



ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

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Bangkok

**REVIEW OF ISSUES PERTINENT TO THE SUBSIDIARY STRUCTURE OF  
THE COMMISSION: SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

(Item 2 (g) of the provisional agenda)

**REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT  
ON ITS FIRST SESSION**

*Note by the secretariat*

**SUMMARY**

The Committee on Social Development held its first session in Bangkok from 24 to 26 September 2008. It considered the following: a framework for action towards an inclusive society; issues on managing emerging and persistent risks to ensure inclusive social development; and reducing disparities and exclusion. The Committee was also provided with an overview of the process towards the finalization and endorsement by member States of the programme of work of the secretariat for the biennium 2010-2011.

The Commission may wish to consider the major conclusions and decisions of the Committee and to endorse the recommendations brought to its attention. The Commission may also wish to provide the secretariat with guidance on the implementation of the recommendations.

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### I. MATTERS CALLING FOR ACTION BY THE COMMISSION OR BROUGHT TO ITS ATTENTION

1. The Committee recommended that members and associate members of the Commission strengthen their commitment to regional cooperation and coordination on international migration.
2. The Committee recommended that the secretariat carry out further research on the multidimensional aspects of international migration and development and explore ways to protect migrants in vulnerable situations.
3. The Committee recommended that the secretariat pay special attention to the challenges faced by countries with special needs as a result of international migration and ensure that their voices were heard in regional and global platforms.
4. The Committee recommended that the secretariat further reinforce the collection of demographic data and research on population issues, as well as training in the field of demography, with a view to enhancing the capacity of policymakers to understand the implications of demographic transitions and to develop effective and informed policies and strategies to tackle challenges arising from those transitions.
5. The Committee suggested that the secretariat further promote the exchange of experiences and reinforce policy dialogue through, among other things, South-South cooperation.
6. Recognizing the broad and multidimensional nature of the population field, the Committee recommended that the secretariat build on its strengths in the areas of

policy dialogue, the exchange of good practices and capacity-building, and work in partnership with various United Nations agencies and international organizations to avoid duplication and to optimize the use of resources.

7. In the area of social protection, the Committee recommended that the secretariat develop a database, facilitate the exchange of good practices, and support capacity development for policymakers, programme developers, service providers and other stakeholders.

8. The Committee recommended that ESCAP serve as a regional platform for dialogue on social policy instruments to address food security challenges, and in that regard, engage in cooperation and coordination with relevant international organizations.

9. The Committee recommended that the secretariat facilitate the exchange of information, develop innovative practices on disability, and provide technical assistance for creating a data collection system and formulating a feasible definition of disability based on the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health.<sup>1</sup>

10. The Committee recommended that the secretariat continue promoting the implementation, by countries in the Asian and Pacific region, 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<sup>2</sup> and the Biwako Plus Five,<sup>3</sup> as well as the ratification and implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.<sup>4</sup>

11. The Committee recommended that the secretariat play a larger role in facilitating the sharing of experiences among member countries with a view to promoting gender equality in the region, particularly in the pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals.

12. The Committee recommended that the secretariat undertake capacity-building activities, such as regional trainings/sensitization seminars in gender-responsive budgeting with a view to enabling member countries to acquire a better conceptual and practical understanding of the process and to share good practices and lessons learned.

## **II. PROCEEDINGS**

### **A. Framework for action: towards an inclusive society**

13. The Committee had before it the document entitled “Framework for action: towards an inclusive society” (E/ESCAP/CSD/1).

14. A panel discussion was held on the subject of social protection in which presentations were made by the Chief of the Social Development Division of ESCAP regarding document E/ESCAP/CSD/1 and by the representative of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) on the Bank’s social protection index project. A presentation was also given by the representative of the International Labour

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<sup>1</sup> See World Health Assembly resolution 54.21 of 22 May 2001.

<sup>2</sup> E/ESCAP/APDDP/4/Rev.1 (see also Commission resolution 59/3).

<sup>3</sup> E/ESCAP/APDDP(2)/2 (see also Commission resolution 64/8).

<sup>4</sup> General Assembly resolution 61/106, annex I.

Organization on his organization's global campaign to extend social security to all based on the four pillars of the basic social security floor, namely (a) access to basic/essential health-care benefits, (b) income security for all children, (c) targeted income support for the poor and unemployed and (d) income security for older persons and persons with disabilities.

