Account of proceedings

Agenda item 1
Opening of the session

Senior officials segment

1. The senior officials segment was opened by the Executive Secretary on 15 May 2017. The Executive Secretary delivered a welcoming statement.

Ministerial segment

2. The Commission elected Mr. Enele Sosene Sopoaga (Tuvalu) Chair of the seventy-third session on 17 May 2017, and he presided over the opening session of the ministerial segment. A video message from the Secretary-General was played. The Executive Secretary delivered her welcoming remarks and a policy statement. A video commemorating the life and achievements of His Majesty the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand was played. General Tanasak Patimapragorn, Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand, delivered the inaugural address on behalf of the Government of Thailand. Mr. Tommy Esang Remengesau, Jr., President of Palau, and Ms. Helen Clark, former Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, delivered keynote speeches. Ms. Dessima Williams, Special Adviser on Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, delivered remarks on behalf of the President of the seventy-first session of the General Assembly.

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 regional implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020 (E/ESCAP/73/1), the report on the Regional Capacity-building Workshop on Sustainable Development Goals Modelling for the Least Developed Countries in Asia and the Pacific (E/ESCAP/73/2), the note by the secretariat on regional implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014-2024 (E/ESCAP/73/3), the report on progress made on the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway and the Sustainable Development Goals in the Pacific (E/ESCAP/73/4) and the note by the secretariat on the summary of the Asia-Pacific Countries with Special Needs Development Report 2017 (E/ESCAP/73/5).
4. Statements were made by representatives of the following members and associate members: Australia; Bangladesh; Bhutan; Fiji; Lao People’s Democratic Republic; and Republic of Korea. A statement was made by the representative of the Office of the High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.

5. The Commission expressed its appreciation to the secretariat for supporting countries with special needs, and in particular for the analytical work presented in the *Asia-Pacific Countries with Special Needs Development Report 2017*.

6. The Commission recognized that least developed, landlocked developing and small island developing States, collectively referred to as countries with special needs, had made progress in implementing their relevant programmes of action. However, those countries remained extremely vulnerable to external shocks, such as those caused by extreme weather events, climate change, health epidemics and macroeconomic shocks. They also faced considerable constraints in terms of infrastructure development and access to financial resources and to international markets.

7. The Commission pointed out that many least developed countries had met the criteria for graduation from the least developed country status and more were expected to do so at the next triennial review, in 2018. One reason was that those economies had achieved 7 per cent growth on average during the first decade of the current millennium, in line with the target set out in the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020 (Istanbul Programme of Action). However, it was noted that achievements in sectors such as sanitation and hygiene remained poor and highlighted the need for strengthening balanced development of the economy, society and the environment.

8. The Commission noted that the least developed countries continued to face serious development challenges, especially in strengthening their productive capacities and diversifying their export bases, as well as strengthening resilience to external crises. Continued special and differential treatment by the international community, such as duty-free and quota-free market access for exports from least developed economies, was important in order to strengthen development in those countries.

9. The Commission recognized the importance of transfer of technology to least developed economies and looked forward to the full operationalization of the Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries.

10. It was emphasized that to achieve equitable progress and inclusive sustainable development, the transition of landlocked developing countries to land-linked countries would require increased international support and assistance and entailed a greater need for cooperation with transit neighbours and development partners (regional and international) in the areas of human resources development, technical and financial support and investments in infrastructure. For those economies, it was important to foster trade facilitation, transit transport and infrastructure development.

11. The Commission noted the high vulnerability of the Pacific subregion to natural disasters and climate change and highlighted the importance of maintaining the health of the Pacific Ocean, including by addressing ocean acidification and combating illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing. In that context, the Commission emphasized the need for
small island developing States to pursue integrated approaches that enhanced
disaster preparedness and resilience to future shocks.

12. The Commission also emphasized the need to remove social and
institutional gender-related barriers, particularly as the Sustainable
Development Goals emphasized a people-centred approach to development
and as gender equality and women’s empowerment needed to be at the
forefront of development policies. The secretariat was requested to continue
to support countries by, for instance, providing technical assistance and
support as well as capacity-building for national statistical offices in the key
areas of gender and disability, in order to achieve the mandates of the Samoa
Pathway and to meet the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable
Development. The secretariat was encouraged to continue working on its
Pacific-tailored approach for development and to collaborate with other
United Nations agencies, regional organizations and non-governmental
organization partners to minimize duplication.

13. While challenging, mobilizing financial resources was particularly
critical to strengthening development in countries with special needs. The
Commission thus called upon advanced countries to meet their commitments
and obligations and to enhance their development cooperation and support for
the most vulnerable countries for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
Countries with special needs also required technical assistance and support
from the international community, particularly to create synergies between
the 2030 Agenda and their respective national programmes of action.

14. At its 6th plenary meeting, on 19 May 2017, the Commission took
note of the note by the secretariat on the regional implementation of the
Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade
2011-2020, the report on the Regional Capacity-building Workshop on
Sustainable Development Goals Modelling for the Least Developed
Countries in Asia and the Pacific, the report on progress made on the SIDS
Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway and the Sustainable
Development Goals in the Pacific and the note by the secretariat on the
summary of the Asia-Pacific Countries with Special Needs Development

15. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, the Commission adopted resolution
73/2 on strengthening the regional mechanism for the implementation of the
Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the
Decade 2014-2024.

High-level exchange

16. The high-level exchange on infrastructure and sustainable
development in the Asia-Pacific least developed countries, landlocked
developing countries and small island developing States focused on existing
infrastructure deficits in those countries and on how sufficient financial
resources could be raised to strengthen the development of new infrastructure
and to maintain existing infrastructure.

17. The panel was moderated by Mr. Tommy Esang Remengesau, Jr.,
(Palau). The panellists were:

(a) Mr. Joe Natuman (Vanuatu);
(b) Mr. Tsend Munkh-Orgil (Mongolia);
(c) Mr. Muhammad Abdul Mannan (Bangladesh);
(d) Ms. Dessima Williams (Office of the President of the General Assembly);
(e) Mr. Rajiv Biswas (IHS Markit).

18. In his opening remarks, Mr. Remengesau welcomed the participants and briefly introduced the topic.

19. The Executive Secretary made introductory remarks and presented the key findings of the *Asia-Pacific Countries with Special Needs Development Report 2017*.

20. Mr. Natuman underscored the critical role of physical infrastructure in improving connectivity within and across countries and in promoting inclusive and sustainable development among the Asia-Pacific countries with special needs. Infrastructure development in small island developing States faced a number of challenges, ranging from the logistical and cost implications of working in a remote and dispersed archipelago, to high vulnerability to disasters and climate change, to constraints associated with a limited and unpredictable funding base. He explained some of the challenges, including that of access to health care for remote populations (75 per cent of the 280,000 inhabitants of Vanuatu lived in rural areas, spread over 83 islands). While some current infrastructure projects would provide affordable and green energy and access to health care, including for women, girls and persons with disabilities, Mr. Natuman informed the Commission that resources provided for the operation and maintenance of infrastructure assets were inadequate, which had resulted in a failure to provide the services for which they were intended and had resulted in costly reconstruction. Recognizing the difficulty small island developing States faced in generating sufficient domestic revenue, he stressed that donor assistance, through budget support, technical assistance and capacity-building, would continue to play a key role in financing the construction and maintenance required to support the delivery of basic infrastructure services. He concluded by suggesting that, to enhance the effectiveness of cooperation, development partners and the international community should realign their cooperation strategies more closely with the national priorities, policies, structures, principles and processes established by the Governments of small island developing States.

21. Mr. Munkh-Orgil highlighted the critical role played by the United Nations in assisting the Government of Mongolia in its transition from a centrally-planned model to a market system in the 1990s and in building its technical capacity in negotiating cooperation agreements, such as the trilateral agreement on the economic corridor between China, Mongolia and the Russian Federation. The continued assistance of ESCAP, particularly the provision of technical knowledge and expertise through capacity-building activities, would be critical to his country’s continued development, particularly regarding its engagement in international cooperation initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative. The biggest development challenge for his country was to overcome its landlockedness, as it accounted for at least half of the cost of doing business internationally. In particular, he noted that while approximately a tenth of those high costs stemmed from tariffs imposed by other countries, non-tariff barriers played a significantly greater role. He stressed the need for infrastructure development to overcome challenges related to being landlocked and noted that significant financial resources would need to be mobilized for that, particularly given the large size of the territory of Mongolia.
22. Mr. Mannan informed the Commission that the Government of Bangladesh was streamlining synergies for physical, social and institutional infrastructure under its national planning framework, which would contribute substantially to attaining the Sustainable Development Goals. Three priorities were key: building roads, connecting people to the power grid and bringing more children into formal education to achieve a 100 per cent literacy rate by 2020. Multilateral and bilateral financial modalities, such as those provided by the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, were supporting infrastructure projects. However, due to the growing strength of the economy of Bangladesh, domestic resources were expected to play an increasingly important role in supporting infrastructure projects, particularly those related to the construction of transport infrastructure. He highlighted some proactive government policies that were being implemented to increase public resources, including strengthening tax revenues and managing existing resources more effectively. Strengthening engagement with the private sector by creating more partnerships in infrastructure-related projects was an important element of his country’s development strategy, and he noted the importance of regional and subregional initiatives (such as those between Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal) for raising additional resources in support of infrastructure projects to connect with other parts of the Asia-Pacific region. Finally, he encouraged development partners, including ESCAP, to continue providing capacity-building activities to strengthen his country’s development.

23. Ms. Williams said that infrastructure would play a critical role in implementing the 2030 Agenda. She highlighted that resilient infrastructure created conditions for sustainable economic growth, increased productivity and facilitated the creation of decent work for all, noting also that the Asia-Pacific region had achieved remarkable development progress. However, poverty and social exclusion, especially of women and minority groups, remained widespread throughout the region and large infrastructure gaps persisted. In view of the significant financial resources that developing countries in the region required to close infrastructure gaps, she emphasized the importance of greater assistance from the international community, particularly in terms of meeting its agreed-upon aid obligations. She highlighted the importance of paying attention to sustainable energy, sustainable transportation and liveable cities as three important areas linked to physical infrastructure and broader achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Modern, low-carbon, people-friendly and sustainably financed infrastructure across the region would contribute to achieving the Goals. Developing countries should take advantage of low interest rates and rapid technological change to leapfrog to sustainable methods of production and consumption and to avoid becoming locked into unsustainable carbon-intensive paths of development. She emphasized that regulatory incentives should guide financial flows and incentivize investments in sustainable sectors and technologies and that countries should eliminate subsidies on fossil fuels and internalize the price of carbon into investments. Mitigating the effects of climate change was critical to island nations and infrastructure development should be facilitated by the Green Climate Fund and regional development banks.

24. Mr. Biswas outlined the significant financial resources that were required to close infrastructure gaps in countries with special needs in Asia and the Pacific. He highlighted that before undertaking investments in countries with special needs, the private sector took into account countries’ risks profiles; those profiles were generally contingent upon political factors, exchange rate risks and repayment schedules. In that context, the small size
of many countries with special needs (both in terms of population size as well as output), as well as the shallowness of their existing capital markets, posed additional barriers to investors. Using the ESCAP access to physical infrastructure index, he identified gaps between countries with special needs and other developing countries in the region. The index was a useful tool to benchmark infrastructure needs and progress in closing gaps. He acknowledged that countries could attract more private sector investment if regulatory standards were improved. He further recognized the potential of pension and insurance funds in supporting infrastructure development in collaboration with multilateral financial and development banks, commercial banks and national development banks. ESCAP and other development partners had an important role to play in improving the capacity of policymakers to raise and efficiently use financial resources for infrastructure development in the countries with special needs in the region.

Agenda item 3
Review of issues pertinent to the subsidiary structure of the Commission, including the work of the regional institutions

25. The Commission had before it the note by the secretariat on the summary of progress in the implementation of Commission resolutions (E/ESCAP/73/6) and the interim programme performance report for the biennium 2016-2017 (E/ESCAP/73/INF/7).

26. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, the Commission took note of the note by the secretariat on the summary of progress in the implementation of Commission resolutions and the interim programme performance report for the biennium 2016-2017.

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

27. 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 Centre for Alleviation of Poverty through Sustainable Agriculture on its thirteenth session (E/ESCAP/73/8) and the report on the Regional Workshop on the Adaptation of the 2030 Agenda and the Istanbul Programme of Action at the National Level for the Least Developed Countries in Asia and the Pacific (E/ESCAP/73/9).

28. Statements were made by representatives of the following members and associate members: Bangladesh; China; India; and Indonesia.

29. The Commission noted that while economies in the region continued to grow, alleviating poverty and making economic growth inclusive remained priorities for Asia and the Pacific. Thus, it recommended that the secretariat strengthen its leadership on regional cooperation for poverty reduction.

30. The Commission also noted that the mobilization of financial resources for development, such as official development assistance (ODA) and foreign direct investments (FDI), needed to be reinvigorated. One delegation expressed the view that the Monterrey Consensus of the International Conference on Financing for Development, in which the Conference called for the target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product (GNP) of developed countries as ODA to developing countries, and 0.15 to 0.20 per cent of GNP of developed countries to least developed countries, should be given serious consideration.
31. The Commission expressed appreciation for the secretariat’s initiative in aligning the Istanbul Programme of Action with the 2030 Agenda and recognized that the secretariat’s workshops on that topic had provided important knowledge-sharing opportunities for the Asia-Pacific least developed countries. One delegation encouraged the secretariat to continue its support for member States to adapt both agendas at the national level.

