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Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific

Sixth session

Astana, 27 September-2 October 2010

Item 12 of the provisional agenda

Consideration of the report of the senior officials

Report of the senior officials

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

1. The senior officials recognized that economic uncertainty, rising and volatile food, energy and commodity prices, and environmental change and persistent social inequalities had a serious impact on the regional development outlook. They also recognized that the period since the fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific had been a difficult time for the countries and people of the region. They highlighted the fact that the triple food, fuel and financial crisis had threatened to undermine economic growth prospects and that, at the same time, the region had experienced natural disasters and extreme climate-related events, including cyclones, drought and floods.

2. The senior officials emphasized the need for sustainable economic growth in order to ensure a good standard of living for the region's large and increasing population. In this regard, both the quantity and quality of economic growth were considered important for the region to move forward. For the Pacific subregion, senior officials recognized the need to address the risks posed by climate change, sea level rise and natural disasters, as a matter not only of quantity or quality of growth, but also of ensuring survival.

3. The senior officials stressed the firm and increasingly evident commitment to the goal of sustainable development by the countries of the region, which was reflected in the initiatives reported at the meeting. Governments and civil society had actively pursued sustainable development, including many initiatives to promote green growth, and especially in relation to the use of energy. The senior officials noted that significant progress had been made in mainstreaming environmental concerns into development policies.

4. The senior officials identified several approaches for implementing green growth in the context of sustainable development efforts. The

meeting emphasized the flexibility of the green growth approach and that each country should chart its own path based on its natural resource endowments and specific conditions. In addition, it was suggested that shifts to greener growth models should be undertaken gradually owing to the potential for stress in developing countries.

5. The senior officials noted the critical challenge of resource constraints and the related challenge of ensuring that resources are used to promote equitable socio-economic progress. They cautioned that any initiatives to limit the consumption of natural resources through eco-efficient, green growth, should not perpetuate inequalities or constrain the ability to meet the needs of the people.

6. Implementation of and discussions on green growth should also reflect the internationally agreed principle of “common but differentiated responsibility”. Similarly, the core principles of sustainable development—equity, poverty eradication, and the right to development—should be upheld.

7. The senior officials called on the secretariat and other interested parties to support the Pacific countries in their efforts to convene a special ministerial meeting for sustainable development in 2011 in the Pacific to review progress in implementing decisions and to prepare for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20 Conference), to be held in 2012.

8. The senior officials recommend that the ministers adopt the draft ministerial declaration on environment and development in Asia and the Pacific, 2010 (E/ESCAP/MCED(6)/L.3) and the draft regional implementation plan for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific, 2011-2015 (E/ESCAP/MCED(6)/L.4). Those documents would form a basis for action during the next five-year period, taking into account the diversity of development needs and capabilities of countries.

9. The senior officials also recommend that progress in the execution of the regional implementation plan be monitored, and a comprehensive review undertaken at the seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific, to be held in 2015.

10. The senior officials welcomed the Astana Green Bridge Initiative of the Government of Kazakhstan and endorsed it as one of the three outcome documents of the sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific for subsequent regional action (E/ESCAP/MCED(6)/L.5/Rev.1). The senior officials called on the international donor community and the private sector to support the implementation of the Initiative and requested the secretariat to take the necessary action to support implementation of the Initiative as an interregional Initiative.

11. The senior officials expressed their appreciation to the Government of the Republic of Korea for its offer of continued support to the Seoul Initiative on Green Growth for an additional five-year period up to 2015. They requested the secretariat to continue to provide support for the implementation of the initiative.

12. The senior officials expressed appreciation to the Government of Kazakhstan for generously hosting the Conference.

II. Proceedings of the Conference

13. The secretariat presented the documents for agenda items 2 to 7.¹ The following delegations took the floor: Afghanistan; Armenia, Bangladesh; Bhutan; Cambodia; China; Fiji; Georgia; India; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Japan; Kazakhstan; Kiribati; Kyrgyzstan; Lao People's Democratic Republic; Maldives; Mongolia; Myanmar; Nauru;² Nepal; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; Samoa; Singapore; Tajikistan; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Turkey; Turkmenistan; Tuvalu; Uzbekistan; and Vanuatu.

A. Sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific: trends, challenges, opportunities and policy perspectives (Agenda item 2)

14. The Meeting had before it the note by the secretariat on the item (E/ESCAP/MCED(6)/1).

15. Several delegations recognized that the document illustrated various key aspects of the challenges that were being faced by their countries. One delegation noted the specific resource constraints in relation to water and land. At the same time, another representative noted the need for a balanced assessment of the challenges.

16. Several delegations noted that green growth would contribute to poverty reduction, and reduce the vulnerability to risks posed by the converging economic, resource and environmental challenges. They acknowledged the role of natural resources in supporting rural livelihoods and the fact that those resources had been significantly degraded in recent decades. Several other delegations emphasized that pro-poor and green growth approaches should be based on sustainable livelihoods and sound management of natural resources and that governance was a critical requirement for better management of resources on which the poor depend. Many delegations recognized the urgent need to enhance the capacity of developing countries to manage the natural resource base sustainably.