15. Several delegations noted with appreciation the topical and informative document prepared by the secretariat as well as the presentations made by the panellists on the subject, which had highlighted new social policy paradigms.

16. Several delegations welcomed the social protection index of ADB, which covered labour market programmes, social security and insurance, microcredit/finance programmes and child protection programmes, including reduced educational costs. The index had four indicators of measurement, namely social protection expenditure, coverage, distribution and impact.

17. In response to one delegation's question, the representative of ADB noted that the social protection index could serve as a guide, basis for discussion, debate and critique on the issue of social protection. He also noted that one of the shortcomings of the index was the limited availability of data and/or the difficulty in obtaining data.

18. One delegation pointed out the importance of South-South cooperation, and in response, the panellists held up the universal health coverage policies of Thailand and the cash transfer programmes in Nepal as examples of policies from which other countries of the region could learn, as well as examples of bilateral and multilateral arrangements.

19. One delegation noted that microfinance for the poor could be a social protection measure and, in the case of cash disbursed by Governments in the form of microcredit, the risk of non-repayment could be reduced with better implementation and design. In some cases, public-private partnerships could improve the management of such programmes. It was pointed out that microcredit programmes would be useful not only for risk mitigation, through, for example, savings or microinsurance, but also for coping with risks after a shock by, among other things, smoothing consumption.

20. Two delegations noted the increasing recognition of the effectiveness of strategies that gave financial control to women in the household. In that regard, one delegation reported on a cash transfer programme in which the money was given to mothers. Initiatives also existed to promote gender equality by improving the numbers of women in decision-making positions. For example, Nepal reported that it had achieved a 30 per cent representation of women in the parliament.

21. The representative of CARE International noted that political will would be needed for social policy to be implemented effectively and that the role of the State would therefore be important, especially in the challenging context of privatization and deregulation. The participation of multiple stakeholders in that regard would be required.

## **B. Managing emerging and persistent risks to ensure inclusive social development**

22. The Committee had before it three documents. The first document was entitled "Managing risks posed by food insecurity through inclusive social policy and social protection interventions" (E/ESCAP/CSD/2).

23. Some delegations recognized that rising food prices had had a greater negative impact on the poor than on any other group and that there was a need to increase investments in agriculture and water management and in the development of new technologies, to review the intellectual property rights regime related to food crops, to create more favourable international trade regimes, and to develop policies with greater attention to protecting vulnerable groups.

24. One delegation noted that food insecurity threatened human security in developing countries and that it therefore supported the activities of organizations engaged in humanitarian assistance. The representative of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) noted with concern that climate change was already having significant impacts on food production in the Pacific island countries and territories. The dispersed geography of many Pacific island countries made them particularly vulnerable to rising fuel costs, while the loss of traditional knowledge and skills, and greater reliance on expensive imported food were contributing to poor nutritional outcomes.

25. Several delegations briefed the Committee about their countries' policies, programmes and experiences in enhancing food security through measures such as developing rural infrastructure; improving water management, crop insurance schemes, linkages between farmers and markets, and grain reserves; stabilizing food prices; enhancing human capital and school feeding programmes; reducing post-harvest crop losses and creating physical assets through targeted programmes.

26. Several delegations stressed the need to balance food security and energy security by ensuring that the production of biofuels did not negatively affect the production of food through the use of wasteland and the production of non-food grain-based crops for biofuel production. Some delegations also made reference to the experiences of the Green Revolution, which enhanced food security in Asia and called for more investments in the research and development of agriculture.

27. One delegation informed the Committee about a poverty reduction programme that provided poor households with conditional cash transfers in order to improve the health and nutrition of family members as well as to educate young children. Conditions that accompanied the transfers included children's attendance at day care, pre-school or elementary school at least 85 per cent of school days; pregnant women seeking pre- and post-natal care and attended to by a trained birth attendant; and attendance by parents at responsible parenthood sessions.

28. One delegation stressed the significance of improving public-private partnerships to engender more viable development strategies and especially to sustain agricultural growth.

29. Two delegations noted that the increase in food prices globally could not be considered a consequence of rapid economic growth and the increased demand for grains in their countries, as their countries had in fact increased their production of grains and were not importing grains from the world market. In that connection, one delegation requested the secretariat to delete the related portion of a sentence in E/ESCAP/CSD/2, paragraph 8, which read "and the increased demand for meat and dairy products by members of the expanding middle class and urban populations in countries experiencing rapid economic growth, such as China and India".