32. The Commission acknowledged the secretariat’s active role in building regional consensus and appropriate macroeconomic policies through its High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development in Asia and the Pacific, its High-level Dialogue on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration for Enhancing Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific, and its thematic reports on regional economic and social development. In particular, the Commission noted the fourth High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development in Asia and the Pacific held in April 2017, which included analytical studies and dialogue in areas such as tax policy and public-private partnerships.

33. The Commission also acknowledged the work of the Centre for Alleviation of Poverty through Sustainable Agriculture contributing to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 2 and promoting sustainable agriculture through capacity-building among member States. The Commission expressed the expectation that the Centre would continue its operations with enhanced support from ESCAP member States. The host country of the Centre informed the Commission of its readiness to continue to provide contributions to the Centre, noting, however, that the financial responsibility should not be attributed disproportionately or solely to the host country.

34. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, the Commission endorsed the report of the Governing Council of the Centre for Alleviation of Poverty through Sustainable Agriculture on its thirteenth session.

35. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, the Commission took note of the report on the Regional Workshop on the Adaptation of the 2030 Agenda and the Istanbul Programme of Action at the National Level for the Least Developed Countries in Asia and the Pacific.

Sub-item (b)
Trade and investment

36. In addition to the documents for consideration common to agenda item 3, the Commission had before it the report of the 3rd meeting of the Interim Intergovernmental Steering Group on Cross-border Paperless Trade Facilitation (E/ESCAP/73/11), the report on trade, investment, science, technology and innovation as means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (E/ESCAP/73/12), the report of the Governing Council of the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology on its twelfth session (E/ESCAP/73/13), the report of the Governing Council of the Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization on its twelfth session (E/ESCAP/73/14) and the report of the Asia-Pacific Business Forum 2017 (E/ESCAP/73/INF/8).

37. Statements were made by representatives of the following members and associate members: Bangladesh; Bhutan; China; Democratic People’s Republic of Korea; Fiji; India; Malaysia; and Thailand.

38. The Commission noted the importance of trade and investment as a means of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular
Goal 17, and emphasized the importance of the multilateral trading system in global trade. One delegation called for an equitable trading system that ensured that developing countries were better integrated into the global trading system, including by increasing the share of global exports from least developed countries and providing those countries with duty-free and quota-free access to developed-country markets. In that regard, the Commission was reminded that India had become the first developing country to extend duty-free and quota-free market access to the least developed countries in 2008.

39. The Commission also noted the complementary role of regional trade agreements, including the Asia-Pacific Trade Agreement, in promoting regional cooperation and integration in general, and regional trade in particular, and supported the various development initiatives of the secretariat and other entities in that area.

40. The Commission welcomed initiatives that promoted South-South trade and intraregional and interregional connectivity. In that context, one delegation requested the secretariat to enhance its capacity-building for countries to help them to integrate more effectively into global and regional value chains. Another delegation observed that least developed countries continued to face non-tariff barriers to their exports, including the lack of mutual recognition agreements on standards and supply-side constraints, and called for support from the secretariat and other development partners for assistance and resources to address these issues.

41. The Commission recognized the importance of trade facilitation and information and communications technology (ICT) for trade and transit. Various countries expressed their appreciation for the work of the secretariat in that area and encouraged member countries to sign the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific. The Commission was informed by one representative that her Government had submitted a draft legal text with the World Trade Organization to advance the discussions on trade facilitation in the services sector and that her country was already providing preferential access to services trade from least developed countries in selected sectors.

42. The Commission noted the importance of FDI for development and also noted the initiatives of various countries to promote FDI through, inter alia, incentives and export promotion zones. However, as not all countries were successful in attracting FDI, the Commission called upon the secretariat to provide capacity-building assistance in that area to those countries.

43. The Commission noted the importance of science, technology and innovation for sustainable development and the initiatives adopted by various countries, such as those on social innovation; “technopreneurship”; women in science, technology and innovation; science, technology and innovation education; and e-governance, among others. In particular, the Commission noted with appreciation the work of the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology and its Governing Council and recommended that that work should be continued. In addition, the Commission noted a request from some delegations to the secretariat and the Centre to enhance their technical assistance and to play a constructive role in the area of science, technology and innovation, including information dissemination, knowledge-sharing of good practices, capacity-building, the promotion of South-South cooperation, increasing regional and international cooperation in science, technology and innovation, and the facilitation of technology transfer and to strengthen their work in areas such as agriculture, renewable energy and environmentally sound technologies to support the achievement of the Sustainable
Development Goals. Enhancing knowledge-sharing with regard to science and technology park development and incubation was mentioned as an area for South-South cooperation. The Commission was informed of an event on that topic that would take place in Anhui Province, China, in the second half of 2017.

44. The Commission recognized the importance of sustainable agriculture and agricultural mechanization and the work of the Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization and its Asian and Pacific Network for Testing of Agricultural Machinery. It was noted that the Centre had been steadily working towards achieving production gains, improved rural livelihood and poverty alleviation through sustainable agricultural mechanization and that one country had bolstered support for the Centre. The Commission was further informed that that country was ready to work closely with ESCAP member countries to promote regional partnerships and coordination for sustainable agriculture and mechanization. Responding to a query about needs assessment by the Centre, the secretariat informed the Commission that such needs assessment were conducted, in principle, in all areas of the subprogramme on trade and investment and were usually demand driven. The Commission was informed by the host country of the Centre that it had increased its financial support to the Centre.

45. The Commission noted the statement made by the representative of the ESCAP Business Advisory Council and the ESCAP Sustainable Business Network which underlined the importance of the business sector’s role in achieving the 2030 Agenda and the need for better alignment of the work of the Business Advisory Council and the Sustainable Business Network with the intergovernmental meetings of ESCAP, including the Commission sessions. The Commission was further informed by the representative of Hong Kong, China, of its intention to host the next meeting of the Asia-Pacific Business Forum in early 2018.

46. The Commission also noted the statement made by the representative of the World Association of Small and Medium Enterprises which highlighted the importance of cooperation with ESCAP in order to provide assistance to countries to develop their micro, small and medium-sized enterprises in a number of areas, including trade barriers, information sharing and payment systems.

47. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, the Commission took note of the report of the 3rd meeting of the Interim Intergovernmental Steering Group on Cross-border Paperless Trade Facilitation, the report on trade, investment, science, technology and innovation as means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the report of the Asia-Pacific Business Forum 2017.

48. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, the Commission endorsed the report of the Governing Council of the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology on its twelfth session, as well as the report of the Governing Council of the Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization on its twelfth session.

49. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, the Commission adopted resolution 73/3 on advancing integrated and seamless connectivity for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific.

50. Subsequent to the adoption, the representative of India stated that her delegation was not in a position to support the above-mentioned resolution.
The Government of India firmly believed that connectivity initiatives must be based on universally recognized international norms, good governance, rule of law, openness, transparency and equality, and that connectivity projects must be pursued in a manner that respected sovereignty and territorial integrity. While her Government shared the international community’s desire for enhancing physical connectivity and believed that it should bring greater economic benefits to all in an equitable and balanced manner, her Government had reservations with regard to various parts of the text and expressed its wish to disassociate itself from the adoption by consensus of the resolution, to allow consensus to occur while ensuring that the text would not be binding domestically.

Sub-item (c)
Transport

51. In addition to the documents for consideration common to agenda item 3, the Commission had before it the report of the Ministerial Conference on Transport on its third session (E/ESCAP/73/15), the Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Transport Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific, including the Regional Action Programme for Sustainable Transport Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific, phase I (2017-2021) (E/ESCAP/73/15/Add.1) and the information document on global attention to sustainable transport development (E/ESCAP/73/INF/6).

52. Statements were made by representatives of the following members and associate members: Armenia; Bangladesh; China; India; Republic of Korea; and Russian Federation.

53. The Commission recognized the priority accorded to transport by Asian and Pacific Governments and its member States’ commitment to regional cooperation for the development of transport connectivity, including through projects supported by the secretariat, such as the Asian Highway network, the Trans-Asian Railway network and the network of dry ports, as well as maritime connectivity and transport facilitation.

54. The Commission recognized transport as a key driver of economic development and a core instrument in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and stressed the importance of integrated intermodal transport systems in supporting the sustainable development agenda. Accordingly, the Commission acknowledged the call for active intergovernmental cooperation for the development of such systems, as well as for attaching priority to the comprehensive development of international intermodal transport corridors in the region, including the routes identified as Euro-Asian Transport Links.

55. The Commission welcomed the Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Transport Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific adopted at the Ministerial Conference on Transport in Moscow in December 2016 and expressed its support for the implementation of the Regional Action Programme for Sustainable Transport Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific, phase I (2017-2021). The Commission recognized that strengthening transport connectivity was key to achieving sustainable growth in small island developing States and landlocked developing countries.

56. The Commission recognized the important role of the secretariat in promoting and improving regional transport connectivity and stressed that the Asian Highway network, the Trans-Asian Railway network and the network of dry ports of international importance were providing a platform to advance the connectivity agenda and facilitate the emergence of an integrated
transport system covering the region. In that regard, the Commission was apprised of initiatives and projects being implemented by member States to improve transport connectivity within their territories as well as with neighbouring countries.

57. The Commission further noted the successful convening of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, held in Beijing on 14 and 15 May 2017, with broad and high-level participation from ESCAP member States. The Commission also noted the signing of a Letter of Intent between China and ESCAP on Advancing Regional Connectivity and the Belt and Road Initiative in Beijing on 11 April 2016.

58. As regards connectivity, the Commission stressed the importance of developing transport corridors between Asia and Europe and welcomed the support from some member States to the future establishment of an interregional coordination committee on transport between Asia and Europe as a major platform to identify and single out specific issues that needed to be addressed.

59. Furthermore, the Commission noted that policies and projects aiming to achieve sustainable seamless connectivity and door-to-door services for people and goods should exploit the comparative advantages of all modes of transport, including non-motorized modes of transport, with priority given to the development of those modes offering high levels of energy efficiency and environmental protection. In that regard, the Commission noted the particular challenges countries of the region faced in harmonizing technical and operational standards pertaining to rail transport.

60. The Commission further acknowledged the need to develop port infrastructure and expressed its appreciation for the organization of a seminar on the subject in December 2016 with financial support from the Government of the Republic of Korea.

61. The Commission recognized the significant role of the Intergovernmental Agreement on Dry Ports in facilitating the efficient movement of trade across borders and noted that member States had used the Agreement to identify dry ports of international importance earmarked for development. In that regard, the Commission noted the request that the secretariat share best practices related to the development and operation of dry ports through the organization of capacity-building activities.

62. The Commission recognized that achieving transport connectivity was a long-term effort requiring a high level of cooperation among all stakeholders and enhanced coordination among the development programmes under different cooperation frameworks, including the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Forum for Regional Cooperation Economic Corridors, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, the Greater Tumen Initiative, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation.

63. The Commission welcomed the signing of the Intergovernmental Agreement on International Road Transport along the Asian Highway Network by the Governments of China, Mongolia and the Russian Federation in December 2016 and acknowledged that the Agreement was an important initiative for operationalizing the Asian Highway network. The Commission recognized that all the parties to the Intergovernmental Agreement on the
Asian Highway Network were invited to consider accession to the new Agreement.

64. The Commission acknowledged that challenges prevented the seamless movement of goods and people across borders, which resulted in higher transport and logistics costs. In that regard, the Commission noted the view that the simplification and harmonization of standards, operating rules, regulations and cross-border transport documents should be a priority of ESCAP members and associate members. It welcomed the adoption of the Model Subregional Agreement on Transport Facilitation, the Model Bilateral Agreement on International Road Transport, the Model Multilateral Permit for International Road Transport and the Standard Model of Logistics Information Systems by the Ministerial Conference on Transport.

65. The Commission noted the signing in June 2015 of the Motor Vehicles Agreement for the Regulation of Passenger, Personal and Cargo Vehicular Traffic by the Governments of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal.

66. The Commission also noted the successful trial run of an electronic vehicle tracking system for transit transport between Bhutan and India with the assistance of the secretariat and the Asian Development Bank, based on the ESCAP Secure Cross Border Transport Model, and a further trial run from Dhaka to the Patparganj Inland Container Depot in Delhi for transport among Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal, as well as the planned use of the system in Nepal.

67. The Commission acknowledged the non-physical barriers impeding the efficiency and safety of international railway transport, including two different gauges within a country and an outdated signalling system, and the need to explore bilateral and multilateral ways to remove those barriers.

68. The Commission noted the proposal to formulate a regional agreement on the facilitation of international railway transport for the parties to the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway Network.

69. The Commission was apprised of the involvement of the Government of India in activities to facilitate cross-border and transit transport by land, including a Friendship Motor Car Rally from New Delhi to Bangkok via Myanmar in November 2016; its accession to the Customs Convention on the International Transport of Goods under Cover of TIR Carnets; the finalization of the India-Afghanistan Motor Vehicle Agreement; and the operation of bus services with Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan.

70. The Commission noted the generous financial support from the Governments of China, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation to ESCAP projects on transport connectivity. It also noted the reiteration of their commitment to continue to support the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Transport Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific.

71. The Commission was informed of the intention of the Government of the Republic of Korea to expand cooperation with ESCAP from road and railway to maritime transport and to develop a new cooperation project with ESCAP for the improvement of port infrastructure, including ports in small island developing States.
72. The Commission was informed of the willingness of the Russian Federation to continue to finance ESCAP technical cooperation projects on the development of an integrated international intermodal transport system.

