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Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

6th meeting of the Interim Intergovernmental Steering Group
on Cross-border Paperless Trade Facilitation

Bangkok, 25 and 26 January 2021

**Report of the 6th meeting of the Interim
Intergovernmental Steering Group on Cross-border
Paperless Trade Facilitation**

**I. Matters calling for action by the Commission or brought to
its attention**

**A. Facilitating implementation of the Framework Agreement on
Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific**

1. The Interim Intergovernmental Steering Group on Cross-border Paperless Trade Facilitation decides to encourage its members to proactively support their Governments in becoming parties to the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific as soon as possible. The Steering Group requests the secretariat to promote accession to and ratification of the Framework Agreement by as many member States as possible, for the purpose of maximizing its benefits and impact, and to provide technical assistance to developing member States in their completion of domestic ratification/accession procedures. The Steering Group also requests the secretariat to study options for enhanced cooperation with other paperless trade initiatives and to study proposed ways to engage private sector and development partners.

**B. Preparation of a draft road map for the implementation of the
substantive provisions of the Framework Agreement on Facilitation
of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific**

2. The Steering Group notes the progress made by the Legal and Technical Working Groups and endorses the legal and technical readiness assessment checklists as well as the template for individual action plans prepared by them. The Steering Group decides that governance and institutional matters related to cross-border paperless trade will be discussed in joint sessions of the Legal and Technical Working Groups.

C. Operation of the Interim Intergovernmental Steering Group on Cross-border Paperless Trade Facilitation

3. The Steering Group agrees to meet before the first meeting of the Paperless Trade Council to decide on its future work and operation, and to continue during that time to develop supporting documents and tools related to the draft road map for the implementation of the substantive provisions of the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific. The Steering Group recommends that the first meeting of the Paperless Trade Council be organized as soon as possible, in accordance with article 11 of the Framework Agreement, to facilitate the implementation of the Framework Agreement.

II. Organization

A. Opening, duration and organization of the meeting

4. The 6th meeting of the Steering Group was held online on 25 and 26 January 2021.

5. The Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) delivered an opening statement.

B. Attendance

6. The meeting was attended by representatives of the following members and associate members of the Commission: Armenia; Bangladesh; Cambodia; China; France; Georgia; India; Indonesia; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Malaysia; Mongolia; Nepal; Pakistan; Philippines; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; Singapore; Sri Lanka; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Turkey; Turkmenistan; United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; and Viet Nam.

7. Representatives of the following United Nations bodies, specialized agencies and funds attended: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; United Nations Commission on International Trade Law; United Nations Conference on Trade and Development; and World Trade Organization.

8. Representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations attended: Asian Development Bank; Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation; Commonwealth; International Narcotics Control Board; International Think Tank for Landlocked Developing Countries; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development; and World Customs Organization.

9. A representative of the International Chamber of Commerce attended.

C. Election of officers

10. The following officers were elected:

Chair: Mr. Joyoung Jeon (Republic of Korea)

Vice-Chair: Mr. Md. Abdus Samad Al Azad (Bangladesh)

D. Agenda

11. The Steering Group adopted the following agenda:
 1. Opening of the meeting:
 - (a) Opening statements;
 - (b) Election of officers;
 - (c) Adoption of the agenda.
 2. Review of regional progress in cross-border paperless trade.
 3. Report on progress made in the implementation of the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific.
 4. Report on progress made by the Legal and Technical Working Groups.
 5. Discussion on the future operation of the Steering Group.
 6. Other matters.
 7. Adoption of the report of the Steering Group on its 6th meeting.

