Nam.

The seminars focused on enhancing national capabilities to formulate appropriate tourism development policies.

106. At the request of the respective Governments, advisory services were provided by the secretariat on: exclusive tourist zone development (Bangladesh), national park management and ecotourism development (Pakistan), strengthening local participation in tourism development (Philippines) and promoting women's active involvement in tourism (Philippines). Thirteen publications were produced on the subjects of ecotourism, integrated planning for sustainable tourism development, the human resource requirements of the tourism sector, tourism development along the Asian Highway, facilitation of travel, managing sustainable tourism development, poverty alleviation through tourism, promotion of Buddhist tourism circuits, barrier-free tourism and implementation of the Plan of Action. In addition, the secretariat implemented activities to support the Network of Asia-Pacific Education and Training Institutes in Tourism, which has 211 education and training institutes, and national tourism organizations from 42 countries as members. Secretariat activities also support the Working Group on the Greater Mekong Subregion Tourism Sector.

107. The role of specialized agencies and regional organizations, such as ADB, is acknowledged. In particular, ADB has contributed to the development of the Greater Mekong Subregion Tourism Sector Strategy, carried out the Mekong/Lancang River tourism planning study and implemented the Mekong tourism development project.

IV. ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

108. The main objectives of the Plan of Action were achieved during the period 1999-2005. As described above, national capabilities were strengthened and greater regional cooperation occurred at the initiative of the ESCAP members and associate members with support from international and regional organizations. In view of changing conditions and in response to emerging new challenges and unforeseen issues, capabilities must be continuously strengthened. Specific goals may be time-bound, but capabilities and support for regional cooperation require ongoing commitments if the countries of the region agree.

109. During the time frame of the Plan of Action, virtually all ESCAP members and associate members were aware of and benefited from the phenomenal worldwide growth of the tourism industry and its contribution to GNP growth, foreign exchange earnings and increased employment. For those countries that had recently opened their economies and societies to tourism, it appeared that policymakers had focused most of their attention on the economic aspects of tourism development.

110. In terms of sustainable tourism development, it was learned that a strictly economic view of the tourism industry was too narrow and could not adjust quickly to the rapid changes and profound impact of a globalizing tourism industry, technological advances and sensitivity to a variety of man-made and natural shocks.

111. During this period, many Asian and Pacific Governments turned to tourism master plans, integrated plans and the tourism satellite account methodology. One lesson learned from this experience was the extent to which the tourism industry had intricate links to the rest of the national economy as well as regional and subregional economic patterns. This suggested that the benefits from tourism had the potential to spread widely, but some negative effects were also possible. To address those issues, it was possible to strengthen the capabilities of government officials and agencies through training workshops and seminars.

112. The concept of sustainable tourism development as interpreted from the Plan of Action, the World Tourism Organization and the international agenda seemed to be narrowly focused on environmental considerations. The significance of the social aspects of sustainable tourism development and the recommendations that other stakeholders be brought into the planning and policymaking processes were included in the Plan of Action, but seemed to be downplayed until quite recently. One lesson learned was that the unique and diverse environments of Asian and Pacific countries attracted increasing numbers of tourists, to the extent that ecotourism seemed to be a major component of sustainable tourism development.

113. Various meetings at the regional and national levels helped to highlight the unique and diverse cultures and histories throughout the region that stimulated new trends in tourist demand. As a result, there was growing awareness of the social and cultural aspects of tourism development during the period of the Plan of Action. Policymakers, stakeholders, international organizations and tourist businesses were developing a wider concept of sustainable tourism development. Among others, this was reflected in the revised definition of sustainable tourism by the World Tourism Organization.

114. The viewpoint that participation by all stakeholders was a key element in sustainable tourism development became more widespread. The international agenda was also giving high priority to issues of poverty and development, especially with reference to the Millennium Development Goals. A number of least developed countries in Asia and the Pacific were considering that tourism development could be one tool for reducing poverty when local development and capacity-building at the community level were seen as part of sustainable tourism development. Other stakeholders, such as the private sector of the tourism industry, might be persuaded to see human resources development from a socio-economic view of sustainable tourism development.

115. A positive lesson learned from one country's experience was that while marketing and promotion were necessary, there were constraints due to limited public funds. As a solution, one Government had introduced an independent funding mechanism with revenue from a 1 per cent tax on the turnover of all registered tourism establishments.

116. Some country reports tended to see tourism as a highly competitive industry in which international marketing and a brand image were the main considerations in developing infrastructure and destinations. However, a major accomplishment and a lesson learned from the Plan of Action were the benefits of regional and subregional cooperation in Asia and the Pacific, especially for human resources development.

V. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE MEETING

117. The Meeting may wish to take into account the accomplishments and lessons learned in order to develop the Plan of Action for Sustainable Tourism Development in the Asian and Pacific Region, phase II (2006-2012).

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