REGIONAL STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK for the Facilitation of International ROAD TRANSPORT
MINISTERIAL DECLARATION ON TRANSPORT DEVELOPMENT IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

We, the Ministers of transport and representatives of the members and associate members of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific attending the Ministerial Conference on Transport, held in Bangkok from 12 to 16 March 2012,

Recognizing the crucial importance of efficient, reliable and safe transport infrastructure and services to regional integration and the sustainable and inclusive economic and social development of countries in the ESCAP region,

Recalling Commission resolution 63/9 of 23 May 2007 on the implementation of the Busan Declaration on Transport Development in Asia and the Pacific\(^1\) and the Regional Action Programme for Transport Development in Asia and the Pacific, phase I (2007-2011), and Commission resolution 66/4 of 19 May 2010 on the implementation of the Bangkok Declaration on Transport Development in Asia,

\(^{1}\) E/ESCAP/63/13, chap. V.
Recalling also the Almaty Programme of Action: Addressing the Special Needs of Landlocked Developing Countries within a New Global Framework for Transit Transport Cooperation for Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries,\(^2\) the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States,\(^3\) and the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020 (the Istanbul Programme of Action),\(^4\)

Recognizing the need for long-term commitment and continuity in addressing critical issues in the transport sector to support sustained economic growth, improve the living standards of our peoples and further increase the competitiveness of economies of the region,

Encouraged by the successful regional cooperation that led to the entry into force of the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network\(^5\) and the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway Network,\(^6\) and progress in the formulation of an intergovernmental agreement on dry ports,

Recognizing that growth in intraregional trade can be further supported if regional transport corridors are expanded and bottlenecks removed,

Reaffirming our commitment to the implementation of the Busan Declaration on Transport Development in Asia and the Pacific, and the Bangkok Declaration on Transport Development in Asia,

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\(^3\) Report of the International Meeting to Review the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, Port Louis, Mauritius, 10-14 January 2005 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.05.II.A.4 and corrigendum), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

1. *Adopt* the Regional Action Programme for Transport Development in Asia and the Pacific, phase II (2012-2016),7

2. *Adopt* the Regional Strategic Framework for the Facilitation of International Road Transport,8

3. *Request* the Executive Secretary to continue to accord priority to the implementation of the Busan Declaration on Transport Development in Asia and the Pacific1 and the Regional Action Programme for Transport Development in Asia and the Pacific, phase II (2012-2016), especially to assist regional members and associate members in their efforts to realize the vision of a sustainable international integrated intermodal transport and logistics system,

4. *Also request* the Executive Secretary:

   (a) To ensure effective coordination with other United Nations and multilateral agencies as well as subregional organizations;

   (b) To collaborate effectively with international and regional financing institutions, multilateral and bilateral donors and private sector investors and international organizations to mobilize further financial and technical support for the wider development and operationalization of the Trans-Asian Railway and the Asian Highway;

   (c) To convene a ministerial conference on transport in 2016 to assess and evaluate the implementation of the Regional Action Programme for Transport Development in Asia and the Pacific, phase II (2012-2016), and to consider a future programme of work.

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7 Annex I.
8 Annex II.
The objective of the regional strategic framework is to help regional member countries and their development partners increase the effectiveness of facilitation programmes and projects and accelerate the development of international road transport through long-term targets.

The framework provides general direction for member countries and their development partners when formulating facilitation policy, agreements, programmes and projects as well as related measures. It also helps promote common approaches to addressing facilitation issues with a view to reducing the complexity of the present system.

The framework also helps bring together national, bilateral, subregional and regional efforts in a more coordinated way to accelerate the process of transport facilitation.

Recognizing the prerequisite nature of some of the non-physical barriers that prevent international road transport, it is proposed that the regional strategic framework initially focus on the fundamental elements of international road transport and the key modalities for facilitation.\textsuperscript{a}

\textsuperscript{a} If a country has more liberalized and simplified arrangements for some of the listed areas, it may focus on other recommended areas.
I. FUNDAMENTAL ELEMENTS OF INTERNATIONAL ROAD TRANSPORT

A. Road transport permits and traffic rights

1. Description of the issue
Across Asia, international movement by road is largely confined to border areas and a limited number of roads. Most transport permits are issued for only a single trip along a designated route by a specified individual vehicle. Another constraint to international road transport is the restriction of transit operations. As a result, goods carried by road often have to be trans-shipped at border areas or loading points along a designated route. This adds needless costs and delays to the transport process.

2. Target
Wider application of multiple-entry transport permits issued to a carrier for any compliant vehicle in its fleet. Such permits, valid for one year, could be used on multiple routes or road networks for both interstate and transit transport operations. In addition, multilateral transport permits should be promoted for wider application in parallel with bilateral transport permits.

