Annex II

Chair’s summary of proceedings of the seventh session of the Committee on Environment and Development

I. Introduction

1. Owing to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the seventh session of the Committee on Environment and Development at the ministerial level was organized as a hybrid event, from November 29th – December 1st, 2022. The senior officials’ segment was organized on November 29th, and the ministerial segment was organized on December 1st. On November 29th two side events were organized and on the 30th one side event and three partnership events, as well as the 5th Asia Pacific Day for the Ocean, were organized. The Chair’s summary covers the discussions and the proceedings of the seventh session of the Committee on Environment and Development.

II. Summary of discussions under agenda items 2-4

A. Review of the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Development for Asia and the Pacific, 2017 (Agenda item 2)

2. The Committee on Environment and Development had before it document ESCAP/CED/2022/1.

3. Representatives of the following members and associate members of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific made statements: China, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, and Tajikistan.

4. Representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations made statements: The International Federation of Social Workers.

5. The secretariat presented its review of the progress on the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific, 2017. It noted the marked changes in support for climate action and strengthened stewardship of natural resources at the global level and by countries of the region. The areas of ESCAP’s work on the subprogramme on environment and development were outlined and the results of a survey of expert views on environment and development challenges and progress in the region were shared.

6. Ms. Yatsuka Kataoka, Programme Director, City Taskforce, Institute for Global Environmental Strategies; Dr. Meena Bilgi, Core Associate, Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resources Management and Asia-Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism; and Mr. David Mclachlan-Karr, Regional Director, Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, UN Development Coordination Office addressed the Committee as discussants.

7. The Committee observed that environmental degradation, exacerbated by climate change, undermined hard-won development gains, and contributions toward building sustainable and inclusive societies. Threatening
livelihoods, health, and well-being, and impeding progress on the reduction of poverty, hunger, and inequality. It also highlighted the challenges of unsustainable production and consumption and the need to address environmental issues together with economic and social issues in an integrated and balanced manner. The Committee pointed to the challenges faced by member states including vulnerability to climate change and declining water security from the melting of glaciers and the economic losses arising from natural disasters, despite the low share in global emissions by some.

8. The Committee welcomed member states' efforts towards harmonizing nature, development, and shared progress towards carbon neutrality, energy and emissions reduction targets, supportive carbon neutrality legislation, and carbon pricing regulations. Promoting investments via establishing green taxonomy, climate action through forestry and land use, renewable energy strategies, and action planning on marine plastic debris and green transformation and planning for a just transition was urged by some delegations.

9. The Committee expressed strong support for multilateral actions, and the need for a united platform to solve emerging and existing environmental problems. The Committee pointed out that ambitious commitments required meaningful implementation efforts, a spirit of constructive cooperation, and collective action. Further, the unification of stakeholders, and all countries, developed and developing was needed. The Committee urged step-by-step action, intensifying dialogues, sharing of knowledge and best practices, capacity building, as well as technology development and transfer.

10. The Committee noted ESCAP’s support for regional cooperation in the areas of climate change, air pollution, agricultural mechanization, and oceans, and the need to build on existing ESCAP frameworks. The North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation (NEASPEC) was cited as a model for transboundary cooperation. Continued support for ESCAP’s work was expressed.

11. The Committee welcomed member states’ regional and multilateral cooperation initiatives, including the Tripartite Minister’s meeting, the launch of a landmark G20 Joint Energy Transitions Partnership, centering of G20 priorities on oceans and accelerating the implementation of SDG14 and the establishment of a Regional Capacity Centre for Clean Seas (RC3S). It also welcomed the intention of member states to strengthen cooperation in the areas of dust and sandstorms, air pollution, land degradation, advancing the coastal and marine agenda in the context of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and climate adaptation. It further welcomed the initiative to preserve glaciers, by the proposed proclamation of the year 2025 the year of preservation of glaciers, along with the establishment of a United Nations trust fund.

12. The Committee also welcomed the technical cooperation support provided by member states including for the implementation of the Paris Agreement, for supporting finance, technical and capacity building for developing countries.

