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**KEY DEVELOPMENTS AND ACTIVITIES AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL:  
EMERGING SOCIAL ISSUES**

(Item 4 (c) of the provisional agenda)

**PROGRESS IN ADDRESSING PERSISTENT AND EMERGING SOCIAL ISSUES**

*Note by the secretariat*

**SUMMARY**

The present document consists of two sections. Section I presents the report of the Committee on Emerging Social Issues on its second session, held in Bangkok from 1 to 3 November 2005. It includes a list of matters calling for action by the Commission or to be brought to its attention, and the proceedings of the session. The Commission is invited to consider the major conclusions and decisions of the Committee and endorse the recommendations brought to its attention.

Section II of the document provides an overview of the latest progress in the implementation of recent resolutions relating to emerging social issues, including Commission resolution 60/1 of 28 April 2004 on the Shanghai Declaration.

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## **I. REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON EMERGING SOCIAL ISSUES ON ITS SECOND SESSION**

### **A. Matters calling for action by the Commission or to be brought to its attention**

1. The Committee requested the secretariat to take effective measures, upon the request of member countries, to support national implementation of the Millennium Development Goals in combination with the implementation of the commitments reached at other global conferences in the last decade on issues relating to social development, including women, children, HIV/AIDS and ageing, which could enhance the sustainability of the achievements recorded.
2. The Committee requested the secretariat to draw on good national experiences in implementing the Millennium Development Goals related to social development, in order to help developing members and associate members to map out strategies and build capacity to achieve their commitments.
3. The Committee urged the secretariat to provide more opportunities for members and associate members to share national experiences in social protection and youth employment.
4. The Committee, mindful that there were global forums on international migration, noted that the secretariat might facilitate continued regional dialogue on international migration and its consequences in the broader development context. It also called on the secretariat to promote regional cooperation on international migration through the exchange of information and best practices in the management of migration.
5. The Committee urged the secretariat to conduct a systematic regional study on international migration, including female migration, in order to identify knowledge gaps and the developmental impacts of international migration in countries of both origin and destination, as well as to ensure that migration policies were consistent with broad development goals.
6. The Committee expressed appreciation of the leadership role of ESCAP in assisting Governments to meet commitments to disability issues and encouraged the secretariat to continue to provide a forum for information exchange and capacity-building activities, and to formulate regional inputs on critical issues identified in the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action towards an Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific.
7. The Committee welcomed the convening of the high-level regional meeting to review the status of implementation of the Shanghai Implementation Strategy for the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and the Macao Plan of Action on Ageing for Asia and the Pacific, which was expected to be held in late 2006 or early 2007, as well as the midpoint review of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 2003-2012, scheduled to be held in 2007.

8. The Committee requested the secretariat to provide support, upon the request of member countries, in the areas of gender mainstreaming; the participation of women in politics; instituting gender-responsive governance to enhance development, reduce conflicts and address women's needs in natural disasters; and women's human rights.

9. The Committee urged ESCAP to take further action in follow-up to the adoption of the Regional Framework for Strategic Action: Promoting Health and Sustainable Development. It requested the secretariat to assist members and associate members in implementing the Regional Framework.

10. The Committee urged ESCAP to continue its efforts to strengthen regional cooperation and facilitate the exchange of country experiences and good practices in health and health-related interventions, as well as to mainstream health within development processes.

11. The Committee requested the secretariat to provide further technical support to member countries in strengthening publicly financed health schemes in order to achieve universal coverage, including social health insurance.

12. The Committee urged ESCAP to work with other relevant United Nations agencies and international organizations to assist countries in strengthening their national capacity to develop effective responses to avian influenza and prevent the disease from becoming a pandemic.

13. The Committee endorsed the report of the Subcommittee on Socially Vulnerable Groups on its first session, held in Bangkok from 13 to 15 September 2004, and that of the Subcommittee on Health and Development on its first session, held in Bangkok from 1 to 3 December 2004.

## **B. Proceedings of the session**

### **1. Enhancing regional cooperation to address emerging social challenges**

14. Experts were invited to share their perspectives and views, for the information of the Committee, on three key areas: socially vulnerable groups, gender and development, and health and development, with a particular focus on mental health and avian influenza. The views expressed were those of the speakers only and did not necessarily reflect the views of the Committee or the secretariat.

15. Ms. Corazon S. de la Paz, President, International Social Security Association, noted that the majority of the poor people in the region could not afford to participate in formal contributory social protection schemes and that the growth of labour force participation in the informal sector had worsened the provision of sustainable basic social protection coverage. She stressed that affordability was one of the most difficult challenges in extending social protection to all and that it was crucial to take into account gender roles and address direct and indirect discrimination by applying a gender perspective to social protection.