3. Process
When member countries formulate or renew their bilateral and multilateral agreements on international road transport or hold consultations on the implementation of the agreements, they may consider adopting transport permits valid for multiple entries with one year validity and/or on multiple routes or road networks and allow their competent authorities to issue the permits to their carriers instead of particular vehicles.

B. Visas for professional drivers and crews of road vehicles

1. Description of the issue
Unlike seafarers and aircrews, professional road vehicle drivers do not benefit from streamlined global arrangements for the issuance of visas or temporary entry to undertake international transport operations. Visa issuance for professional road vehicle drivers is largely subject to bilateral agreements on visas. In recent years, some countries have tried to address the issue through
subregional arrangements. International organizations have also made an effort to help facilitate visa issuance for professional road vehicle drivers. In spite of this, there is still no specific visa category for vehicle drivers in many countries and in most countries in the region they are considered either visitors or foreign labourers for the purpose of visa issuance.

Professional road vehicle drivers have to go through complicated and difficult procedures to apply for visas and are generally granted only a single-entry visa each time. In some countries, drivers are required to apply for visas in person at embassies or consulates in major cities and wait a week or more to either obtain a visa or to learn that their application has been rejected.

As a result, visa difficulties continue to cause delays in the delivery of goods and sometimes require the changing of vehicles or at least drivers at border crossings.

2. Target
As a minimum target, regional member countries may pursue multiple-entry visas valid for one year for professional drivers and crews of road vehicles. Countries may also agree to a uniform set of documents and basic procedures.

3. Process
In order to achieve this target, the competent national authorities for international road transport can act as intermediaries to facilitate the issuance of visas by embassies or consulates. The competent national authority in one country may, as appropriate, prepare a list of professional drivers and exchange it with their counterpart in another country for onward transmission to ministries of foreign affairs, embassies or consulates. Alternatively, the competent national authorities may provide certifying letters along with guarantees from carriers when drivers apply for visas.

The transport authorities need to consult with ministries of foreign affairs when they negotiate subregional facilitation agreements that include clauses for visa arrangements. If necessary, they should request relevant authorities to negotiate bilateral/subregional visa arrangements for professional drivers.
C. Temporary importation of road vehicles

1. Description of the issue
In most countries where vehicles are permitted to cross borders, it is common to use a guarantee of some sort (such as a bond, a cash deposit through a local agent or the payment of a one-time charge upon each entry) to satisfy the requirements of the Customs authorities. Only a few countries in the region do not impose such requirements.

There exist a few international conventions relating to temporary admissions to which most countries in the region have not acceded.

The use of unified subregional agreements and a subregional guarantee system is not the most convenient solution for carriers, but it does help avoid cash or bond deposits or charges at each border and for travel through several countries. However, charges for the use of the documents and guarantees issued under this system can be a major concern. If such charges are higher than the one-time charge of a fixed amount at border crossings, the guarantee system loses its advantages.

2. Target
As a minimum regional standard, the application of international conventions on temporary importation should be encouraged.

3. Process
The countries that have not acceded to the international conventions on temporary importation should take steps to gradually promote the same. These conventions have identical commitments with respect to the temporary importation of vehicles. The countries that are already contracting parties may take action to ensure that practical arrangements for full implementation are put in place.

D. Insurance of vehicles

1. Description of the issue
Insurance is commonly required to be purchased at each border crossing

\[b\] The Customs Convention on the Temporary Importation of Commercial Road Vehicles and/or the WCO Convention on Temporary Admission (Istanbul Convention).
throughout the region, which causes delays and obliges drivers to obtain individual receipts for cash payments. Although subregional insurance schemes have been planned for many years, much remains to be done before such schemes can become operational.

2. Target
Third-party insurance should be used as a regional minimum standard for vehicles undertaking international road transport through the use of either the Green Card system\(^c\) or a similar subregional system.

3. Process
It is desirable for member countries to join the Green Card system. Countries in subregions that have road transport links with Europe may adopt the Green Card system for easy access to Europe. Countries in other subregions may develop subregional motor vehicle third-party insurance schemes compatible with the Green Card system while maintaining the long-term goal of acceding to the Green Card system. For countries that are not participating in any subregional insurance scheme, bilateral or trilateral arrangements based on the Green Card system may be considered.

### E. Vehicle weights and dimensions

1. Description of the issue
For many regional member countries, damage to roads and bridges caused by overweight vehicles is a serious problem which can be compounded by overloaded foreign vehicles. The problem exists partly because different countries have different technical standards on permissible weights and dimensions, and partly because some carriers desire to turn a higher profit through fewer runs with heavier loads.

At the same time, repeated weighing and inspections at border crossings and inland weight stations for international vehicles impede transport efficiency. Carriers have requested that weighing procedures be simplified and that the number of weighings and inspections within countries reduced.

