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Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
Paperless Trade Council of the Framework Agreement on
Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific

Third session
Bangkok and online, 6 and 7 June 2024

Report of the Paperless Trade Council of the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific on its third session

I. Conclusions and recommendations

1. The Paperless Trade Council noted the expansion of its membership from 11 member States at its second session to 13 member States at its third session.

2. The Paperless Trade Council welcomed the outcomes of the third session of the Standing Committee of the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific. It requested the Standing Committee and the secretariat to take follow-up actions according to the outcomes of the session and to report to it at its fourth session on the progress made in that regard.

3. The Paperless Trade Council recommended that all parties that had not yet done so take steps to establish a national committee for the implementation of the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific before the fourth session of the Paperless Trade Council. It was noted that the establishment of such a committee could be done through a change in the terms of reference of a related national committee or the creation of a subcommittee.

4. The Paperless Trade Council recommended that each party prepare or update, as the case may be, a national plan for the implementation of the Framework Agreement, to be presented at the fourth session of the Standing Committee.

5. The Paperless Trade Council called upon members and associate members of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific that are in the position to do so, as well as development partners, to provide technical or financial assistance to support capacity-building for the implementation of the Framework Agreement.

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6. The Paperless Trade Council encouraged all parties, both in their communications with trading partners and in the context of their participation in forums and meetings, to promote the Framework Agreement and encourage other States to accede to it.

7. The Paperless Trade Council requested the secretariat to carry out capacity-building, training and outreach activities, where possible, to support parties in their efforts to implement the Framework Agreement.

8. The Paperless Trade Council decided that the fourth sessions of the Standing Committee and of the Paperless Trade Council would be held in Bangkok and online, from 9 to 11 June 2025 and on 12 and 13 June 2025, respectively. The Paperless Trade Council also decided that the fifth sessions of the Standing Committee and of the Paperless Trade Council would be held in Bangkok and online from 8 to 10 June 2026 and on 11 and 12 June 2026, respectively.

II. Organization

A. Opening, duration and organization of the session

9. The Paperless Trade Council held its third session in Bangkok and online on 6 and 7 June 2024. The Executive Secretary of the Commission and the Chair of the third session of the Paperless Trade Council made opening statements.

B. Attendance

10. Representatives of the following States members of the Commission that are parties to the Framework Agreement attended: Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, China, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste and Turkmenistan.

11. Representatives of the following States members of the Commission attended as observers: Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Maldives, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka, Thailand, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Vanuatu and Viet Nam.

12. Representatives of the following offices of the Secretariat attended: United Nations Commission on International Trade Law and United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

13. A representative of the Eurasian Economic Commission, an intergovernmental organization, also attended.

14. In accordance with rule 11.3 of the Paperless Trade Council's rules of procedure and rule 12 of the Commission's rules of procedure, the Chair and Vice-Chair examined the credentials of all the representatives and found them to be in order.

C. Election of officers

15. The Paperless Trade Council elected the following officers:

Chair:	Mr. Sanzharbek Bolotov (Kyrgyzstan)
Vice-Chair:	Mr. Juvençio Martins (Timor-Leste)

D. Agenda

16. The Paperless Trade Council adopted the following agenda:

1. Opening of the session:

   (a) Opening addresses;

   (b) Election of officers;

   (c) Adoption of the agenda.

2. Statements by the members of the Paperless Trade Council.

3. Evaluation of the progress made in the implementation of the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific and discussion on the way forward.

4. Dates and venue of the fourth session.

5. Other matters.

6. Adoption of the report of the Paperless Trade Council on its third session.

E. Other events

17. The following seminars, side events and special sessions were held in conjunction with the third session of the Paperless Trade Council:

(a) 3 June 2024: presentations and discussions on greater regulatory cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region for boosting e-commerce and paperless trade;

(b) 3 June 2024: panel discussion on assessing needs and identifying joint actions to empower Asia-Pacific countries to reap development dividends;

(c) 3 and 4 June 2024: panel discussion, presentations and workshop on leveraging digitalization for sustainable trade facilitation by Asian countries belonging to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation;

(d) 3 and 5 June 2024: demonstrations of business solutions for paperless trade;

(e) 4 June 2024: presentations on cross-border paperless trade from a business perspective;

(f) 4 June 2024: panel discussion on trade in the digital age and aligning technology with regulation;

(g) 4 June 2024: workshop on advancing cross-border paperless trade and taking advantage of the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific;

(h) 4 and 5 June 2024: regional workshop on blockchain and emerging technologies for trade competitiveness;

(i) 5 June 2024: presentations and a panel discussion on the experience of Thailand in creating integrated digital platforms for trade digitalization;

(j) 5 June 2024: presentation on moving to paperless trade across the Commonwealth;

(k) 5 June 2024: panel discussion and presentations on the policy, finance and industry dimensions of accelerating digital trade;

(l) 6 June 2024: presentation of findings from a feasibility study for pilot projects to introduce electronic trade documents in Central Asia and beyond;

(m) 6 June 2024: presentation and panel discussion on converging approaches to the digital transformation of trade in the Eurasian Economic Union and beyond;

(n) 7 June 2024: presentation on United Nations tools for evidence-based trade digitalization.