16. Ms. de la Paz emphasized that the purpose of social protection must go beyond providing income security in retirement and should include protection against contingencies such as sickness, disability, unemployment and natural disasters. She also stressed that social security should encompass preventive measures and employ an integrated approach embracing the entire life cycle and promoting healthy lifestyles that would avoid or delay those contingencies. To that end, she emphasized the need for close collaboration with the ESCAP secretariat and other international organizations.

17. Mr. Antonio Budi Tjahjono, Rapporteur, Youth Consultative Group of the United Nations Secretary General's Youth Employment Network, presented an overview of the situation concerning youth and employment in Asia and the Pacific and its relevance to the Millennium Development Goals. He drew the attention of the Committee to the high rates of youth unemployment in Asia and the Pacific, especially in South Asia and South-East Asia. He highlighted the work of the Network, which had been established in 2001 to enhance the global commitment to developing and implementing strategies for the promotion of decent and productive work for youth and support for the Goals.

18. Mr. Tjahjono made recommendations aimed at enhancing regional cooperation for youth development, including youth employment, and the more vigorous engagement of youth and youth organizations in the national and regional policymaking processes. He also recommended that ESCAP take the lead role in developing a regional platform for action to prioritize youth employment issues and enhance regional cooperation in that area.

19. Dr. Dominic Tak Shing Lee, Professor, Department of Psychiatry, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, China, presented an overview of mental health issues in the Asian and Pacific region, along with policy recommendations. He highlighted the growing burden of mental health disorders in the region, of which depression comprised the highest proportion. The disease burden caused by unipolar depressive disorders was much higher among women than men in the region. He stressed that women and men had different mental health priorities, which merited different preventive strategies and treatment approaches.

20. Dr. Lee highlighted the growing trend of substance use and the linkage between substance use and HIV infections. He pointed out that poverty, debt, hunger, gender disadvantage, abuse, depression, chronic fatigue and poor neonatal and child health were closely connected. It was therefore important to integrate mental health promotion into broader social policies that addressed poverty, unemployment and gender discrimination. He stressed the need for a regional mental health agenda to tackle the stigma associated with mental illness. He proposed that expenditure on creating mental health infrastructure and services be considered an investment rather than a burden.

21. Dr. Somchai Peerapakorn, Office of the World Health Organization Representative to Thailand, explained the nature of avian influenza and its impact on human beings. He highlighted the risk of a global pandemic of avian influenza the event that the virus mutated into a form capable of human-to-human transmission, and pointed out that the Asian and Pacific region could be the hardest hit. He described the strategies of Thailand for influenza pandemic preparedness as an example of national response and highlighted the need for a multisectoral approach, regional cooperation and transparency.

22. Several delegations expressed appreciation of the presentations, exchanged views on emerging challenges to social development in the region and suggested measures to enhance regional cooperation to address those challenges. They emphasized the need to take into consideration the social dimension of poverty and the importance of good governance and political will.

23. It was noted that the debate on social protection was growing in relevance to the discourse on social development policy in the region and that options were being sought to address the increasing inability of the informal sector to comply with contributory pension schemes. Delegations underscored the importance of enhancing regional cooperation in developing and strengthening social protection systems and in exchanging experiences and best practices in promoting youth employment and youth development in the region.

## **2. Socially vulnerable groups: selected issues**

24. The Committee had before it four documents: the report of the Subcommittee on Socially Vulnerable Groups on its first session, held in Bangkok from 13 to 15 September 2004 (E/ESCAP/CESI(2)/1); "International migration in the ESCAP region: key policy implications" (E/ESCAP/CESI(2)/2); "Enhancing the social integration of vulnerable groups: challenges and prospects" (E/ESCAP/CESI(2)/3); and "Examining progress towards gender equality and social development: new trends and challenges" (E/ESCAP/CESI(2)/4).

25. The Committee emphasized the importance of reviewing the implementation of the Copenhagen Programme of Action adopted by the World Summit for Social Development and the recommendations of the 5-year and 10-year review meetings which had focused on three core areas, namely, poverty alleviation, employment generation and social integration.

26. The Committee noted with concern that several countries in the region were unlikely to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. It was reminded that the key to realizing the Goals lay in the social integration of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. The Committee also recognized that it would be necessary to provide funding support for the least developed countries to enable them to achieve the Goals.

