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Committee on Environment and Development

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Ministerial Declaration on Protecting Our Planet through Regional Cooperation and Solidarity in Asia and the Pacific

1. We, the ministers for the environment and representatives of the members and associate members of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific,
2. Having met in Bangkok from 29 November to 1 December 2022 at the seventh session of the Committee on Environment and Development, held at the ministerial level,
3. Emphasizing our firm commitment to tackling and overcoming the multiple challenges to our planet's environment, inter alia, climate change, biodiversity loss, deforestation, environmental pollution and all natural disasters,
4. Reaffirming all the principles set out in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development¹ and our commitment to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,² while taking into account different national socioeconomic circumstances, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities,
5. Recalling the Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Development for Asia and the Pacific, 2017, which was adopted at the seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific,³ as well as Commission resolution 77/1 of 29 April 2021 on building back better from crises through regional cooperation in Asia and the Pacific, resolution 76/1 of 21 May 2020 on strengthening cooperation to promote the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources for

¹ *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3–14 June 1992*, vol. I, *Resolutions Adopted by the Conference* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigendum), resolution 1, annex I.

² General Assembly resolution 70/1.

³ ESCAP/74/10/Add.1.

sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific, resolution 75/4 of 31 May 2019 on strengthening regional cooperation to tackle air pollution challenges in Asia and the Pacific, resolution 72/9 of 19 May 2016 on regional cooperation to promote the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific, resolution 72/8 of 19 May 2016 on fostering regional cooperation and partnerships to respond to the climate change challenge in the Asia-Pacific region and resolution 72/7 of 19 May 2016 on regional cooperation to combat sand and dust storms in Asia and the Pacific,

6. Recognizing the importance of the regional platform provided for more than 30 years by the ministerial conferences on environment and development in Asia and the Pacific and the need for periodic meetings at the ministerial level to provide regional leadership on environmental policies and strategies,

7. Taking note of the forthcoming flagship report entitled *Protecting Our Planet through Regional Cooperation and Solidarity in Asia and the Pacific*, which contains information on the current state of the environment in Asia and the Pacific and in which opportunities for regional action are identified,

8. Underscoring the findings of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services⁴ and the contribution by Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, entitled *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*,⁵

9. Reaffirming that a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is important for the enjoyment of human rights and for sustainable development in all its dimensions and that a sustainable, resilient and more equal Asia-Pacific region depends on determined action to reverse the current trends of environmental degradation and to urgently reinforce conservation, restoration and sustainable use of the environment for present and future generations,

10. Emphasizing that mitigation of and adaptation to climate change represent an immediate and urgent global priority,

11. Reaffirming that today's challenges require cooperation across borders, as well as across the whole of society, and emphasizing the importance of dedicated North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation for development partnerships and our strong commitment to multilateralism and international solidarity, including by leveraging synergies between the work of the Commission and its parent body, the Economic and Social Council,

12. Taking into consideration the opportunities arising from strengthened regional cooperation, and considering different national circumstances, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and

⁴ E.S. Brondizio and others, eds., *Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services* (Bonn, Germany, Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, 2019).

⁵ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability: Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, Hans-Otto Pörtner and others, eds. (Cambridge, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Cambridge University Press, 2022).

priorities, we, the ministers and representatives of the members and associate members of the Commission, resolve:

(a) To put human beings at the centre of concerns for sustainable development as they are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature for sustainable production and consumption, while pursuing biodiversity and ecosystem conservation, promoting mitigation and adaptation actions in support of environment-responsive coronavirus disease (COVID-19) recovery and sustainable development and addressing the three pillars of sustainable development in a balanced manner;

(b) To promote and strengthen ecosystem-based approaches and nature-based solutions to address biodiversity loss, restore degraded ecosystems, boost resilience, mitigate and adapt to climate change, support sustainable food production methods, promote health and contribute to addressing other challenges;

(c) To adopt the Regional Action Programme on Air Pollution annexed to the present Ministerial Declaration to support regional and domestic actions on improving air quality;

(d) To protect, conserve and sustainably manage the ocean and marine ecosystems, which will contribute to mitigating and reducing greenhouse gas emissions and to improving the food security and disaster resilience at the local and national levels;

(e) To promote sustainable, inclusive, resilient and low-greenhouse-gas-emission urban development to ensure healthy urban environments and address issues of rising urban poverty and inequalities, and to enhance livelihoods while reducing the adverse environmental effects of unplanned urbanization;

