**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC**

# REPORT OF THE AD-HOC SESSION OF STANDING COMMITTEE OF FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT ON FACILITATION OF CROSS-BORDER PAPERLESS TRADE IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

United Nations East and North-East Asia Office, Incheon, Republic of Korea, and Online
11 December 2024

## I. ORGANIZATION OF THE SESSION

1. The ad-hoc session of the Standing Committee of the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific was held at the United Nations ESCAP East and North-East Asia Office, Incheon, Republic of Korea, and online on 11 December 2024.

### A. Attendance

2. The session was attended by the following Parties to the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific: 1) Azerbaijan, 2) Bangladesh, 3) China, 4) Iran (Islamic Republic of), 5) Kyrgyzstan, 6) Mongolia, 7) Philippines, 8) Republic of Korea, 9) Russian Federation, 10) Tajikistan, 11) Timor-Leste, 12) Turkmenistan, 13) Tuvalu; and 14) Uzbekistan.

3. Representatives from the following countries attended the meeting as observers: 1) Bhutan, 2) India, 3) Indonesia, 4) Kazakhstan, 4) Lao PDR, 6) Maldives, 7) Napal, 8) Pakistan, 9) Papua New Guinea, 10) Sri Lanka, and 11) Viet Nam.

4. Representatives from the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, World Customs Organization (WCO), and WCO Asia Pacific Regional Office for Capacity Building attended the meeting.

### B. Opening Address

5. Mr. Yann Duval, Chief of Trade Policy and Facilitation Section, Trade, Investment, and Innovation Division, in his opening address, emphasized that this was the first Standing Committee session held outside of ESCAP headquarters in Bangkok and expressed hope that this initiative would encourage more countries to host future meetings, thereby fostering a stronger sense of ownership and engagement among all Parties. Mr. Duval welcomed Uzbekistan, which acceded to the Framework Agreement in November 2024, as the 14th Party to this UN treaty.

### C. Election of officers

6. The Standing Committee elected Mr. Enkhbold Vorshilov, Counsellor and Advisor, Department of International Trade and Economic Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mongolia as chair and Mr. Shibir Bicitro Barua, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Commerce, Bangladesh as vice-chair of the ad-hoc session of the Standing Committee.

### D. Agenda

7. The Standing Committee adopted the agenda as shown in Annex 1.

## II. ACCOUNT OF PROCEEDINGS

### A. Review of the implementation of tasks following the third session of the Standing Committee and the third session of the Paperless Trade Council and way forward

(Item 2a of the agenda)

8. The Standing Committee reviewed the draft proposal prepared by the secretariat in terms of updating the collective action plan[1] and noted the substantial efforts made by the secretariat and the Parties in advancing the implementation of the collective action plan. The Standing Committee indicated that the updating of the collective action plan would require review and consultation among multiple different government agencies within each country, and therefore, requested the secretariat to formally invite the Parties to provide replies before the fourth session of the Standing Committee to be held in June 2025.

9. In updating the collective action plan, the Standing Committee in principle welcomed the Working Group on implementation of Article 8 of the Framework Agreement to review the action plan related to this article and provide suggestions.

10. The Standing Committee acknowledged that the UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation led by the secretariat, together with the Trade Digitalization Index (TDI) developed by the secretariat, could provide useful information to monitor the implementation of the Framework Agreement.

11. The Standing Committee recognized the importance of webinars organized by the secretariat and its partners in debating important issues related to cross-border paperless trade and encouraged the Parties to actively attend the webinars and revisit the webinar recordings if necessary. The secretariat also informed participants that for the capacity building webinar series, Parties were welcome to contact the secretariat on particular topics of interest.

(Item 2b of the agenda)

12. The Secretariat introduced the status of the Working Group on the implementation of Article 8 of the Framework Agreement. Under the guidance of the Standing Committee, seven Working Group meetings were organized in 2024. The Standing Committee took note that 57 Working Group members (including the national focal points of the Framework Agreement) from 12 Parties have been nominated to the Working Group. The Standing Committee called for all the Parties to nominate more experts to the Working Group, noting that the experts may come from various sectors such as industry, academia and think tanks.

13. The Standing Committee took note that Mr. Sung-heun Ha from the Republic of Korea was nominated and elected to be the chair of the Working Group during its fifth meeting held on 8 November 2024. Mr. Ha presented the results of a survey conducted

[1] The background document was circulated to the participants and was made available publicly before the meeting: https://bit.ly/4fnjvwb.

among Working Group members to capture their insights and recommendations on how to design and implement a Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA) under the Framework Agreement. Based on the results of the survey Mr. Ha proposed a possible way forward for the Working Group including drafting an implementation plan and preparing mutual recognition guidelines.

14. The Standing Committee recognized the substantial work conducted by the Working Group, including the comprehensive analysis of promising cross-border mutual recognition cases and efforts to shortlist possible models for MRA under the Framework Agreement. The Standing Committee agreed that the next key step for the Working Group should be to develop a clear implementation plan, ahead of the fourth session of the Standing Committee. This plan may help Parties to designate relevant experts and form task forces dedicated to major tasks. The Standing Committee pointed out that mutual recognition guidelines should support Parties to enhance collaboration while maintaining flexibility in respective implementation approaches to be adopted by different Parties.

