Account of proceedings

Agenda item 1
Opening of the session

1. The senior officials segment was opened by the Executive Secretary on 11 May 2018. The Executive Secretary delivered a welcoming statement.

2. The Commission elected Ms. Hilda C. Heine (Marshall Islands) Chair of the seventy-fourth session on 14 May 2018, and she presided over the opening session of the ministerial segment. Video messages from the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General were played. The Executive Secretary delivered welcome remarks and a policy statement. Mr. Don Pramudwinai, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Thailand, delivered the welcome address on behalf of the Government of Thailand. Statements were delivered by Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, President of the seventy-second session of the General Assembly; Mr. Taneti Maamau, President, Kiribati; Ms. Hilda C. Heine, President, Marshall Islands; and Mrs. Carrie Yuet Ngor Lam Cheng, Chief Executive, Hong Kong, China.

Agenda item 2
Special Body on Least Developed, Landlocked Developing and Pacific Island Developing Countries

3. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) had before it the note by the secretariat on the summary of the Asia-Pacific Countries with Special Needs Development Report 2018 (ESCAP/74/1).

4. Representatives of the following members and associate members of the Commission made statements: Bangladesh; Bhutan; Fiji; India; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Lao People’s Democratic Republic; Nepal; Pakistan; Russian Federation; Timor-Leste; Turkey; and Vanuatu. A representative of the Pacific Islands Development Forum also made a statement.

5. Several representatives acknowledged that the links between conflict and development were interdependent and that sustaining peace was an important requirement for achieving sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Commission also emphasized that natural disasters could be an acute trigger of conflict. The Commission recognized the importance of inclusive development and the valuable role that women and communities played in peacebuilding processes.
6. Several representatives from countries with special needs acknowledged with appreciation the policy recommendations set out in the report. Some representatives from other developing countries expressed concern about their inclusion in the report, made objections to certain findings and suggested the deletion of their countries from the report.

7. Foreseeing the loss of international support measures granted to least developed countries upon graduation, the Commission emphasized that resource mobilization, including through climate finance and other new financing windows, was essential to ensuring that their graduation process was smooth and sustainable. The Commission encouraged the secretariat to continue its support to least developed countries with respect to official development assistance and their effective participation in multilateral trade negotiations, as well as with respect to capacity-building and technical cooperation in preparation for their graduation from the category of least developed country and with a view to achieving the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020, by providing capacity-building and promoting knowledge exchange and the sharing of best practices by the countries that had recently graduated. Furthermore, the Commission called for attention to least developed countries that were also landlocked developing countries, as they faced additional development challenges and vulnerabilities owing to geographical limitations and infrastructure gaps, as well as limited access to global markets, small populations or high transportation costs.

8. The Commission also noted that natural disasters, such as floods, storms, earthquakes or the effects of climate change, hampered progress and efforts towards sustainable development in small island developing States. While acknowledging the active engagement of the secretariat, the Commission called for further assistance and enhanced support of the United Nations system to those economies, particularly through the facilitation of capacity-building, technical cooperation, and knowledge and skills transfer to address vulnerabilities and build resilience to such disasters.

9. At its 7th plenary meeting, on 16 May 2018, the Commission considered agenda item 2 and the note by the secretariat on the summary of the Asia-Pacific Countries with Special Needs Development Report 2018 prepared for the agenda item, and, inter alia, recommended the need to revise the report for the non-countries with special needs member States.

10. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission adopted resolution 74/1 on supporting the smooth transition of the least developed countries in Asia and the Pacific towards a sustainable graduation.

11. The representative of Bangladesh explained the rationale for and intention of the resolution and called upon other members to support its implementation and upon the broader international community to support graduating least developed countries.

12. The representative of Timor-Leste invited the international community, development partners and the Commission to continue to assist least developed countries through capacity-building and the sharing of knowledge, experiences and lessons learned in achieving sustainable graduation.
Agenda item 3
Review of issues pertinent to the subsidiary structure of the Commission, including the work of the regional institutions

13. The Commission had before it the note by the secretariat on the summary of progress in the implementation of Commission resolutions (ESCAP/74/2) and the note by the secretariat on the programme performance report for the biennium 2016–2017 (ESCAP/74/3).

14. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission took note of note by the secretariat on the summary of progress in the implementation of Commission resolutions and the note by the secretariat on the programme performance report for the biennium 2016–2017.

Sub-item (a)
Macroeconomic policy, poverty reduction and financing for development

15. In addition to the documents for consideration common to agenda item 3, the Commission had before it the report of the Committee on Macroeconomic Policy, Poverty Reduction and Financing for Development at its first session (ESCAP/74/4) and the note by the secretariat on the summary of the Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2018 (ESCAP/74/41).

16. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: Bangladesh; Bhutan; China; Fiji; India; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Malaysia; Pakistan; Republic of Korea; and Thailand.

17. The Commission noted that the Asia-Pacific region was experiencing steady economic growth and stable inflation, yet it faced various downside risks, such as increasing global trade disputes and the tightening of fiscal and monetary policies in major economies, and needed to remain watchful of financial risks.

18. The Commission noted that prudent macroeconomic policy management was essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the region. Prudent policy management helped promote macroeconomic stability, which was reflected in economic indicators such as sustainable public debt levels, manageable external accounts deficits and stable inflation. However, there were also countries where such issues as rising public debt or external sector management remained a challenge. To achieve macroeconomic stability, countries would benefit from vigilant economic monitoring, including through such tools as an economic early warning system, and from public policies aimed at increasing countries’ resilience to financial volatility. In that vein, the Commission underscored the importance of the secretariat’s continued support in building national capacities for macroeconomic policy analysis and requested regional workshops to share experiences and strengthen capacities in data management and analysis.

19. The Commission recognized that eliminating poverty in all its forms required social protection, increased skills development and income-generating activities, especially in ageing societies and for vulnerable segments in rural and less developed areas, and noted recent specific successes from such initiatives as employment and skills development programmes. In a similar vein, the Commission recognized the need to better support financial inclusion, micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises and young entrepreneurs, especially in rural areas and through targeted government spending.
20. The Commission acknowledged the importance of financing for development. The importance of international resources in the form of official development assistance, foreign direct investment and other financial flows was emphasized to complement domestic resources. The Commission urged the economies of Asia and the Pacific to enhance and coordinate cooperative efforts to implement the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development.

21. Furthermore, the Commission recognized the importance of domestic public resource mobilization for the effective pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals. Low levels of tax revenue remained a formidable challenge in many countries of the region. Governments had responded to that challenge and taken reforms to broaden their tax base, strengthen tax administration and improve fiscal management, including through the adoption of online systems for revenue management, e-payment or e-procurement systems. The Commission also recognized the support from member States to international and regional initiatives on tax matters, including the Addis Tax Initiative and the discussions on tax policies at the ESCAP high-level dialogues on financing for development in Asia and the Pacific.

22. The Commission welcomed efforts by ESCAP to develop capital markets, including bond markets and aspects that could facilitate public-private partnerships, especially in countries with special needs. Thus, the importance of increasing financing for infrastructure through innovative financing vehicles and of mainstreaming public-private partnerships was stressed. The ESCAP initiative to create a regional public-private partnership network was welcomed, as it would provide a platform for the development of public-private partnerships in the region.

23. The Commission noted that the digital economy offered significant opportunities, as illustrated by examples of ways in which to leverage technology to improve tax administration, public procurement, social transfers and national payment systems. At the same time, there was a need to address the digital divide and the challenges of job polarization and social inequality.

24. The Commission also agreed on the need to balance the three dimensions of sustainable development to advance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda through integrated socioeconomic and environmental policymaking, and highlighted the need for efforts to strengthen environmental protection, reduce environmental vulnerabilities, diversify countries’ economies and improve the quality of economic growth in the region, as reflected in some initiatives that representatives shared. Acknowledging the active engagement of ESCAP, the Commission also underscored that small island developing States bore the fiscal effects of climate change, and it called for continued and more specific allocation of resources, capacity-building and knowledge skills transfer, inter alia.

25. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission endorsed the report of the Committee on Macroeconomic Policy, Poverty Reduction and Financing for Development at its first session.

26. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission took note of the note by the secretariat on the summary of the Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2018.
Sub-item (b)
Trade and investment

27. In addition to the documents for consideration common to agenda item 3, the Commission had before it the report of the Committee on Trade and Investment on its fifth session (ESCAP/74/5), the report of the fourth meeting of the Interim Intergovernmental Steering Group on Cross-border Paperless Trade Facilitation (ESCAP/74/6), the note by the secretariat entitled “Trade and investment in Asia and the Pacific: policy challenges and secretariat response” (ESCAP/74/8) and the information document on the Asia-Pacific Business Forum 2018 (ESCAP/74/INF/6).

28. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: Bangladesh; China; India; Pakistan; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; and Thailand.

29. An audio recording was played of a statement by the Acting President of the ESCAP Sustainable Business Network on the work of the Network and the Asia-Pacific Business Forum 2018, which had been held in Hong Kong, China.

30. Recognizing that trade and investment were drivers of growth, the Commission agreed that countries of the region should work together to promote trade and investment and, for that purpose, maintain open trade regimes that were transparent, inclusive and mutually beneficial. It emphasized the primacy of a transparent, predictable, non-discriminatory, rules-based multilateral trading system that contributed to inclusive growth.

31. The Commission noted the current rise in protectionism and protectionist rhetoric, and several representatives expressed concerns about that trend. The growing number of non-tariff measures was highlighted, as was the need to ensure that they did not unduly undermine the export of goods of developing countries in particular. In that context, the Commission was informed of the commitments and efforts made by some countries to further liberalize trade and promote economic globalization, including by increasing market access, creating a better investment environment and enhancing the protection of intellectual property rights.

32. The Commission expressed its continued support for regional economic cooperation and integration. Countries were already engaged in various regional trade agreements. Several representatives acknowledged the complementarity between regional trade agreements and the multilateral trading system, along with the need for preferential rules of origin that were simple and easy to administer. Flexibility in harmonizing such rules would be needed, however, since economic structure varied between countries.

33. The Commission was informed of regional integration initiatives aimed at establishing a common economic space for participating countries to facilitate the free movement of goods, services, capital and people, such as the Eurasian Economic Union. Some representatives also noted the potential of the Belt and Road Initiative as a peaceful, regional, and increasingly global, cooperation initiative. The Commission was informed that four years after the Belt and Road Initiative had been proposed, over 100 countries around the world and international organizations had supported the Initiative and participated in it. Some representatives noted that the progress and achievements of the Initiative in terms of policy, infrastructure, trade, financial and people-to-people connectivity were broadly observable, and showed that the Belt and Road Initiative responded to current trends, conforming to established development frameworks, met the people’s interests and had broad
prospects, as testified by the warm response from the international community. The Commission also noted that all countries should respect each other’s sovereignty, dignity and territorial integrity, each other’s development paths and social systems, and each other’s core interests and major concerns. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, as an important part of the Belt and Road Initiative, was not directed at any third parties, and not relevant to disputes over territorial sovereignty. The Belt and Road Initiative was an open and inclusive initiative that welcomed participation from all countries to share the development opportunities.

34. The Commission recognized the importance of trade facilitation, including paperless trade, and took note of the efforts made by various countries in that area. In that context, the Commission highlighted the need for effective implementation of the Agreement on Trade Facilitation of the World Trade Organization. In addition, several representatives called for all eligible countries in the region to join the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific as soon as possible, as it was considered an important tool to reduce trade costs and promote regional trade and connectivity, including for small and medium-sized enterprises. The representative of the Russian Federation announced his country’s intention to join the Framework Agreement.

35. In order to facilitate the effective implementation of the Framework Agreement, the secretariat was called upon to provide technical assistance in that area and other trade-related areas upon request. In particular, the representative of Bangladesh requested technical assistance in conducting legal and technical readiness assessments on cross-border paperless trade.

36. The Commission voiced concern about the impact of the digital economy and the fourth industrial revolution, including e-commerce, on vulnerable groups and its potential to further widen the digital divide between genders, individual countries and companies. In that context, the Commission recognized the need for policy coordination through the sharing of information on individual countries’ policies and experiences and through enhanced technical assistance in that area. In particular, one representative requested the secretariat to study the impact of the digital economy on value chains and vulnerable groups such as women and small and medium-sized enterprises in developing countries.

37. The Commission noted the need to further mobilize international resources for development, especially in the form of foreign direct investment and other private flows. The development of mechanisms for bilateral investment in areas that yielded long-term and stable returns was discussed, as was the importance of recognizing the needs of micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises when formulating trade and investment rules.

38. The representative of India reaffirmed her delegation’s belief in the primacy of a multilateral trading system which espouses the principles of transparency, predictability, non-discrimination, inclusivity of growth and was rules-based, and noted that trade agreements complement the multilateral trading system. She further noted that India’s approach to trade agreements had been transcribed by the Act East Policy with a focus on the Asia-Pacific region. She emphasized the vital importance of micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises for her country and stressed the need to bridge the digital divide when looking at developing e-commerce. The representative of India further reiterated her delegation’s position regarding the Belt and Road Initiative, and expressed her country’s concern that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, part of the Belt and Road Initiative, passed through parts of the Indian State of
Jammu and Kashmir, which was under illegal occupation by Pakistan, reflecting a lack of understanding and appreciation of the concerns of India on the issue of sovereignty and territorial integrity. She noted that any regional connectivity project should be based on universally recognized international norms, good governance, the rule of law, openness, transparency, equality and financial responsibility, with due respect to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries. The representative of Pakistan said that, in the context of trade and investment, regional initiatives related to connectivity were important as they brought together linkages on transport, energy, and special economic and industrial zones. He said that the Belt and Road Initiative was a “game changer,” as it was a transcontinental connectivity and development project which had been widely appreciated and acknowledged by several countries and international forums. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, a flagship project of the Initiative, would have a positive impact and benefit to the Pakistan economy, as was evident by it providing momentum and economic growth in Pakistan. Regarding the status of Jammu and Kashmir, he said that India had no sovereignty over Jammu and Kashmir, and the question of territorial integrity did not arise, as it was not an integral part of India. He noted that Jammu and Kashmir was an unresolved issue between India and Pakistan recognized by various resolutions of the Security Council of the United Nations, which pronounced that the final disposition of the State of Jammu and Kashmir will be made in accordance with the will of the people expressed through the democratic method of a free and impartial plebiscite conducted under the auspices of the United Nations. The representative further expressed the view that as long as India did not fulfil its obligations and remained in violation of United Nations resolutions, it should not be allowed to block the progress and socioeconomic development of the people concerned and the region as a whole. The Belt and Road Initiative should be seen in the context of a development project, and as a development project it need not be politicized.