73. The Commission was informed of the invitation extended by the representative of the Russian Federation to attend a number of forthcoming events in the Russian Federation, namely the Transport of Siberia Conference (Novosibirsk, 24 to 27 May 2017), the Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum (1 to 3 June 2017) and Transport Week 2017 (Moscow, 2 to 8 December 2017).

74. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, the Commission endorsed the report of the Ministerial Conference on Transport on its third session.

75. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, the Commission took note of the information document on global attention to sustainable transport development.

76. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, the Commission adopted resolution 73/4 on the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Transport Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific.

77. Subsequent to the adoption, the representative of the United States of America mentioned that his delegation was pleased to join the consensus on this resolution, but noted that his country had not participated in the Ministerial Conference on Transport and did not necessarily endorse the contents of the Declaration or the annexes contained therein.

Sub-item (d)
Environment and development

78. In addition to the documents for consideration common to agenda item 3, the Commission had before it the note by the secretariat entitled “Urbanization and sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific: linkages and policy implications” (E/ESCAP/73/16), the note by the secretariat entitled “Starting implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Asia-Pacific region: a focus on integration and environment and development issues” (E/ESCAP/73/17), the report of the Coordinating Committee for Geoscience Programmes in East and South-East Asia (CCOP) (E/ESCAP/73/INF/1/Rev.1) and the report of the Mekong River Commission (E/ESCAP/73/INF/2).

79. Statements were made by representatives of the following members and associate members: Bangladesh; Bhutan; China; Japan; and Thailand.

80. The Commission reiterated its commitment to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, while recognizing the role of the secretariat in coordinating the implementation of the regional road map for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific.

81. The Commission noted that environmental sustainability was a core dimension of sustainable development that was linked to more than half of the targets of the 2030 Agenda and that it was integral to national planning efforts to improve economic growth, influence sustainable consumption and production, make development inclusive, reduce urban air pollution, reduce social and ecological vulnerability, integrate the management of waste and hazardous waste, and create clean and liveable cities. The Commission noted
the need to mainstream environmental issues into development to ensure sustainability in the long run and noted that the success of transforming policies into practice depended on cooperation and a sense of ownership by stakeholders, in particular at the local level. The Commission encouraged the secretariat to continue working with relevant United Nations bodies to implement and strengthen policy coherence for better integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

82. It was stated that many countries were facing challenges due to the conflicting relationship between environment and development issues and therefore in the Asia-Pacific region persistent support and cooperation were required to ensure sustainable economic growth, energy security, water resources management, climate change impact monitoring and sustainable urban development. The Commission recognized the need for continuing regional cooperation and capacity-building on technology transfer, forest and water conservation, natural resources management, climate change adaptation and mitigation, vulnerability assessments, and wildlife protection, and on enhancing the ability of countries to monitor climate change impacts and on modelling exercises for the transformation towards a green economy.

83. The Commission recognized the significance of international climate finance mechanisms for reducing the costs of climate change adaptation and environmental protection, especially for least developed, landlocked developing and small island developing States.

84. The Commission noted the potential and significance of technological innovation and policy coordination in national approaches for achieving urgent environmental targets, such as increasing efficiencies in the use of natural resources and reducing emissions per unit of economic growth, thereby helping to attain the environmental sustainability necessary for sustainable development. The Commission welcomed the adoption by the Fourth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development of the regional road map for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific and looked forward to increased cooperation and sharing of best practices from member States.

85. It was suggested that the secretariat needed to ensure that its work on climate change should be conducted in compliance with its mandate and expertise, in particular those on climate-related disaster risk reduction, and in cooperation and collaboration with other United Nations agencies, such as the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Environment Programme.

86. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, the Commission took note of the notes by the secretariat entitled “Urbanization and sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific: linkages and policy implications” and “Starting implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Asia-Pacific region: a focus on integration and environment and development issues”, as well as the reports of the Coordinating Committee for Geoscience Programmes in East and South-East Asia and of the Mekong River Commission.

87. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, the Commission adopted resolution 73/5 on strengthening Asia-Pacific’s support for the United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14.
Sub-item (e)
Information and communications technology, science, technology and innovation

88. In addition to the documents for consideration common to agenda item 3, the Commission had before it the report of the Committee on Information and Communications Technology, Science, Technology and Innovation on its first session (E/ESCAP/73/10) and the report of the Governing Council of the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development on its eleventh session (E/ESCAP/73/18).

89. Statements were made by representatives of the following members and associate members: Bangladesh; China; Democratic People’s Republic of Korea; Fiji; India; Indonesia; Philippines; Republic of Korea; Sri Lanka; and Thailand.

90. The Commission acknowledged the importance of ICT as an enabler of cross-sectoral development goals and a driver of the digital economy and digital society. It further supported the role of ESCAP as a regional platform for intergovernmental cooperation and for developing a regional action framework to promote inclusive digital technology and regional ICT connectivity. Expanding regional ICT infrastructure connectivity and the development of hard and soft infrastructure were identified as important initiatives for the achievement of the World Summit on the Information Society goals and the Sustainable Development Goals.

91. The Commission expressed its appreciation to the secretariat as well as to the members of the Working Group on the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway for their work. It noted that the Master Plan for the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway and the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Regional Cooperation Framework Document were endorsed at the first session of the Committee on Information and Communications Technology, Science, Technology and Innovation in October 2016. The Commission encouraged members and associate members to support the implementation of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative and encouraged the secretariat to continue the work outlined in the report of the Committee. Collaboration among Governments, private telecommunications operators, international and regional institutions and other stakeholders in the implementation of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative was also encouraged.

92. While noting the disaster-prone nature of the region, the Commission noted the need to engage in regional cooperation for the implementation of e-resilience. It requested the secretariat to conduct policy analysis, capacity-building, regional knowledge management and the development of common standards efforts, while translating the Master Plan for the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway and the Regional Cooperation Framework Document into subregional and regional cooperation projects.

93. In recognition of the role of science, technology and innovation in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, the Commission supported the secretariat’s work on establishing an Asia-Pacific innovation forum and requested that the role of the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology be enhanced. Cooperation in the areas of science, technology and innovation for agriculture, food security, disaster management and disaster risk reduction, based on the rapid development of information and communications technologies such as e-learning, e-governance, e-health and
e-agriculture, were highlighted, as was the need to ensure more regional integration efforts for science, technology and innovation, long-term capacity development and the establishment of a platform for the transfer of technology as well as ICT.

94. The Commission commended the efforts and programmes of the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development on human and institutional ICT capacity-building.

95. The Commission noted that the Centre’s Academy of ICT Essentials for Government Leaders and Primer Series on ICT for Development for Youth were being used in national capacity development efforts for civil servants and youth. It welcomed the Centre’s new flagship programme, the Women ICT Frontier Initiative, to promote ICT-enabled women entrepreneurship.

96. The Commission noted that Sri Lanka was the first country in the region to launch the Women ICT Frontier Initiative and that it was being implemented by the Government in partnership with civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders to ensure its effectiveness and sustainability. It was noted that Bangladesh would launch the Women ICT Frontier Initiative in July 2017.

97. The Commission recognized the importance of the Centre’s mission on human capacity development for ICT and reaffirmed support for the Centre. The host country of the Centre informed the Commission that it would continue providing financial contributions to the Centre and encouraged all member States to support the Centre’s programmes and operations through financial and in-kind contributions.

98. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, the Commission endorsed the report of the Committee on Information and Communications Technology, Science, Technology and Innovation on its first session, as well as the report of the Governing Council of the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development on its eleventh session.

99. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, the Commission adopted resolution 73/6 on the implementation of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative through regional cooperation.

Sub-item (f)  
Disaster risk reduction

100. 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 the Development of Disaster Information Management on its first session (E/ESCAP/73/19), the note by the secretariat on space applications for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (E/ESCAP/73/20), the report on regional cooperation mechanisms for multi-hazard risk assessment and early warning (E/ESCAP/73/21), the report of the Typhoon Committee (E/ESCAP/73/INF/3/Rev.1) and the report of the Panel on Tropical Cyclones (E/ESCAP/73/INF/4).

101. Statements were made by representatives of the following members and associate members: Bangladesh; Bhutan; China; Democratic People’s Republic of Korea; Fiji; Japan; India; Iran (Islamic Republic of); and
Thailand. A representative of the ESCAP/WMO Typhoon Committee also made a statement.

102. The Commission was informed of country-led national initiatives on disaster risk reduction and resilience to implement the commitments made under the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 and the 2030 Agenda. The Commission recognized the importance of mainstreaming disaster risk reduction into country policies and plans and was informed by several delegations of the progress made. The Commission was informed of one country’s efforts to mainstream disaster risk reduction into the health sector, guided by the Bangkok Principles for the implementation of the health aspects of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.

103. The Commission welcomed the implementation of several country-led initiatives that had benefited other countries in the region, including the launch of a South Asia satellite for improving information relating to weather data exchanges and disaster management; support for weather observation and the provision of weather services to countries in South Asia and countries participating in the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation; the National Disaster Reduction Centre of China as the node of the ESCAP Regional Network of Knowledge and Innovation Centres in Disaster Risk Reduction; support for the Regional Cooperative Mechanism for Drought Monitoring and Early Warning; human resource capacity development; capacity-building support to Pacific islands on geo-portal and geo-database training; and the Sentinel Asia initiative. The Commission also welcomed the financial contributions to the ESCAP Multi-Donor Trust Fund for Tsunami, Disaster and Climate Preparedness in Indian Ocean and Southeast Asian Countries and the establishment of the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management.

104. The Commission was informed of the successful organization of the Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in New Delhi in November 2016 and of the New Delhi Declaration on disaster risk reduction in Asia and the Pacific 2016, in which the Conference highlighted, inter alia, the need to promote science and technology applications and research for evidence-based disaster risk reduction policies, practices and solutions, including through regional cooperation.

105. The Commission highlighted the importance of multi-hazard early warning systems for building resilience and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. In that regard, it recognized the leading role of the secretariat in strengthening regional cooperation mechanisms for multi-hazard early warning systems and disaster risk assessment. It underlined the need to leverage its intergovernmental platform to strengthen regional cooperation on early warning systems.

106. The Commission expressed support for the secretariat’s work facilitating regional and cross-border cooperation through the sharing of knowledge, lessons and good practices for disaster risk reduction. It welcomed the expansion of regional cooperation on early warning systems to address specific hazards, including sand and dust storms and transboundary floods, and the expansion to the Pacific of cooperation mechanisms which leverage the experience of the WMO/ESCAP Panel on Tropical Cyclones and the ESCAP/WMO Typhoon Committee. The secretariat was requested to accord priority to the implementation of the programme of work of the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management and the development of early warning systems for dust and sandstorms.
107. The Commission acknowledged the importance of utilizing space applications and ICT as vital tools for addressing disaster risks and supported the secretariat’s initiatives on greater use of space applications for sustainable development and disaster risk reduction in the Asia-Pacific region.

108. The Commission highlighted the important role of the ESCAP Multi-Donor Trust Fund for Tsunami, Disaster and Climate Preparedness in Indian Ocean and Southeast Asian Countries in supporting specific projects that benefit member States and, in that regard, noted the need for enhanced capacity-building activities on forecasting, monitoring and accessing early warning systems.

109. The Commission recognized the importance of improving national data collection and monitoring mechanisms for both the Sendai Framework and the disaster-related targets and indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals. It welcomed the secretariat’s support for enhancing the capacity of national statistical systems in the region to produce and use disaster-related statistics. It noted a successful pilot application of the Disaster-related Statistics Framework.

110. The Commission recognized the role of ESCAP as the platform for member States to collectively identify challenges, share experiences and strengthen regional cooperation in building resilience to natural disasters. It took note of a proposal for ESCAP to coordinate regional support for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda as it pertained to risk-sensitive development.

111. The Commission noted a request that the secretariat develop a regional guide to share the good practices emerging from post-disaster needs assessments at the country level, including the application of innovation and technologies. The secretariat was also requested to compile, on an annual basis, information on all capacity-building activities on disaster risk reduction conducted by Governments and to circulate it to all ESCAP member States.

112. The Commission was informed by the representative of the Panel on Tropical Cyclones about the Panel’s work to strengthen regional cooperation among countries affected by tropical cyclones in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea.

113. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, the Commission endorsed the report of the Governing Council of the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management on its first session.

114. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, the Commission took note of the note by the secretariat on space applications for the 2030 Agenda, the report on regional cooperation mechanisms for multi-hazard risk assessment and early warning, the report of the Typhoon Committee and the report of the Panel on Tropical Cyclones.

115. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, the Commission adopted resolution 73/7 on enhancing regional cooperation for the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 in Asia and the Pacific.

116. Subsequent to the adoption, the representative of the United States informed the Commission that his Government was in the process of reviewing many of its policies, including in relation to climate change and the Paris Agreement, and that while that review was underway, the United States reserved its position on those issues.
Sub-item (g)
Social development

117. In addition to the documents for consideration common to agenda item 3, the Commission had before it the note by the secretariat on the preparations for the third regional review of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing in Asia and the Pacific (E/ESCAP/73/22) and the note by the secretariat on the preparations for the high-level intergovernmental meeting on the midpoint review of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013-2022 (E/ESCAP/73/23).