15. The Standing Committee took note that, wherever possible, the provision of Russian/English interpretation for the Working Group meetings should be continued, and additional interpretation in other languages might be considered in the future as needed, to ensure broad participation of the Working Group.

## B. Discussion on the preparation for the fourth session of the Standing Committee and fourth session of the Paperless Trade Council

(Item 3a of the agenda)

16. The secretariat presented the draft recommendations on adopting international standards as part of the implementation of the Framework Agreement[2]. The secretariat elaborated that the number of recommended standards in the text was kept to a minimum to ensure these standards are relevant to all or most of the Parties. The Standing Committee understood that once it agreed on the text, it may propose to the Paperless Trade Council for issuance at its fourth session to be held on 12 and 13 June 2025.

17. The representative from United Nations Commission on International Trade Law introduced the following UNCITRAL instruments and their advantages: 1) UNCITRAL Model Law on Electronic Commerce (MLEC) 1996; 2) UNCITRAL Model Law on Electronic Signatures (MLES) 2001; 3) United Nations Convention on the Use of Electronic Communications in International Contracts 2005; 4) UNCITRAL Model Law on Electronic Transferable Records (MLETR) 2017; and 5) UNCITRAL Model Law on the Use and Cross-border Recognition of Identity Management and Trust Services (MLIT) 2022. The Standing Committee was informed that these frameworks could play an important role in helping to enhance the efficiency and validity of digital transactions in international trade, while ensuring legal certainty and interoperability.

[2] The background document was circulated to the participants and was made available publicly before the meeting: https://bit.ly/3P36pcS.

18. The representative from the WCO introduced the WCO Data Model. He emphasized that the model was a standardized framework designed to simplify and harmonize international trade data exchange and defined common structures to ensure interoperability between customs agencies, government entities, and the private sector. The model was aligned with the international instruments including the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) and the Revised Kyoto Convention, and could serve as a foundation for developing integrated systems such as Single Window platforms.

19. The representative from United Nations Economic Commission for Europe introduced the United Nations Trade Data Element Directory (UNTDED). She highlighted that UNTDED was a comprehensive catalog of trade data elements, used widely across organizations globally. UNTDED could facilitate the standardization of data content for both paper-based and electronic documents, making trade documents and their fields directly comparable, and therefore could support identifying duplication and reducing the number of documents required. It also directly supports the implementation of WTO TFA, particularly Provision 10.3, which encourages the use of international standards for trade facilitation.

20. The Standing Committee welcomed the initiative of drafting such recommendations and pointed out that internal consultation within each Party might be necessary for further reviewing the text of such recommendations. Parties were invited to review the text and provide feedback within 60 days.

(Item 3b of the agenda)

21. The Standing Committee reviewed the draft Programmes for the fourth session of the Standing Committee to be held in the afternoons on 9 to 11 June 2025 and the fourth session of the Paperless Trade Council to be held in the afternoons on 12 and 13 June 2025, both in Bangkok and online. The secretariat would circulate the draft Programmes to the Parties for their feedback by early February 2025, with an aim to finalize them by mid-March 2025.

22. The Standing Committee took note that the fourth session of the Standing Committee and the fourth session of the Paperless Trade Council would be organized as part of the second Paperless Trade Week to be held from 9 to 13 June 2025, which would feature capacity building and other events related to paperless and cross-border paperless trade in the mornings. In this respect, the Parties may consider inviting development partners to organize meetings and events during the Paperless Trade Week.

23. The secretariat reiterated that the implementation of the Framework Agreement should be mainly driven by the Parties. Therefore, each party was encouraged to submit specific proposals on implementing the Framework Agreement. A case for reference in this connection was that China had submitted a proposal on setting up an alliance for electronic bill of lading during the third session of the Standing Committee and third session of the Paperless Trade Council.

## C. Other matters

(Item 4 of the agenda)

24. No issue was raised under this agenda item.

## D. Closing

(Item 5 of the agenda)

25. The secretariat informed the meeting that the draft report would be circulated to the Parties by 18 December 2024, with a request for the Parties to respond with any comments by 25 December 2024. The Standing Committee would aim to finalize and adopt the report within 2024.

**Annex 1.**

**Ad-hoc Session of the Standing Committee of the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-Border Paperless Trade for Asia and the Pacific**

United Nations Conference Center, Bangkok

11 December 2024

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| 1300-1400 hours | | **Registration** |
| 1400-1410 hours | Item 1 | **Opening of the meeting**<br>(a) Opening remarks<br>(b) Election of Officers<br>(c) Adoption of the agenda |
| 1410-1515 hours | Item 2 | **Review of the implementation of tasks following the third session of the Standing Committee and the third session of the Paperless Trade Council and way forward**<br>2a. Updating the collective action plan and deciding any follow up actions<br>2b. Reviewing the work which has been carried out by the Working Group on implementation of Article 8 of CPTA and discussing way forward |
| 1515-1530 hours | | Break |
| 1530-1615 hours | Item 3 | **Discussion on the preparation for the fourth session of the Standing Committee and fourth session of the Paperless Trade Council**<br>3a. Discussing a draft document on recommendations on adopting international standards and deciding any follow up actions<br>3b. Draft agendas of the fourth session of the Standing Committee and the fourth session of the Paperless Trade Council |
| 1615-1650 hours | Item 4 | **Other matters** |
| 1650-1700 hours | Item 5 | **Closing** |