13. The Committee took note of the importance of social workers working with communities that are hardest hit by climate change, and the call for immediate transparent, and accountable climate change, a focus on the role of civil society, strengthened public collective action, and platforms for people’s voices. One representative highlighted the People’s Charter for an Eco-Social World as an important reference.
B. Protecting our planet through regional cooperation and solidarity in Asia and the Pacific (Agenda item 3)

14. The Committee had before it a note by the secretariat on protecting our planet through regional cooperation and solidarity in Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP/CED/2022/2) and the terms of reference of the technical expert group on environment and development (ESCAP/CED/2022/3) along with information documents on operationalizing the environment-health nexus in Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP/CED/2022/INF/1), sustainable mechanization-based solutions for climate-smart agriculture in Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP/CED/2022/INF/2) and trends and impacts of urbanization in Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP/CED/2020/INF/3).

15. Representatives of the following members and associate members of the Commission made statements: China, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Japan, Maldives and Sri Lanka.

16. A representative of the following intergovernmental organizations also made a statement: Open-ended working group on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

17. Representatives of the following non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, and other entities made statements: Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact and India Water Foundation.

18. The Committee benefited from a presentation by the secretariat on enhancing regional cooperation to address environmental challenges in the Asia Pacific region. The need for strengthened regional collaboration and solidarity to take robust action to solve environmental issues in Asia and the Pacific and meet the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was emphasized. Enhanced collaboration for effective international environmental governance and multilateral processes was underscored, as well as the importance of coordinated and complementary actions for addressing climate change, unsustainable urbanization, loss of biodiversity, and ecosystem degradation, as well as pollution and waste.

19. Ms. Poonam Ghimire, Youth Member of the UN High-level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism addressed the Committee.

20. The chair of the working group which led the drafting of the terms of reference for the technical expert group on environment and development presented the terms of reference for the technical expert group on environment and development as contained in ESCAP/CED/2022/3.

21. The Committee noted with appreciation the flagship report prepared by the secretariat to inform its deliberations. Member states called for stronger collective action and collaboration, underscoring knowledge-sharing, capacity development, and technical cooperation to support developing countries in addressing environmental and development challenges, including through south-south cooperation. The need to recognize and promote the role of national institutes, academia, and local governments was brought to the attention of the Committee by one representative, who provided specific examples of marine protection initiatives and plastic waste management which provided guidance to local governments to prepare action plans in line with national priorities. Member states emphasized the role of nationally determined contributions and other action plans to ensure the energy transition away from fossil fuels, improve air quality and promote ocean action by engaging all
levels of government and society. Representatives highlighted the urgency to increase climate financing for small island developing states and to further combat desertification to improve the resilience of affected communities.

22. Representatives of major groups highlighted the importance of climate-smart agriculture to improve livelihoods. Representatives further recommended integrating indigenous and scientific knowledge to enhance regional cooperation, underscoring the importance of the human rights of indigenous peoples and current challenges related to environmental conservation efforts, such as involuntary displacement from ancestral sites and territories.

C. Strengthening regional collaboration to protect our planet (Agenda item 6)

23. Representatives of the following members and associate members of the Commission made statements: Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, France, Indonesia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Maldives, Mongolia, Republic of Korea, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, United States.


25. Representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations also made statements: Economic Cooperation Organization.

26. Representatives of the following non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, and other entities made statements: Bangkok Metropolitan Administration and Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact.

27. The Committee welcomed a ministerial roundtable discussion on “Strengthening regional collaboration to protect our planet” with H.E. Mr. Bat-Ulzii Bat-Erdene, Minister of Environment and Tourism of Mongolia; H.E. Eang Sophalleth, Secretary of State, Ministry of Environment of Cambodia; H.E. Madame Zulfiya Suleimenova, Vice Minister of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources of Kazakhstan; H.E. Madame Vilaykham Phosalath, Vice Minister of Public Works and Transport of Lao People’s Democratic Republic; H.E. Mr. Dong Jin Kim, President of National Institute of Environmental Research, Republic of Korea; and H.E. Mr. Thaleamgsak Petchsuwan, Deputy Permanent Secretary of Natural Resources and Environment of Thailand.