(f) To support participatory approaches to environmental protection, appropriate access by citizens to information concerning the environment, public participation, the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes and effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings;

13. Decide that the ninth session of the Committee on Environment and Development, in 2026, will be held at the ministerial level;

14. Request the Executive Secretary to support members and associate members by:

(a) Facilitating regional cooperation for sharing best practices and knowledge to mutually support efforts to achieve national goals of low-carbon transition and low-greenhouse-gas emission development strategies, including through capacity-building and technical advisory support;

(b) Facilitating efforts to combat air pollution through regional dialogue and technical cooperation under the Regional Action Programme;

(c) Facilitating regional cooperation efforts and programmes to protect the ocean, so as to accelerate the implementation of Commission resolution 76/1, in alignment with global frameworks such as the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development;

(d) Facilitating the vertical integration of urban policies through enhanced coordination between local and national authorities, and building the capacities of cities to manage urban growth and develop local climate actions, deploy smart city technologies, build resilient infrastructure and adopt nature-based solutions to minimize the impact of urbanization on the environment;

(e) Facilitating dialogue and the exchange of best practices and experiences on the promotion of access to information concerning the environment and public participation in decision-making processes through capacity-building activities;

(f) Enhancing the network of regional multi-stakeholder platforms for discussing, prioritizing and supporting action on environment and development, in support of the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the Sustainable Development Goals;

(g) Ensuring coordination with the United Nations Environment Programme and other United Nations bodies, funds, programmes and specialized agencies in the implementation of the present Ministerial Declaration, as appropriate;

(h) Reporting on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the present Ministerial Declaration at the ninth session of the Committee on Environment and Development, to be held in 2026, at the ministerial level.

Annex

Regional Action Programme on Air Pollution

I. Introduction

1. Nearly 90 per cent of the population of the Asia-Pacific region regularly breathe air considered by the World Health Organization (WHO) to be unsafe. Globally, more than 7 million premature deaths are attributed to air pollution, with the greatest number (two thirds) occurring in the Asia-Pacific region.¹

2. Air pollution is a growing environmental challenge common to many countries and cities across the region. Between 1990 and 2015, the region saw an estimated 19 per cent increase in annual population-weighted concentrations of PM_{2.5},² nearly double the 10 per cent global increase during the same period. Some pollutants affecting air quality are also climate pollutants, and many sources of air pollutants are also sources of greenhouse gases, making clean air actions critical to addressing climate change.

3. Unsustainable production and consumption patterns contribute to poor air quality. Economic growth and rapid urbanization in the region have been accompanied by an increase in air pollution.³

4. In resolution 75/4 of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) on strengthening regional cooperation to tackle air pollution challenges in Asia and the Pacific, member States recognized the pressing environmental challenge posed by air pollution.

5. Reducing air pollution is integral to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and, specifically, the relevant targets under Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good health and well-being), Goal 7 (Affordable and clean energy), Goal 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure), Goal 11 (Sustainable cities and communities), Goal 12 (Responsible consumption and production), Goal 13 (Climate action) and Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

6. In response to the regional and transboundary challenges posed by air pollution, the present Regional Action Programme on Air Pollution includes but is not limited to the following objectives:

(a) To promote science-based and policy-oriented cooperation for improved air quality management, taking into account good practices and relevant experiences from other regions;

(b) To establish an open regional platform for the exchange of information and best practices on air pollution challenges and solutions, as may be deemed necessary and appropriate by members and associate members of ESCAP;

¹ WHO, *WHO Global Air Quality Guidelines: Particulate Matter (PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀), Ozone, Nitrogen Dioxide, Sulfur Dioxide and Carbon Monoxide* (Geneva, 2021).

² PM_{2.5} means the mass per cubic metre of air of particles with a diameter less than 2.5 micrometres.

³ Climate and Clean Air Coalition to Reduce Short-lived Climate Pollutants and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), *Air Pollution in Asia and the Pacific: Science-based Solutions* (Bangkok, 2019).

(c) To promote domestic actions and regional cooperation on air pollution;

(d) To identify technical and financial resources to accelerate multilateral and cooperative action on air pollution;

(e) To foster dialogue and technical cooperation aimed at effective air quality management, including by addressing transboundary air pollution, with the competent authorities of members and associate members determining the thematic areas of such dialogue and technical cooperation.