\(^c\) See, for example, ECE/TRANS/SC.1/2009/6.
There is no international or regional standard on weights or dimensions of vehicles permitted to travel on roads. Member countries have been trying to harmonize or unify standards at the subregional level. Bilateral agreements on international road transport normally require carriers to observe the domestic standards of host countries, which are mostly different from the countries where the carriers are registered.

2. Target
For healthy and sustainable development of international road transport in the region, it would be helpful if permissible weights and dimensions of vehicles, including axle loads, became unified at the bilateral, trilateral, quadrilateral and subregional levels.

3. Process
A practical approach could be to unify such standards through bilateral and multilateral, including trilateral, quadrilateral and subregional arrangements. Member countries may also consider negotiating a control system for overloaded vehicles through bilateral and multilateral agreements. The control system may include fines together with warning notices and suspension of transport permits.

F. Vehicle registration and inspection certificates

1. Description of the issue
Currently, ESCAP member countries use bilateral or multilateral agreements to mutually recognize vehicle registration and inspection certificates. However, the use of characters of national languages in registration certificates and number plates is still common. This causes difficulties when border crossing officials attempt to clear vehicles for entry. It also causes difficulties for traffic police and will cause further difficulties when electronic clearance systems are introduced.

For mutual recognition of vehicle registration certificates, standardized distinguishing signs of the State of registration, detailed requirements of technical conditions and periodic inspections of vehicles as well as the standardized registration number plates or marks of vehicles need to be used. The registra-
tion number plates or marks should be composed of either Arabic numerals or Arabic numerals and capital Latin characters, as defined in the Convention on Road Traffic [1968].

2. Target
Adoption of the standards on vehicle registration certificates, number plates or marks, and country distinguishing signs, as contained in the Convention on Road Traffic [1968], should be encouraged.

3. Process
Countries that have not yet become contracting parties to the Convention on Road Traffic [1968] need to take measures to accede to it.

Countries that would find it difficult to accede to the Convention in the short term may consider adopting the standards contained in the Convention, as well as exploring the possibility of using other mechanisms that are consistent with that convention and avoiding the use of different standards in any bilateral and multilateral agreements into which they may enter.

II. KEY MODALITIES FOR FACILITATING INTERNATIONAL ROAD TRANSPORT

Valuable experience has been gained in the region, and a wealth of knowledge exists at the national, subregional and regional levels with respect to successful and less successful approaches to both the formulation and subsequent implementation of transport agreements. To provide a focus for collaborative efforts, cooperation and exchange of experiences among member countries, the key modalities described below are suggested.

A. Building an effective legal regime
International conventions, subregional and bilateral agreements have a vital role to play.

1. Establishment of a regional network of legal experts on transport facilitation
Promoting and implementing international facilitation conventions, formulating and implementing subregional agreements, concluding bilateral agree-
ments and harmonizing documentation and procedures all rely on national, subregional and international legal experts. A regional network of national and subregional negotiators and legal experts from governments, transport associations and academic institutions could therefore play a vital role by providing advice and promoting the harmonization and coordination of different legal instruments on transport facilitation.

Through the network, member countries and subregional organizations/ institutions would be able to do the following:

- Exchange information
- Coordinate with each other
- Pinpoint areas of legal conflict between different subregional agreements and their implications
- Suggest solutions to legal conflicts where a country is party to two or more agreements
- Suggest ways to connect countries located in different subregions that are party to different agreements the existence of which impedes
- Share experiences

The network might also help promote international facilitation conventions and the formulation and implementation of subregional facilitation agreements and assist in the development and improvement of bilateral agreements on international road transport. It would become a network of core professionals on legal issues surrounding road transport facilitation in the region, providing legal support for formulation and implementation of agreements.

The network may exchange information through electronic communication, seminars, training, expert meetings, group studies and individual studies. The ESCAP secretariat may provide secretarial support to the network and financial support for some years. In the long run, the network would operate independently with the secretarial support of ESCAP and undertake studies as requested by governmental agencies, ESCAP and other organizations/institutions.
2. **Accession to selected international facilitation conventions**

Commission resolution 48/11 provides countries in the region with a common and harmonized set of standards in the field of international land transport facilitation through an initial set of conventions\(^d\) to which countries in the ESCAP region could accede.

A study undertaken by the secretariat in 2006, as requested by the Commission, concluded with the proposal that three further international legal instruments were added to complement those recommended in resolution 48/11:

- (a) The Protocol to the Convention on the Contract for the International Carriage of Goods by Road, 1978;
- (b) The revised Kyoto Convention on the Simplification and Harmonization of Customs Procedures, 1999;
- (c) The Convention on Temporary Admission (Istanbul Convention), 1990.