30. One delegation noted that the correct management of agricultural resources was essential to ensure food security and that there was a need to change the architecture of international food policy. The delegation stressed the importance of ensuring food safety through, inter alia, effective consumer protection measures and

enhanced sanitary control. It recommended that ESCAP play a role in facilitating the exchange and analysis of experiences and good practices on social policy instruments and safety nets in relation to food production and distribution in order to improve access to and the affordability of food.

31. Some delegations noted that ensuring food security was a responsibility that needed to be shared by all Governments and that regional cooperation could enhance efforts to counter food insecurity and ensure more equitable access to food.

32. The second document was entitled “Seizing opportunities and tackling challenges arising from population dynamics to build an inclusive society” (E/ESCAP/CSD/3).

33. Some delegations requested the secretariat to remove the third sentence in paragraph 33 of E/ESCAP/CSD/3 as it did not provide an accurate reflection of the situation.

34. Another delegation suggested that the next sentence in the same paragraph be revised by deleting the word “irregular”.

35. Some delegations shared the experiences of their countries with regard to the demographic transition. Some delegations noted that their countries had sustained low fertility and had already completed the demographic transition, hence they were facing issues related to the ageing of their societies.

36. Several delegations noted that their countries still had a large and growing proportion of young people. They emphasized the need for employment creation for that population age group in order to benefit from the demographic dividend. In that respect, some delegations shared experiences regarding the specific employment-creation programmes that their countries were implementing, as well as the increased efforts placed on providing educational opportunities.

37. Some delegations noted that, while young people’s contributions represented a potential opportunity for national development, that population age group often remained in vulnerable situations and faced many challenges, including unemployment, poverty, a lack of skills, and a lack of access to education and health services, all of which could give rise to social problems.

38. Some delegations noted in particular the rapid changes occurring in family structures and lifestyles and their effect on intergenerational support for older persons. Some delegations noted that the protection of older persons was an area of concern and should be better addressed.

39. The Committee was informed of various policies and measures that had been taken in order to improve the welfare of older persons, and of the development of long-term strategies to cater to the needs of the growing older population. One delegation proposed the establishment of a special regional network to monitor and assist older persons of the region.

40. One delegation informed the Committee that its Government was according much importance to population issues in its technical cooperation programmes and stressed that family planning was crucial to improve health indicators, such as reducing maternal mortality.

41. One delegation noted that 2009 marked the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population

and Development.<sup>5</sup> In that connection, the Committee was informed about the convening of the Fifth Asia Pacific Conference on Reproductive and Sexual Health in Beijing, which had been scheduled to be held from 18 to 20 October 2009.

42. Two delegations emphasized the need for a gender-sensitive approach to population ageing, as women comprised a large proportion of older persons in the region and were particularly at risk of living alone and in poverty.

43. The Committee was briefed on the outcomes of the Asia-Pacific High-level Meeting on International Migration and Development, held in Bangkok on 22 and 23 September 2008. Some delegations noted that development disparities and demographic imbalances had spurred international migration in the Asian and Pacific region. One delegation also stressed that there was increasing evidence of the link between migration and poverty reduction.

44. Several delegations also noted that the protection of migrants should warrant special attention. One delegation informed the Committee about measures that its country had already taken in order to protect their nationals in the countries of destination.

45. One delegation noted with concern the outflow of skilled workers, stressing the negative impact on productivity in the country and the risk of some countries' dependence on migration. The delegation also described incentives that its country was offering in order to facilitate return migration and other existing measures aimed at maximizing the benefits of migration while mitigating its negative impacts.

46. Some delegations noted with concern the consequences of human trafficking and smuggling in the region. They recognized that combating human trafficking required comprehensive measures, including strong protection and rehabilitation services for victims. One delegation identified the need to reduce the trafficking of women and children as a priority.

47. In noting the impact of international migration on development and its potential contribution to poverty reduction, several delegations stressed the particular challenges that least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States were facing as a result of migration.

48. One delegation reported on the existing measures and initiatives its Government was taking to assist migrant workers. For example, measures aimed at ensuring the protection of its migrant workers included a workers' resource centre and the deployment of social workers to provide psychosocial support for distressed overseas workers and victims of trafficking. The same delegation extended an invitation to all member States to attend the second meeting of the Global Forum on Migration and Development, to be held in Manila in October 2008. One delegation emphasized that there should be a global collective effort to set up minimum wages for migrant workers with different skills and experience.