Annex I

List of documents

<i>Document symbol</i>	<i>Document title</i>	<i>Agenda item</i>
<i>General series</i>		
ESCAP/PTA/IISG/2021/1	Results and implications of the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation for Asia and the Pacific	2
ESCAP/PTA/IISG/2021/2	Report on progress made in the implementation of the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific	3
ESCAP/PTA/IISG/2021/3	Report on progress made by the Legal and Technical Working Groups in their mandated tasks	4
ESCAP/PTA/IISG/2021/4	Legal readiness assessment checklist for cross-border paperless trade	4
ESCAP/PTA/IISG/2021/5	Technical readiness assessment checklist for cross-border paperless trade	4
ESCAP/PTA/IISG/2021/6	Template for individual action plans	4
ESCAP/PTA/IISG/2021/7	Report of the 6th meeting of the Interim Intergovernmental Steering Group on Cross-border Paperless Trade Facilitation	
<i>Limited series</i>		
ESCAP/PTA/IISG/2021/L.1	Annotated provisional agenda	1 (c)
ESCAP/PTA/IISG/2021/L.2	Draft report	7

Annex II

Chair's summary of proceedings of the 6th meeting of the Interim Intergovernmental Steering Group on Cross-border Paperless Trade Facilitation

I. Introduction

1. Owing to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the 6th meeting of the Interim Intergovernmental Steering Group on Cross-border Paperless Trade Facilitation was held online (for three hours on 25 January and one and a half hours on 26 January 2021). Given the time constraints of the online session, and to facilitate an exchange of views on the substantive agenda items, country interventions were focused on the issues covered under agenda items 2–6. In the present Chair's summary, the details of country statements are not elaborated upon; rather, the points of convergence of views of the meeting under the above-mentioned agenda items are succinctly summarized.

II. Summary of discussions under agenda items 2–6

A. Review of regional progress in cross-border paperless trade (Agenda item 2)

2. The meeting had before it the note by the secretariat on the results and implications of the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP/PTA/IISG/2021/1). The Chief of the Trade Policy and Facilitation Section of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) gave a presentation on key findings from the latest completed survey and the ongoing 2021 survey, including a new survey module on trade facilitation in times of crises and pandemic.

3. The representative of Bangladesh suggested that the Steering Group discuss possible measures for accelerating the implementation of cross-border paperless trade, which had been affected by COVID-19. The representative of India, highlighting the progress made in that country with regard to trade facilitation, informed the meeting of efforts in cross-border paperless trade facilitation in India, including the Single Window Interface for Facilitating Trade.

4. The representative of the International Chamber of Commerce informed the meeting of the Digital Trade Roadmap, developed by the International Chamber of Commerce, and highlighted the facilitating role of model laws, in particular the UNCITRAL Model Law on Electronic Transferable Records.

5. The representative of China expressed appreciation for the secretariat's efforts in developing the survey and highlighted the importance of cross-border paperless trade in alleviating the impact of COVID-19. The secretariat reminded the participating delegates that their cooperation was needed in completing the questionnaires for the 2021 survey as soon as possible in February.

B. Report on progress made in the implementation of the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific (Agenda item 3)

6. The meeting had before it the note by the secretariat containing the report on progress made in the implementation of the Framework Agreement on

Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP/PTA/IISG/2021/2). The Chief of the Trade Policy and Facilitation Section of ESCAP gave a presentation on progress made, including technical assistance and capacity-building support provided as well as the current status of ratification of/accession to the Framework Agreement by the member States and its entry into force. The Chair invited representatives of participating member States to report on their status with regard to becoming parties to the Framework Agreement.

7. Representatives of the following members and associate members of ESCAP reported on their status: Armenia; Bangladesh; China; Georgia; India; Indonesia; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Malaysia; Mongolia; Nepal; Pakistan; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; Sri Lanka; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Turkey; and Viet Nam.

8. Armenia informed the meeting that it was reviewing domestic legislation in preparation for ratification.

9. Bangladesh informed the meeting that it had deposited its instrument of ratification and was in the process of preparing for implementation.

10. China expressed its wish for the Paperless Trade Council of the Framework Agreement and subsidiary bodies to be established as soon as possible, and encouraged other member States to join the Framework Agreement to jointly promote cross-border paperless trade.