28. The Committee welcomed a ministerial roundtable discussion on “The Future of our Oceans” with H.E. Hon. Semi Koroilavesau, Minister for Fisheries and Oceans Champion, Fiji; H.E. Hon. Toeolesulusulu Cedric Salesa Pose Schuster, Minister of Natural Resources and Environment and Samoa Tourism Authority; H.E. Dr. Alue Dohong, Vice Minister, Ministry of Environment and Forestry, Indonesia.

29. Rapporteur, H.E. Juvencio de Jesus Martins, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Timor-Leste to ESCAP, presented recommendations and key messages of the 5th Asia-Pacific Day for the Ocean, which took place on 30 November 2022, under the auspices of the Committee. The 5th Asia-Pacific Day for the Ocean highlighted that ocean governance requires the support of national and local ocean and coastal assessments, informed by science and indigenous and traditional knowledge. To this purpose, environmental rights including access to information, public
participation, and access to justice are integral elements. International action was urged to reach the target of 30% of marine protected areas by 2030. Impacts on supply chains were observed, calling for resilient and sustainable maritime connectivity, with safer and greener port operations. Recommendations to promote innovation and cybersecurity by developing regulatory frameworks with GHG reduction via carbon pricing mechanisms and enhancing gender diversity in the maritime sector were made. Ocean accounting was seen as instrumental to underpin measurement, innovation, investment, management, and planning of progress toward sustainable ocean development. Public-private financing arrangements accessible to small and medium enterprises were identified as necessary to protect endangered ecosystems. This requires better policy frameworks including standards to mobilize private sector support to the blue economy and ocean-based solutions.

30. The Committee expressed concern for the impacts of environmental degradation and climate change on human health, well-being, and socioeconomic development and urged for stronger regional collaboration and action to protect our planet. In addressing air pollution and climate change, the Committee pointed out key actions including coal phase-out, transitioning to renewables, promoting sustainable mobility, enhancing control measures, and strengthening regional collaboration on air quality monitoring as well as on open data and information sharing. The Committee welcomed the adoption of a regional action programme on air pollution and recommended synergies with existing multilateral cooperation mechanisms such as the Asia Pacific Clean Air Partnership, the North-East Asia Clean Air Partnership, the Acid Deposition Monitoring Network in East Asia (EANET), among others. The Committee welcomed the announcement of Mongolia to host an Asia-Pacific High-Level Meeting on Clean Air in March 2023 in support of operationalizing the regional action programme.

31. The Committee reiterated its commitment to achieving carbon neutrality and net zero emissions, supported by long-term low-emission development strategies, and enhanced nationally determined contributions in line with the Paris Agreement’s goal. Best practices and opportunities on nature-based solutions, carbon pricing, carbon trading systems, ocean-based mitigation solutions, and other emission reduction measures targeting carbon-intensive industries were shared. In addition to climate mitigation, the Committee called for strengthening climate adaptation action and resilience, including for low-lying countries and mountain countries which are vulnerable to extreme weather events, flooding, glacier melting, water resources depletion, and other adverse climate impacts and cascading risks. The Committee underscored the massive financial impacts and damages of extreme weather events such as floods, which may trigger climate migration and threatens food security. Decisionmakers were encouraged to develop appropriate legal frameworks to support green and blue economic developments. The establishment of a regional forum on loss and damage in alignment with the COP27 global Loss and Damage Fund as well as strengthening enabling environment with the private sector with green finance frameworks was suggested.

32. The Committee took note of the interconnectivity of the environment and human health considering COVID-19 and other natural disasters and called for nature-positive transformation and living in harmony with nature. Encompassing a one health approach to understanding issues such as long-range transboundary air pollution was emphasized. The Committee also exchanged best practices for reducing and reversing biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation. Expanding protected areas to cover critical biodiversity hotspots informed by surveys, strengthening regional collaboration on transboundary protected areas, developing local capacity for
forest restoration, and enhancing wildlife conservation were some of the measures mentioned.