27. The Committee emphasized that social protection should aim at equality of opportunity for vulnerable groups through a rights-based approach and the elimination of discrimination. It pointed to the need to protect vulnerable groups, including women, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities and migrants, and to promote their rights and well-being. The need to set up effective and efficient social protection systems for ensuring appropriate income and access to social services, including essential health-care services, was emphasized.

28. The Committee further noted that social protection enabled social solidarity and social integration. It was emphasized that, although the family continued to play a crucial role in insulating its members from individual contingencies, informal arrangements, including community-based mechanisms, were not adequate and should not be a substitute for a formal social protection system. The Committee agreed that mainstreaming gender equality into social protection policies would help to enhance social integration.

29. Several delegations informed the Committee that, owing to the low levels of fertility and mortality, their populations were expected to have a growing proportion of older persons in the foreseeable future. It was necessary to give greater attention to the social and economic implications of that phenomenon, especially the declining size of the labour force and the increasing burden of expenditure on medical insurance, pensions and care services. A number of national initiatives had been taken to strengthen institutional mechanisms and integrate issues on ageing into national development policies.

30. The Committee reiterated the necessity to meet not only the economic and material needs of older persons but also their psychosocial needs, and to integrate them into society. Some delegations also emphasized the necessity to shift from a welfare approach to rights-based and community-based approaches in responding to the needs of older persons. Active policies and programmes on ageing to prepare for ageing societies were seen as a priority in some countries to combat the negative consequences of ageing.

31. The Committee welcomed the significant national efforts that had been made in establishing national focal points, multi-ministerial administrative bodies and legislation, to translate national strategies into practical measures that made a difference in the lives of older persons and their families. A number of delegations also reported on concrete measures taken to meet the needs of older persons, including the introduction of long-term care insurance schemes for the elderly, income support through non-contributory pension schemes and the expansion of health coverage programmes.

32. Delegations expressed support for the high-level regional meeting to review the status of implementation of the Shanghai Implementation Strategy for the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and the Macao Plan of Action on Ageing for Asia and the Pacific, which was expected to be held in late 2006 or early 2007.

33. Delegations exchanged views on issues relating to youth and their national experiences in promoting youth development. The Committee noted that the elimination of poverty among young people required increased investments in social services and greater access to opportunities, and that education, particularly vocational education and skill training, including in the area of information and communication technology (ICT), was essential. It also stressed the need for coherent and focused policies aimed at making use of the potential of young people and enhancing their participation in the national development process.

34. The Committee considered issues relating to the role of the family as a fundamental social institution. It stressed that the family played an important role in providing care and support to its members, especially children and the elderly, and people with HIV/AIDS, and in times of difficulty. The Committee stressed that Governments should be encouraged to strengthen the capacity of institutions to formulate and implement social policies which enhanced family development and social cohesion, and that community participation should be strengthened.

35. Mr. Rolf K. Jenny, Executive Director, Global Commission on International Migration, briefed the Committee on the report entitled "Migration in an interconnected world: new directions for actions", which had been launched on 5 October 2005. The report was submitted for the information of the participants in the session.

36. The representative of the least developed countries wished the Committee to note that those countries encouraged Governments that had not yet done so to sign and ratify key international agreements on international migration. One delegation suggested that international forums concerning international migration, such as the High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, scheduled to be held during the sixty-first session of the General Assembly in 2006, would be better suited to address an issue such as legal instruments.

37. The Committee noted that international migration was increasingly seen as a force that could contribute to poverty alleviation and socio-economic development. It stressed the importance of promoting policies that maximized the benefits of migration while minimizing its negative impacts, and integrating international migration into national development strategies as well as population and labour force projections. The Committee also recognized the need to incorporate the gender dimensions of migration into all stages of policy formulation and implementation.

38. The Committee expressed concern over irregular migration, particularly human trafficking, and the exploitation, hardship and abuse of irregular migrants. It emphasized the urgent need to enhance counter-trafficking measures through regional cooperation involving all stakeholders.

39. The Committee welcomed the significant national efforts made in the implementation of the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action towards an Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific, the regional policy guideline for the second Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons (2003-2012), particularly in the areas of



contribution to a proposed international convention on disability, a rights-based legal and policy framework, the establishment of institutional mechanisms, a community-based approach, education, employment, the effective use of technologies for better access to basic services, and innovative measures to reach out to persons with disabilities in rural areas.

40. Several delegations addressed the important partnership between Governments, the private sector and NGOs, particularly representatives of organizations of persons with disabilities, in the development and implementation of disability-sensitive policies, services and projects.