49. The third document was entitled "Building an inclusive society by addressing health-related risks and improving health financing" (E/ESCAP/CSD/4).

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<sup>5</sup> *Report of the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5-13 September 1994* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.95.XIII.18), chap. I, resolution 1, annex.

50. Some delegations informed the Committee of actions that their countries had taken to expand the coverage of health insurance schemes to include coverage for the rural poor and workers in the informal sector.

51. Some delegations noted the efforts made by their countries with regard to HIV/AIDS, including prevention, and the expansion of treatment and support for the family members of patients.

52. One delegation informed the Committee that its health policy was gender-sensitive and that gender analysis was used in health sector policymaking and planning. It also reported that sex-disaggregated data were being collected under all major programme interventions and that maternal and child health was being promoted as one of the most important objectives of its country's family welfare programme.

53. Another delegation conveyed its support for reproductive health services, including those focusing on reducing maternal and neonatal mortality, as they were crucial for enhancing the health of individuals, families and communities.

54. Several delegations drew the attention of the Committee to the demand for health care stemming from population ageing and the impact of chronic diseases. Concerns were also raised regarding the effects on health systems of the lack of sufficient health personnel or the migration of such personnel.

55. The representative of SPC drew attention to the concerns of the Pacific island countries and territories where the increased consumption of low-quality imported food contributed to escalating rates of malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies and a consequent rise in non-communicable diseases. That was placing a considerable strain on health systems. The delegation informed the Committee about its country's public health programme to raise awareness of the nutritional value of traditional foods. The delegation stressed that the small populations and dispersed geography of the Pacific countries made health service delivery difficult.

56. One delegation thanked the secretariat for its efforts in implementing Commission resolution 63/8 on sustainable financing towards achieving universal health-care coverage in Asia and the Pacific and called for continuous work in that regard so as to make it possible to remain on track for the achievement of the goal set forth in that resolution.

57. One delegation urged the secretariat to develop a database of good practices and development models in the area of health and social protection policies, to support the exchange of good practices and to facilitate evidence-based studies on policy analysis and development.

### **C. Reducing disparities and exclusion**

58. The Committee had before it two documents. The first document was entitled "Reducing disparities: a gender perspective" (E/ESCAP/CSD/5).

59. One delegation noted the need for coordination among programmes of the United Nations to avoid overlap and duplication and to enhance synergies. In that connection, the Committee was informed about a recent initiative undertaken under the United Nations Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM). The Special Gender Adviser to the Executive Secretary of ESCAP informed the Committee of the formation of the Thematic Working Group on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women, co-chaired by ESCAP and the United Nations Development Fund for



Women. The Executive Secretary had arranged a thematic discussion entitled “Critical gender issues for the Asia-Pacific region: the United Nations system response” at the meeting of RCM on 16 September 2008. Presentations assessing key gender equality issues in the region had been made by the five other thematic working groups: Education for All, Health, Poverty and Hunger, International Migration and Human Trafficking, and Environment and Disaster Management. Each thematic group had provided an overview of priority issues in the region, regional-level United Nations system responses and ways to enhance the policy cohesiveness of those responses from a gender perspective.

60. The Committee was also informed of the focus of the Thematic Working Group on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women on the Millennium Development Goals and actions that were needed to implement commitments to the Goals. The Special Gender Adviser noted that a significant outcome of those presentations had been a statement by RCM, which the Executive Secretary of ESCAP had forwarded to the Deputy Secretary-General. The statement had included concerns and recommendations regarding the situation of women and girls in the region in terms of gender equality outcomes and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The Deputy Secretary-General had conveyed the statement to the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly in advance of the High-level Event on the Millennium Development Goals on 25 September 2008.

61. Several delegations reported that, although gender equality measures were being undertaken and some progress was being made, much still needed to be done in the region. Several delegations informed the Committee of initiatives taken in gender mainstreaming in their national development policies, plans and programmes. Several delegations discussed the measures taken by their countries to strengthen institutional mechanisms with a view to promoting gender equality; the measures included the creation of a new ministry and a special office with a focus on women’s issues, and the placement of gender focal points in all ministries and in local governments.