39. The representative of India, speaking in exercise of her first right of reply, said that the entire state of Jammu and Kashmir was an integral and inalienable part of India and the so-called China-Pakistan Economic Corridor passed through the territory of India under illegal occupation by Pakistan. Pakistan’s unwarranted references to resolutions of the United Nations Security Council were misleading and meant to divert attention from its own blatant disregard for non-compliance of international obligations, such as resolution 1267 (1999), as well as those under the Financial Action Task Force, which in February 2018 had called for enhanced monitoring of Pakistan because of concerns relating to terror financing. United Nations-proscribed terrorist organizations such as Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and its internationally designated leader Hafiz Saeed, the mastermind of the Mumbai terrorist attacks of 26 November 2008, as well as Jaish-e-Mohammed and Hizbul Mujahideen, continued to operate freely in Pakistan controlled territories. Pakistan was carrying out an intense campaign to destabilize the situation in the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir by promoting cross-border infiltration and terrorism; inciting, promoting and glorifying violence and unrest; and making baseless allegations in international forums. The representative of Pakistan, speaking in exercise of his first right of reply, said India’s position on Jammu and Kashmir was patently false. He said that the issue of Jammu and Kashmir was not only a bilateral dispute between India and Pakistan, but also an international issue as it related to international peace and security, as well as an issue of human rights and of self-determination. He recalled that there were international resolutions stating that the legitimate right for self-determination should not be confused with terrorism. For that reason, the United Nations Security Council had placed it on its agenda and had passed several resolutions – including
resolutions 47 (1948), 51 (1948), 80 (1950), 91 (1951) and 122 (1957), and two resolutions by the Council’s Commission for India and Pakistan – which remained relevant and needed to be implemented. He noted that India’s claim of sovereignty was not recognized by a single State Member of the United Nations and thus only an occupier would oppose implementation of United Nations resolutions. On the issue of terrorism, he said it was a global problem confronting all countries. The representative said that India had planned, financed and perpetrated terrorism activities in Pakistan, noting in this regard the arrest in Pakistan of a serving Indian naval officer who confessed to planning and committing acts of terrorism and instability in Pakistan. He also noted that it was India itself which had committed ceasefire violations in Jammu and Kashmir, which Pakistan had reported to the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan, the peacekeeping mission whose role it was to verify such violations.

40. The representative of India, speaking in exercise of her second right of reply, said that India had repeatedly asked Pakistan to abide by its commitment not to allow any territory under its control to be used against India in any manner; to respect the sanctity of the International Boundary and Line of Control; and to adhere to the 2003 understanding on ceasefire along the International Boundary and Line of Control. Every country had a legitimate right to protect its national security and territorial integrity, and India would firmly resist the entry of terrorists into its territory and retained the right to respond to the covering fire in support of their infiltration. The representative of India mentioned that Pakistan’s claim of providing “political, diplomatic and moral support” actually extended to providing military, financial and logistical support to terrorism against India and spread the venom of religious extremism under the pretext of its political and moral support. The representative of Pakistan, speaking in exercise of his second right of reply, said that Pakistan’s principled policy indeed was to provide political, moral and diplomatic support to the right of self-determination of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, and that Pakistan did not allow its territory to be used to commit terrorism anywhere, but India was directly perpetrating terrorism inside Pakistan, including by using the Afghan territory. On religious intolerance, Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)-inspired extremism and the entire phenomenon of intolerance in India was before the entire world. He noted that United Nations resolutions on Jammu and Kashmir had been accepted by both Pakistan and India and were binding on both. Therefore, when India denied those resolutions – which remained to be implemented – it also failed to acknowledge that its own leaders had accepted them. The representative repeated the call for all member States to urge India to implement the United Nations resolutions on Kashmir.

41. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission endorsed the report of the Committee on Trade and Investment on its fifth session.

42. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission took note of the report of the fourth meeting of the Interim Intergovernmental Steering Group on Cross-border Paperless Trade Facilitation, the note by the secretariat entitled “Trade and investment in Asia and the Pacific: policy challenges and secretariat response” and the information document on the Asia-Pacific Business Forum 2018.
Sub-item (c)  
Transport

43. In addition to the documents for consideration common to agenda item 3, the Commission had before it the note by the secretariat on strengthening regional efforts to improve road safety (ESCAP/74/9).

44. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: Bangladesh; China; Malaysia; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; and Thailand. A representative of the Pacific Islands Development Forum also made a statement.

45. The Commission recognized that the development of integrated and intermodal transport, seamless connectivity and urban transport were essential for advancing the 2030 Agenda and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Well-connected and integrated transport and enhanced urban mobility could improve accessibility for vulnerable groups, promote trade and investment, provide increased employment opportunities and, ultimately, reduce inequalities in the Asian and Pacific region.

46. The Commission was apprised of national and subregional initiatives and projects that were being implemented by member States and that were aimed at achieving sustainable seamless connectivity for people and goods, taking into account environmental performance, energy efficiency and harmonized operational standards across all modes of transport. In that regard, the Commission was informed by a number of member States that their Governments had embedded seamless connectivity in their respective development master plans or national transport strategies to meet the requirements of the 2030 Agenda.

47. The Commission noted that member States were increasingly integrating their national transport infrastructure development plans into subregional and regional connectivity initiatives, in particular in providing landlocked countries and remote hinterland areas with access to international maritime ports.

48. In that regard, some representatives noted that bilateral and multilateral initiatives, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, provided suitable collaborative frameworks for tackling a number of transport-related issues serving the realization of the 2030 Agenda. The Commission was informed of progress in regional connectivity under a number of subregional initiatives, such as the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Forum for Regional Cooperation, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, the South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. One representative also noted that the interregional coordination committee on transport between Asia and Europe, currently being established by ESCAP in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Europe, would also provide a platform to involve all stakeholders in addressing issues relating to enhancing intra- and interregional connectivity.

49. The Commission further acknowledged that innovation, the use of emerging technologies and the deployment of intelligent transport systems could play an important role in reducing the reliance of transport on fossil fuels, cutting down greenhouse gas emissions, alleviating traffic congestion and reducing the dominance of road transport through a modal shift to more environmentally friendly modes of transport such as rail and waterways. In that regard, the Commission noted programmes that were being implemented in the
region to develop rail mass transit systems as well as long-distance rail services to strengthen sustainable economic development and social integration.

50. The Commission recalled the Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Transport Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific and the Regional Action Programme for Sustainable Transport Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific, phase I (2017–2021), and reiterated the priority accorded to their implementation. In that regard, the Commission underlined the importance of achieving the region-wide facilitation of international transport through the simplification and harmonization of documents and procedures, efficient management techniques for transport infrastructure and services, and the coordinated development and operation of dry ports and intermodal facilities.

51. The Commission recognized that the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network, the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway Network and the Intergovernmental Agreement on Dry Ports provided normative architecture for transport development in the region. It underscored that the Intergovernmental Agreement on International Road Transport along the Asian Highway Network that had been concluded between the Governments of China, Mongolia and the Russian Federation would play an important role in operationalizing the Asian Highway network, and noted the call for all Asian Highway member countries to consider becoming parties.

52. The Commission acknowledged that the rate of motorization and the growing demand for transport in the region called for sustainable, inclusive and accessible urban transport systems. In that regard, it noted the importance of viewing road safety not exclusively from the angle of road accidents, but also in terms of other related negative externalities, such as respiratory diseases.

53. The Commission was informed of the outcomes of the High-level International Conference “City and Transport: Safety, Efficiency and Sustainability”, which had been held in Khabarovsk, Russian Federation, on 4 and 5 September 2017, and which had considered the provision of public transport, non-motorized transport, electric and smart mobility, and the use of intelligent transport systems, including global navigation satellite systems, as essential components of sustainable urban transport systems.

54. The Commission recognized that road safety was a region-wide problem that required urgent attention. In that regard, the Commission was apprised of the new annex to the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network, entitled “Asian Highway Design Standards for Road Safety”, which had been adopted by the Working Group on the Asian Highway Network at its seventh meeting, in December 2017, and of the progress achieved in Malaysia through a comprehensive national road safety improvement programme, including such elements as law enforcement, a national awareness programme and training of teachers for road safety education in primary schools.

55. Recognizing that the sharing of best practices ought to be part of a general approach to reduce road deaths and injuries as part of efforts to achieve the target under Sustainable Development Goal 3 on good health and well-being, the Commission acknowledged the offer of the Government of Malaysia to collaborate with the secretariat in disseminating best practices by hosting a related workshop. It also noted the view that road safety in the region could benefit from the establishment of guidelines for model road safety audits as well as comprehensive guidelines on road safety advocacy and awareness.
56. The Commission noted the view that decarbonatization and modernization of the maritime sector should be part of a general approach aimed at mitigating the negative externalities of transport, in particular for Pacific island countries. In that regard, the Commission noted the challenge that Pacific island countries were facing in replacing their often outdated fleet with modern and more environmentally friendly vessels.

57. The Commission acknowledged that the development of sustainable transport connectivity, smart cities and improved road safety were long-term endeavours that required efficient partnerships and collaboration among member States, and recognized the importance of the secretariat’s role with regard to capacity-building to assist member States in the implementation of related programmes and activities. It also noted the desire for continued collaboration between ESCAP and the Governments of the region.

58. The Commission noted the financial support of the Governments of China, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation to ESCAP in the implementation of projects related to the establishment of sustainable transport connectivity, the deployment of intelligent transport systems and improvements in road safety. It also noted their continued commitment to supporting the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Transport Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific through enhanced cooperation with the secretariat. In that regard, the Commission also welcomed the current and planned activities of the secretariat in assisting member States with improving regional transport connectivity.

59. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission took note of the note by the secretariat on strengthening regional efforts to improve road safety.

60. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission adopted resolution 74/2 on the promotion of the regional framework for the planning, design, development and operation of dry ports of international importance.

61. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission adopted resolution 74/3 on improving road safety in Asia and the Pacific for sustainable transport systems.

62. Subsequent to the adoption, the representative of the United States of America expressed the concerns of her Government about specific references to legal instruments and agreements, which, in many of the referenced cases, were drafted within a regional organization of the United Nations and to which only a small number of members were parties. She also expressed the concerns of her Government about references to internationally recognized standards: national Governments were best positioned to balance road safety and other factors.

Sub-item (d)
Environment and development

63. In addition to the documents for consideration common to agenda item 3, the Commission had before it the report of the seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP/74/10), the Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Development for Asia and the Pacific, 2017 (ESCAP/74/10/Add.1), the note by the secretariat on enhancing regional coordination of water-related activities (ESCAP/74/11), the note by the secretariat entitled “Empowering cities to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda: mobilizing municipal finance for sustainable infrastructure in the
Asia-Pacific region” (ESCAP/74/12), the report of the Governing Council of the Centre for Alleviation of Poverty through Sustainable Agriculture on its fourteenth session (ESCAP/74/13), the report of the Governing Council of the Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization on its thirteenth session (ESCAP/74/14), the report of the Coordinating Committee for Geoscience Programmes in East and South-East Asia (ESCAP/74/INF/1) and the report of the Mekong River Commission (ESCAP/74/INF/2).

64. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: Bangladesh; Bhutan; China; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; and Thailand.


66. The Commission stressed the challenges faced by the Asia-Pacific region with respect to achieving sustainable development and environmental sustainability. The Commission noted that rapid growth had created challenges related to natural resource management, and highlighted environmental concerns such as water pollution, marine debris, deforestation, degradation of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, threats to wildlife, unsustainable consumption, agricultural practices and unplanned urban growth, inter alia. Many countries were vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change and climate-induced disasters, and some had prepared pro-poor management strategies and action plans on adaptation and mitigation to implement the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

67. The Commission noted the need for institutional and policy reforms to achieve sustainable development, and the importance of mainstreaming the environmental dimension into national development agendas to achieve the 2030 Agenda. The Commission was informed of environment and development projects and initiatives in various countries. It acknowledged that progress had been made with respect to reducing major pollutants and carbon dioxide, increasing forest coverage and combating desertification, while pursuing green development and the green economy.

68. The Commission was informed of efforts to reduce ocean plastic pollution by engaging local communities and other stakeholders and raising awareness, and the voluntary commitments pledged by the Government of Thailand during the United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 in 2017. The Commission was also informed that the Government of the Russian Federation had pledged funds to undertake work at the subregional level on marine resources starting from 2019.

69. The Commission was informed of efforts by member States to promote low-carbon cities, including through the development of environmental indicators for sustainable cities, and of the role of climate policy at the subnational level to promote the development of low-carbon, liveable and sustainable cities.

70. The Commission highlighted the importance of agriculture and natural resource management for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific. Considering the need to promote sustainable agricultural mechanization in the
region, the Commission expressed appreciation for the progress achieved by 
the Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization in 2017. The 
Commission expressed support for the implementation of the Centre's 
workplan in 2018 and its midterm development strategy (2017–2019). The 
Commission underscored the importance of mobilizing more resources for the 
Centre to provide targeted capacity-building and knowledge-sharing activities 
for members and associate members, as well as enhanced support and technical 
assistance for smallholders on mechanization to promote sustainable 
agriculture, clean energy and clean water.