41. The Committee reaffirmed Governments' commitments to the midpoint review of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons (2003-2012) and the formulation of "Biwako +5: forward-looking strategies towards 2012".

42. The Committee stressed the interconnectedness of women's increased role in international and internal migration with other global issues and the need to address migration in tandem with gender-responsive policies in other key interrelated areas.

43. Several delegations highlighted the importance of ensuring initiatives for protecting women and children, in particular with regard to reproductive and sexual health, including programmes instituted to eliminate discriminatory practices endangering girls and women.

44. The Committee underscored the need for stronger initiatives and action to combat domestic violence and other forms of violence against women. Several delegations reported on the major legislative measures which they had instituted in the past year to protect women from domestic violence. The Committee also noted the importance of promoting the use of ICT for the advancement and protection of women.

45. The Committee welcomed the offer of the Government of Indonesia to host the Regional Workshop on Enhancing Gender Mainstreaming within ESCAP Member Countries' Development Programmes, in cooperation with ESCAP.

### **3. Health and development: selected issues**

46. The Committee had before it three documents: the report of the Subcommittee on Health and Development on its first session, held in Bangkok from 1 to 3 December 2004 (E/ESCAP/CESI(2)/5), "Strengthening public health capacity-building with a view to achieving the Millennium Development Goals related to health" (E/ESCAP/CESI(2)/6) and "Addressing emerging health risks: strengthening health promotion" (E/ESCAP/CESI(2)/7).

47. The Committee noted that the report of the Subcommittee on Health and Development contained the strategic direction and content of the ESCAP health and development programme, namely, the Regional Framework for Strategic Action: Promoting Health and Sustainable Development.

48. The Committee noted that the Regional Framework provided a common platform for enhanced regional cooperation on strengthening policies and regulatory frameworks to address the root determinants of ill health and mortality, with particular focus on gender, poverty and the inclusion of vulnerable groups. It also advocated a shift to a broader development approach to public health.

49. Several delegations reported on their progress and challenges in achieving the Goals related to health by 2015. They called for ESCAP action to formulate a “road map” to guide efforts towards achievement of the health-related Goals, in follow-up to the High-level Plenary Meeting of the sixtieth session of the General Assembly (also known as the 2005 World Summit), held in New York in September 2005, and the High-level Regional Meeting on the Millennium Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific: the Way Forward 2015, held in Jakarta from 3 to 5 August 2005.

50. Several delegations expressed a commitment to cooperating with ESCAP and other United Nations agencies in order to integrate health into development, meet the related challenges, share technical support and build capacity in surveillance, monitoring, reporting and early warning mechanisms, especially with regard to the threat of communicable diseases.

51. The Committee noted that public health capacity could be further strengthened by a focus on delivering effective primary health-care services, ensuring equity and addressing changes in health behaviour. Several delegations highlighted the need for a multisectoral approach, involving Governments, civil society and the private sector.

52. The Committee was informed of the efforts by some members to provide financial and technical assistance in helping other countries to achieve the Goals related to health, with initiatives to strengthen sustainable development, health infrastructure and health human resources development.

53. The Committee considered the strengthening of public health systems by refocusing on primary health care, in order to ensure equity and universal access to public health services, to be of paramount importance.

54. The Committee recognized that strengthening the capacity of institutions that designed, planned and implemented public health services was vital for improving public health systems. Those institutions included Governments, the private sector and civil society institutions, all of which formed part of the public health system.

55. The Committee held the view that more efforts should be made to build capacity, in countries of the region, to design and deliver appropriate mechanisms, such as social health insurance schemes, to reduce the economic burden of health care on the poor and to enhance their access to quality health services.

56. The Committee recognized the double burden of communicable and non-communicable diseases that the ESCAP region faced and the threat posed by new and re-emerging communicable diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, SARS and avian influenza.

57. The Committee expressed concern over the spread of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the region. Several delegations shared their countries' experience in public education on HIV/AIDS, promoting access to condoms and reproductive health services, as well as to antiviral drugs for the treatment of HIV/AIDS. They also stressed the need to target youth, women and mobile populations more effectively in interventions on HIV/AIDS.

58. The Committee expressed concern over the threat of a pandemic of avian influenza. Several representatives stressed the need for urgent and coordinated action at the national and regional levels through the establishment of a regional surveillance and preparedness mechanism on communicable diseases. Several representatives shared their countries' experience in the control of SARS and the current measures being taken to contain outbreaks of avian influenza. The Committee was briefed by the secretariat on the socio-economic implications of a potential pandemic of avian influenza and the latest developments in response to the current outbreak.