118. Statements were made by representatives of the following members and associate members: Bangladesh; China; India; Japan; Republic of Korea; and Thailand.

119. The Commission expressed its strong commitment to the 2030 Agenda and recognized that social development was a crucial element of sustainable development, while reiterating its commitment to leaving no one behind.

120. The Commission took note of the secretariat’s work on social development, which had been recently reorganized to align more closely with the social agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals in order to better assist member States to make a sustainable socioeconomic transformation through the use of evidence-based policy analysis for the reduction of poverty and inequality, including through social protection mechanisms, gender equality, empowerment of youth and social inclusion of marginalized groups, including older persons, persons with disabilities and migrant workers. The Commission expressed its appreciation for the secretariat’s work with regard to social development and implementing the 2030 Agenda.

121. The Commission noted the work carried out by the secretariat to support member States in implementing the Incheon Strategy to “Make the Right Real” for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific, to create an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society. It noted that the Incheon Strategy aligned with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and was strongly linked to the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

122. The Commission highlighted gender-responsive budgeting as an effective tool to mainstream gender and advance women’s empowerment in national budgets and sectoral policies and programmes and highlighted the secretariat’s capacity development work in that regard.

123. Several delegations noted the work supporting member States on policies to address population ageing, including the third regional review of the Madrid Plan of Action, and expressed their readiness to support the review process.

124. Several delegations stressed the importance of social protection to the reduction of poverty, inequality and vulnerability among populations in their countries and shared recent policies introduced to strengthen social protection. It was reported that one country had allocated a certain proportion of its budget to addressing inequalities.

125. The Commission emphasized the importance of closing gender gaps. Effective measures some countries had implemented to promote women’s economic participation, entrepreneurship, and leadership and political participation were highlighted, including the Gender Equality Act in
Thailand, which was that country’s first legal instrument to provide specific protection for all persons regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity.

126. The Commission was informed of national initiatives to promote disability-inclusive development and disability rights. The initiatives addressed various areas of the Incheon Strategy, such as the promotion of universal design and barrier-free environments, including (a) physical environments, transport and ICT, (b) employment opportunities, (c) technical and vocational training and (d) accessible and affordable education, as well as the development of policies and the enactment of new laws on the rights of persons with disabilities. The Commission was further briefed on an international conference co-organized by the Governments of Bangladesh and Bhutan to develop multisectoral action plans to address the needs of persons with autism and neurodevelopmental disorders.

127. The Commission was also informed about recent policy developments in various countries to address population ageing, such as providing income security for older persons, protecting the rights of older persons and facilitating ageing in place. Representatives of countries with rapidly ageing societies expressed their interest in sharing their experiences designing policies to address population ageing with other countries in the Asia-Pacific region. In that context, the importance of providing income security to older persons to avoid old-age poverty was stressed.

128. Noting that ICT enabled women’s empowerment, the Government of the Republic of Korea updated the Commission about its technical cooperation with ESCAP to develop a toolbox on gender-responsive e-government.

129. The Commission was briefed on various technical cooperation projects and initiatives, including one on disability statistics, which was funded by the Government of the Republic of Korea, one on disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction, which was funded by the Government of Japan, and one on strengthening the rights of older persons, in partnership with Zhongshan College, China.

130. The Commission recognized the critical role that improved disability statistics would play in systematically monitoring the implementation of the Incheon Strategy. In that regard, the Commission expressed appreciation for the secretariat’s efforts to improve the reliability and comparability of disability data and to support member States to develop national action plans.

131. The Commission welcomed the offer by the Government of China to host the high-level intergovernmental meeting on the midpoint review of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013-2022, in Beijing from 27 November to 1 December 2017. The meeting would review the implementation of the Incheon Strategy in the first half of the Decade and adopt an outcome document to expedite its implementation in the remaining five years.

132. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, the Commission took note of the note by the secretariat on the preparations for the third regional review of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing in Asia and the Pacific.

133. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, the Commission took note of note by the secretariat on the preparations for the high-level intergovernmental meeting on the midpoint review of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013-2022.
Sub-item (h)
Statistics

134. In addition to the documents for consideration common to agenda item 3, the Commission had before it the report of the Committee on Statistics on its fifth session (E/ESCAP/73/24), the report on the Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific on its 2nd meeting (E/ESCAP/73/25) and the report of the Governing Council of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific on its twelfth session (E/ESCAP/73/26).

135. Statements were made by representatives of the following members and associate members: Bangladesh; China; India; Japan; Lao People’s Democratic Republic; Malaysia; Philippines; Republic of Korea; and Thailand.

136. The Commission highlighted the important role of reliable, timely, accurate and high-quality data and statistics for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and in particular for monitoring progress and in support of evidence-based planning and policymaking. The Commission further recognized the role of the Committee on Statistics in coordinating capacity development initiatives for the Sustainable Development Goals through the collective vision and framework for action by the Asia-Pacific statistical community and the establishment of focused expert and steering groups working under the auspices of the Committee or the Commission. It was suggested that a regional expert group on indicators for the Sustainable Development Goals might further facilitate that work.

137. The Commission expressed its appreciation for the secretariat’s support for developing disaster-related statistics, implementing the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting, advancing civil registration and vital statistics systems, and strengthening economic, population and social statistics.

138. The Commission also expressed its appreciation for the work of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific and emphasized the importance of e-learning for increasing access to training. The Commission also highlighted the important role of the Network for the Coordination of Statistical Training in Asia and the Pacific. The representatives of several countries reiterated their Governments’ commitment to collaborating with the Statistical Institute through the provision of in-kind or financial support.

139. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, the Commission endorsed the report of the Committee on Statistics on its fifth session, as well as the report of the Governing Council of the Statistical Institute on its twelfth session.

140. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, the Commission took note of the report on the Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific on its 2nd meeting.

Sub-item (i)
Subregional activities for development

141. 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 eleventh session (E/ESCAP/73/27) and the note by the secretariat on subregional perspectives on sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific (E/ESCAP/73/28).
142. Statements were made by representatives of the following members and associate members: Afghanistan; Armenia; Azerbaijan; Bangladesh; China; Democratic People’s Republic of Korea; Fiji; Japan; Palau; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; Tajikistan; Tuvalu; and Vanuatu.

Component 1: the Pacific

143. The Commission acknowledged the support provided by the secretariat to Pacific island member States through its Subregional Office for the Pacific, particularly the Office’s work supporting the 2030 Agenda, the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Samoa Pathway. The Commission noted the particular vulnerabilities to natural disasters and climate change faced by Pacific small island developing States. The Commission recognized the importance of strengthening coordination among development partners and the United Nations system in support of disaster risk management and highlighted the importance of capacity-building, technology transfer and data sharing in support of climate change mitigation and adaptation. The Commission noted the importance of restoring the health of the Pacific Ocean, and in that context noted the support provided by the secretariat for the preparations for the United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. The Commission noted the importance of data and statistics for Sustainable Development Goal monitoring and of partnerships for Goal 17 and noted a request to the secretariat to continue to strengthen its support for robust data given the constraints on national statistical systems of Pacific island member States. Requests were made for support for climate change policy, climate risk insurance and United Nations actions to protect the rights of people displaced by climate change.

Component 2: East and North-East Asia

144. The Commission acknowledged the work of the Subregional Office for East and North-East Asia. In particular, it noted the 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 noted that China was considering hosting the 22nd Senior Officials Meeting of the North East Asian Subregional Programme. The Commission also noted the discussions at the 21st Senior Officials Meeting, which was held in Seoul on 16 and 17 March 2017, on launching a new subregional framework on transboundary air pollution, and encouraged further consultations by member States.

145. The Commission also noted the contributions of the Subregional Office to facilitate the achievement of the 2030 Agenda through its research products, inter alia, and further expressed interest in strengthening subregional cooperation in common priority areas, including cross-border trade, transport and energy.

146. It was noted that natural disasters were a critical challenge to sustainable development in East and North-East Asia. The Subregional Office noted a request to consider increasing activities to strengthen the capacity of member States to manage disaster risk by providing training and technical assistance to policymakers and field officers working in that area.
Component 3: North and Central Asia

147. The Commission acknowledged the work of the Subregional Office for North and Central Asia supporting member States to resolve economic, social and environmental issues and strengthen subregional cooperation. The Commission recognized the importance of the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia as a mechanism for subregional cooperation in the monitoring and implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The Commission called upon the secretariat to actively participate in the implementation process of the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018-2028, in order to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The Commission noted that the future programme of work of the Subregional Office would be focused on transport, energy and ICT connectivity. The Commission was informed of national initiatives to promote subregional connectivity. The Commission recalled the adoption by the Governing Council of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia at its eleventh session, which was held in Ganja, Azerbaijan, in November 2016, of the Ganja Declaration on Strengthening Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals through Enhanced Cooperation. In the Declaration, member States’ commitment to strengthen collaboration and policy coherence for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals was reconfirmed.

148. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, the Commission endorsed the report of the Governing Council of the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia on its eleventh session.

Component 4: South and South-West Asia

149. The Commission was informed of the key challenges countries in the subregion faced in implementing the 2030 Agenda and of the increasingly important role regional cooperation could play in supporting progress towards the Goals, including with regard to enhancing the financial means to implement them. In that connection, the strong commitment of several countries to regional cooperation initiatives, undertaken as part of frameworks developed by subregional organizations, such as SAARC, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation and the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal initiative, was emphasized.

150. One delegation expressed appreciation for the support it had received through the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia, as well as through the Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia, for building the country’s technical capacity for World Trade Organization accession, requested further assistance in areas pertaining to compliance with World Trade Organization obligations and post-accession-related issues, and suggested that ESCAP focus its work on the specific Sustainable Development Goal-related challenges landlocked developing countries faced, given their preponderance among Central Asian countries.

151. The Commission noted the request for it to further prioritize its work, focusing on specific Sustainable Development Goals or targets, in particular those which landlocked developing countries struggled to achieve, and on select areas where ESCAP added value, including based on close coordination with other regional organizations and/or United Nations system funds, programmes or agencies to support member States’ implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
152. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, the Commission took note of the note by the secretariat on subregional perspectives on sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific.

Sub-item (j)

Energy

153. In addition to the documents for consideration common to agenda item 3, the Commission had before it the report of the Committee on Energy on its first session (E/ESCAP/73/30) and the note by the secretariat on the status of the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 7 in Asia and the Pacific (E/ESCAP/73/INF/5).

154. Statements were made by representatives of the following members and associate members: Bangladesh; Bhutan; China; India; Pakistan; Republic of Korea; and Russian Federation.

155. The Commission welcomed the establishment of the Committee on Energy as an intergovernmental forum to promote and strengthen energy dialogue. The Commission recognized the importance of sustainable energy in order to facilitate economic growth and sustainable development in the region, noting the role of energy in the implementation of 2030 Agenda. In that connection, the Commission was encouraged to learn about various national efforts to attain Sustainable Development Goal 7, including those in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and the Republic of Korea. The Commission stressed the importance of cooperation at the subregional and regional levels in order to address the varying energy needs among countries, including enhancing energy connectivity, balancing energy supply and energy demand needs, diversification of energy mixes, increasing share and generation capacity of renewables and efficient management of resources, as well as increasing investment in the energy sector.

156. The Commission noted the ongoing initiatives and plans related to gas and oil pipelines as well as power connectivity in South and South-West Asia. It also noted the North-East Asia Energy Security Forum was an example of subregional dialogue for identifying cooperation possibilities for regional energy security.

157. The Commission recognized the support of the Russian Federation for the preparations for the second Asian and Pacific Energy Forum, in 2018, and noted the country’s expectation of producing solutions for further improvement of multilateral cooperation on energy.

158. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, the Commission took note of the note by the secretariat on the status of the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 7 in Asia and the Pacific.

159. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, the Commission adopted resolution 73/8 on strengthening regional cooperation for sustainable energy development in Asia and the Pacific, in which, inter alia, it endorsed the report of the Committee on Energy on its first session.

160. Subsequent to the adoption, the representative of the United States informed the Commission that his Government was in the process of reviewing many of its policies, including in relation to climate change and the Paris Agreement, and that while that review was underway, the United States reserved its position on those issues.
Agenda item 4
Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific

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

Sub-item (a)
Fourth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development

162. The Commission had before it the report of the Fourth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (E/ESCAP/73/31).

163. Statements were made by the representatives of the following members and associate members: Bangladesh; Bhutan; Fiji; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Pakistan; and Tuvalu.

164. The Commission noted, and expressed appreciation for, the comprehensive work of the secretariat in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

165. The Commission expressed support for the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda, which should be complemented by regional initiatives, including the ongoing work on connectivity and integration. The Commission noted that while national Governments were primarily responsible for making progress on its implementation, the regional commissions had an essential role to play in supporting national action. It was further noted that a changing development context presented great challenges to member States in their efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, which would require regional cooperation. Addressing the challenges presented by the ambitious scope and magnitude of the transformative agenda would require national ownership, unwavering political will, putting people at the centre, and ensuring their inclusion and participation.

166. The Commission highlighted the importance of international cooperation, and the continued support of development partners. In that context, the crucial role of the means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda was emphasized, including knowledge-sharing and technical and financial resources, and continued support for human and institutional capacity-building was requested.

167. The Commission acknowledged that to achieve the 2030 Agenda, a number of reforms should be implemented, including in relation to fiscal management. It was also noted that often, such reforms required strong political will. Furthermore, capacity-building was vital to undertake needed reforms, especially with regard to the means of implementation. That included the provision and availability of financial, technical and knowledge-based best practices to countries in need, in order for them to be able to achieve the 17 Goals of the 2030 Agenda.

