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Midpoint review of the conference structure of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

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Note by the secretariat

Summary

In its resolution 78/2, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific decided to review its conference structure at its eighty-third session, in 2027, with a midpoint review at its eighty-first session, in 2025, and requested the Executive Secretary to submit a report in both cases, with a focus on the programme areas of the Commission, which would serve as a basis for the review. The present document contains recommendations on the conference structure of the Commission pertaining to its subsidiary bodies.

The Commission may wish to consider the recommendations contained in the document and provide guidance on any changes to be made to the conference structure.

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 78/2, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific decided to review its conference structure at its eighty-third session, in 2027, with a midpoint review at its eighty-first session, in 2025, and requested the Executive Secretary to submit a report in each instance, with a focus on the programme areas of the Commission, which will serve as a basis for the review.

2. Subsequently, in its resolution 80/4, the Commission decided to review the working methods of the committees and other bodies subsidiary to the Commission, as appropriate and as necessary, in the context of the midpoint review of the conference structure of the Commission, to be conducted at its eighty-first session.

* ESCAP/81/1.

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3. Pursuant to the above-mentioned resolutions, in the present document the secretariat provides background information on previous reviews of the conference structure of the Commission, presents the issues brought to the attention of member States in the context of the current midpoint review and summarizes the consultations held on the matter in the lead-up to the eighty-first session of the Commission.

II. Background

4. The conference structure of the Commission sets out certain aspects related to the organization of the sessions of the Commission; the subsidiary structure of the Commission and the terms of reference of subsidiary bodies; and provisions for holding ad hoc ministerial conferences and other intergovernmental meetings.

5. The current conference structure of the Commission was established in resolution 64/1, which was adopted at the sixty-fourth session, in April 2008.

6. The conference structure was subsequently revised through the adoption, in May 2015, of resolution 71/1, by which the Commission established the Committee on Energy and reconstituted the Committee on Information and Communications Technology as the Committee on Information and Communications Technology, Science, Technology and Innovation and the Committee on Macroeconomic Policy, Poverty Reduction and Inclusive Development as the Committee on Macroeconomic Policy, Poverty Reduction and Financing for Development.

7. Pursuant to resolution 73/1, adopted in May 2017, the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development was included as part of the subsidiary structure of the Commission.

8. Through resolution 78/2, adopted in May 2022, and with a view to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Commission updated the terms of reference and issues to be considered by its committees and decided to reconstitute the Committee on Trade and Investment as the Committee on Trade, Investment, Enterprise and Business Innovation.

III. Recommendations concerning the midpoint review of the conference structure of the Commission

A. Review of the working methods of the committees subsidiary to the Commission in follow-up to resolution 80/4

9. At its eightieth session, the Commission adopted resolution 80/4, in which it requested the secretariat to circulate any draft texts for consideration at the session, along with any relevant supporting background information, in accordance with rule 2 and without prejudice to rules 31 and 32 of its rules of procedure, that is at least 42 days prior to the session in question. Pursuant to that resolution, all draft recommendations and decisions proposed by the secretariat for consideration and adoption by the subsidiary bodies, notably the committees subsidiary to the Commission, are included in the relevant pre-session documents, which are prepared and issued in accordance with rule 2 of the rules of procedure of the Commission.

10. Implementing resolution 80/4 requires clarifying when and how draft recommendations and decisions proposed by the secretariat are to be

considered by the committees. The following steps, which reflect the existing practice of some of the committees, are proposed by the secretariat as a basis for consideration:

(a) Ahead of each session, the secretariat circulates its proposed draft recommendations and decisions in the pre-session documents prepared to inform discussions under the relevant agenda items;

(b) During the session, discussions on the draft recommendations and decisions are held under the relevant agenda item, after the delivery of statements;

(c) Following the discussions, which may lead to the amendment or deletion of the proposed draft recommendations and decisions, agreed texts are included in the draft report to be adopted on the last day of the session;

(d) When adopting the report on the last day of the session, the committees will also adopt the draft recommendations and decisions already discussed under the relevant agenda items, when agreement on the texts will have been reached.

11. These are the steps that have been followed for the intergovernmental meetings convened under the auspices of the Commission since the adoption of resolution 80/4, namely: the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Digital Inclusion and Transformation (Astana, 3–5 September 2024); the eighth session of the Committee on Social Development (Bangkok, 8–10 October 2024); the eighth session of the Committee on Environment and Development (Bangkok, 16–18 October 2024); the eighth session of the Committee on Transport (Bangkok, 5–7 November 2024); the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on the Beijing+30 Review (Bangkok, 19–21 November 2024); and the ninth session of the Committee on Statistics (Bangkok, 11–13 December 2024).

12. For meetings with negotiated outcomes such as ministerial declarations or regional action plans, discussions would continue to be held ahead of the meeting through written comments, hybrid consultations and drafting groups (as is normally done to negotiate Commission resolutions or other outcome documents), or through a combination thereof. This standard process was followed, for example, for the negotiation of the Astana Ministerial Declaration on Digital Inclusion and Transformation in Asia and the Pacific.