59. The Committee also recognized the impact of certain health risks on the increasing prevalence of non-communicable diseases. That was associated with changing lifestyles and living conditions and the impact of globalization, urbanization and increased population. Several representatives shared their countries' experience in the financing of health promotion strategies through the taxation of alcohol and tobacco, and the effectiveness of price control measures in bringing about positive changes in health behaviour.

60. Drawing lessons from good practices within the ESCAP region, the Committee highlighted the need for countries in the region to mainstream health promotion and prevention strategies for non-communicable diseases into their public health and development agendas.

61. The Committee acknowledged the collaborative efforts between ESCAP and other international organizations in developing a joint approach to address the new health-related development challenges. It also emphasized the unique role of ESCAP in assisting members and associate members in developing multisectoral responses to emerging health issues with implications for socio-economic development.

#### **4. Programme planning and evaluation**

##### **(a) Review of the strategic framework for the biennium 2008-2009: subprogramme on social development, including emerging social issues**

62. The Committee had before it "ESCAP programme overview in connection with the draft strategic framework for the biennium 2008-2009" (E/ESCAP/CESI(2)/8).

63. The secretariat informed the Committee that the overview had been developed taking into account the outcome<sup>1</sup> of the 2005 World Summit, held in September 2005, which would serve as a guiding document for the strategic framework for 2008-2009. The Committee noted that the overview represented a preliminary draft, which would be revised further on the basis of inputs received from members and associate members of the Commission.

64. The overview would provide the basis for the preparation of the strategic framework for 2008-2009 for the subprogramme on social development, including emerging social issues. As required by General Assembly resolution 58/269 of 23 December 2003 on strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change, the strategic framework followed a results-based format to improve performance, achieve meaningful results and impacts, and utilize limited resources efficiently. The secretariat gave a presentation on the draft logical framework for the subprogramme on social development, including emerging social issues, which had been developed by the secretariat.

65. The Committee noted the time frame for further development of the strategic framework and the various internal and intergovernmental reviews which would be necessary before its consideration by the General Assembly at its sixty-first session, in 2006. The document would eventually include an objective, expected accomplishments, indicators of achievement and a strategy for the subprogramme based on the organizational priorities, existing legislative mandates and comparative advantage of ESCAP.

66. The Committee expressed appreciation of the comprehensive explanation of the overview provided by the secretariat and welcomed its particular focus on the Millennium Development Goals and priority countries, especially the Pacific island developing countries and territories, and the least developed and landlocked developing countries. The secretariat added that the 2005 World Summit Outcome called for reforms in the economic and social sectors, which could have an impact on the preparation of the ESCAP strategic framework for 2008-2009.

67. The Committee noted that the draft was a preliminary one which would need to be refined in the course of the coming months, in consultation with members and associate members. It noted that the draft would be considered in its entirety by the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission (ACPR) in early 2006 and by the Commission at its sixty-second session, in April 2006.

68. In response to a question by one representative, the secretariat explained that the Office of the Secretary-General had instructed all United Nations departments to submit to it, by 11 November 2005, a report on mandates that were more than five years old. The secretariat would inform ACPR of any new developments regarding that matter.

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<sup>1</sup> General Assembly resolution 60/1 of 16 September 2005.

69. One representative suggested supplementing the logical framework approach applied in the design of the strategic framework with a “policy-action matrix” to define more clearly the activities, indicators and time frame needed to achieve results. The secretariat explained that while some elements, such as indicators and time frames, would be elaborated in the strategic framework, activities would be defined when formulating the programme budget at the end of 2006.

**(b) ESCAP guidelines for programme monitoring, review and evaluation**

70. The Committee reviewed “ESCAP guidelines for programme monitoring, review and evaluation” (E/ESCAP/CESI(2)/9).

71. The Committee noted the secretariat’s efforts in strengthening the monitoring and evaluation of programme activities in line with the recommendations made in General Assembly resolution 58/269. It also acknowledged that strengthening the monitoring and evaluation of programme activities as part of the revitalization of ESCAP would enhance confidence in its work, which would be beneficial for members and associate members, donors and ESCAP in the long term.

72. The secretariat expressed gratitude to the Governments of Japan, the Netherlands and the Republic of Korea for their support of the secretariat’s ongoing evaluation of technical cooperation programmes.

**5. Review of a selected flagship project**

73. The Committee reviewed the evaluation report on a selected flagship project to support the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 2003-2012, as contained in E/ESCAP/CESI(2)/10.