168. The Commission welcomed and supported the proposed inclusion of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development in the ESCAP conference structure. The Commission recognized the role of the Forum in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, in terms of helping to identify regional challenges and solutions, supporting systematic regional follow-up and review, synergizing the efforts of member States and supporting the preparation of voluntary national reviews. In that regard, the Commission was informed by several member States of their plans to
participate in upcoming voluntary national review presentations at the high-
level political forum on sustainable development in 2017 and in 2018.

169. The Commission also welcomed and supported the adoption by the
Forum of the regional road map for implementing the 2030 Agenda for
Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific. The road map would
strengthen regional cooperation, including on priority issues identified within
it; coordinate effective international cooperation; and foster exchange of best
practices and mutual learning. That was highlighted as critical for a robust,
voluntary, transparent and integrated regional follow-up and review
framework. The Commission expressed appreciation for the member-State-
driven and consultative process by which the road map was developed, and
reiterated the integrated, indivisible and global nature of the 2030 Agenda
and the need to take into account national circumstances and priorities,
including the different approaches, visions, models and tools available to
each country as reflected therein.

170. The Commission was informed of various national initiatives related
to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Several member States had set
ambitious targets in line with the Sustainable Development Goals, which in
some cases were already an integral part of their national plans and priorities.
At the national level, high-level coordination and follow-up bodies as well as
monitoring frameworks had been established, supportive analyses including
data gap analyses had been carried out and institutional mapping completed.
Consultative processes had led to strong ownership of the Goals and
priority-setting at the local level. Line ministries had been charged with
taking the lead on specific targets and establishing specific action plans, and
delivery on Goal targets were an integral part of performance agreements. At
the subregional level, a Pacific Sustainable Development Goals road map,
which was expected to be adopted by Pacific leaders in September 2017,
could serve as an integrated subregional monitoring and reporting framework
for implementing and reviewing the regional road map. The Commission was
informed of progress made by various members in relation to primary
education, poverty reduction, energy efficiency, renewable energy, health
care and climate change. The Commission also heard about challenges faced
by member States, including in terms of addressing the availability of reliable
national-level data, mobilizing financing, boosting productivity, addressing
infrastructure deficits, strengthening human capacity and maintaining
stability of trade performance and remittance flows.

171. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, the Commission adopted resolution 73/9
on the regional road map for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable
Development in Asia and the Pacific, in which, inter alia, it endorsed the
report of the Fourth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development.

Sub-item (b)
Financing for development

172. The Commission had before it the note verbale dated 10 May 2017
from the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Thailand addressed to the secretariat of the
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (E/ESCAP/73/32)
on the Chair’s summary of the fourth High-level Dialogue on Financing for
Development in Asia and the Pacific.

173. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, the Commission took note of the note
verbale dated 10 May 2017 from the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Thailand
addressed to the secretariat of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia
and the Pacific.
Agenda item 5
Management issues

174. The Executive Secretary made an introductory statement on management issues.

Sub-item (a)
Proposed programme of work for the biennium 2018-2019

175. The Commission had before it the note by the secretariat on the proposed programme of work for the biennium 2018-2019 (E/ESCAP/73/33).

176. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, the Commission endorsed the proposed programme of work for the biennium 2018-2019.

Sub-item (b)
Programme changes for the biennium 2016-2017

177. The Commission had before it the note by the secretariat on programme changes for the biennium 2016-2017 (E/ESCAP/73/34).

178. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, the Commission endorsed the proposed programme changes for the biennium 2016-2017.

Sub-item (c)
Overview of partnerships, extrabudgetary contributions and capacity development

179. The Commission had before it the note by the secretariat on the overview of partnerships, extrabudgetary contributions and capacity development (E/ESCAP/73/35).

180. Statements were made by representatives of the following members and associate members: Bangladesh; China; India; Indonesia; Japan; Republic of Korea; Sri Lanka; and Thailand.

181. The Commission noted that the total cash contributions received by ESCAP in 2016 for technical cooperation work had amounted to $17.5 million, of which $10.2 million had come from bilateral donors – ESCAP member and non-member States – which remained the main extrabudgetary source of funding.

182. The Commission recognized the contribution of technical cooperation work by ESCAP in strengthening the capacity of developing countries in the region to achieve the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

183. The Commission recognized the pivotal role of the regional institutions in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the region, including in the areas of statistics, sustainable agriculture, ICT and disaster risk reduction.

184. The representative of Bangladesh briefed the Commission about the partnership between the Government of Bangladesh and the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development in areas such as the Women ICT Frontier Initiative and its programme for promoting women’s entrepreneurship.
185. The representative of Indonesia acknowledged the work of the regional institutions, and reiterated that the funding of the Centre for Alleviation of Poverty through Sustainable Agriculture should not be disproportionately charged to Indonesia as the host country, since all member States had benefited from the Centre.

186. The representative of the Republic of Korea noted its technical cooperation with ESCAP, including through the Korea-ESCAP Cooperation Fund, in the areas of gender, trade, transport and disaster risk reduction to enhance regional connectivity and integration. The representative reflected on the achievements of the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development in building institutional and human resource capacities to use ICT for sustainable development.

187. The representative of Sri Lanka expressed support for the work of the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development in view of its relevance to ongoing government programmes for building the capacity of citizens to enable them to benefit from and contribute to a digital Sri Lanka. The Government would continue to implement the Centre’s programmes in Sri Lanka using its own resources.

188. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, the Commission took note of the note by the secretariat on the overview of partnerships, extrabudgetary contributions and capacity development, and expressed appreciation for pledges amounting to approximately $5.567 million for 2017 from: Bangladesh; Brunei Darussalam; China; India; Indonesia; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Japan; Macao, China; Malaysia; Sri Lanka; and Thailand.

Agenda item 6
Review of the implementation of Commission resolution 71/1

189. The Commission had before it the note by the secretariat on the review of the implementation of Commission resolution 71/1 and its corrigendum (E/ESCAP/73/36 and Corr.1).

190. A statement was made by the representative of Bangladesh.

191. It was proposed that the Commission should consider allocating more time in future sessions to the consideration of the agenda item on the review of issues pertinent to the subsidiary structure of the Commission, including the work of regional institutions, during the senior officials segment.

192. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, the Commission adopted resolution 73/1 on a conference structure of the Commission aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Agenda item 7
Activities of the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission

193. The Commission had before it the report of the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission (E/ESCAP/73/37).

194. In his capacity as Rapporteur of the Advisory Committee, the Permanent Representative of Pakistan presented the highlights of the activities of the Advisory Committee since the seventy-second session of the Commission.
195. Statements were made by representatives of the following members and associate members: Bangladesh; China; and Japan.

196. The Commission noted that the Advisory Committee had provided advice and guidance to the secretariat on important issues, and that it served as a channel for member States to cooperate with each other and with the secretariat. The Commission expressed its appreciation to the Rapporteur of the Advisory Committee, the chairs of the various sessions held since the seventy-second session of the Commission and the Executive Secretary for advancing the work of the Advisory Committee and promoting the work of ESCAP.

197. Also at its 6th 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-fourth session of the Commission (2018)

198. The Commission had before it the note by the secretariat on the dates, venue and theme topic for the seventy-fourth session of the Commission (2018) (E/ESCAP/73/38).

199. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, the Commission decided that its seventy-fourth session would be held in April or May 2018; 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-fourth session would be “Inequality in the era of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.

Agenda item 9
Policy issues for the Asia-Pacific region

Sub-item (a)
Inclusive and sustainable economic and social development in Asia and the Pacific through regional economic cooperation and integration

200. The Commission had before it the note by the secretariat on enhancing regional economic cooperation and integration in Asia and the Pacific (E/ESCAP/73/39) and the note verbale dated 28 April 2017 from the Office of H.E. Mr. Min Bahadur Shrestha, Vice-Chairman, National Planning Commission of Nepal, addressed to the secretariat of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (E/ESCAP/73/INF/9).

Policy statement by the Executive Secretary

201. In her policy statement, the Executive Secretary acknowledged the seventieth anniversary of ESCAP. Reflecting on development in the Asia-Pacific region since 1947, she noted the transformation from widespread political instability, poverty and social tensions to growing economic leadership in the world. She highlighted significant achievements by ESCAP during that dynamic period, including the establishment of the Asian Development Bank, agreements on Asian highways and railways, policy support for promoting intraregional trade and enhancement of social policy frameworks. Nonetheless, the United Nations principles of multilateralism,
inclusiveness and openness remained pertinent to addressing the challenges faced by the region, including growing inequalities and the denial of basic rights.

202. Turning to the present, the Executive Secretary said that while growth in the Asia-Pacific region had stabilized, protectionism and uncertainty in global markets presented downside risks. In response, the region had reiterated its commitment to promoting free trade, investment and greater liberalization. The region could mitigate such downside risks by strengthening economic cooperation and integration, enhancing domestic and regional demand, improving the quality of governance in the public and private sectors and promoting responsible fiscal policy. Furthermore, the focus must shift to the quality of growth to reduce inequalities and overcome environmental and climate-related challenges.

203. The Executive Secretary explained that implementation of the 2030 Agenda, together with the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, presented unique opportunities for the Asia-Pacific region to confront emerging challenges, and ESCAP could serve as a platform to realize those opportunities.

204. Towards those efforts, the Executive Secretary noted that the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development had evolved as a coordinating intergovernmental body, whose role was to define priorities, oversee the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, promote regional policy coherence and conduct follow-up and review. The regional road map for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific and a Sustainable Development Goals resource facility, soon to be operationalized, would further facilitate member States’ implementation of the Goals. The Executive Secretary also highlighted the work of the fourth High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development in Asia and the Pacific, including bolstering public-private partnerships and assisting with the development of regulatory frameworks.

205. Referring to the principle of leaving no one behind, as embedded in the 2030 Agenda, the Executive Secretary emphasized the importance of the Special Body on Least Developed, Landlocked Developing and Pacific Island Developing Countries. In particular, she noted that the Asia-Pacific region needed to provide support to the following: (a) small island developing States, to build resilience to climate change and enable better management of oceans; (b) least developed countries, to accelerate social and economic development; and (c) landlocked developing countries, to enhance connectivity. ESCAP supported the international programmes and action plans for those countries through its analytical work, including the annual *Asia-Pacific Countries with Special Needs Development Report*.

206. The Executive Secretary outlined how the Commission and its secretariat had been reconfigured to respond to the 2030 Agenda: (a) the Committee on Energy had been operationalized, supported by a new Energy Division, laying the foundation for regional collaboration on sustainable energy; (b) the Ministerial Conference on Transport had adopted the Regional Action Programme for Sustainable Transport Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific, phase I (2017-2021); (c) the Committee on Information and Communications Technology, Science, Technology and Innovation had, at its first session, discussed the role of those critical sectors as means of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals; (d) the reconstituted Committee on Macroeconomic Policy, Poverty Reduction and Financing for Development now offered an opportunity to promote financing in support of
the Sustainable Development Goals; (e) the Committee on Statistics had endorsed the collective vision and framework for action to support regional statistical development in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals; (f) the Committee on Trade and Investment now supported Goal 17; and (g) the Social Development Division had been restructured to support more directly the implementation of the Goals, including those on gender equality, ageing, disability and migration.

Country statements

207. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: Afghanistan; Armenia; Australia; Azerbaijan; Bangladesh; Bhutan; Brunei Darussalam; Cambodia; China; Fiji; Georgia; Hong Kong, China; India; Indonesia; Japan; Kazakhstan; Lao People’s Democratic Republic; Malaysia; Marshall Islands; Mongolia; Myanmar; Nauru; Nepal; Pakistan; Papua New Guinea; Philippines; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; Samoa; Singapore; Sri Lanka; Tajikistan; Thailand; Tonga; United States of America; Vanuatu; and Viet Nam.

208. The Commission noted the overall strong economic performance of the Asia-Pacific region, which was the leading contributor to global economic growth. However, countries in the region were at different stages of development, and wide development gaps persisted, especially for least developed countries. Going forward, the region would need to address risks associated with capital flows and trade protectionism, while taking medium-term measures to increase potential growth, including by building the foundation for a knowledge economy and promoting greater innovation and structural reforms.

209. The Commission emphasized the importance of inclusive, equitable and job-rich economic development. Despite significant progress, multidimensional poverty and inequality resulted in marginalization and exclusion for millions of people. The Commission recognized recent measures to increase vocational skills and productive employment, which were important for harnessing the demographic dividend. Some countries were also expanding broadband Internet connection to rural areas.

210. The Commission noted the challenges faced by least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States in coping with economic vulnerability, arising from narrow economic bases and overreliance on a single sector for revenue, and building resilience to external shocks, climate change and natural disasters. The Commission heard a request for the secretariat to further support least developed countries in their preparations to graduate from the status of least developed country by providing technical and advisory services, conducting an ex ante impact assessment of the likely consequences of graduation, promoting exchange of knowledge and best practices and sharing the experiences of countries that had recently graduated.

211. The Commission noted the importance of the recommendations of Asia-Pacific Countries with Special Needs Development Report 2017: Investing in Infrastructure for an Inclusive and Sustainable Future to address infrastructure development, including expanding transport linkages and ICT and energy infrastructure, in order to ensure a sustainable future of the Asia-Pacific countries with special needs. Given the unique challenges faced by countries with special needs in mobilizing domestic financial resources, the Commission also highlighted the critical role of regional and international coordination and of financial and technical assistance from development
partners to expediting the process of infrastructure development, especially in clean energy infrastructure.