71. The Commission was informed of the commitment made by the 
Government of the Republic of Korea to further enhance cooperation within 
the Mekong region to improve the quality of life and support economic 
development. As part of its “New Southern Policy”, its cooperation with the 
Mekong region would enhance connectivity and narrow the development gap 
in member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

72. The Commission noted the need to strengthen regional cooperation on 
a broad range of environmental issues, including pollution control, coastal and 
marine resources, water conservation and natural resources management. 
There was also a need for financial resources to support technical assistance 
and capacity development, improved data and technology transfer to address 
climate change and achieve a green economy. Towards fostering 
environmentally friendly growth in the region, the Commission encouraged the 
exchange of knowledge and good practices, and highlighted the benefits of 
sharing experiences gained in other countries. In that regard, the Commission 
highlighted the role of ESCAP in facilitating such exchange to support member 
States towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

73. One representative was of the view that the Committee on 
Environment and Development should address the following topics: the 
integration of environmental issues into development policy, policies and 
strategies for the sustainable planning and use of water resources, and regional 
cooperation for enhanced security and the sustainable use of energy. That 
representative proposed that the secretariat should review issues that were 
pertinent to the subsidiary structure of the Commission, including the work of 
the regional institutions, namely institutional reforms, capacity-building and 
technology transfer.

74. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission endorsed the report 
of the seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in 
Asia and the Pacific and the report of the Governing Council of the Centre for 
Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization on its thirteenth session.

75. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission took note of the note 
by the secretariat on enhancing regional coordination of water-related 
activities, the note by the secretariat entitled “Empowering cities to implement 
the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda: 
mobilizing municipal finance for sustainable infrastructure in the Asia-Pacific 
region”, the report of the Coordinating Committee for Geoscience Programmes 
in East and South-East Asia and the report of the Mekong River Commission.

76. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission adopted resolution 74/4 
on the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration on Environment and 
Development for Asia and the Pacific, 2017, by a recorded vote of 30 to 1, with 
1 abstention. The voting was as follows:
(a) In favour: Armenia; Australia; Bangladesh; Bhutan; China; Democratic People’s Republic of Korea; Fiji; India; Indonesia; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Japan; Kazakhstan; Lao People’s Democratic Republic; Malaysia; Marshall Islands; Mongolia; Nepal; Pakistan; Papua New Guinea; Philippines; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; Samoa; Sri Lanka; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Tonga; Turkey; United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; Vanuatu;

(b) Against: United States of America;

(c) Abstaining: Brunei Darussalam.

77. The representative of the United States of America explained that her delegation had voted against the adoption of the resolution because of concerns about the underlying Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Development for Asia and the Pacific, 2017. With respect to language on climate change and the reference to the Paris Agreement, she noted that the United States of America had announced its intention to withdraw from the Paris Agreement as soon as it would be eligible to do so, and therefore such language would be without prejudice to her delegation’s positions. With respect to paragraph 17 of the Ministerial Declaration, her delegation did not support the selective singling-out of particular principles of the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, and did not accept that principle 7 had any relevance or application to the range of issues addressed in the Ministerial Declaration. Her delegation did not support references to technology transfer, and continued to oppose language that her delegation believed undermined intellectual property rights. Many of the outcome documents referenced in the Ministerial Declaration, including the 2030 Agenda, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 and the New Urban Agenda, were non-binding documents that did not create or affect rights or obligations under international law. Recalling paragraph 58 of the 2030 Agenda, she highlighted that its implementation must respect and be without prejudice to the independent mandates of other processes and institutions, including the World Trade Organization.

78. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission adopted resolution 74/5 on the transition of the Centre for Alleviation of Poverty through Sustainable Agriculture to an intergovernmental organization outside the United Nations system.

Sub-item (e)

Information and communications technology, science, technology and innovation

79. In addition to the documents for consideration common to agenda item 3, the Commission had before it the report of the Governing Council of the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology on its thirteenth session (ESCAP/74/7), the note by the secretariat on the report on the challenges and opportunities in the implementation of regional broadband connectivity for all in Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP/74/15), the note by the secretariat on technology outlook for sustainable development (ESCAP/74/16), the report of the Governing Council of the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development on its twelfth session (ESCAP/74/18) and the note by the secretariat entitled “Emerging trends in innovation policy to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals: promoting inclusive innovation and supporting social enterprises” (ESCAP/74/32).
80. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: Bangladesh; China; Democratic People’s Republic of Korea; Fiji; India; Philippines; Republic of Korea; and Thailand.

81. The Commission welcomed the measures taken by the secretariat in the implementation of its resolution 72/10 on the regional review of the implementation of the World Summit on the Information Society action lines. It urged continued efforts by all member States in the implementation of the resolution, given that the World Summit on the Information Society action lines were closely linked to the Sustainable Development Goals and that information and communications technology (ICT) played a pivotal role as a catalyst for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

82. The Commission emphasized the importance of promoting ICT connectivity, in particular the availability, affordability and reliability of broadband access for all, to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. There was also a need to expand broadband connectivity, strengthen cybersecurity and develop human-centric policies for the development of artificial intelligence, the Internet of things and geospatial information. In addition, instances of the use and sector-specific initiatives of artificial intelligence and geospatial information could be identified and their replication promoted across countries, including through capacity development in various dimensions. The representative of the Republic of Korea offered to share with other member States technical and policy experiences and best practices in implementing the next generation of broadband using fifth-generation wireless systems (5G) technology.

83. The Commission acknowledged the vital role played by ICT through artificial intelligence and the Internet of things in promoting socioeconomic development and poverty reduction. The Commission was informed of various country initiatives, including progress made in the implementation of Thailand 4.0 and ICT connectivity; efforts to support universal, non-discriminatory and affordable Internet access to all to bridge the digital divide and enhance digital inclusion through the “Digital India” programme; and “Digital Bangladesh”, an integral part of Vision 2021 of the Government of Bangladesh, which aimed to achieve a prosperous and equitable Bangladesh with middle-income status.

84. The Commission noted that strengthening ICT connectivity through the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative contributed to the overall socioeconomic development of the region, including in terms of disaster risk reduction, and that ICT supported connectivity between different countries. In that context, the Commission invited all ESCAP members and associate members and partners to continue collaborating closely on the implementation of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative to reduce the digital divide among countries. The initiative was recognized for the way in which it injected dynamism into the promotion of broadband connectivity among ESCAP member States. The Commission was informed of the hosting in Bangladesh of the first session of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Steering Committee, in November 2017, which had built regional consensus on developing seamless broadband connectivity, through subregional implementation and with the support of multi-stakeholder partnerships. A number of countries welcomed the work that had been done by ESCAP on promoting regional cooperation in enhancing broadband connectivity for the Pacific island countries, and informed the Commission that key priority areas had been identified for the development of the Asia-Pacific information superhighway subregional implementation plan in the Pacific.
85. The Commission noted that science, technology and innovation were major driving forces for sustainable development in the region, and welcomed the inclusion of technology and innovation in its programme of work. It also noted the vital role of new and emerging technologies for sustainable development.

86. Some representatives proposed that countries that were further ahead in the development, use and regulation of artificial intelligence might consider assisting those that had been lagging behind. The Commission highlighted intelligence, innovation, inclusiveness and interaction as guiding principles for a digital economy and society.

87. The Commission was informed of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Technology Parks, which had taken place in Anhui Province, China, in November 2017, and of the offer by the Government of China to increase collaboration with the secretariat and member States in the area of innovation and to promote innovative development in the region.

88. One representative was of the view that the Committee on Information and Communications Technology, Science, Technology and Innovation should pay due attention to the dissemination of science and technology best practices to developing and least developed countries, and support their capacity-building to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

89. The Commission expressed appreciation for the contribution of the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development to the strengthening of the capacities of member States to implement ICT for sustainable development through its flagship training programmes for policymakers, women and youth.

90. The Commission noted the imperative to reduce the digital divide and understand the effects of the digital economy, including the way in which it could exacerbate vulnerability. In that regard, one representative highlighted the Women ICT Frontier Initiative undertaken by the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development, which provided education to women who were vulnerable and had limited access to ICT, and invited other countries to participate in the initiative.

91. The Commission underscored the continued importance of building capacities for the use of ICT so that countries could fully leverage the rapid digital innovations for inclusive and sustainable development, and called for the strengthening of its capacity development programmes in support of the 2030 Agenda.

92. One representative noted that the programmes of the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development contributed to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular those relating to quality education (Goal 4), gender equality (Goal 5) and decent work and economic growth (Goal 8). The Commission was informed of the ASEAN subregional launch of the Women ICT Frontier Initiative, which had been held in Manila in August 2017, and that the Government of the Philippines had integrated the Centre’s Academy of ICT Essentials for Government Leaders into its training activities for government chief information officers.
93. The Commission recognized the importance of the capacity-building work carried out by the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology for policymakers in areas of policymaking on science, technology and innovation; the development, adoption and adaptation of new and emerging technologies; and technology transfer and commercialization. The Commission expressed its appreciation for the work carried out by the Centre.

94. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission took note of the note by the secretariat on the report on the challenges and opportunities in the implementation of regional broadband connectivity for all in Asia and the Pacific, the note by the secretariat on technology outlook for sustainable development and the note by the secretariat entitled “Emerging trends in innovation policy to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals: promoting inclusive innovation and supporting social enterprises”.

95. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission endorsed the report of the Governing Council of the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology on its thirteenth session and the report of the Governing Council of the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development on its twelfth session.

Sub-item (f)
Disaster risk reduction

96. In addition to the documents for consideration common to agenda item 3, the Commission had before it the report of the Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction on its fifth session (ESCAP/74/17), the report of the Governing Council of the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management on its second session (ESCAP/74/19), the report of the Typhoon Committee (ESCAP/74/INF/3) and the report of the Panel on Tropical Cyclones (ESCAP/74/INF/4).

97. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: Bangladesh; Bhutan; China; India; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Japan; and Thailand. A representative of the ESCAP/WMO Typhoon Committee made a statement.

98. The Commission was informed of the ongoing efforts of the Asia-Pacific disaster resilience network, which comprised the regional platform for multi-hazard early warning systems, geospatial services and the regional hub of knowledge and information. The Commission recognized the importance of the network in furthering regional coordination and multidisciplinary networking on disaster risk reduction, building on the secretariat’s normative and analytical work in disaster risk reduction.

99. The Commission was informed of country-led initiatives on multi-hazard early warning systems. The Commission recognized the role of ESCAP in building the capacities of Pacific island countries on multi-hazard early warning mechanisms with geospatial information. The Commission welcomed ESCAP-supported regional cooperation initiatives on drought monitoring, sand and dust storms, and seismic microzonation.

100. The Commission highlighted the important role of multi-hazard early warning systems for building resilience towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. In that regard, it expressed appreciation for the success of the ESCAP Multi-Donor Trust Fund for Tsunami, Disaster and Climate Preparedness in Indian Ocean and Southeast Asian Countries in implementing
regional multi-hazard early warning systems and in supporting the development of synergized standard operating procedures for coastal multi-hazard early warning systems, while noting that the efforts using the Trust Fund to implement multi-hazard early warning systems could be further strengthened through stronger partnerships with donors and member countries.

101. The Commission recognized the importance of strengthening regional networks for the real-time sharing and dissemination of warning information, increasing resource mobilization and supporting the development of disaggregated data for risk assessment, particularly through the use of geographical information systems and space technology.

102. The Commission was informed of initiatives by countries on space applications for disaster management, including the launch by Bangladesh of its first high-orbit communications satellite on 11 May 2018.

103. The Commission recognized the role of ESCAP in supporting regional cooperation on space applications for disaster risk reduction, and expressed its commitment to the Regional Space Applications Programme for Sustainable Development, recommending that ESCAP could provide further assistance in using geographical information systems and space technology in warning dissemination, risk assessment and post-disaster rehabilitation programmes. The Commission was informed of support by the Government of China for the ESCAP Regional Cooperative Mechanism for Drought Monitoring and Early Warning and its offer to continue providing assistance to develop the Asia-Pacific plan of action for space applications (2018–2030).

104. The Commission took note of the work of the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics in Asia and the Pacific in support of monitoring of the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 and progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. One representative underscored that the Disaster-related Statistics Framework should be translated into action through continued and extensive sharing of knowledge and good practices across the region.

105. The Commission underlined the need to share knowledge and information on all aspects of disaster risk reduction through capacity-building and regional cooperation, and expressed support for the role of the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management in enhancing regional cooperation on disaster information management. The region-wide benefits of the proposed network and alert system for combating sand and dust storms under the Centre were recognized, as was the technical assistance that had been provided by the Centre for reducing seismic risks. The representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran informed the Commission that the Centre was expected to be fully operational by the end of 2018 and of its Government’s support to the Centre to achieve the objective set in Commission resolutions 71/11 and 67/4.

106. The Commission was informed of the fiftieth anniversary of the ESCAP/WMO Typhoon Committee and the role that it had played in reducing risks from typhoon-related disasters over the past half-century.

107. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission endorsed the report of the Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction on its fifth session and the report of the Governing Council of the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management on its second session.
108. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission took note of the report of the Typhoon Committee and the report of the Panel on Tropical Cyclones.

109. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission adopted resolution 74/6 on advancing disaster-related statistics in Asia and the Pacific.

Sub-item (g)
Social development

110. In addition to the documents for consideration common to agenda item 3, the Commission had before it the report of the Asia-Pacific Intergovernmental Meeting on the Third Review and Appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (ESCAP/74/20), the report of the Asia-Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (ESCAP/74/21), the Chair’s summary of the Asia-Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (ESCAP/74/21/Add.1), the report of the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting on the Midpoint Review of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013–2022 (ESCAP/74/22), the Beijing Declaration, including the Action Plan to Accelerate the Implementation of the Incheon Strategy (ESCAP/74/22/Add.1), the note by the secretariat on key social development challenges in the Asia-Pacific region in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (ESCAP/74/23) and the note verbale dated 24 April 2018 from the Permanent Mission of the People’s Republic of China to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific addressed to the secretariat of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP/74/INF/5).

111. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: Bangladesh; China; Fiji; India; and Thailand.

112. The Commission reaffirmed its commitment to reducing inequalities and to developing inclusive societies that left no one behind, in line with the 2030 Agenda.

113. The Commission took note of the secretariat’s work on social development, and expressed its appreciation for the secretariat’s support on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and for the successful convening of the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting on the Midpoint Review of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013–2022, the Asia-Pacific Intergovernmental Meeting on the Third Review and Appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, and the Asia-Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.


115. The Commission highlighted social protection as a tool to eliminate poverty and inequality, and some representatives briefed the Commission on national social protection policies and programmes, such as a State welfare card scheme and housing projects for low-income households, monthly child allowances, stipends and income-support schemes for vulnerable groups, and
safety nets and supplementary pension schemes to address poverty and protect against income insecurity in old age.

116. The Commission was informed of national initiatives for the protection and development of children, including through training and rehabilitation centres for destitute children and through good practices with regard to ensuring equal access to education, regardless of citizenship and migrant status. One representative also expressed support for the process of developing the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

117. Several representatives stressed the need to safeguard equal employment opportunities for all, particularly women and persons with disabilities, and to promote income stability for low-income workers. The Commission acknowledged the challenges associated with ensuring youth employment, yet recognized that youth had innovative ideas and that young entrepreneurs needed to be provided with access to financing.

118. The Commission underscored the importance of disability-inclusive development and of expediting the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Incheon Strategy to “Make the Right Real” for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific. In that regard, several representatives expressed appreciation for efforts by ESCAP to facilitate regional cooperation in the implementation of the Incheon Strategy, including by promoting evidence-based approaches to policymaking on disability.

119. The Commission was informed of recent national policies and programmes on disability covering various areas of the Incheon Strategy. Such country initiatives included: harmonizing national laws with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; providing barrier-free and accessible environments to support social, economic and political participation of persons with disabilities, such as accessible polling stations; providing opportunities for skills development and employment, and social protection services; improving disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction systems; providing inclusive education for children with disabilities; enhancing early detection and prevention of causes of disability, as well as health-care and rehabilitation support; empowering women with disabilities and persons with autism; and improving disability data collection.

120. Several countries reiterated their commitment to the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002, and shared good practices in its implementation, such as measures to provide income security for older persons, providing access to health care at all levels for older persons, providing access to assistive devices and enhancing geriatric training.

121. The Commission noted that advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women was essential for inclusive and sustainable development. Several representatives noted with concern the continuing pervasiveness of gender-based discrimination, and that gender inequalities – deeply rooted and present across all countries – continued to impact every dimension of sustainable development. Policies and programmes to promote the economic empowerment of women and gender-responsive budgeting were highlighted as key strategies to promote inclusive and sustainable societies towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

122. The Commission emphasized the importance of national policy and legislative frameworks in providing enabling environments that were conducive to promoting women’s equal participation in decision-making,
eliminating gender-based violence and protecting the rights of women living in poverty and vulnerable situations, including by enhancing their access to decent employment, financing and innovative technologies. In that regard, one representative noted research by ESCAP on women’s entrepreneurship in ASEAN, which showed that greater access to technologies and innovative approaches to making finance and credit available to women were key levers that could foster an enabling environment for aspiring entrepreneurs.


124. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission took note of the report of the Asia-Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Chair’s summary of that Meeting, and the note by the secretariat on key social development challenges in the Asia-Pacific region in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

125. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission adopted resolution 74/7 entitled “Towards disability-inclusive sustainable development: implementation of the Beijing Declaration, including the Action Plan to Accelerate the Implementation of the Incheon Strategy”.

126. Subsequent to the adoption, the representative of the United States of America said that her delegation was pleased to join the consensus on that resolution, but, while the Incheon Strategy and Beijing Declaration contained much that was useful to empower persons with disabilities, her delegation did not support all of the statements or recommendations in those documents.

Sub-item (h)
Statistics

127. In addition to the documents for consideration common to agenda item 3, the Commission had before it the note by the secretariat entitled “The Disaster-related Statistics Framework: results of the work of the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics in Asia and the Pacific” (ESCAP/74/24), the note by the secretariat on the report on the Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific on its third meeting (ESCAP/74/25) and the report of the Governing Council of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific on its thirteenth session (ESCAP/74/26).

128. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: Bangladesh; China; India; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Japan; Malaysia; Russian Federation; Samoa; and Thailand.

129. The Commission stressed the importance of improving statistics for implementing the 2030 Agenda and for strengthening the evidence base for policymaking. It noted the role of the collective vision and framework for
action by the Asia-Pacific statistical community in galvanizing national support for statistics development, and recognized the initiative of the secretariat to strengthen policy-data integration as important for its successful implementation.


131. The Commission expressed appreciation for the secretariat’s work on disaster-related statistics and the efforts of the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics in Asia and the Pacific to develop the Disaster-related Statistics Framework. Several representatives encouraged the secretariat to facilitate knowledge-sharing and develop training materials on disaster-related statistics, including on the use of geospatial data and geographic information systems.

132. The Commission expressed appreciation for the work of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific, including the statistical training provided by the Institute in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The Commission suggested further strengthening of that stream of work, including through additional e-learning courses on indicators for measuring the Sustainable Development Goals and training on disaster-related statistics, climate change statistics, and the application and use of geographic information systems and big data to produce official statistics.

133. The Commission expressed appreciation for the in-kind and financial contributions provided by the Governments of China, India and the Russian Federation to the work of the Institute, and welcomed the commitments made by several Governments to continue or increase their contributions.

134. The representative of Japan informed the Commission that his Government was unable to announce its cash contribution and in-kind contribution to the Institute because it had deep concerns about the current staffing pattern of the Institute, which had been executed without a budget proposal or assessment from ESCAP and was not aligned with the basis on which the contribution from the Government of Japan was made. While the representative of Japan recognized the importance of the Institute’s training programmes, he emphasized that ESCAP should restructure the staff of SIAP at the earliest opportunity, as suggested by the Governing Council.

135. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission endorsed the report of the Governing Council of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific on its thirteenth session.

136. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission adopted resolution 74/6 on advancing disaster-related statistics in Asia and the Pacific and resolution 74/8 on accelerating the implementation of the Regional Action Framework on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific.
Sub-item (i)

Energy

137. In addition to the documents for consideration common to agenda item 3, the Commission had before it the report of the Second Asian and Pacific Energy Forum (ESCAP/74/27), the Ministerial Declaration of the Second Asian and Pacific Energy Forum (ESCAP/74/27/Add.1) and the note by the secretariat entitled “Report on energy transition in Asia and the Pacific: pathways for ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all” (ESCAP/74/28).

138. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: Bangladesh; Bhutan; China; India; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Republic of Korea; and Russian Federation.

139. The Commission welcomed the outcomes of the Second Asian and Pacific Energy Forum, including the Ministerial Declaration on Regional Cooperation for Energy Transition towards Sustainable and Resilient Societies in Asia and the Pacific. The Commission recognized the efforts of the secretariat in providing support to member States on the implementation of the outcome of the First Asian and Pacific Energy Forum, including regular policy dialogues, the development of the Asia-Pacific Energy Portal and regular policy analysis, which had led to the convening of the second Forum.

140. The Commission noted the primary importance of attaining Sustainable Development Goal 7 for overall national development. The promotion of energy security would also be important in contributing to stable economic and social development.

141. The Commission recognized the progress that had been made in achieving the Goal 7 targets, and that more efforts were needed. It noted the particular need to increase investment in support of Goal 7 and emphasized the importance of creating enabling policy environments that were conducive to public-private partnerships and innovative business models. It further noted the need for capacity-building and the importance of technology transfer.

142. Some representatives informed the Commission about the progress made in providing access to electricity, while noting that 420 million people in the region were still living without such access. Little progress had been made in the provision of access to clean cooking fuels and technologies, with more than 2.1 billion people lacking access.

143. The Commission was informed of member States’ strategies and targets on making broader use of natural gas, to increase the share of renewable energy, and noted its crucial role in diversifying the energy supply and mitigating climate change.

144. The Commission noted that despite the reduction in energy intensity in the region, there was still a need to reduce transmission and distribution losses of the power grid, introduce better building codes, standards and labelling of appliances, and improve demand-side management of agriculture and municipalities as well as small and medium-sized enterprises.

145. Taking into consideration the outcomes of the Second Asian and Pacific Energy Forum, the Commission recognized the significant potential of regional energy cooperation. In that connection, several representatives noted the importance of energy trade with neighbouring States and of a long-term strategy through the ESCAP platform aimed at promoting regional cooperation
to improve energy connectivity, including electricity, oil and gas pipelines, and recommended the drafting of a regional road map on cross-border electricity connectivity. A number of representatives highlighted the vital role that the existing Expert Working Group on Energy Connectivity could play in the drafting of the road map.

146. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission endorsed the report of the Second Asian and Pacific Energy Forum.

147. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission took note of the note by the secretariat entitled “Report on energy transition in Asia and the Pacific: pathways for ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all”.

148. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission adopted resolution 74/9 on the implementation of the outcomes of the Second Asian and Pacific Energy Forum, by a recorded vote of 31 to 1, with no abstentions. The voting was as follows:

(a) In favour: Armenia; Australia; Bangladesh; Bhutan; Brunei Darussalam; China; Democratic People’s Republic of Korea; Fiji; India; Indonesia; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Japan; Kazakhstan; Lao People’s Democratic Republic; Malaysia; Marshall Islands; Mongolia; Nepal; Pakistan; Papua New Guinea; Philippines; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; Samoa; Sri Lanka; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Tonga; Turkey; United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; Vanuatu;

(b) Against: United States of America.

149. Subsequent to the adoption, the representative of the Russian Federation expressed the regret of his delegation that the Commission had had to vote on the resolution. The result spoke for itself and his delegation encouraged an agenda that united the membership. ESCAP members had always found common language independently of the differences that existed amongst them, and the vote should not create a precedent for future sessions of the Commission.

150. The representative of the United States of America explained that her delegation had voted against the adoption of the resolution because the Ministerial Declaration that had been adopted by the Second Asian and Pacific Energy Forum contained language that was unacceptable to her delegation. She expressed concern over the endorsement of a road map on cross-border electricity connectivity when members had had no opportunity to evaluate or discuss the guiding principles of such a road map. She expressed the concern of her delegation at the prospect of ESCAP considering any one national proposal that pressed a proprietary electrical technology throughout the region. Her delegation did not support references to technology transfer and opposed language that it believed undermined intellectual property rights. It was her delegation’s view that the secretariat should take action that reflected the consensus of its members rather than a majority or plurality.

Sub-item (j)

Subregional activities for development

151. In addition to the documents for consideration common to agenda item 3, the Commission had before it the report of the Governing Council of the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia on its twelfth session (ESCAP/74/29) and the note by the secretariat entitled “Subregional
perspectives on inequality in Asia and the Pacific and update on subregional activities for development” (ESCAP/74/30).

152. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: Bangladesh; Bhutan; China; Republic of Korea; and Samoa. Representatives of the Asia-Pacific Development Center on Disability Foundation and the Commission on Science and Technology for Sustainable Development in the South also made statements.

153. The Commission expressed appreciation for the valuable work undertaken by the subregional offices and the unique platforms that they provided, which helped to contextualize and accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, strengthen regional cooperation and contribute to achieving greater policy coherence and synergy and to expressing the voices of the subregions in the pursuit of inclusive and sustainable development.

Component 1: the Pacific

154. The Commission acknowledged the efforts of member States to deepen regional cooperation through a number of initiatives, including in Central Asia, and the importance of paying special attention to small island developing States.

155. The Commission discussed the importance of regionalizing and localizing the 2030 Agenda to ensure that no one was left behind, and highlighted subregional good practice with regard to contextualized sustainable development.

Component 2: East and North-East Asia

156. The Commission acknowledged the contributions of the Subregional Office for East and North-East Asia to subregional cooperation, as a unique multilateral body providing a platform for joint action and exchange of information on such topics as the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, energy security, development cooperation, science, technology and innovation and the Asia Carbon Footprint Network.

157. The Commission noted the Subregional Office’s work to strengthen environmental cooperation in the subregion by serving as the secretariat for the North East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation. It welcomed the intention of the Government of China to host the twenty-second Senior Officials Meeting of the North East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation and to make its annual financial contribution in 2018. One representative noted that technologies such as remote sensing and digital connectivity could be used as a tool to facilitate interconnectivity within the East and North-East Asia subregion.

Component 3: North and Central Asia

158. The Commission was briefed on the “New Northern Policy” of the Government of the Republic of Korea to promote cooperation with Central Asia, and the creation of the Korea-Central Asia Cooperation Forum and its secretariat to implement projects in six core areas, including in cooperation with ESCAP projects: (a) transport and logistics; (b) energy; (c) industrial modernization and diversification; (d) climate change and environment; (e) health care; and (f) education and culture.
Component 4: South and South-West Asia

159. One representative underscored the importance of regional and subregional cross-border connectivity initiatives and networks – such as those of the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal initiative, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation and the South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation – to advance regional economic integration, reduce inequality and promote trade, investment and connectivity in the subregion and beyond.

160. One representative expressed appreciation for the work of the secretariat on subregional activities for development, and welcomed the new Head of the Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia. That representative underscored the relevance of the work of the Subregional Office and reiterated the need to raise the visibility of its work, as it contributed to the common pursuit of regional economic cooperation and integration and to deeper collaboration with subregional organizations such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation.

161. A representative of an organization expressed appreciation for the work of ESCAP in the area of disability and stated that one ESCAP publication had inspired it to produce the “Autism at a Glance” publication series to provide information and statistics on autism in the ASEAN subregion.

162. A representative of an intergovernmental organization underscored the importance of adaptive and assistive technologies and innovation in improving the lives of persons with disabilities, increasing their access to opportunities and reducing inequality, and encouraged subregional bodies to facilitate the availability of assistive technologies as part of disability-inclusive development.

163. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission endorsed the report of the Governing Council of the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia on its twelfth session.

164. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission took note of the note by the secretariat entitled “Subregional perspectives on inequality in Asia and the Pacific and update on subregional activities for development”.

Agenda item 4
Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific

165. The Commission had before it the report of the Fifth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (E/ESCAP/74/31).

166. The Executive Secretary made an introductory statement on the agenda item.

167. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: Bhutan; Lao People’s Democratic Republic; and Papua New Guinea.

168. The Commission expressed its commitment to the 2030 Agenda and support for the visions and principles of that ambitious agenda. The Commission welcomed the adoption of the regional road map for
implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific.

169. The Commission noted the intention of some members to present their voluntary national review reports at the upcoming high-level political forum on sustainable development, as well as the specific steps taken to ensure inclusive processes in one case.

170. The Commission was informed of the progress made in localizing the Sustainable Development Goals and strengthening governance structures for their implementation. Cross-sectoral coordination and implementation bodies with leadership at the highest levels had been established, while Goals and indicators were integrated with national development plans and indicators. One representative highlighted the establishment of an eighteenth goal on keeping lives safe from unexploded ordinances, as the latter presented a major constraint to land use.

171. Member States faced several implementation challenges. The ability of Governments to monitor progress was particularly affected by the mismatch of data cycles, the general lack of data, in particular updated and disaggregated data, the large number of nationally defined indicators and the lack of qualified staff to keep track of progress. Further challenges were posed by the shortcomings and capacity of implementing agencies. The implementation of the 2030 Agenda would also require increased attention to the horizontal and vertical coordination required for the convergence of efforts required to reach the poorest and most left-behind groups, to involve non-state actors and to increase knowledge and awareness of the 2030 Agenda, especially at the provincial and district levels.

172. The Commission expressed its appreciation for the secretariat’s support for its efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, with particular reference to the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development and its role in facilitating preparations for the voluntary national reviews, as well as its support for stakeholder engagement.

173. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission endorsed the report of the Fifth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development.

Agenda item 5
Regional economic cooperation and integration in Asia and the Pacific

174. The Commission had before it the report of the Second Ministerial Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP/74/33), the Ministerial Declaration on Enhancing Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration to Support the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP/74/33/Add.1) and the note by the secretariat entitled “Integrated and seamless connectivity for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific: progress and the way forward” (ESCAP/74/34).

175. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: Bangladesh; China; India; Malaysia; and Republic of Korea.

176. The Commission recognized the importance of regional economic cooperation and integration for sustainable development and acknowledged the role ESCAP had played in that area. It also emphasized the need to work on the four pillars of regional economic cooperation and integration, with a focus on supporting developing countries to achieve favourable economic, social and
environmental outcomes in a balanced manner. A number of representatives noted that, as the region was a major player in and central hub for global trade, it was important to promote trade further as a tool for regional integration.

177. A number of representatives stressed the need to harmonize the preferential rules of origin of various overlapping trade agreements because their associated procedures were too complex and could make it difficult for traders, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, to benefit from those agreements. Some representatives pointed out that there was no empirical evidence to suggest that market integration could actually achieve the objective of eradicating poverty or reducing income inequality. Hence, there was a need to make trade policies more inclusive, so that they might benefit women, small and medium-sized enterprises, and people in rural areas.

178. The Commission emphasized the need to reduce transaction costs in order to enhance trade integration, including by addressing non-tariff measures, for which it pointed out the usefulness of the Agreement on Trade Facilitation of the World Trade Organization. Several representatives also highlighted the significance of the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific in the region and encouraged ESCAP members to join in order to benefit from reductions in costs, time and impediments to customs clearance.

179. The Commission highlighted the primacy of the multilateral trading system, with its principles of transparency, predictability, non-discrimination, inclusivity of growth, development and rules. A number of representatives also observed that regional trade agreements could help to address institutional and governance gaps in the multilateral trading system and benefit its members, although trade agreements could be detrimental to countries which were not parties to them. The view was expressed that regional trade agreements should incorporate more flexible terms and conditions for less advanced economies, as well as an investment component to facilitate the transfer of technology.

180. The Commission emphasized the importance of promoting seamless connectivity, including transport, energy and ICT connectivity, for achieving sustainable development in the region. It indicated the need for a multilateral platform for cooperation on trade, connectivity and infrastructure, including energy and trade and investment. Specifically, some representatives stressed the need to develop a regional road map on energy connectivity, which should be periodically reviewed to ensure a smooth transition from planning to implementation. Some representatives recalled collaborations particular to specific subregions, such as those relating to energy connectivity within ASEAN, and noted the potential of the Belt and Road Initiative to contribute to seamless connectivity in the region.

181. Countries sharing experiences on how to cope with natural disasters highlighted regional cooperation and integration as a mechanism to support sustainable development, as it could mitigate the negative effects of such phenomena. The Commission called for regional cooperation and integration to be aligned with the 2030 Agenda.

182. The ASEAN Connectivity Forum, which had been held by the ASEAN-Korea Centre, focused on expanding ICT connectivity in the region. Some representatives noted that, although the ICT sector was generally developed in the region, many countries were still lagging behind in embracing technologies to create significant positive changes in the daily lives of people and that broader discussions on ICT connectivity were needed. The
Commission recognized that ICT connectivity was an essential part of promoting integration and achieving sustainable development in the region.

183. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission endorsed the report of the Second Ministerial Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific.

184. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission took note of the note by the secretariat entitled “Integrated and seamless connectivity for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific: progress and the way forward”.

185. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission adopted resolution 74/10 on the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration on Enhancing Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration to Support the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific by a recorded vote of 31 to 1 and no abstentions. The voting was as follows:

(a) In favour: Armenia; Australia; Bangladesh; Bhutan; Brunei Darussalam; China; Democratic People’s Republic of Korea; Fiji; India; Indonesia; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Japan; Kazakhstan; Lao People’s Democratic Republic; Malaysia; Marshall Islands; Mongolia; Myanmar; Nepal; Pakistan; Papua New Guinea; Philippines; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; Samoa; Sri Lanka; Timor-Leste; Tonga; Turkey; United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; and Vanuatu;

(b) Against: United States of America.

186. Subsequent to the adoption, a representative highlighted the importance of regional economic cooperation and integration for countries in the Asia and Pacific region and in particular for the least developed countries. He thanked other members for the overwhelming support for the resolution and expressed the hope that even the country which found it difficult to vote in favour of the resolution would extend its full support to its implementation.

187. The representative of the United States of America explained that her delegation had voted against the adoption of the resolution because the Ministerial Declaration on Enhancing Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration to Support the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific contained language unacceptable to her delegation. Her delegation did not join the consensus on inviting ESCAP to be directly involved in the work of enhancing regional economic cooperation. The secretariat should take action that reflected the consensus of its members rather than a mere majority. She further explained her delegation’s understanding of the term “protectionism” and that the 2030 Agenda comprised non-binding targets that States Members of the United Nations aspired to achieve, albeit according to national policies and priorities.

188. A representative noted that regional economic cooperation and integration was important to promote economic development in the region. He deeply regretted the fact that the resolution had been put to a vote and hoped that all members would make concerted efforts to maintain the unity and tradition of consensus at ESCAP.

Agenda item 6
Management issues

189. The Executive Secretary made an introductory statement on management issues.
Sub-item (a)

Changes to programme planning and budgeting

190. The Commission had before it the note by the secretariat on changes to programme planning and budgeting (ESCAP/74/35).

191. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission took note of the note by the secretariat on changes to programme planning and budgeting.

Sub-item (b)

Programme changes for the biennium 2018–2019

192. The Commission had before it the note by the secretariat on programme changes for the biennium 2018–2019 (ESCAP/74/36).

193. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission endorsed the proposed programme changes for the biennium 2018–2019 put forward by the secretariat.

Sub-item (c)

Report on the evaluation activities of the Commission during the biennium 2016–2017

194. The Commission had before it the report on the evaluation activities of the Commission during the biennium 2016–2017 (ESCAP/74/37).

195. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission took note of the report on the evaluation activities of the Commission during the biennium 2016–2017.

Sub-item (d)

Overview of partnerships, extrabudgetary contributions and capacity development

196. The Commission had before it the note by the secretariat on the overview of partnerships, extrabudgetary contributions and capacity development (ESCAP/74/38).

197. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: Brunei Darussalam; China; India; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Japan; and Thailand.

198. The Commission noted that the total cash contributions received by ESCAP in 2017 for technical cooperation work amounted to $18.7 million, of which $14 million came from bilateral donors, which remained the main extrabudgetary source of funding.

199. The Commission noted the contribution of technical cooperation work by ESCAP and the important role played by the secretariat’s regional institutions in capacity development in the areas of statistics, sustainable agriculture, transfer of technology, ICT and disaster risk reduction.

200. According to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Government had already contributed $3.3 million for the establishment of the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management as well as additional in-kind contributions towards its activities. The representative provided examples of some of those activities and further expressed the Government’s readiness to continue supporting its activities.
201. The representative of Japan informed the Commission that his delegation was not able to announce its cash contribution nor in-kind contribution to the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific, because his Government had deep concerns about its current staffing pattern, which had been executed without consideration for the contribution by member countries, including Japan, the host country of SIAP. He recognized the importance of the Institute’s training programmes and announced his Government’s intention to provide fellowships for participants to three training programmes through the Japan International Cooperation Agency.

202. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission took note of the note by the secretariat on the overview of partnerships, extrabudgetary contributions and capacity development and expressed its appreciation for the pledges amounting to approximately $3.6 million for 2018 from members and associate members: Brunei Darussalam; China; India; Macao, China; and Thailand.

**Agenda item 7**

**Activities of the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission**

203. The Commission had before it the report of the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission (ESCAP/74/39).

204. In his capacity as Rapporteur of the Advisory Committee, the Permanent Representative of Fiji presented the highlights of the activities of the Advisory Committee since the seventy-third session of the Commission.

205. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission took note of the report of the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission.

**Agenda item 8**

**Dates, venue and theme topic for the seventy-fifth session of the Commission (2019)**

206. The Commission had before it the note by the secretariat on the dates, venue and theme topic for the seventy-fifth session of the Commission (2019) (ESCAP/74/40).

207. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the Commission decided that its seventy-fifth session would be held in April or May 2019; the actual dates would be determined in consultation with the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission. The Commission also decided that the theme topic for its seventy-fifth session would be “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”.

**Agenda item 9**

**Policy issues for the Asia-Pacific region: theme topic for the seventy fourth session of the Commission, “Inequality in the era of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”**

208. The Commission had before it the note by the secretariat on inequality in Asia and the Pacific in the era of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (ESCAP/74/42).
Policy statement by the Executive Secretary

209. In her policy statement, the Executive Secretary reflected upon the region’s near-term prospects and outlook amid global uncertainty, its medium-term challenges, the region’s emerging policy directions, the dynamics of regional cooperation and integration, and the case for the Asia-Pacific region to spur on multilateralism to overcome global governance challenges.

210. Drawing on recent ESCAP reports, the Executive Secretary elaborated on progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and provided an overview of the state of inequality in the region. Arguing that an integrated sustainable development agenda warranted an integrated response, she outlined some of the policy directions required, such as the need for strengthened social protection, greater financial inclusion to empower those denied financial services, and increased spending on education in certain areas, including for reskilling teachers and improving curricula. Reducing exposure vulnerability to environmental hazards would require better urban planning and legislation to protect the right to a clean, safe and healthy environment, while closing the digital divide would require enhanced broadband infrastructure and the deployment of frontier technologies.

211. The Executive Secretary expressed her optimism about the outlook for the region. The dynamism of the region was an asset, domestic demand would remain strong and the rebalancing of economies away from export- and investment-led growth was underway. She highlighted the region’s potential to further rejuvenate investment, calling for large-scale climate-friendly infrastructure investment and stressing that matching domestic finance and an enabling policy environment were critical to leverage private resources and expertise. A revolution in technology was forcing structural shifts in manufacturing, raising service sector contributions to value addition and delivering sustainable solutions. New technologies such as data analytics, artificial intelligence, the Internet of things and 3D printing had enhanced the demand for digitization, electronic components and robots. Technology could concentrate wealth and knowledge among the hands of a limited number of owners and aggravate inequalities between countries, and she called for multilateral frameworks to be enhanced to ensure fair play, as it was a global phenomenon with far-reaching consequences.

212. As intraregional trade represented more than 50 per cent of the total region’s trade, deepening regional integration would enable the region to increase overall trade levels, unleash the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises, and support growth and jobs. She further reflected on the potential of regional connectivity initiatives, in particular in relation to transport and energy. Regional market integration could consolidate existing preferential regional trade agreements consistent with multilateral rules. She further reflected on the role of the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific, which had been negotiated on the ESCAP platform, and regional financial integration processes in facilitating trade.

213. Lastly, the Executive Secretary reflected on the role of Asia and the Pacific in shaping a fair global governance and multilateralism system, as the world faced critical challenges, such as rising inequalities of income, wealth and opportunities within countries; financial globalization and a fragmented global financial regulatory regime; the multilateral trading regime unable to deliver its agenda given the complexities of reaching consensus; the multilateral system not keeping pace with global advancements and challenges, such as frontier technologies; and multilateral institutions under stress. The
region had an opportunity to accelerate the pace of implementation of the 2030 Agenda, to shape policies to reduce inequality, to exploit frontier technologies and to strengthen multilateralism for the benefit of all citizens across Asia and the Pacific.

Inequality in the era of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

214. The Executive Secretary gave introductory remarks and presented the key findings of the theme study on inequality in Asia and the Pacific in the era of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

215. The following speakers made statements to the Commission:

(a) Mr. Lucas Chancel (Paris School of Economics);
(b) Mr. Thomas Pogge (Yale University);
(c) Ms. Armida Alisjahbana (Padjadjaran University);
(d) Ms. Nino Zambakhidze (Georgian Farmers Association);
(e) Mr. Alexander R. Malaket (OPUS Advisory Services International).