62. Several delegations stated that meeting the Millennium Development Goals was high on their countries’ agendas and affirmed the need for multisectoral strategies to reduce poverty and achieve gender equality through a variety of education, health-care and income-generation programmes. Some delegations recognized that a large number of the poor lived in rural areas, and that the majority of the poor were women. Some delegations indicated that programmes for rural women were a priority and a crucial part of poverty alleviation.

63. One delegation stressed the importance of property rights legislation for promoting gender equality. One delegation reported that, in 2007, its country had enacted a law on property rights guaranteeing the rights of women.

64. Several delegations highlighted the enactment of laws and acts vital for the advancement of gender equality. In addition to laws on women’s representation, property rights, domestic violence and child marriage, one delegation reported that its country had passed a dowry prohibition act.

65. Some delegations reported on the initiatives taken by their countries to provide female children with an education, including free tuition and midday meals, and to guarantee education for rural children. One delegation also reported on the creation of women’s schools in rural areas.

66. Some delegations requested the secretariat to reformulate relevant paragraphs in the document entitled “Reducing disparities: a gender perspective” (E/ESCAP/CSD/5), which addressed the inequality of older women in terms of health

conditions and access to health services, disparities in life expectancy and the link between violence against women and the loss of their productivity.

67. Several delegations described their countries' programmes in the area of health-care provision for both mothers and children, including reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, and maternal and childcare services. Initiatives on health education and investment in health infrastructure in rural areas were also mentioned.

68. Several delegations described their countries initiatives focused on income generation, such as microcredit, and other affirmative action responses, including ensuring that a certain percentage of employment opportunities went to women, particularly in rural areas. Employment opportunities created for women were also supported by training and skills development in science and technology, special programmes for women entrepreneurs, and the provision of adequate banking facilities and childcare services. Some delegations noted that development schemes for the promotion of employment and economic empowerment for rural women were also being implemented.

69. Some delegations highlighted initiatives aimed at ensuring women's representation in politics and decision-making through quotas at several levels of government, including in national, provincial, local and community-level institutions. One delegation confirmed that quotas in local government had led to high levels of women's participation. It also reported on its country's accomplishments in promoting the representation of women in the armed forces and the judiciary.

70. Eliminating violence against women was identified as a priority area by several delegations. Two delegations reported that their countries had taken a number of measures to reduce the trafficking of women, including the promotion of decent work for women. One delegation reported that its country had instituted anti-violence and anti-trafficking laws to protect women; however, the enforcement of those laws had been difficult. The importance of establishing a narrower definition of violence against women was also mentioned by one delegation. Another delegation noted that societal attitudes needed to change, and women must be seen as equals if violence against women was to be eliminated.

71. A number of delegations reported their countries' initiatives in gender budgeting. One delegation reported that gender budgeting had been integrated into its Government's appropriation act, and another delegation reported that gender budgeting had been made mandatory for all schemes with a gender component. Several delegations stated that more work needed to be done in the area of gender statistics to formulate gender-responsive policies.

72. One delegation reported that its Government's official development assistance policy had supported efforts in other countries to ensure women's participation and the promotion of gender equality in the development process through contributions to multilateral organizations and bilateral assistance.

73. Two delegations suggested amending the wording used in document E/ESCAP/CSD/5 in order to be in line with the Millennium Development Goals.

74. The second document was entitled "Building an inclusive society by addressing the exclusion of persons with disabilities" (E/ESCAP/CSD/6).

75. One delegation recognized the importance of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities<sup>4</sup> as a milestone instrument, and noted that the Convention promoted persons with disabilities not as objects of charity but as rights holders and

active agents of development. The Committee was informed that some countries in the region had either ratified or signed the Convention.

76. It was acknowledged that many countries in the region had made significant strides in creating equal opportunities and an inclusive society for persons with disabilities. Many countries had either developed or amended their legislation or disability-specific policies and plans to prohibit discrimination against persons with disabilities and to protect their rights.

77. The Committee was also informed of other efforts made by countries in the areas of accessibility, disability data collection, inclusive and special education, livelihood improvement, employment promotion, the provision and production of assistive devices, and rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities. In particular, some delegations acknowledged a range of measures to promote employment opportunities for persons with disabilities via the provision of vocational training, concessional loans, collateral-free microcredit, and quota systems in both the public and private sectors. One delegation informed the Committee that a budget had been allocated for all ministries and local government units to support programmes and services for persons with disabilities and older persons.

