
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Seventy-fifth session

Bangkok, 27–31 May 2019

Item 7 of the provisional agenda*

Midterm review of the conference structure of the Commission

Midpoint review of the conference structure of the Commission: Chair's summary of discussions**

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 73/1 the Commission decided to review its conference structure at its seventy-eighth session in 2022, with a midpoint review at its seventy-fifth session, in 2019, and requested the Executive Secretary to submit a report in both cases, with a focus on the programme areas of the Commission, to serve as a basis for the review.
2. Three initial informal consultations of the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission were held in December 2018 and January 2019, informed by a non-paper prepared by the secretariat.
3. The Advisory Committee took stock of these discussions at its 380th session and suggested to continue informal consultations after the issuance of the report by the secretariat on the midterm review of the conference structure.
4. Following the issuance of an advanced, unedited and English-only version of the report of the secretariat¹, two informal consultations of the Advisory Committee were held on 2 April and 17 April 2019 and Chaired by H.E. Ms. Raushan Yesbulatova, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary and Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan to ESCAP.
5. This document contains a summary of the discussions prepared by the Chair, along the lines of the ideas and issues presented in the report by the secretariat.

* ESCAP/75/L.1.

** This document is being issued without formal editing.

¹ ESCAP/75/30.

II. Summary of discussions

A. General views and ideas

6. The meeting underscored the relevance of the ongoing reform of the United Nations development system, and how this would intersect with the midterm review of the conference structure. Several members of the Advisory Committee felt it may be premature to introduce substantial changes to the conference structure of the Commission at this midpoint review.

7. Some members suggested reviewing and discussing all recommendations proposed by member States and those contained in the report by the secretariat, and then assess which recommendations could be executed at the seventy-fifth Commission session, either through a resolution or a decision, which recommendations may be further explored after the seventy-fifth Commission session through an open-ended working group or by the Advisory Committee, and which ones should be discarded.

B. Content of the Commission session

8. With regard to the recommendation on a series of theme topics for multiple years, some members said they were not ready to support it as they felt that this limited the ability of the Commission to address emerging issues.

9. Members were open to the proposal for the Commission to adopt a declaration, from time to time. However, members felt this should be considered only when there was a need for it and its added value would be clear, and there would be no need to make it a requirement. Some members noted that a declaration should complement, not substitute, thematic resolutions that the Commission usually adopts. Moreover, any declaration would need to be negotiated in advance, similar to resolutions.

10. In relation to the recommendation to review the allocation of agenda items and how they are discussed, members expressed support for deliberations to focus more on policy-oriented discussions and on matters requiring the Commission's action or attention. Several members also generally supported the proposal to cluster the review of the outcomes of subsidiary bodies along the lines of the three dimensions of sustainable development and the means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda. One member noted the difficulties of balancing various interlinkages between thematic issues and suggested focusing on core issues instead.

11. Members were generally open to the idea of allocating a day for special events organized by member States and other stakeholders. While some members felt the current duration of the Commission of five working days was too long to attract high-level representation and would favour a streamlining of the agenda, others felt the current duration was already fine and any day for special events should be considered prior to the session. Drawing from the experience of the Asia-Pacific Forum for Sustainable Development, some members suggested avoiding side events overlapping with core segments of the meeting, while others asked for the call for side events to be sent to member States well in advance in order to allow sufficient time to coordinate with capitals and prepare.

C. Organization of the Commission session

12. Some members expressed general support for the proposal to alternate a high-level session with a "Committee of the Whole" to be organized at United

Nations Headquarters in New York but noted that further analysis would need to be conducted, drawing from the experience of other regional commissions, and that it may be premature to consider this recommendation at this session. Other members did not support the recommendation and called for the current arrangements to be maintained, noting the value of annual high-level sessions in Bangkok.

13. Members expressed support for the idea of making the dates of the Commission more predictable, drawing from the experience in the General Assembly. Members were also supportive of having the Commission being held away from Bangkok, provided the host country covered the additional costs, and noting that this should be an opportunity and not an obligation.

14. Members expressed support for the proposal to rotate the Chair of the Commission and for each session to select the Chair for the next session, noting the added value that the Chair could bring in the preparations for the session, including in terms of mobilizing participation from other member States.

D. Subsidiary bodies of the Commission

15. Members felt it was important to examine the subsidiary structure of the Commission for effectiveness, efficiency and relevance, but that it would be premature to do so at the seventy-fifth session of the Commission session. An examination of the subsidiary structure of the Commission could be initiated after the seventy-fifth session.

16. Noting that the Commission, in its resolution 71/1, had requested the secretariat to continue to undertake a systematic monitoring and evaluation of the conference structure and its link to the programme priorities of the Commission, some members suggested that a comprehensive evaluation could be prepared by the secretariat for the consideration of member States at any time, including prior to the final review scheduled for 2022.

17. Some members expressed support for the recommendation to align the frequency of ad-hoc ministerial conferences with their associated committees or convene committees at the ministerial level on an ad-hoc basis to ensure high-level engagement.

III. Conclusion

18. There was general consensus among members of the Advisory Committee that discussions on major issues of a programmatic nature may be better deferred to after the seventy-fifth session of the Commission, taking into account the reform of the United Nations development system.

19. At the same time, members felt that the Commission at its seventy-fifth session may consider endorsing recommendations of a procedural nature geared towards improving the planning and conduct of Commission sessions, and requested the Chair to develop a draft text as a basis for further negotiations.

20. Lastly, members of the Advisory Committee recommended establishing an open-ended working group to advance discussions on the review of the conference structure of the Commission after the seventy-fifth session of the Commission, and to report the findings and recommendations to the Commission at its seventy-sixth session, without prejudice to the final review of the conference structure to be conducted at the seventy-eighth session of the Commission.