74. The Committee expressed appreciation to the secretariat for its initiatives and efforts in the area of disability. Several delegations noted that the Decade and its regional policy guideline, the Biwako Framework, had been instrumental in the launching of their own national initiatives, including national decades on disability, as well as national policies and action plans.

75. The Committee supported the critical and leading role of ESCAP in the 2007 mid-term review of the Biwako Framework, and the development of the “Biwako +5: forward-looking strategies” for the second half of the Decade. It expressed the view that it was important to enhance the linkage between disability issues and internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

**6. Other matters**

76. The representative of Pakistan briefed the Committee on the devastating impact of the recent earthquake, which had affected 5 million people. Her Government appreciated the international assistance in disaster relief and appealed to ESCAP members and associate members for further assistance in the areas of health care and disability, as well as for the reconstruction of schools, roads and communication systems. On behalf of the Committee, the Chairperson urged support for the appeal by the representative of Pakistan.

77. The representative of Mongolia informed the Committee of his country's celebration in 2006 of the 800th anniversary of its statehood, which would provide an opportunity for renewed interest in nomadic civilization.

78. Upon the request of one delegation, the secretariat explained that the scope of the secretariat's work under "emerging social issues" covered two categories: new issues that had appeared in recent years, such as HIV/AIDS, and the new dimensions of existing issues that merited greater attention in the context of rapid socio-economic and demographic changes, such as ageing.

## **7. Adoption of the report**

79. The Committee adopted the report on its second session on 3 November 2005.

## **II. OTHER RELEVANT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE AREA OF EMERGING SOCIAL ISSUES**

### **A. Socially vulnerable groups**

80. The Commission, in its resolution 60/1 on the Shanghai Declaration adopted on 28 April 2004, articulated the commitment of members and associate members of ESCAP to promote social policy development and the mainstreaming of social dimensions into national development programmes, and to promote human security through greater regional cooperation, especially for vulnerable people. Furthermore, in its resolution 61/7 adopted on 18 May 2005, the Commission requested the Executive Secretary to continue to seek means to support the secretariat's technical cooperation work in the area of community-building and human development to protect and enhance the capabilities of vulnerable people. In follow-up to those resolutions, ESCAP is committed to strengthening the capacity of member countries for developing and implementing policies to address persistent and emerging social issues, ensuring the protection of socially vulnerable people.

81. The programme implemented by ESCAP in the area of population during the last two years placed special emphasis on health and mortality. ESCAP, in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), convened the regional Seminar on Emerging Issues of Health and Mortality, held in Bangkok in September 2004, which resulted in the publication of Asian Population Studies Series No. 163, entitled *Emerging Issues of Health and Mortality in the Asian and Pacific Region*. The study addressed, among other things, the issue of gender dimensions in child mortality, adult mortality and the health care of older persons. The study recommended several strategies for achieving the Millennium Development Goals of reducing child mortality and improving maternal health.

82. International migration is an emerging issue which involves a growing number of countries in the region. However, its social dimensions and social impact have not been fully explored. In August 2005, ESCAP, in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration, UNFPA and the

Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development, organized the Regional Seminar on the Social Implications of International Migration, which was held in Bangkok. The Seminar examined, among other things, such issues as the implications of international migration for children and the migrant families, and human trafficking. In the recommendations adopted at the Seminar, Governments were urged to review their national policies on international migration and seek policy coherence with broad developmental goals, and to develop policies that reflected the interests of various stakeholders.

83. ESCAP also organized the Training Workshop on Population and Planning in Central Asia, held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, in November 2004 for seven Central Asian countries, and the Training Workshop on Population, Poverty and Gender, in Bangkok in September 2005, for countries in South-East and South Asia. The implementation of those programmes has contributed to national capacity-building, as it is targeted at national planners and policymakers.

84. ESCAP has disseminated population information widely through both printed publications and electronic means to facilitate knowledge-sharing and contribute to the creation of an evolving knowledge base. It publishes the professional journal entitled the *Asia-Pacific Population Journal*, which targets policymakers and programme planners, among others. ESCAP published four issues of the *Journal* in 2004 and three in 2005. It also publishes a bimonthly newsletter for general readers and maintains an online database on various demographic indicators and population information.

85. Population ageing in the ESCAP region presents a significant challenge for social development policies, especially concerning health and social security arrangements. In October 2004, ESCAP organized the Regional Seminar on Follow-up to the Shanghai Implementation Strategy for the Madrid and Macao Plans of Action on Ageing, which was held in Macao, China. As recommended at that Seminar, ESCAP is proposing to convene a high-level meeting in late 2006 or early 2007 on the five-year regional review of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing.