33. The Committee called for increased regional efforts in promoting a lifestyle change for sustainable consumption and production, pursuing green growth, and promoting an integrated approach underpinned by cultural change. The Committee highlighted the importance of enhancing resource efficiency, reducing waste, and supporting a transition to a circular economy, including through incentivizing eco-friendly design, and mandating the use of recycled materials. Interrelatedly, the Committee expressed concern about marine plastic litter, emphasizing the need to reduce reliance on single-use plastics, strengthen plastic circularity, and ban imports of plastic scrap. A representative raised the issue of increasing chemical production and fertilizer use and highlighted the need for sustainable nitrogen management.

34. The Committee noted the need to improve regional cooperation on connectivity and measures to counter IUU fishing. Challenges of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) were raised in a common voice, underscoring that despite their minor contributions to GHG emissions globally, there are national-level plans and strategies for climate change mitigation. The resilience of marine ecosystems and resources could be placed at the center of the Blue Economy, increasing the significance of ecosystem health protection.

35. The need for sustainable urban development was highlighted, including the implementation of SDG11 and the New Urban Agenda (NUA) as a common developmental pathway for cities and regions. The importance of comprehensive urban planning approaches that include job creation, livelihoods, improved quality of life, protection of the environment, and climate action was emphasized. Several measures were identified to promote sustainable, inclusive, resilient, and livable cities. Strengthening comprehensive and participatory urban planning approaches, building the capacity of institutions, review of urban planning laws, and measuring progress against the New Urban Agenda was mentioned. The Committee called for enhancing cities’ resilience to climate change and ecological impacts, especially for coastal cities. The Committee expressed welcome of the 8th Asia-Pacific Urban Forum to be held in collaboration with UN-HABITAT in Suwon, the Republic of Korea in October 2023.

36. The Committee noted the importance of strengthening regional collaboration on environment and development to achieve the 2030 Agenda and well-being for all. The Committee welcomed regional efforts in promoting information and data sharing, technology transfer, technical assistance, financial support, capacity building, and south-south cooperation, among others. The Committee highlighted the importance of a whole-of-society approach in sustainability transitions and stressed the importance of partnerships with civil society organizations, the private sector, academia, intergovernmental bodies, and other stakeholders at the local, national, regional, and global levels. The Committee took note of several regional and interregional initiatives including the Astana Green Bridge Initiative, the ASEAN Green Deal, the Ashgabat Consensus for Action, the proposal to declare 2025 as the International Year for Preservation of Glaciers, among others.

37. The importance to enhance collaboration and partnership with the organizations of Indigenous Peoples, Women, and Youth for inclusive contributions to the protection of the planet and to ensure the environmental human rights for all was called for. The need for ecosystem-based solutions, increased green urban space, as well as strengthening of international, regional, and domestic collaboration, and networks between cities were highlighted.
Unlocking urban climate finance and promoting basic urban services such as WASH as well as socially and environmentally friendly urban housing were emphasized.

38. The importance to focus not only on resource efficiency and a green transition but also a just and inclusive transition was highlighted. Progress was also reported on the UNEA 5.2 Declaration, including the initiation of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to develop a treaty to end plastic pollution.

E. Adoption of the ministerial declaration on environment and development for Asia and the Pacific 2022 (Agenda item 8)

39. The Committee on Environment and Development adopted the Ministerial Declaration on Protecting Our Planet through Regional Cooperation and Solidarity in Asia and the Pacific and the Regional Action Programme on Air Pollution.

F. Adoption of the report of the committee on its seventh session (Agenda item 9)

40. The Committee adopted the terms of reference of the technical expert group on environment and development with additional amendments proposed by member States, as contained in (ESCAP/CED/2022/3/Rev.1, annex).

41. On the 1st of December 2022, the Committee adopted the report on its seventh session.