216. Mr. Chancel outlined the main findings from the World Inequality Report 2018 and refuted three myths about globalization, inequality and growth. Income inequality had increased almost everywhere. While many had gained from economic growth, the richest 1 per cent had benefited the most. A comparison of economic growth, poverty reduction and inequality in China and India provided important policy lessons. Furthermore, he compared the United States of America and the European Union and concluded that equality was not a predetermined effect of technological progress but of policy choices, such as whether to have progressive taxation and investment in the social sector. Mr. Chancel cautioned that in a business-as-usual scenario, inequality would continue to rise.

217. Mr. Pogge stated that inequality was a choice, primarily made in the political arena. Inequality was a self-entrenched phenomenon, in which the better off had ways to influence politics, spending money and time influencing the rules of the game to favour people in the upper income brackets. He further suggested that innovation was an easy way to politically address rising inequalities and gave an example from the pharmaceutical industry where a health impact fund could make innovative medicines affordable to the poor without adversely affecting innovation by companies.

218. Ms. Alisjahbana highlighted persistent gaps in access to education and health in Indonesia. Inequality of opportunity had not fallen as anticipated. Building on findings of a study commissioned by ESCAP, she showed how inequality in education between rural and urban areas had been increasing. The increasing gap in the mean years of schooling between the top 10 per cent of income earners in Indonesia and the bottom 40 per cent was worrisome. In terms of health outcomes in Indonesia, certain indicators, such as life expectancy, access to water supply and sanitation, as well as births assisted by skilled personnel, had improved on average but inequality in access to water and sanitation was persisting, particularly between rural and urban areas, as well as between Java and non-Java provinces.

219. Ms. Zambakhidze emphasized that there was no sustainable development without peace. Economic development was the main challenge in Georgia, and poverty reduction remained a priority on the country’s agenda. In particular, low productivity continued to affect the competitiveness of
Georgian agricultural products in the domestic and global markets. The main challenges to food security were high import dependency, low local production and the lack of physical or economic access to nutritious food, particularly for those living in mountainous regions. Political stability as well as the active participation of civil society was a precondition to the economic development of any country that wished to raise awareness on the issue. The need to raise resources through development cooperation would be critical to supporting agriculture and implementing the 2030 Agenda.

220. Mr. Malaket informed the Commission of the gender-based inequality that affected obtaining trade financing, including for risk mitigation. There was a large annual global trade financing gap of approximately $1.5 trillion which undermined efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. In that regard, an appropriate policy response was needed that promoted international trade that was consistent with the Goals, including appropriate trade financing for micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises through technology-enabled platforms.

Country statements

221. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: Afghanistan; Australia; Bangladesh; Bhutan; Brunei Darussalam; Cambodia; China; Democratic People’s Republic of Korea; Fiji; India; Indonesia; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Japan; Kazakhstan; Lao People’s Democratic Republic; Malaysia; Marshall Islands; Mongolia; Myanmar; Nauru; Nepal; Pakistan; Philippines; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; Samoa; Singapore; Sri Lanka; Thailand; Tonga; Turkey; Turkmenistan; United States of America; Vanuatu; and Viet Nam. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction and representatives of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Commission on Science and Technology for Sustainable Development in the South also made statements.

222. The Commission noted that income inequality was a major challenge in the Asia-Pacific region. Given that the region had become more interdependent and interconnected over the past decades, that process had unleashed both opportunities and challenges.

223. Among those challenges, income inequality remained persistent in the region, as shown by the increase in the Gini coefficient. In that context, one representative observed that the richest 10 per cent earned up to 40 per cent of the total global income, which was further increasing wealth inequality in the Asia-Pacific region.

224. Economic growth was not enough to reduce inequality in income and wealth. The Asia-Pacific region had witnessed a remarkable dynamism in economic growth which had lifted close to a billion of people out of extreme poverty. At the same time, the income gap between rich and poor persisted and was widening in several countries. The reduction of income and wealth inequality had become a critical aspect that needed to be addressed in national development planning and strategies and to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

225. Several representatives emphasized that income inequality had worsened both in urban and rural areas and among various socioeconomic groups. According to one representative, the Government had set itself a target to reduce income inequality, as measured by the Gini coefficient, to 0.45 or below.
226. Income inequality could hamper economic growth, peace and social justice, and therefore created a serious challenge to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The Commission called for national policies, plans, institutions and development programmes to reduce income inequality.

227. Income inequality could be addressed by financing and development policy interventions, such as strengthening fiscal policies and tax administration; utilizing revenue and expenditure effectively; increasing access to productive employment; improving firm income and productivity; leveraging public-private partnerships to increase investment opportunities; improving access to institutional finance; and developing good governance, accountability mechanisms and legal frameworks.

228. The Commission also took note of various tax measures aimed at reducing inequality. One representative, whose country was undergoing a tax reform process, noted how tax reform-related cash transfers could help alleviate price impacts on the poor. Another representative noted that tax breaks for low-income workers could have an equalizing effect and underscored the importance of unemployment insurance for reducing vulnerability of workers.

229. The Commission also highlighted the need to strengthen regional cooperation mechanisms, such as the Platform for Collaboration on Tax, the United Nations Tax Trust Fund and the Asian Development Bank, in order to support policymakers in improving taxation capacities in developing countries.

230. Several representatives highlighted the links between socioeconomic development, poverty reduction and inequality and referred to steps taken to integrate goals to reduce poverty and inequality in national development plans.

231. Addressing inequality of opportunity was fundamental to addressing all other inequalities, to reducing poverty and to ensuring that no one was left behind. Addressing inequality of opportunities should be a priority for policymakers across the region and beyond. Many representatives highlighted initiatives to reduce gaps in the areas of education, health care, nutrition, financial inclusion, employment opportunities and political participation, as well as basic household services, such as electricity, clean fuels, water, sanitation and broadband Internet access.

232. Several representatives pointed out that inequality of outcome and inequality of opportunity were primarily experienced along rural-urban lines. Rural poverty was more widespread than urban poverty and, in some cases, internally displaced people in rural areas were identified as particularly vulnerable. Some Governments had taken action to eliminate rural poverty, often by targeting income support to rural populations, expanding crucial health-care services to remote rural areas or devolving more decision-making authority to the periphery, including municipalities and local governments.

233. Adequate, resilient and well-connected transport infrastructure was inexorably linked to improved access to health care, education and employment, and thus was a vehicle for alleviating poverty and addressing persistent inequality gaps, in particular between urban and rural areas.

234. Having recognized the vital role of education in improving prospects in life, the Commission noted the important efforts made by several countries in expanding access to and affordability and quality of education. Despite progress, some representatives highlighted continuing challenges such as high
dropout rates, often induced by poverty and the need for school-aged children to work instead.

235. To address persisting inequalities in education, some Governments had boosted investment in education, which had contributed to better educational outcomes and reduction in illiteracy rates.

236. The Commission took note of several initiatives by countries to increase attendance in and completion of secondary education, such as the provision of free education, child benefit allowances and free school books. To improve affordability of education, some countries had also established scholarships for students or increased investments in pre-school education, although more work needed to be done to meet the early learning needs of pre-school-aged children across the region.

237. Inequality in access to decent employment persisted and was tightly linked to other inequalities of opportunity, such as access to education and health care. To break that cycle, some countries had introduced training to improve the employability of persons with disabilities and incentives for the private and public sectors to employ more persons with disabilities. Some representatives also highlighted efforts to improve educational outcomes for children with disabilities. Others highlighted the importance of vocational training, skills development and employment facilitation programmes in creating equal opportunities.

238. The Commission noted with concern the significant inequality in access to health care that many people in the Asian and Pacific region still faced and the vital role of investments in the provision of health care to reduce inequality. While the right to health care was enshrined in some countries’ laws and constitutions, significant gaps remained. Several countries had been successful in introducing universal health-care schemes, which had contributed to more equitable health outcomes across their populations. Some countries had introduced ambitious new initiatives for universal access to health care. Others had continued making improvements in reducing maternal and infant mortality rates. Some representatives also highlighted efforts to improve health outcomes for persons with disabilities.

239. The Commission also noted the importance of access to nutritious food, grains and agricultural products as a precondition for leading a healthy and productive life. In that context, some representatives highlighted the importance of the mechanization of agriculture and of investments to boost agricultural productivity. One representative highlighted progress in reducing malnutrition in children. Some representatives noted that food insecurity posed a risk for parts of their populations, while others highlighted that natural disasters also affected food supply and food security.

240. With regard to access to basic household services, important progress had been made in several countries in expanding access to clean water, sanitation, electricity and clean cooking fuels. In some cases, households in need were provided with subsidies for water and electricity. Some representatives also highlighted initiatives to provide affordable housing to the poor.

241. The Commission highlighted the importance of social protection for reducing inequality of opportunities and inequality of outcome. Several countries had established national social protection frameworks, which had not only helped to reduce inequalities but also to build and safeguard resilience.
during natural disasters, while other representatives shared specific examples of social protection programmes implemented in their countries.

242. Some representatives also highlighted the importance of capacity-building and sharing experiences on social protection and taxation, including through special centres and knowledge hubs on social protection, training courses and capacity-building activities on taxation.

243. The Commission also emphasized the importance of targeted initiatives for promoting entrepreneurship among youth and women and of the development of start-ups and micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises by enhancing their capacity to integrate into global value chains and benefit more from existing and pending regional trade agreements.

244. One representative noted that social entrepreneurship also played a pivotal role in reducing inequality, in particular in the agricultural and fisheries sectors, since social entrepreneurs were not only seeking profit, they were also looking for a means to empower the community in which they operated.

245. Eliminating gender inequalities and empowering women would be key to addressing all other inequalities and ensuring sustainable development. One representative recognized that gender inequality, often stemming from traditional patriarchal societal norms, was jeopardizing efforts to reduce inequality and achieve prosperity for all in the region. Several representatives also noted with regret that gender-based violence and gender discrimination persisted, and that member States should step up efforts to address the roots of the problem. Others noted significant gaps in women’s political participation, educational achievement and participation in the labour force.

246. The Commission also noted the progress in some countries towards achieving gender equality, including gender parity in education and access to basic services, women’s participation in decision-making and political processes, and the economic empowerment of women. One representative shared the experience of setting up an incubator to train and support start-ups and new enterprises that developed innovative products and services to address the needs of vulnerable communities, particularly women, children and refugees. Some representatives commended various subregional initiatives for their contributions to fostering sustainable social development and inclusion, particularly for women and girls, including the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration.

247. Noting the persistent gender gap across the Asia-Pacific region, the Commission called for intensified efforts to close the distance in political participation and access to productive resources and economic opportunities, as well as to address gender-based violence and discrimination in order to realize Sustainable Development Goal 5.

248. Inequality of opportunity for persons with disabilities persisted across Asia and the Pacific. Starting from early in life, persons with disabilities faced discrimination in access to education, employment opportunities and the physical environment. Recognizing the multiple disadvantages faced by persons with disabilities, some representatives referred to their Governments’ initiatives to ensure that children with disabilities attended school, received adequate nutrition and had access to social protection systems, that persons with disabilities had equitable access to the labour market, and that national legislation fully complied with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
249. Representatives of several Pacific island countries noted that the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway served as an important framework, guiding their work towards reducing inequality of opportunity for the small island developing States. Other related subregional frameworks such as the Pacific Road Map for Sustainable Development, the Framework for Pacific Regionalism and the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration were important initiatives that were aligned with the 2030 Agenda.

250. Inequality of outcome had perpetuated intergenerational inequality. One representative referred to the links between inequality of outcome and inequality of opportunity, quoting the late Sir Anthony Atkinson, a pioneer on inequality research: “If we are concerned about equality of opportunity tomorrow, we need to be concerned about inequality of outcome today.”

251. The impact of environmental factors such as climate change, natural hazards and pollution disproportionately harmed the poor, including women, children, older persons and people with special needs. Climate change was a key accelerator of inequality within and across countries.

252. Adaptation and mitigation efforts against climate change needed to be strengthened, including with a special focus on the most vulnerable populations. The Commission underscored the importance of tailored development solutions to support countries with special needs, particularly small island developing States and fragile States, which had unique vulnerabilities which merited specific support from the international community.

253. Efforts made by member States in integrating environmental considerations and building disaster resilience were a key component within national development plans, development strategies and visions. Empowering women to take an active role in rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts after disasters and more broadly in environmental protection measures was an effective strategy to address inequality.

254. The Commission emphasized the role of sustainable natural resource management in the form of, inter alia, afforestation, forest conservation, better management of marine reserves, ocean conservation, enhanced investment in agriculture and the sustainable management of fisheries in reducing income inequality. In relation to that, one representative called for ESCAP to enhance its focus on boosting the capacity and growth of the fisheries sector in the Pacific island countries. The Commission also noted efforts by member States in promoting inclusive development through sustainable urbanization, linking major metropolitan centres with other settlements and providing assistance to disadvantaged municipalities.

255. The Commission recognized the exposure and susceptibility of countries, particularly small island developing States, to natural disasters and climate change. Disasters, in conjunction with climate change, intensified poverty and inequalities within countries, disproportionately affected poor and vulnerable peoples, and reversed the gains made towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Commission noted the challenges emanating from natural disasters identified in the 2017 Asia-Pacific Disaster Report. In that context, one representative provided information about Cyclone Pam and the worst damage to infrastructure which caused severe disruption to transport services. The representative noted that issues related to climate change impacts, such as infrastructure damage caused by severe coastal erosion, water scarcity and increased salinity, had dominated the discussion at
a recent session of parliament and had resulted in a call for resources to address those urgent needs.

256. Generating adequate and disaggregated data and statistics was important in order to be able to prioritize actions to support those most impacted by climate change and disaster. Additional financial resources, including climate finance, needed to be mobilized to address the risks posed by climate change and other environmental factors. Innovation, the diffusion of green technologies, and enhanced partnerships and peer-to-peer learning were key enablers of inclusive development. The Commission also underscored the importance of promoting green growth and the green economy as strategies that could accelerate inclusive development.