86. In 2004 and 2005, ESCAP also conducted participatory bottom-up studies in rural and semi-urban areas of Bangladesh, China, Indonesia and Sri Lanka to promote better understanding of the changing requirements of old age among the elderly poor and non-pensioners. The studies also underscored acceptable political, social and cultural norms and settings. The outcome of those studies was used to provide evidence-based recommendations on possible policy interventions to improve social protection schemes and long-term health care, and adjustment options to guide existing ones.

87. As a basic unit of society, the family institution in Asia and the Pacific is undergoing tremendous transition and has been affected by social change, such as changing values and lifestyles, and changing family structures and size. Since its inception in 1994, the International Day of Families has been observed annually by ESCAP. On 9 May 2005, the secretariat, in cooperation with the Government of Thailand and non-governmental organizations and institutions, organized a one-day

seminar on family development issues to observe the International Day. The event emphasized the role of the family in providing its members with support and care, the challenges in addressing the needs of families and the necessity to strengthen the family institution in the fulfilment of its societal and developmental functions.

88. The HIV/AIDS epidemic has had a devastating impact on families in Asia and the Pacific, and the family and its networks are instrumental in helping individuals and communities to cope with the disease and its consequences, as well as to meet other economic and social challenges. ESCAP and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations jointly organized the Workshop on HIV/AIDS and Family Well-being, which was held in Bangkok in December 2005. The Workshop examined the impact of HIV/AIDS on the family and existing policies and programmes. It adopted a policy framework for addressing the impact of HIV/AIDS on family well-being, including recommendations for strengthening the ability of families to cope, and its applicability to the ESCAP region.

89. The Biwako Millennium Framework for Action towards an Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific is a regional mandate on disability, promoting disability-specific and disability-inclusive policy development as its basic principle. In its resolutions 59/3 of 4 September 2003 and 61/8 of 18 May 2005, the Commission requested the Executive Secretary to provide Governments in the region with technical support for the continued monitoring of the implementation of the Framework.

90. In pursuance of those resolutions, four expert meetings have been convened in Bangkok since 2004: (a) Regional Workshop on Monitoring the Implementation of the Framework, October 2004; (b) tenth session of the Thematic Working Group on Disability-related Concerns, July 2005; (c) Regional Workshop on a Comprehensive National Plan on Action on Disability-Towards the Midpoint Review of the Biwako Millennium Framework, October 2005; (d) Conference on Disability: A Global Perspective on Rights to Education and Livelihood, October 2005. These meetings helped build consensus among Governments and NGOs in the region with regard to the mainstreaming of disability perspectives into social and economic development agenda and plans.

91. In its resolution 61/8, the Commission called upon members and associate members to continue to support and contribute to the ongoing work on a comprehensive and integral international convention on the protection and promotion of the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities. In this regard, ESCAP organized the Workshop on Regional Follow-up to the Fifth Session and Preparation for the Sixth Session of the Ad Hoc Committee on an International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities, which was held in Bangkok in July 2005. The Workshop contributed to deepening Governments' understanding of the significance of supporting the Convention.



## **B. Gender**

92. In the Shanghai Declaration, adopted by the Commission in its resolution 60/1 of 28 April 2004, members and associate members of the Commission pledged to strive to promote and support gender equality and eliminate discrimination against women. In order to build effectively upon its previous work on the use of international human rights instruments in combating trafficking in women, ESCAP organized the Expert Group Meeting on the Promotion and Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women with Particular Emphasis on Violence against Women and Trafficking in Women, which was held in Bangkok in October 2005. The outcome of the Meeting served as an input into the Secretary-General's study on violence against women and will be transmitted to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women for its consideration and possible future action. The Meeting identified the core obligations of States parties to the Convention in relation to trafficking, using an approach which explored the connections between violence against women, discrimination and trafficking; the links between the obligations of States in relation to the Convention and those derived from other international legal instruments relevant to trafficking; and identified effective practices in relation to implementation of the obligations of States to combat trafficking.

93. Another focus in promoting and supporting gender equality has been development of the capacity of women entrepreneurs in the region. ESCAP has been organizing workshops for women entrepreneurs and providing gender sensitization training for both male and female entrepreneurs, as well as policymakers, in the context of enterprise development. In March 2005, ESCAP organized the Seminar on E-business and Opportunities for Women in Asia-Pacific jointly with the Asia-Pacific Women's Information Network Centre and Business and Professional Women International, which was held in Bangkok.