13. While draft recommendations and decisions proposed by the secretariat could continue to be circulated in the pre-session documents, in line with rule 2 of the rules of procedure of the Commission, guidance is required on the modalities for submitting any additional proposals by member States.

14. While proposals made by member States could be submitted for discussion during the session, under the relevant agenda item, this might not allow for sufficient consultation, either with delegates in the room or with colleagues in the capitals. Thus, it might be more appropriate for proposals by member States to be submitted in advance.

15. In this regard, it is worth noting the guidance already contained in the current conference structure of the Commission on the submission and consideration of draft resolutions:

> Members of the Commission intending to submit draft resolutions to the Commission are strongly encouraged to submit them to the Executive Secretary at least one month prior to the commencement of

the session of the Commission in order to allow sufficient time for review by members and associate members of the Commission.[1]

16. The Commission may wish to consider providing similar guidance for the submission of proposed draft recommendations and decisions by member States.

17. Guidance from member States on these procedural aspects would help to clarify the procedures, as well as the working methods of the committees subsidiary to the Commission, so that all members and associate members have a common understanding and can participate effectively.

B. Renaming the Special Body on Least Developed, Landlocked Developing and Small Island Developing States

18. The Special Body on Least Developed, Landlocked Developing and Small Island Developing States meets during the ministerial segment of Commission sessions.

19. The Commission may wish to consider renaming the Special Body to reflect the terminology used throughout the Secretariat to refer to least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States. Thus, the new name would be "Special Body on Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States".

IV. Summary of the consultations held on the midpoint review of the conference structure of the Commission

20. Four informal consultations among members and associate members were held between September 2024 and January 2025 to collect views on the midpoint review of the conference structure of the Commission and to come to a common understanding on whether any updates to the conference structure were required and, if so, what they should be.[2] The Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Nepal to Thailand and Permanent Representative of Nepal to the Commission, Mr. Dhan Bahadur Oli, served as Chair, and Counsellor and Deputy Permanent Representative of Mongolia to the Commission, Mrs. Guamaral Altangerel, served as Vice-Chair.

21. During the informal consultations, representatives underscored the importance of having enough time to consider draft recommendations and decisions proposed for adoption, including enough time to consult with colleagues in capitals.

22. Representatives reflected on the implementation of resolution 80/4 since its adoption and said that discussing the draft recommendations and decisions under the relevant agenda item had worked well. They emphasized, however, that it was important to allow enough time to discuss the draft recommendations and decisions and called upon the secretariat to develop the programme for each session accordingly.

23. Several representatives noted the importance of avoiding last-minute negotiations, which could hinder the substantive discussions held during the

[1] Commission resolution 78/2, annex, para. 6.

[2] Consultations were held on 23 September, 23 October and 12 November 2024 and on 16 January 2025.

committee session and may not allow representatives to consult with colleagues in capitals. It was also noted that the draft recommendations and decisions proposed by the secretariat should be based on agreed terminology, so as to facilitate discussions.

24. Suggestions were also made to circulate any draft recommendations or decisions proposed by member States prior to the session to allow sufficient time for representatives to review them and to consult with colleagues in capitals. In that regard, representatives agreed that proposals should be submitted one month in advance of the session, as already provided for in the current conference structure for the consideration of draft resolutions.

25. Representatives also agreed to rename the Special Body on Least Developed, Landlocked Developing and Small Island Developing States as the Special Body on Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, in line with the terminology used throughout the United Nations.

26. One representative made a proposal for improving some of the working methods and processes of the secretariat. While supporting the intention of making improvements, other representatives felt the proposal went beyond the scope of the midpoint review.

27. In general, the representatives agreed that the discussions on the midpoint review of the conference structure should focus on the request contained in resolution 78/2 and that representatives should bear in mind that the review of the conference structure would take place in 2027.

V. Issues for consideration by the Commission

28. Based on the discussions held by representatives in the context of the informal consultations on the midpoint review of the conference structure of the Commission, the following draft decisions are proposed for adoption by the Commission at its eighty-first session:

Draft decision 1

At its 9th plenary meeting on 25 April 2025, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, recalling its resolution 80/4 of 26 April 2024, decided that, without prejudice to rules 31 and 32 of its rules of procedure, members of the Commission intending to submit draft recommendations and decisions to be considered by its subsidiary bodies, in particular the committees, are strongly encouraged to submit them to the Executive Secretary at least one month prior to the commencement of the session, in order to allow sufficient time for review by the members and associate members of the Commission.

Draft decision 2

At its 9th plenary meeting on 25 April 2025, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, recalling its resolution 78/2 of 27 May 2022, decided to rename the Special Body on Least Developed, Landlocked Developing and Small Island Developing States as the Special Body on Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.