Together, the 10 international legal instruments can provide a consistent framework for simplification and harmonization of regional facilitation initiatives in line with international standards.

Member countries that have not acceded to the core conventions, as amended, need to consider doing so. If acceding involves a prolonged process due to internal procedures, then member countries should consider adopting the standards set in the conventions at the level of national legislation as a transitional measure.

Effective implementation of the international conventions is as equally important as accession to the conventions. Member countries need to review the obligations of the international conventions together with their existing legislation and practices, and to adjust, as appropriate, their legislation, documentation and procedures relating to international road transport.

3. **Subregional agreements**

The key intention behind subregional agreements on international road transport facilitation is to open up subregional traffic, harmonize and simplify

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formalities and procedures and establish common standards while maintain-
ing consistency with international conventions. Effective implementation of subregional agreements has become an important but challenging task for most regional member countries.

The implementation of subregional agreements involves many ministries and authorities. It also requires amendments to domestic legislation, existing formalities and procedures, and the functions of some agencies and authorities. Strong political support from member countries is needed in order to implement such agreements. Financial and technical support from international organizations and institutions is also needed. Regional advocacy needs to be enhanced to help draw the attention of national Governments and the international community to this important issue.

4. Bilateral agreements

In view of difficulties in the management and implementation of numerous bilateral agreements on international road transport faced by many countries in the region, a regional strategy may be taken to apply international conventions and subregional agreements wherever possible and using bilateral agreements to cover the areas which cannot be realized through international conventions and subregional agreements. The development of a model guideline with a recommended standard structure for bilateral agreements on international road transport could assist member countries in better formulating and implementing numerous bilateral agreements while at the same time working towards greater harmonization.

B. Wider applications of new technologies

The application of new technologies, including information and communications technology applications can significantly enhance road transport facilitation. Building modern border crossings and international road transport equipped with new technologies and electronic declaration systems should be further promoted. The use of new technologies to facilitate border-crossing controls for international road transport is still relatively new within the region. Before such technologies can be fully utilized, legislation needs to be amended and existing formalities and procedures need to be simplified. Regional experience with innovative and integrated applications of new tech-
nologies to clearances and inspections for international road transport can be promoted through the exchange of experience, which may lead to greater levels of harmonization in the region.

C. Development of professional training for international road transport

As the part of the regional strategic framework, professional training of all stakeholders, including policymakers, managers and drivers for international road transport needs to be developed to ensure that they are competent to fulfil their tasks in international operations. Over the mid- to long term, it is desirable to establish national training institutions for national policymakers, managers and drivers undertaking international road transport. However, in South Asia and South-East Asia, subregional training institutions focusing on courses on subregional operations would be more helpful and effective in the short term and help overcome some of the financial and capacity constraints. In Central Asia and West Asia, which have stronger links to Europe, training for subregional operations may be undertaken in parallel with courses for interregional operations.

The ESCAP secretariat could provide assistance, defining the main subjects to be included in the curricula of training institutions, in order to promote the setting of common standards in professional training.

D. Establishment/strengthening of national facilitation coordination mechanisms

A comprehensive and integrated approach, with the involvement of relevant government ministries/agencies and the private sector, is required to address transport facilitation challenges effectively. Such collaboration is crucial to the formulation and implementation of various facilitation measures. Some countries in the ESCAP region have in place coordination mechanisms that could fulfil all of the tasks required and should be further strengthened to ensure that they are fully effective. In addition, mechanisms should be developed to promote the exchange of experiences.
E. Promotion of joint control at border crossings

Joint control at border crossings at the bilateral level, including single window clearance, single stop inspection, joint customs control, establishing priority clearance for certain kinds of goods (for example, perishable goods) on a reciprocal basis and reduction of control agencies at border crossings should be promoted in line with international standards. However, the complexity of joint controls and differences from border crossing to border crossing in the implementation of joint controls needs to be fully recognized and specific comprehensive and detailed studies and designs for each border crossing need to be undertaken before implementing joint control. In this regard, the sharing of experiences among member countries can help in ensuring optimum design in terms of infrastructure and operations.

F. Promotion of economic zones at border crossings, dry ports and logistics centres

Recent developments in free economic zones and joint free economic zones at border crossings, as well as dry ports and logistics centres, have provided new opportunities for authorities and road transport operators to overcome many difficulties in international road transport. The potential benefits in terms of facilitating international road transport and logistics need to be exploited.

G. Further application of facilitation tools

Facilitation tools, such as the time/cost-distance methodology, can help identify impediments to international transport as well as possible remedies. They should be further expanded and promoted with the support of transport ministries and other authorities as well as transport operators. The use of facilitation tools can help refine projects and measure the benefits derived.