94. In response to Commission resolution 61/10 of 18 May 2005 on follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, ESCAP has been placing emphasis on a mainstreaming approach in order to assist its members and associate members more effectively. A technical cooperation project to promote the mainstreaming of girls' education in Cambodia and the Lao People's Democratic Republic was completed in 2005, involving a multiple number of line ministries. Gender perspectives were also incorporated throughout the implementation of an ESCAP technical cooperation project involving three countries affected by the tsunami in December 2004, namely Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Thailand, which focused on formulating a strategy for rebuilding communities to ensure that the rights and needs of the most socially vulnerable groups affected by the tsunami, such as elderly people and persons with disabilities, were protected.

95. In December 2005, ESCAP also organized, jointly with the Government of Indonesia, a workshop for national machineries for women's empowerment and gender equality, with the theme of gender mainstreaming, which was held in Jakarta. Representatives of various national machineries from the region discussed how best that approach could be applied to their work related to the Millennium Development Goals, post-natural disaster response, trafficking and violence against women, and partnerships with civil society.

96. ESCAP has also been making progress in strengthening its organizational gender mainstreaming capacity so that all of its work will contribute to achieving gender equality in the region. In recent months, the ESCAP Gender Mainstreaming Task Force has been drafting the organizational gender policy and action plan, and continued the organization of a series of gender mainstreaming training workshops. The ESCAP gender policy and action plan are expected to be issued in early 2006.

### **C. Health and development**

97. In the Shanghai Declaration, members and associate members of the Commission pledged to strive to enhance capacity-building in public health, inter alia, through the exchange of information and the sharing of experience, as well as research and training programmes. In its resolution 61/12 of 18 May 2005, the Commission requested the Executive Secretary to assist members and associate members in their capacity-building by mainstreaming health concerns into diverse development sectors in support of the fulfilment of the internationally agreed development goals.

98. ESCAP submitted two documents, "Strengthening public health capacity-building with a view to achieving the Millennium Development Goals related to health" (E/ESCAP/CESI(2)/6) and "Addressing emerging health risks: strengthening health promotion" (E/ESCAP/CESI(2)/7), to the Committee on Emerging Social Issues at its second session, held in Bangkok in November 2005. The Committee endorsed the comprehensive Regional Framework for Strategic Action: Promoting Health and Sustainable Development. The five priority areas in the Regional Framework that are pertinent to enhancing capacity-building in public health are the following: (a) strengthening health systems; (b) enhancing multisectoral action for health; (c) managing the health implications of globalization; (d) promoting sustainable environmental development to improve health; and (e) increasing the effectiveness of the response to HIV/AIDS.

99. In the Shanghai Declaration, members and associate members of ESCAP also pledged to strive to coordinate a more effective and comprehensive response to HIV/AIDS and other serious diseases in the region. ESCAP has been sensitizing countries in the region to the socio-economic impact of the avian influenza outbreak and informing them of the sustainable policy options available to countries for tackling the problem. This was done through the medium of panel discussions on the impact of avian influenza in the region held during the second session of the Committee. A policy

brief was also issued for the benefit of all countries, outlining the key issues and challenges facing the region.

100. In furtherance of regional cooperation for a more effective response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, since 2004 ESCAP has been carrying out a project in the Greater Mekong Subregion to improve health and reduce HIV vulnerability among long-distance road transport workers through a multisectoral approach. The project engages diverse stakeholders, including transport workers, transport enterprises, ministries of transport and health, local government entities and civil society organizations.

101. ESCAP undertook an analysis of the gaps in implementation, in the Asian and Pacific region, of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS adopted at the twenty-sixth special session of the General Assembly, held in June 2001, including those pertaining to political and resource commitments. The secretariat also reviewed the achievements of the Asia-Pacific Leadership Forum, which exemplified a significant initiative in the ESCAP region towards the implementation of the Declaration.

102. To scale up effective HIV prevention interventions for youth, it is critically important to invest in rigorously designed research to develop a sound evidence base for policy advocacy. ESCAP has started a project that aims to provide such evidence on effective community-based programmes to empower youth with life skills to make informed and responsible decisions and foster their positive health behaviour. The project targets youth who are out of school, particularly those who are from the lower socio-economic strata of society in Cambodia, China, the Philippines and Sri Lanka.

103. The secretariat is also supporting drug abuse-related pilot training programmes in four countries, namely China, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Thailand and Viet Nam, to address the nexus between drug abuse and HIV/AIDS. The programmes have reached stakeholders ranging from family members, community volunteers, students, young people, teachers, monks and police officers to policymakers and decision-makers, to strengthen initiatives for drug abuse prevention, treatment and rehabilitation.

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