212. The Commission recognized the progress made in implementing the Istanbul Programme of Action, the Vienna Programme of Action and the Samoa Pathway, highlighting the need to further build synergies with the 2030 Agenda. In that context, the Commission expressed appreciation for the efforts made by the secretariat in capturing opportunities for nexus thinking and synergies. The Commission also called for special attention and support from the international community in order for the Sustainable Development Goals to be successfully implemented in Asia-Pacific countries with special needs, to improve their human capital, diversify their economies and build their technological capabilities.

213. The Commission acknowledged the important role of the Vienna Programme of Action in addressing the needs of landlocked developing countries. It highlighted communication and ICT development, trade promotion and facilitation (including tariff unification), transport and energy development as being among the key areas in which policies were necessary to eradicate poverty. Such policies needed to be augmented by closer cooperation with transit neighbours.

214. The Commission recognized that regional cooperation and integration mechanisms such as the Eurasian Economic Union and the Belt and Road Initiative, as well as subregional processes such as the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia, were crucial for overcoming developmental challenges related to landlockedness and improving connectivity, which was key to sustainable development.

215. The Commission highlighted the importance of further enhancing regional economic cooperation and integration as a whole within the Asia-Pacific region to foster economic progress and sustainable development, especially in the light of protectionist tendencies and the rising importance of the region in the global economy. The Commission also noted that increased regional economic cooperation and integration was important for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, including the means of implementation, and overcoming development challenges at the national level, in particular in landlocked developing countries. In that regard, there was a call for the rejection of protectionism and strengthening of the multilateral trading system. The importance of according most-favoured-nation treatment on trade to landlocked developing countries was also noted.

216. The Commission identified trade, financial cooperation and integration, seamless connectivity in infrastructure and ICT, energy, disaster risk management, climate change adaption and mitigation, and technology as important areas for cooperation within the region. The Commission also acknowledged the important role of ESCAP in promoting economic cooperation and integration for sustainable and inclusive development by serving as a regional platform and by coordinating efforts with other international, regional and subregional organizations.

217. The Commission acknowledged that infrastructure development and closer regional cooperation could contribute to the economic diversification of landlocked developing countries. The Commission stressed that an important factor for sustainable development was infrastructure quality, whose development needed in particular to take account of economic as well as social and environmental aspects. In that vein, the Commission recognized that significant infrastructure investments were needed to spur economic
growth, strengthen regional connectivity and ultimately achieve sustainable
development, requiring in turn the mobilization of public resources and
resources from development partners and the private sector. The Commission
noted that access to affordable infrastructure services for the poor often
required subsidies. The Commission recognized that better planning was
necessary to align infrastructure development with the 2030 Agenda and to
ensure that such development incorporated adequate social and environmental
safeguards. The Commission highlighted the importance of ICT and free
trade for countries to graduate from the status of least developed country.

218. The Commission highlighted the central role of public finance in the
effective pursuit of the 2030 Agenda and the importance of tax reforms and
public revenue mobilization to overcome the region’s development
challenges. The Commission was informed of reforms to tax systems that
were being undertaken by a number of countries to ensure a more equal
distribution of income. Furthermore, the Commission acknowledged the
work of ESCAP in the area of financing for development, and called upon the
secretariat to continue assisting member States in that area through research,
analysis and capacity-building.

219. The Commission was informed about the initiatives of various countries
to promote investment and enterprises – in particular small and medium-sized
enterprises, which were considered cornerstones of the economy – and
public-private partnerships to achieve national sustainable development.
The Commission noted that ESCAP played an important role in engaging the
private sector and civil society in achieving sustainable development.

220. The Commission emphasized that governance was critical for
development in the region, as it affected all aspects of countries’ prosperity.
The role of good governance in support of fiscal management was stressed,
while the importance of e-government, e-tools and financial inclusion to
improving the efficiency of public expenditure and the delivery of public
services was emphasized.

221. The Commission expressed appreciation for the timeliness of the
theme topic – “Regional cooperation for sustainable energy” – acknowledging
that access to affordable, reliable and modern energy would continue to
support sustainable development, economic growth and inclusive
employment opportunities in the Asia-Pacific region. In that regard, the
Commission was briefed on the progress and experiences of some member
States in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 7. Renewable energy
development and more effective energy supply were identified as
contributing factors towards achieving the Goals.

222. The Commission welcomed the commitment expressed by several
countries to reducing carbon emissions and accelerating efforts to harness
renewable energy potential and improved energy efficiency. In that regard,
the Commission noted the need for national policies to be aligned with the
commitments made under the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement and
regional action frameworks such as the Samoa Pathway.

223. The Commission recognized that the realization of sustainable energy
objectives was a common responsibility of all members and would require a
new era of energy governance to solve interlinked challenges including
securing economic competitiveness, energy security and environmental
sustainability. The Commission further recognized demand-side management,
including raising awareness of the benefits of energy efficiency, as an
important measure towards meeting sustainable energy objectives.
224. The Commission noted that with rapid economic growth, fossil fuels were expected to remain significant in the regional energy mix, despite their adverse effects on climate change and vulnerabilities associated with price volatilities, in particular for small island developing States.

225. On the promotion of energy efficiency, the Commission was informed of various initiatives introduced by member States, including minimum energy-efficiency performance standards and labelling, targets for energy efficiency in buildings, investments in energy-efficient infrastructure and funding for retrofitting.

226. The Commission recognized the need to enhance energy connectivity, including the establishment of energy transmission corridors (transmission lines and pipelines), especially for landlocked countries. It noted that energy connectivity covered various challenges within the energy sector, including reliability, cost-effectiveness and sustainability of supplies and inadequate infrastructure. The Commission noted that enhanced connectivity supported the building of resilient communities, balanced energy deficit and surplus and improved rural electrification coverage. Several recently commissioned large-scale oil and gas transport projects, as well as other projects under development, further contributed to the region’s energy security and facilitated sustainable development. In view of the fact that some countries had a surplus of energy, such as hydropower, and other countries had a deficit, the Commission noted the potential of trade in energy.

227. The Commission recognized the need for strengthened cooperation in the energy sector and current efforts to enhance bilateral and multilateral cooperation. In that regard, the Commission was informed about related challenges, including regulatory and technological barriers and piecemeal initiatives. Investment in infrastructure and harmonization of standards and regulations as well as strong political will and measures to reduce protectionism were needed to overcome those challenges. The Commission took note of the need for closer collaboration with partners across sectors at the regional and international levels, including the private sector.

228. The Commission recognized the need to spur investment in the development of high-quality energy infrastructure, which would require improvement of the overall investment climate and of energy pricing policies, including those on fuel subsidies.

229. The Commission took note of the need to promote innovative approaches to reach the most remote population through sustainable off-grid solutions. The Commission also took note of the urgent need to expand access to clean fuels and technologies for cooking and heating in order to reduce indoor air pollution and its impact on health. However, increased access to energy would require improvement of the regulatory environment to foster private investment.

230. The Commission noted the many possibilities for enhanced regional collaboration on energy, including promoting complementarity and synergy and ensuring that all resolutions adopted were actually translated into concrete action. In that regard, the secretariat was requested to facilitate cooperation on the development of initiatives on climate change and clean energy as well as technology transfer in the region. Additionally, requests to continue sharing experiences on addressing the challenges of climate change mitigation and energy transition, facilitate harmonization of approaches to sustainability concepts and build capacity with respect to energy-related
statistics were also recognized. It was suggested that the secretariat should also focus on subregional initiatives.

231. The Commission looked forward to the collaboration on sustainable energy within its conference structure, not least through the newly formed Committee on Energy. The Commission was recognized as an ideal platform for advancing discussions on implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including in terms of solving energy connectivity issues, building capacity to support energy transition to attain Goal 7 and playing a facilitating role in energy cooperation, integration and connectivity.


233. The Commission noted the importance of trade for poverty reduction and the trade liberalization initiatives that had been implemented. In that context, the Commission was informed of the free trade agreements that various countries had concluded or were planning to conclude as part of regional cooperation and integration. In particular, the need for free trade for the development of Pacific island countries was noted and, in that regard, the Commission was informed of the signing of the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations Plus in Tonga in June 2017.

234. The Commission underlined the importance of current and pending regional integration arrangements for promoting regional trade and investment and addressing other regional connectivity issues, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Economic Community and the ASEAN Community Vision 2025; the Agreement on South Asian Free Trade; the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership; the Eurasian Economic Union; the Shanghai Cooperation Organization; the trilateral economic corridor between China, Mongolia and the Russian Federation; the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road; a proposed free trade agreement for Asia and the Pacific; and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation.

235. The Commission recognized that seamless connectivity provided a means to unlock the economic potential of the region, and invited member States to stay committed to the implementation of related activities. The Commission noted a suggestion for regional cooperation and integration to be enhanced by building on existing bilateral intergovernmental agreements to realize seamless connectivity in the areas of transport, ICT and energy.

236. The Commission recognized the importance of eliminating physical and non-physical bottlenecks that were still impeding the efficiency of transport connectivity in the region and encouraged member States to promote those infrastructure development projects that were best able to serve domestic as well as subregional and regional trade.

237. The Commission welcomed the Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Transport Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific adopted by the Ministerial Conference on Transport at its third session, held in Moscow in December 2016, and expressed its support for the implementation of the Regional Action Programme for Sustainable Transport Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific, phase I (2017-2021). The Commission noted the requests to the secretariat for assistance in implementing the Regional Action
Programme, including in improving maritime connectivity, safety and security and organizing capacity-building seminars, workshops and training.

238. The Commission noted the signing, in December 2016, of the Intergovernmental Agreement on International Road Transport along the Asian Highway Network by the Governments of China, Mongolia and the Russian Federation as an important initiative to operationalize the Asian Highway network.

239. The Commission noted the priority accorded to transport connectivity by member States and that the provision of seamless transport connectivity had a critical role to play in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular by (a) promoting economic growth and trade, (b) providing landlocked developing countries, least developed countries and small island developing States with greater access to markets and (c) connecting rural areas. In that respect, the Commission was informed that the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, held in Beijing on 14 and 15 May 2017, gave new impetus to the connectivity agenda and provided a platform for practical cooperation on road, rail and maritime transport, and that the Belt and Road Initiative could have a multiplier effect for unimpeded international trade and industrial development and chart a new course for international cooperation. The Commission also noted that the Government of China and ESCAP were planning to organize a joint seminar on the Belt and Road Initiative.

240. The Commission was informed about bilateral and multilateral initiatives that member States were implementing, such as: (a) the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity; (b) the Turkey-Iran (Islamic Republic of)-Pakistan-India-Bangladesh-Myanmar Road Corridor; (c) the Istanbul-Tehran-Islamabad-Delhi-Kolkata-Dhaka-Yangon Railway Corridor; (d) the International North-South Transport Corridor; (e) the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway; (f) the Western China-Wester Europe transport connectivity; (g) the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which had the potential to transform regional economic cooperation; (h) the north-south corridor linking the Black Sea to the Persian Gulf through the territory of Armenia; and (i) the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal initiative to enhance the efficiency of logistics in South Asia.

241. The Commission also noted the increased role of efficient port infrastructure in enhancing national or international connectivity and acknowledged the ongoing construction of a new port in Nauru, the planned construction of a new deep seaport in Anaklia by the Government of Georgia and the Baku International Sea Trade Port in Azerbaijan.

242. The Commission noted a number of activities being undertaken by member States to improve transit through their territories by improving road, rail and port infrastructure, unifying tariffs and simplifying transport procedures along international transport and transit corridors. Such activities had allowed a reduction to seven days of the rail transit time along the Trans-Siberian main line for rail movement between Asia and Europe, and to 15 days between China and Europe through Central Asia and Caucasus, down from 30 to 35 days previously.

243. The Commission would welcome the future establishment of an interregional coordination committee on transport between Asia and Europe as a major platform for the emergence of a vibrant Eurasian economic space, and encouraged the secretariat to collaborate with member States and other United Nations bodies, in particular the Economic Commission for Europe,
to promote intraregional and interregional transport connectivity along transport corridors between Asia and Europe.

244. The Commission noted that a number of countries were starting to consider policies aimed at introducing new environmentally friendly means of transport such as electric vehicles.

245. The Commission was informed of national efforts to further strengthen ICT connectivity and broadband infrastructure to bridge the digital divide, including efforts to achieve national coverage of fibre-optic networks, which would enhance connectivity with the region overall. Improved regional connectivity would offer important development opportunities to least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, since universal access to ICT was fundamental to reducing the digital divide, alleviating poverty and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

246. The Commission noted that achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals along with regional integration, reinforced by ESCAP guidelines and several regional and subregional initiatives in, among others, ICT, was the best option for leaving no one behind. In that regard, the Commission acknowledged support for the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative towards promoting affordability and resilience of broadband connectivity in Asia-Pacific countries. It was underlined that the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway and government initiatives should be aligned and that it was expected to contribute to increasing ICT affordability and availability.