78. Several delegations informed the Committee of the progress of their countries in regard to the multiministerial policy coordination mechanism on disability issues and measures to prevent and penalize any form of harassment against persons with disabilities. One delegation noted the recent organization of the Paralympic Games in China as a very effective medium for removing attitudinal barriers.

79. In regard to implementing the disability agenda, two delegations drew attention to the need for better data collection, efforts to mainstream the perspective of women with disabilities in development activities, and ways of tackling the implementation gaps of policies concerning disability.

80. One delegation noted the need to integrate the disability perspective into the terms of reference of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Human Rights Body, which were being drafted.

#### **D. Other matters**

81. One delegation suggested renaming agenda item 6 as “Building a society with equal opportunity for all”. The same delegation also suggested adding one more sub-item under that agenda item, namely “Disadvantaged and ageing”.

82. In reference to queries from two delegations on the status of the strategic framework and proposed outputs for the proposed programme of work for 2010-2011 (E/ESCAP/CSD/7), the secretariat provided an overview of the process towards the finalization and endorsement by member States of the programme of work of the secretariat for the biennium 2010-2011. The secretariat emphasized that States members of the Commission would have the opportunity to review the proposed programme of work on two further occasions, namely at a special session of the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission, to be held in early 2009, and during the sixty-fifth session of the Commission, to be held in April 2009. The secretariat assured the Committee that the consolidated document containing the draft programme of work would be circulated well in advance for review by member States, taking into account the views of the delegations to the Committee on better balanced outputs, the equal level of detail per section and the prioritization of the activities of the Commission in the area of social development.

83. Also in reference to document E/ESCAP/CSD/7, one delegation sought clarification on the format of the proposed outputs and the rationale behind the inclusion of intermediate outputs pertaining to inter-agency collaboration. The secretariat informed the Committee that instructions from United Nations Headquarters on the format of the proposed programme of work for the period 2010-2011 had yet to be issued. The inclusion of intermediate outputs, which was reflective of the added efforts by the secretariat to strengthen coherence within the United Nations system, should thus be seen as part of an ongoing process.

84. One delegation suggested that the future sessions of the Committee not discuss documents that had not been made available in due time. The secretariat indicated the reasons for the late issuance of some documents (see paragraph 98).

85. Two delegations noted that the agenda items should be reviewed in advance by member countries.

### **E. Adoption of the report**

86. The Committee adopted the report on its first session on 26 September 2008.

## **III. ORGANIZATION**

### **A. Opening, duration and organization of the session**

87. The Committee on Social Development held its first session in Bangkok from 24 to 26 September 2008. In his opening statement, the Deputy Executive Secretary noted that, at its sixty-fourth session, the Commission had decided to establish the Committee on Social Development.<sup>6</sup> He explained that the reorientation of the social development programmes of ESCAP had stemmed from the need to meet persistent and emerging social development challenges in the Asian and Pacific region, which had experienced unprecedented socio-economic development in the previous few decades. Nevertheless, the fruits of such development had not been enjoyed by all, and millions of people in the region remained trapped in poverty, the consequences of which were aggravated by the lack of well-developed social protection systems. Recent increases in food and fuel prices and recurrent natural disasters had painfully exposed the inadequacy of many of the existing social protection policies.

88. The Deputy Executive Secretary further noted that the crucial contribution women had made to the growth of the Asian and Pacific region had not led to comparable economic empowerment or advances in their social and political status. It was essential to formulate policies linking the benefits of economic growth to the advancement of gender equality. He stressed that policies and legislation at the macro level did not necessarily bring about changes for women if existing values and power relations suppressed their advancement. With the launching of the Secretary-General's campaign on the subject, the elimination of violence against women (which continued to exist and even proliferate with impunity in the region, representing a blatant violation of women's human rights) had become a top priority on the international agenda. Persons with disabilities had been excluded from development processes, and measures had to be taken to ensure that such persons had the means to participate in society, enjoy equal opportunities and exercise their rights.

89. The Deputy Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security of Thailand noted that the Committee had been given the formidable

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<sup>6</sup> See Commission resolution 64/1.

task of strengthening national commitments and actions towards building inclusive societies. She expressed her satisfaction that the Committee would be considering many issues that were of great importance to countries in the region and whose consideration was timely. She encouraged ESCAP to continue to play a pivotal role in setting out the regional cooperation framework for countries to cooperate effectively, and to assist in building consensus on key actions needed to meet development challenges. She outlined the various steps that the Government of Thailand was taking in order to address the manifold development concerns brought about by population ageing. The Government of Thailand recognized that developing an effective universal health-care coverage policy was the responsibility of the State and that it was essential to coordinate the planning and utilization of human resources for the benefit of all citizens.