III. Account of proceedings

18. The discussions held during the session have been summarized in an account of proceedings (see annex II).

Annex I

List of documents

Symbol	*Title*	*Agenda item*
General series		
ESCAP/PTA/PTC(3)/1	Provisional agenda	1 (c)
ESCAP/PTA/PTC(3)/1/Add.1	Annotated provisional agenda	1 (c)
ESCAP/PTA/PTC(3)/2	Review of the progress made in the implementation of the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific and the way forward	3
ESCAP/PTA/PTC(3)/3	Report of the Paperless Trade Council of the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific on its third session	
Limited series		
ESCAP/PTA/PTC(3)/L.1	Draft report	6

Annex II

Account of proceedings

I. Introduction

1. The third session of the Paperless Trade Council of the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific was held in Bangkok and online on 6 and 7 June 2024. The present account of proceedings does not contain details of any individual statements made, but a summary of the views of the Paperless Trade Council on the topics raised under items 2–6 of the agenda.

II. Summary of discussions

A. Statements by the members of the Paperless Trade Council (agenda item 2)

2. Representatives of the following members of the Paperless Trade Council made statements: Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, China, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste and Turkmenistan. The Paperless Trade Council noted the expansion of its membership from 11 member States at its second session to 13 member States at its third session.

3. The Paperless Trade Council was informed that substantial progress had been made by parties in several areas relevant to the implementation of the Framework Agreement, including the following: digitalization and simplification of customs operations; development and enhancement of electronic single-window systems; facilitated use of electronic signatures; collaboration with subregional and other partner organizations and Governments on trade facilitation; initiatives and pilot projects on the electronic exchange of trade data and documents; development of digital infrastructure; enhancement of the business environment; and promotion of both domestic and cross-border e-commerce.

4. Several representatives reported on the progress made by their Governments in implementing trade facilitation and paperless trade measures according to the results of the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation.

5. Several representatives reported on the progress made by their Governments in establishing and maintaining a national committee and making a national plan for the implementation of the Framework Agreement.

6. Representatives proposed that the parties to the Framework Agreement take the following actions for its further implementation, either individually or collectively, with the support of the secretariat where appropriate and possible:

(a) Update the collective action plan, taking into account the findings of the assessment of national plans;

(b) Analyse the national action plans of the parties and identify where coordination of efforts among the parties is needed;

(c) Promote public-private partnerships and bring together Governments, private sector entities and international organizations to collaborate on paperless trade projects;

(d) Strengthen cooperation among the parties and with other stakeholders, including through subregional mechanisms, and ensure greater regional cooperation;

(e) Continue to develop human capacity and further strengthen capacity-building and technical assistance, including through pilot projects;

(f) Support interactions between subregional organizations in the Asia-Pacific region, such as the Eurasian Economic Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, in the context of the implementation of the Framework Agreement;

(g) Explore opportunities presented by emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, blockchain technology and the Internet of things;

(h) Continue to mobilize resources for the implementation of the Framework Agreement.

B. Evaluation of the progress made in the implementation of the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific and discussion on the way forward (agenda item 3)

7. The Paperless Trade Council had before it the note by the secretariat on the review of the progress made in the implementation of the Framework Agreement and the way forward (ESCAP/PTA/PTC(3)/2). The secretariat made a presentation, covering the results of the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation conducted in 2023, the work carried out and meetings organized by the secretariat since the second session of the Paperless Trade Council and the status of implementation of the tasks in the collective action plan for the parties to the Framework Agreement. The secretariat invited the Paperless Trade Council to provide further strategic guidance on the way forward.

8. The Chair of the third session of the Standing Committee of the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific reported on its key outcomes. The Paperless Trade Council welcomed those outcomes and requested the Standing Committee and the secretariat to take follow-up actions thereon and to report to it at its fourth session on the progress made in that regard.

C. Dates and venue of the fourth session (agenda item 4)

9. The Paperless Trade Council decided that the fourth sessions of the Standing Committee and of the Paperless Trade Council would be held in Bangkok and online, from 9 to 11 June 2025 and on 12 and 13 June 2025, respectively. The Paperless Trade Council also decided that the fifth sessions of the Standing Committee and of the Paperless Trade Council would be held in Bangkok and online from 8 to 10 June 2026 and on 11 and 12 June 2026, respectively.

D. Other matters (agenda item 5)

10. The representative of China mentioned that his Government had requested the secretariat to circulate a non-paper on the establishment of an Asia-Pacific alliance for electronic bills of lading at the third session of the Standing Committee. He also indicated that his Government would make specific suggestions for further cooperation on such an alliance and called for the active participation of the parties.

E. Adoption of the report of the Paperless Trade Council on its third session (agenda item 6)

11. On 7 June 2024, the Paperless Trade Council adopted the report on its third session.