247. The Commission emphasized that disasters and the impacts of climate change posed a pressing challenge to the countries in the region, including with respect to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

248. The Commission recognized the commitment of member States to accord high priority to reducing disaster risks and addressing the impacts of climate change. The Commission was informed of recent national efforts in that regard, including efforts to implement the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 and the Paris Agreement; inclusion of disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation in national development plans; the adoption of a Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy; and the building of resilient communities through a National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation. At the subregional level, the Commission was informed of a framework for climate- and disaster-resilient development in the Pacific, which provided guidance and support.

249. The Commission was informed of institutional development efforts to respond to disaster risk reduction and climate change, including the recent establishment of a full-fledged Ministry of Climate Change Adaptation, Meteorology and Geo-hazards, Energy, Environment and National Disaster Management; and the ongoing consideration of a legislation bill to establish a Climate Change Council, a high-level policymaking body that would prepare and provide oversight of adaptation and mitigation projects.

250. The Commission acknowledged the leadership role of ESCAP in disaster risk reduction in the region and welcomed further cooperation and coordination on the issues of disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation. The Commission noted a request to the secretariat to increase its support to member States, particularly to vulnerable countries, and to
facilitate greater regional cooperation on disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation in the light of the increasing impacts on the region.

251. The Commission expressed its commitment to increasing cooperation to address shared vulnerabilities and disaster risk in the region, including through the Regional Integrated Multi-hazard Early Warning System for Africa and Asia.

252. Several representatives reiterated their Governments’ commitment to the Paris Agreement, highlighting the importance of fostering the deployment of mitigation technologies and developing sustainable infrastructure, with appropriate assessment of social and environmental impacts. The Commission was informed of the adoption of a green technology master plan by one country as part of its efforts to achieve green growth.

253. The Commission reiterated the importance of environmental sustainability as one of the key factors of sustainable development and growth, and highlighted the need to improve efforts to diversify the economy while preserving and managing natural resources, in particular sea and marine resources and water. In that connection, the Commission was informed about the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018-2028, and the third Asia-Pacific Water Summit, to be held in Yangon in December 2017.

254. The Commission recognized the crucial role of the ocean in the livelihoods of many of the communities of Asia and the Pacific. Noting the vulnerability of the Pacific to threats deriving from climate change and excessive exploitation of the oceans, the Commission highlighted the importance of the upcoming United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14, and welcomed the efforts of the secretariat with respect to its preparation and in supporting Pacific island States in the implementation and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 14.

255. The Commission noted the importance of people-centred and inclusive social development as a pillar of sustainable development; greater efforts were needed to build a human society that left no one behind. The Commission emphasized that investments in health and education were key to sustainable development, and was informed about several examples of national achievements and initiatives to reduce inequality and poverty, provide quality education and health services and improve access to justice and decent work. The importance of collaboration with the private sector in those endeavours was highlighted. The benefits of gender equity, women’s empowerment and disability insurance were also noted.

256. The Commission noted the centrality of regional and subregional cooperation mechanisms and initiatives to address common challenges and support national strategies towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in a wide range of sectors and in order to leave no one behind, to which member States had committed through the adoption of the 2030 Agenda.

257. The Commission noted the importance of nationalizing the Sustainable Development Goals including integration into national development plans, and that continuous monitoring was critical for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Given the current gaps in data capacity, strengthening the availability of data in countries in partnership with national statistical offices was noted as an important mechanism for achieving the Goals. The Commission noted the role of the Government of
the Philippines as co-chair of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators and an invitation to attend the International Conference on Sustainable Development Goals Statistics in October 2017.

258. The Commission noted the important role of ESCAP in identifying best practices and in assisting countries in their economic transformation, highlighting the importance of policy coordination and harmonization for development.

259. Appreciation was expressed for support from ESCAP to human resource development through initiatives of the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development, and the critical nature of having representatives of the Pacific island States on the Governing Council of the Centre was stressed.

260. One delegation reaffirmed its support to ESCAP as the primary intergovernmental platform in the region, and expressed its wish to continue contributing to many of the ESCAP subprogrammes, including in the areas of social development, statistics, information and communications technology, science, technology, innovation, disaster risk reduction and energy.

261. The ESCAP Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia was commended on its efforts to support the subregion in implementing the 2030 Agenda, including through analytical work as undertaken in particular for the subregional report entitled “Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in South Asia: key policy priorities and implementation challenges”, which made pertinent recommendations.

High-level dialogue on regional economic cooperation and integration in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

262. During the high-level dialogue, the relationship between regional economic cooperation and integration and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was discussed. The dialogue was divided into two panel discussions. The first discussed how to leverage regional economic cooperation and integration to attain the Sustainable Development Goals, and the second considered how the 2030 Agenda should guide regional economic cooperation and integration. Both panels were moderated by the Executive Secretary.

263. The panellists on the first panel were:

(a) Mr. Min Bahadur Shrestha (Nepal);
(b) Mr. Semi Tuleca Koroilavesau (Fiji);
(c) Mr. Gellwyn Daniel Hamzah Jusuf (Indonesia);
(d) Mr. Zunaid Ahmed Palak (Bangladesh);
(e) Mr. Vladimir Potapenko (Shanghai Cooperation Organization);
(f) Mr. Wencai Zhang (Asian Development Bank).

264. Mr. Shrestha provided a summary of the key recommendations of the High-level Dialogue on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration for Enhancing Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific, organized by ESCAP on 20 and 21 April 2017, which he had chaired. During that High-level Dialogue, it was agreed that regional economic cooperation and integration and the Sustainable Development Goals were mutually reinforcing and needed to be implemented in such a way that they complemented and
supported each other. He outlined the importance of the four pillars of regional economic cooperation and integration (seamless connectivity, market integration, financial cooperation and addressing shared vulnerabilities). Regional economic cooperation and integration would create enormous opportunities to increase income and employment and help achieve multiple Goals. He stressed that the recommendations of the High-level Dialogue needed to be implemented seriously to benefit all countries in the region.

265. Mr. Koroilavesau stated that promoting market integration, and particularly more access to markets for the growing manufacturing sector in Fiji, was a central objective of his country’s first ever trade policy framework, covering the period 2015-2025. He also noted the need to be mindful of the noodle bowl phenomenon, and that meaningful market access for the Pacific island economies required more transparent and simplified trade procedures. With regard to domestic resource mobilization, he noted the importance of fostering cooperation in tax matters, particularly to improve tax administration and compliance, and of public-private partnerships. He highlighted the vulnerability of Pacific island economies to natural disasters and the threat of climate change. He emphasized the significance of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, the Paris Agreement and Sustainable Development Goal 13 as key elements for regional cooperation in the areas of disaster preparedness and climate change adaptation.

266. Mr. Jusuf said that Indonesia was integrating and mainstreaming the Sustainable Development Goals into the national development strategy using a decentralized approach. His country had established a multi-stakeholder platform for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda consisting of Government and Parliament, academics and experts, business and philanthropy, civil society and the media. He highlighted four interrelated challenges for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals: (a) to ensure that no one was left behind; (b) to build a comprehensive database of indicators; (c) to integrate all stakeholders into action plans and find synergies across State and non-State actors; and (d) to continue improving the country’s decentralization policy, initiated in 2000, to ensure, inter alia, that increased budget allocations to subnational governments were followed by high-quality project implementation. He noted that a key element of his country’s decentralization policy, which covered economic planning and fiscal management, was the transfer of funds from wealthier to poorer local governments. He suggested that, despite differences in income, wealth and human capacity across local governments in Indonesia, his country’s work to ensure that they all made progress together could be a useful example for regional cooperation in Asia and the Pacific.

267. Mr. Palak noted that although ICT was a key enabler of achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific, the region was characterized by large disparities across countries in terms of broadband Internet speed, access and user costs. He noted that through its Digital Bangladesh programme, Bangladesh had made great strides towards expanding broadband connectivity and strengthening innovative tools and technologies to bridge the digital divide. He also mentioned ongoing work to connect Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal through a single fibre-optic cable, and emphasized that enhancing broadband Internet connectivity required both national and regional efforts. Bangladesh thus supported the ESCAP regional broadband connectivity initiative, the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway, as well as a proposal to amend the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network and the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway Network, which
facilitated cost efficient co-deployment of transport and ICT infrastructure. He further emphasized the importance of boosting cooperation across member States to ensure the success of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative.

268. Mr. Potapenko informed the Commission that at the next Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit, to be held in Astana in June 2017, India and Pakistan would become full members of the Organization. With that expansion, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization would become a transregional organization covering 44 per cent of the global population. He underscored the utmost priority assigned by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to ensuring the stability, security, development and prosperity of its member countries. He expressed his deep appreciation of the cooperation between the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and ESCAP, which had resulted in the formulation and negotiation of the International Agreement of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Member States on the Facilitation of International Road Transport that had entered into force on 20 January 2017. He emphasized that the implementation of that agreement would provide new momentum for the construction of new roads and the renovation of existing roads to expand transport connectivity. The agreement would supplement the Belt and Road Initiative, as well as other related initiatives for enhancing regional connectivity, international trade and economic development.

269. Mr. Zhang noted that more than 400 million people in the region had no access to energy. It was important to improve access and affordability for poor people, yet at the same time ensure that projects were financially sustainable in the long term. He emphasized that the traditional role of multilateral development banks in supporting regional initiatives, such as infrastructure connectivity, had been as financiers. However, the resources needed by Asia and the Pacific to address its infrastructure needs and respond to climate change, estimated at $1.7 trillion per year between 2016 and 2030, significantly exceeded the resources of multilateral development banks. Thus, he highlighted the need to mobilize private sector resources for infrastructure finance, particularly through the development of financial markets and public-private partnerships. Furthermore, he emphasized the importance of supporting social development across economic corridors and fostering financial cooperation in the region. He said that multilateral development banks could also support regional economic cooperation and integration initiatives by facilitating policy dialogues, knowledge-sharing and cross-border consensus. He highlighted the importance of capacity-building and technical assistance, particularly for low-income countries in the region, an area that would benefit from enhanced cooperation between the Asian Development Bank and ESCAP.

270. The importance of capacity-building for implementing regional economic cooperation and integration initiatives, particularly in least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, was also emphasized during the floor discussion after the first panel. Capacity-building efforts should be boosted to enhance countries’ capacity to implement projects and sectoral policy reforms in support of regional economic cooperation and integration and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. ESCAP was urged to increase its support to countries with special needs to help build their capacity to benefit from regional cooperation and integration initiatives, in cooperation with development partners and other regional and international organizations. It was suggested that a future ministerial meeting on regional economic cooperation and integration could articulate a regional commitment on that issue.
271. The panellists of the second panel were:

(a) Ms. Hilda Heine (Marshall Islands);
(b) Ms. Adoracion M. Navarro (Philippines);
(c) Mr. Vongthep Arthakaivalvatee (Association of Southeast Asian Nations);
(d) Mr. Seyed Jalaledin Alavi Sabzevari, (Economic Cooperation Organization);
(e) Ms. Helen Clark (former Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme).

272. The Deputy Secretary-General provided a video message in which she outlined the current reform of the development pillar of the United Nations and highlighted the role of the regional commissions in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. She highlighted that increasing physical and virtual connectivity, opening markets and increasing resilience through regional economic cooperation and integration would help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Countries stood to gain from increased economic opportunities, strengthened equality and more resilient environments. The regional road map for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific should add momentum to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The comprehensive review of the United Nations development system would buttress efforts by ESCAP to support countries in overcoming their development challenges. ESCAP could galvanize political momentum on the Sustainable Development Goals and facilitate partnerships to promote conflict prevention and peace. She named four central areas where the regional commissions could provide support: aligning regional and national strategies on transboundary issues; tracking progress at regional forums; mobilizing partnerships and finance for the Sustainable Development Goals; and supporting countries to mainstream the Goals into fiscal planning, including harmonizing data collection and reporting.

273. Ms. Heine informed the Commission that translating the complex and long-range framework of the 2030 Agenda to the national level poses challenges for small island developing States with low development-planning capacity, especially in prioritizing, planning tasks and identifying data gaps. She reported that Pacific island countries would be launching a Pacific road map for sustainable development in September 2017. Well-structured FDI and Asia-Pacific partnerships could transform development pathways that depended on ODA so that they were aligned with the 2030 Agenda. She stressed the importance of maritime transport to improve market integration, connectivity and access to basic services in Pacific island countries. She mentioned some partnership initiatives to improve sustainable maritime transport, including the Central Pacific Shipping Commission. She also applauded ESCAP on its support to the Marshall Islands in implementing the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and human rights policy and legal frameworks. Dependence on fisheries and ocean resources was a major challenge in the Pacific, but also had huge economic potential and a regional link. She highlighted Sustainable Development Goal 14 as a basis for investment and regional partnership to strengthen sustainable fisheries and help Pacific island countries succeed in their development efforts. She further called for attention to building capacity, access to foreign investment and connectivity to support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Pacific.
274. Ms. Navarro noted the significance of robust economic planning and implementation that was guided by good governance for success, in the context of both ASEAN and the Philippines. She emphasized the need to sustain income generation and improve quality of life, including by providing equal opportunities to migrants across the region. Public-private partnerships were an effective way of reducing government spending, spurring technology transfer and better distributing risks. With regard to networking initiatives to enhance regulatory practices, she stressed the benefits of pushing for amendments to or outright repeal of outdated laws, minimizing compliance costs and improving business transactions. To conclude, she advocated deeper social and economic integration in ASEAN, with people mobility being extended to the greater Asia-Pacific region so as to address common challenges more effectively.