90. The Deputy Permanent Secretary noted the progress that had been achieved in terms of gender equality in Thailand, and yet acknowledged the persisting gender gaps, in response to which strong gender mainstreaming and gender awareness efforts had been undertaken. Combating gender-based violence and the trafficking of women was a priority for the country, she said. The country's various achievements towards building an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for persons with disabilities included the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities<sup>4</sup> in July 2008.

## **B. Attendance**

91. Representatives of 25 members and associate members of ESCAP attended the meeting: Armenia, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, France, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Japan, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Thailand, Turkey, Viet Nam and New Caledonia.

92. In addition, representatives of the following offices of the United Nations Secretariat, United Nations bodies, and specialized agencies and related organizations attended: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Development Programme, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, United Nations Population Fund, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Labour Organization, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, and World Health Organization.

93. The following intergovernmental organizations were represented: ADB, International Organization for Migration and SPC.

94. The following non-governmental organizations were represented: Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development, CARE International, Disabled Peoples' International, International Planned Parenthood Federation and Zonta Club of Bangkok.

95. Other entities represented included: Asia-Pacific Development Centre on Disability, Population and Community Development Association, and Thailand Association of the Blind.

### **C. Election of officers**

96. Alicia Bala (Philippines) was elected Chairperson. Muhammad Ali Shah (Pakistan) was elected Vice-chairperson and Oyu Vasha (Mongolia) Rapporteur.

### **D. Agenda**

97. One delegation noted that some of the Committee documents had not been made available according to the set six-week deadline, making it difficult for member countries to study the documents thoroughly. Therefore, it requested the secretariat to ensure that documents for future Committee sessions be made available in a timely fashion, at least through the website. That would help to improve the quality of discussion of the Committee and enhance the work of the secretariat.

98. The Committee was informed that the late submission of some of the documents had been caused by the recent restructuring of the conference structure of the Commission, which had been endorsed by the Economic and Social Council only in July 2008.

99. In response to the question of one delegation regarding the non-inclusion in the agenda of the item on programme planning and evaluation, the Committee was informed that that was a new format being tested in that Committee. The programme planning and evaluation item was discussed to some extent under some of the agenda items.

100. The Committee adopted the following agenda:

1. Opening of the session.
2. Election of officers.
3. Adoption of the agenda.
4. Framework for action: towards an inclusive society.
5. Managing emerging and persistent risks to ensure inclusive social development:
  - (a) Managing risks posed by food insecurity through inclusive social policy and social protection interventions;
  - (b) Seizing opportunities and tackling challenges arising from population dynamics to build an inclusive society;
  - (c) Building an inclusive society by addressing health-related risks and improving health financing.
6. Reducing disparities and exclusion:
  - (a) Reducing disparities: a gender perspective;
  - (b) Building an inclusive society by addressing the exclusion of persons with disabilities.
7. Other matters.
8. Adoption of the report of the Committee on its first session.

*Annex*

**List of documents**

<i>Symbol</i>	<i>Agenda item number</i>	<i>Document title</i>
E/ESCAP/CSD/L.1	1	Provisional agenda
E/ESCAP/CSD/L.2/Rev.2	2	Annotated provisional agenda
E/ESCAP/CSD/L.3	8	Draft report
E/ESCAP/CSD/L.3/Add.1	8	Draft recommendations of the Committee
	3	Information note for participants
E/ESCAP/CSD/1	4	Framework for action: towards an inclusive society
E/ESCAP/CSD/2	5(a)	Managing risks posed by food insecurity through inclusive social policy and social protection interventions
E/ESCAP/CSD/3	5(b)	Seizing opportunities and tackling challenges arising from population dynamics to build an inclusive society
E/ESCAP/CSD/4	5(c)	Building an inclusive society by addressing health-related risks and improving health financing
E/ESCAP/CSD/5	6(a)	Reducing disparities: a gender perspective
E/ESCAP/CSD/6	6(b)	Building an inclusive society by addressing the exclusion of persons with disabilities
E/ESCAP/CSD/7	5(b), 5(c), 6(a) and 6(b)	Strategic framework and proposed outputs for the proposed programme of work for 2010-2011

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