ASIA-PACIFIC COMMEMORATION OF THE 4th INTERNATIONAL DAY OF CLEAN AIR FOR BLUE SKIES

Operationalizing the Regional Action Programme on Air Pollution

Draft Terms of Reference of the Open-Ended Working Group on Air Quality Standards

Objective:

The latest update of the WHO Air Quality Guidelines (2021) states that 7 million people worldwide annually die prematurely of cardiovascular and respiratory diseases that are attributable to ambient and household air pollution. The greatest number (two-thirds) of these premature deaths occurred in the South-East Asian and Western Pacific regions (as defined by the WHO), which can be attributed to the rapid economical and industrial and urban growth in these areas.

The current subregional agreements have contributed to considerable progress in air quality in some (mainly high-income) countries but in general they have not yet led to the necessary overall improvements in air quality and transboundary air pollution in Asia. In most countries, national standards on air quality allow much higher levels of pollution than the standards set by the WHO. In some countries emissions are even on the rise and air quality is worsening by the growing industrial activities with obsolete technologies and unplanned urbanization , which enhances the already unacceptable health and climate risks.

To overcome some of these barriers, ESCAP member States have adopted the Asia-Pacific Regional Action Programme on Air Pollution (RAPAP), which incorporates various components of cooperation on air quality monitoring, data and standards as well as best practices and policies including through leveraging subregional, multistakeholder initiatives. The long-term success of the action programme is dependent upon building a strong evidence base and effectively linking existing initiatives and their relevant scientific committees.

In this context, an open-ended the Working Group on Air Quality Standards will be established to facilitate operationalizing Section 2 of the RAPAP: “Improvement of air quality management”. The working group will convene two virtual meetings during 2023 and 2024, respectively.

Membership and roles:

Membership in the working group is open-ended through the period of its work in 2023-2024, based on the invitation by ESCAP. Members are expected to provide technical guidance on operationalizing the RAPAP and support the collection and analysis of relevant national information pertinent to air quality standards. Furthermore Individual

experts may join in the preparation of the substantive outputs as specified in the work programme based on their specializations and availability. .

Substantive Focus :

The working group will focus on the following substantive themes related to Section 2 of the Regional Action Programme:

(a) Where they are not present, setting national ambient air quality standards in legislation or reviewing and improving existing national air quality standards, as appropriate, taking into account different national social, economic and technical circumstances and capacities and the guidelines of WHO;

(b) Inventory and harmonization recommendations of the various national AQI indicator baskets, with a proposed methodology for regional synchronization. Where they are not present, setting national ambient air quality standards in legislation or reviewing and improving existing national air quality standards, as appropriate, taking into account different national social, economic and technical circumstances and capacities and the guidelines of WHO;4

(c) Encouraging regional and subregional institutions, including scientific and technical committees from existing air pollution initiatives, to strengthen cooperation to improve air quality;

(d) Considering carrying out an assessment of the impact of various air quality management policies on the energy, transport, building, agricultural and industrial sectors, among other sectors;

(e) On the basis of information received from member States, compiling data on best practices on the implementation of air quality management policies in the areas of technology, financing, business models and public and political awareness and engagement, in a holistic manner, as well as sector-based data in the areas of energy, transport, buildings, agriculture and industry, among others;

Outputs:

As a result of the deliberations in the inception meeting, the members of the working group will determine their work programe and outputs with regard to the elements (a) of Section 2 of the RAPAP and taking into account other relevant elements.

This working group, together with the working group on data, will draft a policy brief on enhancing the region's Air Quality standards and Data availability. The policy brief will draw on the review of data and policies across the region, identifying variations in air quality standards and recommendations to strengthen air quality standards (input and peer review by WGs).