11. Georgia informed the meeting that it was in the process of stakeholders' consultation.

12. India informed the meeting that it was in an advanced stage of the stakeholders' consultation process and informed the meeting of its development of a digital platform for the issuance of electronic certificates of origin.

13. Indonesia informed the meeting that it was in the process of stakeholders' consultation.

14. The Islamic Republic of Iran informed the meeting of the trade facilitation measures it had initiated through its national committee on trade facilitation, including online registration to minimize person-to-person contact and electronic issuance of bills of lading.

15. Malaysia informed the meeting that it was in the process of stakeholders' consultation.

16. Mongolia informed the meeting that it was reviewing domestic legislation in preparation for accession.

17. Nepal informed the meeting of its progress in trade facilitation and cross-border paperless trade facilitation, including the development of a single window system and modernization of border agencies.

18. Pakistan informed the meeting that it was in an advanced stage of the stakeholders' consultation process in preparation for accession and planned to seek cabinet approval upon completion of the stakeholders' consultation.

19. The Republic of Korea informed the meeting that it would accede to the Framework Agreement in 2021 and continue contributing to the works of the Legal and Technical Working Groups.

20. The Russian Federation informed the meeting that it initiated an inter-agency consultation on joining the Framework Agreement.
21. Sri Lanka informed the meeting that its national committee on trade facilitation was in the process of conducting a stakeholders' consultation but had been delayed owing to the impact of COVID-19.
22. Thailand informed the meeting that it was in the process of stakeholders' consultation.
23. Timor-Leste informed the meeting that it was in the process of stakeholders' consultation and planned to propose accession to the Framework Agreement to the Council of Ministers for endorsement in the first quarter of 2021.
24. Turkey informed the meeting that it was in the process of stakeholders' consultation.
25. Viet Nam informed the meeting that it was in the process of translating the text of the Framework Agreement into the Vietnamese language for internal consultation.

C. Report on progress made by the Legal and Technical Working Groups
(Agenda item 4)

26. The meeting had before it the note by the secretariat containing the report on progress made by the Legal and Technical Working Groups in their mandated tasks (ESCAP/PTA/IISG/2021/3), the legal readiness assessment checklist for cross-border paperless trade (ESCAP/PTA/IISG/2021/4), the technical readiness assessment checklist for cross-border paperless trade (ESCAP/PTA/IISG/2021/5) and the template for individual action plans (ESCAP/PTA/IISG/2021/6).
27. The secretariat reported on progress made during the 7th and 8th meetings of the Legal and Technical Working Groups, held in Bangkok from 14 to 16 January 2020 and online from 14 to 16 October 2020, respectively. It reported that the Working Groups had focused on the delivery of the three documents related to implementation of article 12 of the Framework Agreement, namely the two checklists and the template for the individual action plans, that were submitted under agenda item 4. It also informed the meeting of the other supporting documents and related tools they had worked on.
28. The Steering Group noted the progress made by the Legal and Technical Working Groups and endorsed the legal and technical readiness assessment checklists as well as the template for individual action plans. It decided not to change the name of the Technical Working Group. In that connection, the Steering Group had a discussion on governance and institutional matters related to cross-border paperless trade and decided to discuss those matters in joint sessions of the Legal and Technical Working Groups.

D. Discussion on the future operation of the Steering Group
(Agenda item 5)

29. The Steering Group agreed to meet before the first meeting of the Paperless Trade Council, to be established in accordance with the Framework Agreement, to decide on its future work and operation, and to continue during that time to develop supporting documents and tools related to the draft road map for the implementation of the substantive provisions of the Framework

Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific. The Steering Group also recommended that the first meeting of the Paperless Trade Council be organized as soon as possible, in accordance with article 11 of the Framework Agreement, to facilitate the implementation of the Framework Agreement.

E. Other matters
(Agenda item 6)

30. The meeting had no other matters to discuss.