275. Mr. Arthakaivalvatee highlighted the importance of creating a shared community to achieve the ASEAN Community Vision 2025. He stressed the importance of leaving no one behind in regional economic cooperation and integration, by strengthening equality and women’s economic empowerment, access to quality education, and free and inclusive movement of labour. He also called for the enhancement of infrastructure investments and the creation of ownership through strategic communication to benefit marginalized populations. The sociocultural pillar of the ASEAN Community provided the backbone for that people-centred approach. He added that, as one of the regions most susceptible to disasters, it was essential for the ASEAN Community to build resilience to mitigate the impact of disasters and climate change, drawing on the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 to coordinate the regional response to crises. Regarding ESCAP cooperation with ASEAN, he noted the importance of identifying common priority areas for collaboration through the Complementarities Initiative to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and ASEAN Community Vision 2025.

276. Mr. Seyed Jalaledin Alavi Sabzevari informed the Commission of the Economic Cooperation Organization Vision 2025, approved earlier in 2017. The main principles and priority areas for regional cooperation outlined in his Organization’s Vision 2025 overlapped with the pillars of regional economic cooperation and integration as well as with the 2030 Agenda. Implementation of the Organization’s regional targets to strengthen trade, enhance transport and connectivity, increase clean energy, increase tourism, economic growth and productivity, and promote social welfare and environmental protection would also contribute to the implementation of regional economic cooperation and integration and the 2030 Agenda. The multitude of forums available to countries in the region, overlapping memberships in regional organizations and the noodle bowl of frameworks were challenging. However, regional economic cooperation and integration, the 2030 Agenda and his Organization’s Vision 2025 shared the joint objective of improving economic development and the welfare of people. He noted that a strengthened partnership between ESCAP and his Organization would enhance the three agendas.

277. Ms. Clark said that the United Nations needed to be a flexible and nimble partner to Member States in order to support them in implementing the 2030 Agenda. That meant that the United Nations must be highly context-specific, applying a decentralized structure that empowered offices at the national level. She applauded the people-centred approach taken by ASEAN and acknowledged the importance of addressing environmental challenges in small island developing States. She emphasized that the United Nations system prioritized positive impact on human development and environmental
sustainability across all its activities. She commended ESCAP on its role as a resource to support countries and regions in aligning with global frameworks. She applauded the ambitious agendas at the regional level, although suggested that without meaningful mainstreaming to the national level they would be difficult to implement.

278. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, the Commission took note of the note by the secretariat on enhancing regional economic cooperation and integration in Asia and the Pacific and the note verbale dated 28 April 2017 from the Office of H.E. Mr. Min Bahadur Shrestha, Vice-Chairman, National Planning Commission of Nepal, addressed to the secretariat of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

Sub-item (b)
Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2017

279. The Commission had before it the note by the secretariat on the summary of the Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2017 (E/ESCAP/73/29).

280. The discussions during the ministerial panel on the Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2017 were focused on the policy challenges faced by the region’s countries and the importance of good governance and fiscal management as tools for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

281. The panel was moderated by the Executive Secretary. The panellists were:

(a) Mr. Teuea Toatu (Kiribati);
(b) Mr. Jone Usamate (Fiji);
(c) Mr. Abdul Sattar Murad (Afghanistan);
(d) Ms. Adoracion M. Navarro (Philippines);
(e) Mr. Rathin Roy (National Institute of Public Finance and Policy, India).

282. The Executive Secretary gave introductory remarks and presented the key findings of the Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2017.

283. Mr. Toatu noted that countries’ economies in the Pacific region were not uniform. Some Governments depended more than others on limited economic activities for their domestic resource mobilization. In Kiribati, 70 per cent of public revenue came from natural resources, specifically fisheries. When such activities were volatile, it posed a challenge for fiscal sustainability, spending on public services and the country’s very growth. To cope with that challenge, Kiribati had been using its reserve fund as a buffer for long-run fiscal sustainability, and undertaken a number of reforms to diversify public revenue sources, such as fees for international airlines. He noted that his country was pursuing reforms to improve the quality and efficiency of public spending, so that it could have a multiplying effect on investments, savings and production. For instance, he noted that subsidies to non-performing State-owned enterprises had declined. Climate change was the single most important threat to Kiribati, and had great implications on the country’s economy, notably the agricultural sector. Hence, the costs of adapting to climate change in the budget should be taken into account (amounting to at least 2 per cent of the budget). There was therefore a need to tap into global sources of climate finance and private financing, which had
been successfully pursued in sectors such as water and sanitation. From a social protection perspective, he explained that employment opportunities in Kiribati were limited. As the Government was the main employer, it was important to stimulate the private sector to create more job opportunities for a young population that often had to migrate to Australia and New Zealand. In that vein, he underlined that regional cooperation could play a useful role, including from a capacity-building perspective.

284. Mr. Usamate acknowledged that economic growth was important, and should be as broad as possible in terms of job creation. The key to attaining it lay in productivity increases. In turn, productivity growth was possible when people felt they were being taken care of, so it was important not to leave anyone behind. For that reason, good governance and strong institutions were required to guarantee a multisectoral approach that covered health, education and decent work conditions. He described his country’s efforts and reforms to analyse the future of work and guarantee workers’ rights – in areas such as assembly, health and conditions of work – and align them with the International Labour Organization’s standards, including by enshrining them in the country’s Constitution. In a similar vein, he explained that Fiji had adopted targets on the use of energy, including a move to 100 per cent renewable energy. However, those targets required access to clean energy and technology, as well as investments for the necessary systems to be in place. Given that in some parts of Fiji access to electricity was still a challenge and that the country’s resources were limited, partnerships with development partners and bigger countries would be very useful.

285. Mr. Murad emphasized the importance of macroeconomic stability for Afghanistan to have a sound fiscal framework. In the pursuit of fiscal sustainability and narrower budget deficits, his country had been supporting fiscal discipline by enhancing revenue collection and a more efficient allocation of spending. For instance, to improve revenue collection, a number of fiscal reforms had been implemented, such as value added tax at 10 per cent. Similarly, as the objective was to rid every government department of corruption, reforms had been undertaken to make civil servants more efficient, through a system to allocate budget to sectors based on their performance. That measure had lowered the risk of corruption and improved the country’s capacity to deliver public services. Other significant reforms had greatly promoted transparency in governance and fiscal management, such as through online systems that provided public access by civil society to data on the Government’s national-level project spending.

286. Ms. Navarro described a number of reforms that the Philippines had implemented to greatly enhance the performance of public expenditure, such as the timely submission of the budget or engagement with civil society at large on budget discussions. To reduce corruption in the Philippines, Ms. Navarro also highlighted the role of other measures such as the electronic government system and the integrated public financial management system with unified account codes. All of those measures had increased transparency and efficiency. She acknowledged, however, that the quality of public services could be improved, and building the capacity of public servants remained important. To create decent jobs, a number of schemes were being pursued by the Government, such as promoting micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises and investment in infrastructure and skills training, with particular attention to legislative measures aimed at eliminating gender- and age-based discrimination. She also pointed to her Government’s efforts to break the intergenerational poverty cycle through investment in health, nutrition and education, thanks to the conditional cash transfer scheme under the Bridging Program for the Filipino Family. Lastly, she highlighted that the
role of public institutions was central, as reforms could be sustained if people trusted their policymakers. For that, she stressed the importance of a people-centred, accountability-based, corruption-free system for public service delivery.

287. After expressing appreciation for the high quality of the 2017 Survey, Mr. Roy noted that countries must decide on a number of fundamental questions about the role that their State institutions should play, which could then be translated into fiscal management, including the right ratio of tax to gross domestic product; what sectors should be taxed, to what extent and how; whether the State should redistribute resources; whether more public revenue should come from corporate taxes; and how the tax administration should be reformed so that it moved from a discretion-based system to a rules-based system. When countries were addressing those questions, they should always keep in mind that the general willingness to pay taxes was greatly influenced by perceptions of the quantity and quality of public services rendered by the State. On the goods and services tax in India, which was equivalent to value added tax, he noted that that fiscal policy initiative involved a great level of coordination efforts between the states in India, uncommon even in many advanced countries, and was therefore not easy. However, the systems were in place and the benefits for trade and business would be huge, as it would bring a genuine single market in India.

288. Also at its 6th 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 2017.

Agenda item 10
Theme topic for the seventy-third session of the Commission: “Regional cooperation for sustainable energy”

289. The Commission had before it the note by the secretariat on enhancing regional cooperation for sustainable energy in Asia and the Pacific (E/ESCAP/73/7).

290. At the ministerial round table on regional cooperation for sustainable energy, the current energy scene and emerging trends in Asia and the Pacific were reviewed and discussions focused on the policy challenges faced by the region’s countries.

291. The panel was moderated by Mr. Ajith P. Perera (Sri Lanka). The panellists were:

(a) Mr. Enele Sosene Sopoaga (Tuvalu);
(b) Mr. Nasrul Hamid (Bangladesh);
(c) Mr. Gulmammad Javadov (Azerbaijan);
(d) General Nattipon Kanokchot (Thailand);
(e) Mr. Wencai Zhang (Asian Development Bank).

292. The Executive Secretary gave introductory remarks and presented the key findings of the theme study on regional cooperation for sustainable energy.

293. Mr. Perera described the energy situation in his country. While Sri Lanka was responsible for only 0.05 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions, it was firmly committed to increasing its share of renewables and reducing its emissions. Much had already been achieved with regard to energy access: almost 100 per cent of households were now provided with...
24-hour electricity. He called for bilateral and multilateral cooperation to enhance energy sustainability in Sri Lanka.

294. Mr. Sopoaga underlined that energy was the key for the sustainable development in small island developing States, and Tuvalu was working on the integration of national policies within the framework of the Samoa Pathway. While poverty reduction was critical, environmental protection in line with the Paris Agreement was even more important. Expressing support for the efforts of small island developing States towards energy transformation, he called on development partners to provide additional support to small island developing States to achieve 100 per cent renewables in their energy mix. He also called on the global community to aim to reduce greenhouse gas emissions as much as possible and as soon as possible. Tuvalu strongly supported Fiji as the host of the twenty-third Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and hoped that countries would act ambitiously and quickly.

295. Mr. Hamid explained that his country used different approaches for the electrification of urban and rural areas, with cooperative distribution companies playing the main role for the latter. The Vision 2021 initiative of Bangladesh aimed for universal access, with annual electricity generation of 24,000 MW by 2021 and 60,000 MW by 2041. Cross-border trade in energy was a key component of transforming the energy sector with a view to attaining sustainable development in Bangladesh, and ongoing cooperation with India, Nepal, and Bhutan needed to be expanded.

296. Mr. Javadov emphasized the important role of energy connectivity in efforts towards energy transformation. Given his country’s natural resources, gas would continue to play the main role for Azerbaijan in the future. Azerbaijan had been investing heavily in cross-border infrastructure, assisted also by entities such as the Asian Development Bank. Considering its resources and geographic location, his country was very interested in connectivity, aiming to cooperate with both Europe and Asia. Azerbaijan also promoted renewable energy and now produced equipment for renewable energy generation.

297. General Kanokchot, addressing energy transformation, elaborated on the national integrated policy approach of Thailand, entitled Energy 4.0, which covered the areas of energy efficiency, renewable energy, energy security, gas and oil. Renewable energy was considered to be pivotal to increasing energy security. Technological innovation, including cooperation with developed countries, was another focus of the policy, which would help to develop high-quality renewable and clean energy products at affordable prices.

298. Mr. Zhang stated that the region was overreliant on the public sector in its efforts to address energy poverty and the transition to clean energy. It was important to increase the engagement of the private sector, while at the same time ensuring that energy remained affordable. Energy was a focus area for the Asian Development Bank, which supported energy projects, energy sector reform and various regional programmes and cross-border projects.

299. In response to a question as to how to make best use of the Asian and Pacific Energy Forum in 2018, the panellists said that it should investigate how partnerships could be leveraged to enhance delivery on the ground. Many ongoing initiatives needed to be improved in that regard. The event should provide a platform for regional cooperation and the sharing of best practices, policies, business models and technologies. The right approach to
energy security should be discussed, including the promotion of a switch from thinking in terms of energy independence to thinking in terms of energy interdependence. Energy sector reform should also be considered at the Forum, as well as the question of how to increase private sector engagement.

300. The representative of China outlined the country’s experience in promoting a transition towards a clean, low-carbon and efficient energy system through innovation, cooperation and openness. Through energy transition, China aimed to strengthen low-carbon and green capacity. In harnessing the mutual benefits of energy transition, regional cooperation and connectivity initiatives would play a key role in strengthening energy security, with the Belt and Road Initiative of particular significance.

301. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, the Commission adopted resolution 73/8 on strengthening regional cooperation for sustainable energy development in Asia and the Pacific.

302. Subsequent to the adoption, the representative of the United States of America informed the Commission that his Government was in the process of reviewing many of its policies, including in relation to climate change and the Paris Agreement, and that while that review was under way, the United States of America reserved its position on those issues.

Agenda item 11
Other matters

Election of the members of the Governing Council of the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology

303. In addition to the host country, India, the Commission elected the following countries to the Governing Council of the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology for the period from 2017 to 2020: Bangladesh; China; Fiji; Indonesia; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Kazakhstan; Malaysia; Pakistan; Philippines; Republic of Korea; Sri Lanka; and Thailand.

Agenda item 12
Adoption of the report of the Commission

304. Also at its 6th plenary meeting, on 19 May 2017, the report of the Commission on its seventy-third session (E/ESCAP/73/40) was adopted unanimously.