II. Improvement of air quality management

7. There are differences among countries in the number of substances monitored, the means of collecting data and the values of standards. The Governments of countries in Asia and the Pacific have adopted the National Ambient Air Quality Standard for all or some of the main air pollutants, including particulate matter, nitrogen oxide, sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide, ozone, various polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons and heavy metals like mercury, lead and cadmium.

8. Possible actions related to air quality may include:

(a) Where they are not present, setting national ambient air quality standards in legislation or reviewing and improving existing national air quality standards, as appropriate, taking into account different national social, economic and technical circumstances and capacities and the guidelines of WHO;⁴

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

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

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

(e) Strengthening cooperation to exchange experiences and best practices.

III. Facilitation of air quality monitoring and sharing of open data related to air quality, as appropriate to the needs of members and associate members

9. The development of air quality management policies, where they are not in place, and their continual improvement, must be supported by robust air quality data and monitoring and science-based approaches. Sharing of open data on air pollution will strengthen the ability of Governments to further develop science-based policies.

⁴ WHO, *WHO Global Air Quality Guidelines*.

10. The continuous enhancement of air quality monitoring systems, if deemed necessary by member States' agencies responsible for air quality monitoring, can ensure progressively better air quality data. Members and associate members may provide assistance in the development of data and monitoring systems to members and associate members that have no or limited access to such systems, taking into account their national policies and priorities.

11. Satellite-based air quality monitoring could generate complementary data on air pollution and the dynamics of trends with regard to transboundary air pollution.

12. The use of stationary and mobile air quality monitoring technologies, as agreed by interested members and associate members, can support regional and subregional solutions to combat air pollution. Scientific research and pilot projects examining such technologies and the dissemination of reliable results may contribute meaningfully to cooperation among members and associate members.

13. National monitoring, data processing and reporting systems on air quality may add value if attention is paid to differences in exposure and vulnerability to air pollution among socially and economically diverse populations.

14. The impacts of sand and dust storms on air quality show the importance of accumulating knowledge, data and monitoring technology in the areas subject to such disasters. Members and associate members welcome the results achieved so far through existing research efforts and frameworks. National and multilateral monitoring, early warning and impact-based forecasting systems for sand and dust storms that are already in place in the region are critical components of disaster risk reduction strategies for a number of affected countries across the region.

15. Possible actions by members and associate members, as appropriate, related to the air quality monitoring and data sharing, which will be determined by members and associate members, as appropriate, may include:

(a) Strengthening the capacity of interested members and associate members, upon their request, to develop national and subnational inventories of air pollutants as an input to prioritize sectors and activities to further promote measures to improve air quality;

(b) Facilitating cooperation and information-sharing among interested members and associate members and relevant organizations working to reduce air pollution, on a voluntary basis and on mutually agreed terms;

(c) Encouraging the sharing of data and information, as appropriate, on a voluntary basis and on mutually agreed terms, by collaborating with regional and subregional entities, as appropriate, to support the analysis of pollutants and their sources at regional and subregional levels;

(d) Further developing sand and dust storms risk studies in risk-prone areas;

(e) Encouraging interested members and associate members to develop additional digital platforms for sharing open air quality monitoring data, building capacity and providing technical support;

(f) Encouraging the sharing of good practices on air quality monitoring, building upon the information provided by members and associate members, as appropriate;

(g) Upon request from interested members and associate members, improving national capacities regarding atmospheric chemistry, air pollutant inventories and air quality modelling, and facilitating the regional sharing of tools and open data related to atmospheric chemistry and air quality monitoring;

(h) Enhancing air quality management systems to improve the implementation of disaster risk reduction strategies and, if needed, their international components, which will be determined by members and associated members, as appropriate.

IV. Exchange of best practices and outreach

16. Subregional initiatives in North-East Asia, South Asia and South-East Asia, as described in paragraph 17 below, as well as region-wide partnerships, have been established to share and scale up the adoption of solutions to air pollution within and among subregions.