257. A proactive role was needed to continue advocacy to scale up mitigation and adaptation efforts and to increase financing for disaster loss and damage. The impact of disasters needed to be measured, including by collecting disaggregated data and monitoring progress with regard to the Sendai Framework. The eighth Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction would be held in Ulaanbaatar from 3 to 6 July 2018 and was expected to adopt a declaration.

258. One representative noted with regret the devastation emanating from nuclear testing in the Pacific Ocean, which had caused significant economic, health and environmental damage to people and to natural resources, and that no compensation had been provided.

259. The Commission expressed appreciation to the secretariat for the regional road map for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific and noted the progress made in its implementation. The regional road map was a guiding document for future development efforts in the region. The Samoa Pathway and the Pacific Road Map for Sustainable Development were key frameworks for small island developing States to promote sustainable development. The Commission requested the secretariat to continue support for those frameworks.

260. The Commission noted the experiences of member States which had completed their voluntary national reviews and of those who were preparing to do so. Effective and inclusive stakeholder engagement was a basis for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and for preparations for the voluntary national reviews. In that regard, the Commission expressed appreciation to the secretariat for the technical support delivered for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including on strengthening the stakeholder engagement process.

261. The Commission recognized that globalization and market-oriented reforms, such as trade and labour market policies, had led to inequalities, including between urban and rural areas, and that various representatives had noted the importance of unimpeded trade, export diversification, trade facilitation, transit trade, investment, and related trade- and investment-enabling infrastructure and policies to link countries to global markets and value chains and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The Commission noted the concerns expressed with regard to trends towards anti-globalization and protectionism and the risk of trade wars as a result, and, in that regard, the need to reaffirm the principle of multilateralism and international rule of law, including the multilateral trading system, under which disputes could be resolved through peaceful means and negotiation on an equal footing.
262. A number of representatives highlighted efforts of regional and subregional mechanisms, particularly those implemented within the frameworks of ASEAN, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, the Mekong River Commission, the Greater Mekong Subregion and the Belt and Road Initiative, which aimed to contribute to investment in infrastructure development, thereby strengthening regional trade, economic cooperation and connectivity.

263. The Commission underscored the continued relevance of multilateral initiatives and programmes, such as the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024, for assisting landlocked developing countries in achieving their full transit transport potential between Asia and Europe and providing access to regional and global markets as a major contributor to reducing inequalities in the region.

264. In that context, one representative commended ESCAP for pursuing regional openness through regional cooperation and integration, including through the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific. The representative called for closer alignment of the work of ESCAP and efforts under the Belt and Road Initiative, including in the area of trade finance.

265. A multilateral and multipronged approach to tackle inequality included investment in sustainable infrastructure, as well as in inland, hinterland and maritime connectivity across the subregions and the Asia-Pacific region as a whole. The development of logistics infrastructure and port facilities was an important element contributing to regional connectivity and internal markets, especially for small island developing States.

266. Expanded energy interconnection could make a significant contribution towards the economic and social development of the region. Electricity interconnection could enable the system integration of growing shares of renewable energy. Some representatives voiced support for the promotion of renewable energy projects in the region.

267. Global partnerships were important to realizing the means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The Commission recognized the role of the private sector and the importance of public-private partnerships in reducing poverty and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. A joint initiative of the Government of Turkey and the United Nations Development Programme had established the Istanbul International Centre for Private Sector in Development. Several representatives recognized the need for an enabling environment for private sector business and investment, while one representative emphasized the need for the private sector to adopt principles of responsible business conduct. Another representative requested the support of the secretariat for the implementation of an investment framework which would ensure policy consistency and coherent streamlined procedures to improve the overall business climate and attract foreign direct investment.

268. The Commission, recognizing the need for fair trade, noted the request from one representative for duty-free and quota-free access for exports from least developed countries.

269. Some representatives emphasized the importance of people’s empowerment. Components of empowerment included ensuring access to justice for all, holding local governments and service providers accountable, improving governance and specifically tackling bureaucracy and corruption.
The concept of social justice was highlighted as central to reducing inequality of opportunity.

270. To achieve progress in reducing inequality of opportunity, it was important to engage multiple stakeholders in policy discussions, including rural and grass-roots communities, local governments and civil society, but also academia and the private sector.

271. Effective data collection and data disaggregation was important to identify and reach those groups that were left behind. Furthermore, improving data collection would result in policy responses that were better targeted.

272. Data collection and disaggregation remained key challenges for the least developed countries and small island developing States. The Commission therefore highlighted the importance of capacity-building for and investment in effective data collection and data disaggregation for proper monitoring of the 2030 Agenda.

273. In that regard, the Commission expressed its appreciation for the efforts of the secretariat to introduce a generic tool that could be used by national statistical offices to engage policymakers and enhance understanding and support for the disaggregated statistics and thereby ensure no one was left behind. The Commission also expressed appreciation for the support of the United Nations in collecting environmental statistics through environmental economic accounting. One representative noted that the development of systems of environmental economic accounting enabled the implementation and monitoring of Sustainable Development Goal 14, to capture quality of life beyond monetary value.

274. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction underscored that low levels of social and capital expenditures and risk-blind investments created inequalities that accentuated risk and vulnerability from disasters and that frequent disasters further exacerbated social and economic inequalities by disproportionately affecting children, women and disabled people. She emphasized that the cycle between disasters, poverty and inequality needed to be broken through better and local-level data collection on disaster losses and on social, economic and gender inequality. The Sendai Framework monitoring process would produce data on disaster losses for the first Sustainable Development Goals progress report at the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

275. A representative of an organization stated that its members collaborated in building a system of regional trade and economic cooperation to create favourable conditions for the progressive realization of the free movement of goods, capitals, services and technologies, noting that transport was the most important area of cooperation of the organization. The representative also highlighted recent initiatives with ESCAP to further expand transport cooperation in the region.

276. A representative of an intergovernmental organization spoke about various initiatives in relation to frontier technology to promote socioeconomic development for countries in the global South. The representative noted that technological innovation could play an instrumental role in reducing socioeconomic inequalities and averting threats such as climate change, growing resource depletion and food insecurity.
Multilateralism in Asia and the Pacific to promote inclusive economic and social development in the region and its contributions to global economic governance

277. The Executive Secretary gave introductory remarks and presented the main challenges and opportunities of multilateralism in relation to sustainable development and global economic governance.

278. The following speakers made statements to the Commission:

(a) Mr. Seung-soo Han (Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction and Water);
(b) Mr. Yaga Venugopal Reddy (Centre for Economic and Social Studies);
(c) Mr. Zhang Jun (China);
(d) Mr. Ishrat Husain (Institute of Business Administration);
(e) Ms. Cristelle Pratt (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat);
(f) Mr. Vladimir Potapenko (Shanghai Cooperation Organization);
(g) Mr. Karsten Warnecke (Asia-Europe Foundation);
(h) Mr. Paul Blustein (Centre for International Governance Innovation).

279. Mr. Han noted that inequality was one of the greatest challenges of the present time and shared his experiences in the Republic of Korea. The financial crises of 1997 and 2008 had significantly increased inequality in his country and global financial institutions had an important role to play in mitigating the effects of financial crises and protecting countries from external financial shocks. He compared the different approaches taken by the Republic of Korea and Malaysia during the Asian financial crisis, as his country liberalized the financial sector while Malaysia imposed stringent capital controls. While both countries recovered, inequality decreased in Malaysia while it increased in the Republic of Korea during the recovery period. Strong institutions were required to reap the benefits of globalization.

280. Mr. Reddy spoke about the financial system where the national currency of one country, namely the United States dollar, was used as the global currency for the global economy. The use of renminbi had increased but remained predominant for public sector transactions. A loss in the trust in reserve currencies had occurred since the financial crisis of 2008, with central banks around the world purchasing gold and some countries turning to buying physical assets. Fundamental changes had taken place that required a reform of the international financial architecture, and he stressed the rising importance of economies in the Asia-Pacific region. He also suggested further explorations into the use of crypto currencies to spearhead a shift towards a truly neutral monetary system.

281. Mr. Zhang stressed that multilateralism was at a critical juncture. Populism, unilateralism and protectionism had been rising and as a result multilateralism had been weakened. He emphasized the importance of multilateralism and suggested that the United Nations, as the core of the multilateral system, should be strengthened in support of peace and development. Multilateralism should be a means to protect common interests and multilateral rules were essential to achieving global equity. Extensive consultation, joint contribution and balanced representation should remain key principles of the multilateral system and improvement to the system should be based on peaceful consultation rather than confrontation. While the
Government of China was pursuing its own development objectives, it aimed to do so while leaving no one behind. The Government had been reforming its domestic economy and was keen to share opportunities with the rest of the world, including through its Belt and Road Initiative.

282. Mr. Husain noted the responsibility of national Governments in addressing inequality and also recognized the potential impact of multilateralism on inequality. Inequality could be addressed through increased social spending, education, the provision of public goods for all and limits on tax incentives for the rich. While multilateralism and the multilateral trade regime benefited developing countries and fuelled growth between 1990 and 2008, since 2008 trade growth had lagged behind and trade liberalization had slowed. Protectionism had a detrimental impact on the trade-growth nexus, particularly in developing countries. Other challenges included more volatile financial flows to developing countries, flight of capital and anti-immigration policies to discourage the economic migration that benefited both sending and receiving countries. The world of work would change with the advancement of technology and intergenerational job mobility had stalled. To improve the situation, Mr. Husain proposed greater international economic cooperation, including through bilateral, regional and multilateral agencies.

283. Ms. Pratt noted that global and regional multilateralism was important for Pacific countries and that it translated into the power of a collective voice and action, especially in the context of global crises, climate change, new geopolitical interests, natural disasters and the vulnerabilities of Pacific islands. The universality of the 2030 Agenda was a triumph for multilateralism, and multilateralism allowed for an equal voice of Pacific countries in the international arena. In order to effectively implement leaving no one behind, the Pacific needed to be heard and consulted. Successful multilateralism required joint actions on sustainability, resilience, peace and prosperity.

284. Mr. Potapenko explained the aim of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and noted that multilateralism was enshrined in its charter and was at the core of its work. He outlined examples of initiatives where the Organization had used the multilateral model and highlighted achievements in the areas of connectivity and transport, such as the Belt and Road Initiative and the Eurasian partnership.

285. Mr. Warnecke stressed that the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals required global partnership and cooperation between various stakeholders. The Asia-Europe Foundation promoted and facilitated cooperation among States and regions and supported the global pursuit of sustainable development. The Asia-Europe Environment Forum, which fostered cooperation between Asia and Europe on the environmental dimension of sustainable development, had recognized the importance of Sustainable Development Goal 17 in particular.

286. Mr. Blustein noted that, since the global financial crisis, the international trading system was characterized by the continuous engagement of power rather than of rules. He expressed worry over the developments in trade relations between China and the United States of America and how they affected the functioning of the World Trade Organization (WTO), including its most valuable feature, the dispute settlement system. Members should take steps to shore up WTO, including by addressing improvements to the dispute settlement system, and not undermine the effectiveness of WTO by succumbing to the temptation to forge regional and bilateral free trade agreements instead. He encouraged policymakers to take affirmative action to
preserve the multilateral system by focusing on the global level and WTO, which had done much to promote prosperity and peace in the past 70 years.

**Country statements**

287. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: Bangladesh; India; Russian Federation; Papua New Guinea; and Viet Nam. A representative of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS also made a statement.

288. The Commission emphasized the importance of multilateralism in achieving the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific and recognized the importance of Sustainable Development Goal 17. Acknowledging that the complexity of global challenges required a multilateral approach, the Commission noted that multilateralism was a means to consider the interest of all, hear all stakeholders and maintain a free and open environment in Asia and the Pacific. Some representatives called for the Asian and Pacific region to be a leader in strengthening multilateralism and in supporting continued reform towards more equal and balanced multilateral institutions. The Commission also acknowledged the role of multilateral cooperation in reducing poverty and inequality and in addressing vulnerabilities.

289. The Commission emphasized the need for multilateral platforms on trade cooperation, connectivity and infrastructure development, including for energy. Several representatives expressed concerns about the recent pursuit of unilateralism and the denunciation of established international rules and practices of multilateralism. It acknowledged the need for reform of multilateral institutions and the multilateral order to reflect the needs of developing countries.

290. Several representatives stressed the importance of trade and openness and stated that protectionism should be avoided. One representative contrasted the protectionist tendencies at the global level with the regional initiatives in Asia and the Pacific aimed at enhancing regional trade, transport and energy connectivity on an inclusive basis. Some representatives noted that the multilateral trading system needed to espouse the principles of transparency, predictability, non-discrimination and inclusiveness of growth and that it needed to be the means to deal with protectionist tendencies. Some representatives called for the multilateral trading system to be strengthened and upgraded, and one representative suggested that the World Trade Organization should more directly address inequalities arising from trade liberalization.

291. According to one representative, the Government had shown long-standing support for multilateralism and the United Nations, and the representative called for increased multilateral cooperation on taxation. The representative also noted that regional trade agreements complemented the multilateral trading system, enabling trade partners to leverage their core competencies and address a wider set of trade-related issues.

292. One representative noted that efforts to boost global and regional trade, including market access for developing countries, should take place at global, regional and national levels. The representative noted that the Comprehensive and Progressive Partnership Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership was a significant effort in advancing rule-based international trade among a large group of countries and that cooperation initiatives developed through ASEAN and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, among others, could also support multilateralism.
293. The Commission noted that disaster mitigation was a focus area for facilitating and enhancing sustainable trade and growth. A number of representatives expressed appreciation for the Commission’s role in promoting sustainable development and supporting cooperation programmes concerning disaster relief, for example through the China-ESCAP Cooperation Fund. They invited the Commission to reflect on the possibility of mandating a permanent standing organization to forecast disasters, provide relief, assist in rehabilitation and support countries and populations vulnerable to climate change.

294. One representative emphasized the importance of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration as a means of developing a global governance mechanism on that topic in support of the 2030 Agenda.

295. A representative of a United Nations body highlighted the importance of regional approaches to address inequalities in the context of the HIV response. In particular, the role of the Regional Framework for Action on HIV and AIDS beyond 2015, endorsed by member States during the 2015 Asia-Pacific Intergovernmental Meeting on HIV and AIDS, was a key tool to help countries to structure their responses. Addressing inequalities, stigma and discrimination in the context of HIV responses would have a catalysing effect in addressing wider inequalities, especially with regard to key populations.

Frontier technological innovation: policies to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals

296. The Executive Secretary gave introductory remarks and presented the main challenges and opportunities related to frontier technological innovation for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

297. The following speakers made statements to the Commission:

(a) Mr. Steve Leonard (SGInnovate);
(b) Mr. Arvind Gupta (MyGovIndia);
(c) Ms. Rosemarie G. Edillon (Philippines);
(d) Mr. Bambang Brodjonegoro (Indonesia);
(e) Ms. Duo Liu (China Academy of Information and Communications Technology);
(f) Mr. Christopher Tremewan (Association of Pacific Rim Universities).

298. Mr. Leonard emphasized the importance of technology for achieving global goals and noted the use of blockchain, a technology that enabled the decentralization of information. He presented several examples of how blockchain could contribute to food safety, proof of identity and vaccination for children and could offer great opportunities to address largely intractable development objectives. He explained how SGInnovate enabled entrepreneurs to develop and disseminate solutions for sustainable development by promoting collaboration between governments and entrepreneurs, linking entrepreneurs with like-minded communities, developing substantive and reliable financial support, providing talent-building services and providing physical spaces that allow for greater interaction.

299. Mr. Gupta reported on the efforts of the Government of India to use identity as a platform to transform its future. In 2010, 400 million people in India had no unique form of identity and 30 to 40 per cent of the population
was excluded from banking, health and education. The establishment of Aadhaar, the world’s largest digital identity platform, enabled citizens to access banking, health and welfare services. That open platform had been built at scale and at low cost to include both digitally connected and digitally unconnected citizens. The Government was the first user of that platform to transfer direct government benefits. Despite the costs of setting it up, the platform had allowed the Government to save sizable financial resources through the reduction of leakages in the payment of government benefits. The platform had also provided business opportunities to the private sector which could use the platform to deliver services.

300. Ms. Edillon noted that technology was neutral but policies influenced whether or not technology supported sustainable development and inclusivity. Policy actions mattered, as they could steer the development of technologies towards desired paths. Given the rapid pace of change, Governments must be flexible in order to swiftly adapt policies to adequately respond to technology changes. Ms. Edillon stressed the importance of democratizing technology access and outlined her country’s vision to promote smarter living, smarter government, a smarter economy, smarter people, smarter mobility and a smarter environment in order to promote inclusive growth, a high-trust and resilient society and a globally competitive knowledge economy.

301. Mr. Brodjonegoro noted that Governments in the region were increasingly interested in how they could benefit from the fourth industrial revolution and address potential challenges. Frontier technologies provided opportunities to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, for example by enhancing productivity, while also posing threats, such as unequal benefits, social conflicts and moral hazard. Countries with low innovation capacities risked becoming only consumers and not active developers of frontier technologies. The Government of Indonesia was taking steps to be ready for frontier technologies, addressing employment challenges and building capacities in that area in terms of both investment in research and development and in skills training.

302. Ms. Liu noted the importance of integrating the digital economy with the real economy and that data had become a valuable and promising resource. She reported on the rapid development of ICT, especially fifth-generation wireless systems (5G) technology, in China and discussed the importance of innovation and ICT for economic and social development. Supporting the development of ICT would require innovation and speeding up ICT evolution and upgrading, coordinated action to narrow the digital divide, building ecosystems for the digital economy and sharing development achievements among the Asia-Pacific region.

303. Mr. Tremewan briefed the Commission on the key research on frontier technologies carried out by the Association of Pacific Rim Universities. The policy principles promoted by the Association for the development of frontier technologies aimed at ensuring that societies were equipped educationally, benefits accrued to all those in need, there was an open public debate on the consequences of new technologies and there was political accountability; ensuring that the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals was the focus of new technologies research; ensuring that the rights to privacy, judicial independence and academic autonomy were protected; and that both the social sciences and humanities were recognized as essential to finding effective solutions.
Country statements

304. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: Armenia; Azerbaijan; Bangladesh; Brunei Darussalam; China; and Russian Federation. A representative of the Commission on Science and Technology for Sustainable Development in the South also made a statement.

305. Science, technology and innovation were fundamental to support economic growth and accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, as recognized in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.

306. Driven by science and technology, economies and societies were undergoing a major and rapid transformation that would transform all aspects of people’s lives, including production, employment, education and health. Science, technology and innovation could exacerbate multidimensional inequalities in the absence of adequate policy responses and technological capabilities. Several representatives noted that science, technology and innovation, including frontier technologies, were also key to reducing all forms of inequality and would enable countries to address health, environmental and other development challenges that exacerbated inequalities and to boost the digital economy in rural and remote areas.

307. The Commission recognized the importance of discussing frontier technologies and exploring their diverse opportunities and challenges as well as policy responses to ensure that new technologies did not exacerbate multidimensional inequalities. In that regard, the Commission attached great importance to regional cooperation.

308. The Commission recognized the determination of countries to contribute to the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals by actively promoting innovation and applying frontier technologies and scientific knowledge. National plans and strategies to support the innovative economy had been introduced by a number of countries. Efforts in that area also included the adoption of frontier technologies and the building of technology to deliver government goods and services, such as digital identities, direct payments and smart government services. One representative noted that in order to benefit from frontier technologies, developing countries needed to invest in human resources and in research and development activities.

309. The potential of new technologies causing unemployment was an issue of concern for many countries. Education and training were a prerequisite for inclusive growth that left no one behind. Improvements to education and intense training on science and technology as well as skills development deserved due attention, as they would provide individuals with the capabilities and skills required in the new context.

310. One representative expressed support for the eight-point policy agenda identified in the theme study as the most relevant measures for shaping a more inclusive, prosperous and sustainable future for all. Those measures included addressing persistent inequalities in technological capabilities among and within countries and bridging the digital divide.

311. Bridging the digital divide and harnessing digital technologies were important to address inequalities and shape more inclusive and sustainable development. National and subregional efforts to extend affordable broadband connectivity and service delivery to reduce inequalities and promote inclusive development had been made in several countries.
312. ICT connectivity was key to facilitating and enhancing sustainable trade and growth. The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit would be held in Port Moresby in November 2018 with the theme “Harnessing inclusive opportunities, embracing the digital future” and it was expected to help to spark big developments in global partnerships for sustainable development.

313. ICT played an important role in growth and development. In particular, the enhancement of ICT connectivity, thereby providing access and bridging the digital divide, provided new solutions to development challenges, access to information and knowledge, and immense potential for social progress. Frontier technologies, such as artificial intelligence, big data and the industrial Internet of things, had brought about significant and fundamental change, and connectivity provided the basis for those innovations.

314. The provision of connectivity, through satellite and terrestrial broadband infrastructure, enabled countries to use ICT to advance sustainable development and to help to reduce inequality. The Asia-Pacific information superhighway was an important regional initiative. A call was made for continued support for the implementation of the Master Plan for the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway by ESCAP member countries.

315. One representative, with regard to the role of space technology and ICT in promoting regional connectivity and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, spoke about the recent successful launch of a first telecommunication satellite. By providing service coverage for various countries, the satellite would have numerous environment- and development-related applications and would provide better data and information in relation to agricultural planning systems, disaster management, weather forecasting, tele-health and e-learning.

316. The Commission was informed of accomplishments made in preparedness, response and recovery to Tropical Cyclone Gita, the various measures taken to protect people and prepare them for the adverse effects of disasters and climate change, including the establishment of a dedicated national disaster management agency, and efforts to build resilience to disasters. In that regard, according to one representative, the Government had developed high resolution geohazard maps using light detection and ranging technology with priority given to areas with high exposure to hazards which also coincided with the poorest areas. Another representative noted that robust measures were being taken to mitigate and reduce impacts of natural disasters in the country’s fifth and sixth National Development Plans. They included measures for upgrading safety and resilience standards in infrastructure, retrofitting vulnerable structures, enhancing disaster preparedness and response capacity, and allocating 2 per cent of the national annual budget to disaster risk reduction and preparedness.

317. The Commission also noted recent endeavours in transport to incorporate frontier technologies into old infrastructure, thereby increasing the quality of transport services for the public and the efficiency of traffic management systems. New technologies were supporting the realization of smart cities and inclusive urban communities by improving urban water and traffic management systems. One representative also noted that the application of frontier technologies to accelerate achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals had played an important role in the country’s expected graduation from the status of least developed country.
318. Member States in the Caucasus, Central Asia and South Asia had implemented transport infrastructure initiatives to enhance access by landlocked countries to international maritime ports on the Black Sea, the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf, in particular through the development, construction and operation of international road and rail transport corridors.

319. Regional cooperation on innovation technologies and building knowledge was essential for strengthening and advancing national economies. The Commission was informed of the establishment of an institution for space technology development. In addition, considerable efforts to support the development of intelligent transport systems and space applications for emergency management of road traffic accidents had to be taken to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

320. Least developed countries, small island developing States and countries with special needs were in danger of being left behind in the region due to, inter alia, limited access to and capabilities in innovation and technology. The transfer of technologies was critical to support the development agenda and to bridge inequalities. Furthermore, ESCAP could play an important role in providing assistance to developing countries in the transfer of technologies, particularly in the context of sustainable development. Several representatives stressed that greater efforts were needed to ensure that sound and advanced technologies were available to developing countries. Some representatives noted that enhancing capacities in science, technology and innovation was essential to advancing development progress in developing countries as well as to accelerating the realization of the international sustainable development agenda.

321. Least developed countries and landlocked developing countries, despite structural limitations, could adopt policies that helped to bridge the digital divide and to promote skilled labour and technological capabilities and that challenged mindsets, for instance regarding the role of women in science, technology, engineering and math careers.

322. The Commission highlighted the importance of a robust framework for technology transfer. One representative noted that the protection of intellectual property rights was the best way to fully realize the potential of innovation.

323. Concerted efforts to build indigenous science, technology and innovation capabilities would help to address inequality. International, regional, South-South and triangular cooperation and the contribution that countries were making to exchange knowledge and support others in building their scientific and technological capabilities were important.

324. The Commission encouraged the secretariat to leverage its advantage as a policy platform and think tank; to continue its proactive role in supporting peer-to-peer learning among countries in the region, including in the areas of science, frontier technologies, green technologies and ICT; to follow the major trend of the new scientific and technological revolution and industrial transformation; and to encourage its members to embrace innovation-driven development and accelerate the upgrading of industrial structures.

325. The Commission noted the importance of the annual United Nations multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals. Its third session would be held on 5 and 6 June 2018, and Japan and Mexico would serve as Co-Chairs. Some representatives also recognized the importance of organizing a regional
innovation forum and proposed that ESCAP organize the first regional innovation forum, at an appropriate time, as part of the implementation of Commission resolution 72/12.

326. Other international and regional organizations, such as the Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries, to be inaugurated in Gebze, Turkey, in June 2018, played an important role in integrating science and technology in national development plans, supporting indigenous capacities in science and technologies, improving the diffusion and adoption of scientific and technological knowledge in developing countries and promoting their integration into the global knowledge economy.

327. Civil society, including grass-roots organizations, academia and faith-based and philanthropic organizations, also played an important role in providing opportunities for all. For example, academia could reach out to communities and help them to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals based on their own local wisdom and available scientific knowledge and technology tools.

328. A representative of an intergovernmental organization, recognizing the historical role of technologies in advancing human civilization, noted that it was important to discuss frontier technologies in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals. She stressed the importance of making new and emerging technologies inclusive. She noted that open, transparent, responsible and smart strategies were needed to take advantage of the frontier technologies. She also highlighted three concerns related to new and emerging technologies: the risk of frontier technologies becoming waste generators, the risk of technology increasing inequality by displacing workers, and the need to promote coherent policy responses that enabled countries that were not prepared for the fourth industrial revolution to be able to take advantage of the opportunities available at the domestic, regional and global levels.

329. Also at its 7th plenary meeting the Commission adopted resolution 74/11 on strengthening regional cooperation to tackle inequality in all its forms in Asia and the Pacific.

330. Subsequent to the adoption, the representative of the United States of America stated that her delegation was disassociating from paragraphs 1 (f) and 2 (e). She stated that her delegation did not support attempts by members to incorporate domestic political language into international normative frameworks in multilateral settings nor requests to the Executive Secretary to support initiatives of individual members over others.

331. A representative noted that the Commission, in the course of the session, had discussed extensively the various aspects of inequality and that the resolution reflected the membership’s common view on inequality and would guide future actions in the region.

Agenda item 10
Other matters

Election of the members of the Governing Council of the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development

332. In addition to the host country, the Republic of Korea, the Commission elected the following countries to the Governing Council of the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for
Development for the period from 2018 to 2021: Bangladesh; Cambodia; India; Indonesia; Philippines; Russian Federation; Sri Lanka; and Thailand.

Election of the members of the Governing Council of the Centre for Sustainable Agriculture Mechanization

333. In addition to the host country, China, the Commission elected the following countries to the Governing Council of the Centre for Sustainable Agriculture Mechanization for the period from 2018 to 2021: Bangladesh; Cambodia; India; Malaysia; Pakistan; Philippines; Thailand; and Viet Nam.

Agenda item 11
Adoption of the report of the Commission

334. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, the report of the Commission on its seventy-fourth session (ESCAP/74/43) was adopted unanimously.

335. Several representatives expressed regret that a number of resolutions had been voted on and called for the tradition of consensus at ESCAP to be upheld at future sessions.