17. Possible actions related to the exchange of best practices and solutions may include:

(a) Sharing solutions on air quality management for various sectors of the economy;

(b) Engaging, as appropriate, with international organizations and subnational authorities to enhance science-based solutions, building upon the good practices and experiences of various platforms and legal instruments, as appropriate, such as the North-East Asia Clean Air Partnership, the Acid Deposition Monitoring Network in East Asia, the Asia-Pacific Clean Air Partnership, the Malé Declaration on Control and Prevention of Air Pollution and its Likely Transboundary Effects for South Asia, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution and the Asian Co-benefits Partnership, which contribute to air quality management in the region, and the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution, which represents an example of a successful solution for air quality management in the Economic Commission for Europe region;

(c) Utilizing the annual regional commemoration of the International Day of Clean Air for blue skies on 7 September as a means to share best practices and solutions;

(d) Encouraging engagement, as appropriate and applicable, with non-governmental organizations, private entities and other stakeholders in dialogues and forums on air quality management such as the Aerosol Robotic Network and the Pandora Asia Network;

(e) Facilitating the exchange of best practices and solutions through partnerships or multilateral activities aimed at accelerating action on air quality management, including by addressing transboundary air pollution;

(f) Facilitating academic research exchanges and the sharing of experiences on matters related to air pollution among academic institutes in members and associate members.

V. Facilitation of capacity-building and technical support for national action

18. It is important to prioritize the capacity-building of low- and middle-income countries to ensure the development and deployment of innovative applications such as machine learning, atmospheric chemistry and air quality modelling, satellite data analysis, data science techniques and smart city technologies.

19. Possible actions related to capacity-building and technical support for interested countries may include:

(a) Facilitating support for the development of national air quality policies and regulations, taking into account the WHO guidelines for air pollution and upon the request of members and associate members, build the capacities of governments and subnational authorities to establish and periodically review their air quality management regimes;

(b) Building the technical capacities of officials to collect and interpret data from innovative sources, including stationary monitoring, satellite imagery, machine learning, reliable low-cost sensors and remote monitoring, and carrying out quality assurance and quality control of these data sources;

(c) Identifying specific capacity-building needs and training programmes to support the establishment of national action programmes on the reduction of air pollution and the mitigation of its impacts on human health, natural ecosystems and crops, among others;

(d) Identifying specific capacity-building needs and training programmes to support reductions in air pollution in various sectors, such as agriculture, industry, public transport and solid waste;

(e) Providing technical assistance, including the sharing of information on good practices and technological solutions, for the agricultural sector to support efforts to effectively manage regional air pollution, including that caused by biomass burning;

(f) Promoting partnerships with the private sector to facilitate the development and use of clean technologies and air pollution reduction techniques in air pollution-generating sectors;

(g) Leveraging existing regional platforms to develop regional capacity-building;

(h) Developing multi-stakeholder partnerships to support capacity-building efforts, engaging North-South, South-South support mechanisms;

(i) Providing assistance and capacity-building to interested national agencies with a view to prioritizing those climate change mitigation and adaptation measures that may also contribute to the reduction of air pollution.

VI. Mobilization of commitment to multilateral cooperation

20. Existing multilateral cooperation mechanisms in ESCAP subregions have contributed in some instances to sharing information on best practices, national and regional policy developments, scientific cooperation and knowledge in the field of transboundary air pollution.

21. Existing cooperation initiatives in Asia and the Pacific provide a valuable contribution to furthering discussions and sharing experiences across subregions and demonstrate the existing commitment of members and associate members to cooperating on air pollution, including on the elements contained in the present Regional Action Programme.

22. Possible actions related to regional cooperation may include:

(a) Strengthening existing platforms for generating and sharing knowledge on air pollution initiatives, policies and technologies in order to strengthen institutional capacity, provide technical assistance on air quality management and support air quality assessments to identify solutions for clean air;

(b) Inviting members and associate members to designate national experts to contribute to regional scientific and technical activities related to air quality management, as appropriate, through the Technical Expert Group of the Committee on Environment and Development;

(c) Facilitating the implementation of the present Regional Action Programme and further regional cooperation on air pollution, including through the Committee on Environment and Development and other platforms for dialogue on air quality management, utilizing opportunities for high-level policy dialogue, as appropriate;

(d) Facilitating comprehensive engagement with major groups and other stakeholders in support of regional cooperation on air quality management, including by contributing to the implementation of the present Regional Action Programme;

(e) Supporting, as appropriate, existing multilateral collaborations in academic and scientific institutions focused on air pollution to expand their focus on and continue their efforts in the Asia-Pacific region.

VII. Functions of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific in support of the Regional Action Programme

23. ESCAP will provide secretariat services for the implementation of the Regional Action Programme and may discharge other functions assigned to it by its members and associate members.