17. Several delegations pointed out that climate change was a major challenge to sustainable development. Some delegations noted that climate change adaptation would be a critical prerequisite for green growth. Several delegations also noted that adaptation should be country-driven, including action at all levels and by different stakeholders.

18. The Meeting noted the multitude of initiatives that responded to the challenges identified in the document. One delegation suggested that the necessary changes to the economy would require new approaches not only for countries in the Asia-Pacific region but also for donors and the international community.

¹ See the annex for the list of documents.

² On behalf of Pacific small island developing States (Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu).

B. Review of the implementation of the recommendations of the fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific (2005), the Seoul Initiative on Green Growth, and the Kitakyushu Initiative for a Clean Environment
(Agenda item 3)

19. The Meeting had before it the following documents:

(a) Progress in the implementation of the recommendations of the fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific (2005) (E/ESCAP/MCED(6)/2);

(b) Progress in the implementation of the Seoul Initiative on Green Growth (E/ESCAP/MCED(6)/3);

(c) Review of the implementation of the Kitakyushu Initiative for a Clean Environment (E/ESCAP/MCED(6)/4 and Corr.1).

20. The documents were introduced by the Director of the Environment and Development Division of ESCAP.

21. Several delegations expressed satisfaction with the progress of national, regional and global initiatives regarding sustainable development and green growth, but pointed out that there was no one-size-fits-all approach and that countries needed to tailor green growth approaches to fit their own priorities. However, the emerging challenges pointed to the need for a focus on improving the quality of economic growth. Specific strategy and policy options were identified in E/ESCAP/MCED(6)/2.

22. Delegations highlighted the progress that had been made in mainstreaming sustainable development and environment into development plans. In the case of Fiji, sustainable development had been mainstreamed in the national policy and planning framework, and a comprehensive medium-term strategy, the Roadmap for Democracy and Sustainable Socio-economic Development, had been established for 2010 to 2014. In Thailand, there had been a significant shift in the approach to national economic and social development planning since 1997. Since then, goals related to improving the quality of economic growth had been part of the national sustainable development policy. These included goals related to the sufficiency economy philosophy of His Majesty the King of Thailand. The upcoming environmental quality and management plan would focus on governance, green growth, international cooperation, environmental conservation and restoration and other areas. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the sustainable development plan was being integrated into the five-year national development plan.

23. In reviewing document E/ESCAP/MCED(6)/3, the senior officials noted that, since its adoption at the fifth Ministerial Conference, the Seoul Initiative on Environmentally Sustainable Economic Growth had contributed to enhancing the capacity of member States to pursue green growth. A regional network for green growth had been established. In addition, under the Initiative, policy consultations had been conducted and leadership programmes for capacity development had been carried out.

C. In-depth review of critical environment and development challenges and response strategies in Asia and the Pacific

(Agenda item 4)

24. The Meeting had before it the following documents:

(a) Emerging challenges and trends in water resources management (E/ESCAP/MCED/(6)/5);

(b) Emerging challenges and trends in energy resources management (E/ESCAP/MCED(6)/6);

(c) Emerging challenges in inclusive and sustainable urban development in Asia and the Pacific (E/ESCAP/MCED(6)/7);

(d) Investment in the sustainable management of natural resources: emerging opportunities and policies (E/ESCAP/MCED(6)/8).

25. The senior officials reaffirmed the importance of sustainable water resource management. They noted that the document highlighted a number of important initiatives for integrated water resources management and for improving access to clean water and sanitation. In Kazakhstan, several steps had been taken to establish a closed-cycle water supply in major industrial facilities under its Zhasyl Damu (green development) Initiative. As a result, it was expected that 3 billion cubic metres of water would be saved each year. One delegation advised the secretariat to adhere to terms for which internationally agreed definitions existed.

26. Representatives highlighted relevant initiatives by their governments. Those initiatives included the National Solar mission, which had as its target the development of 25,000 MW of solar power in India by 2022. Thailand had also developed specific low carbon strategies, taking care of ensuring job creation and recognizing the potential for action through partnerships of stakeholders. A 15-year renewable energy development plan aimed to increase the share of nationwide renewable energy consumption to 20 per cent by 2022 and result in significant investment and emissions reductions. A three-point strategy would be the basis for a pathway to develop a low carbon society by 2030.

27. The representative of India noted the progress of that country in reducing energy intensity, as well as its commitment to reduce carbon intensity. The delegation of Bangladesh stated that sizeable Climate Change Trust Fund had been established internally and recently the Bangladesh Climate Change Resilience Fund had also been established. In India, a comprehensive national action plan on climate change had been established, featuring eight national missions. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, measures had been taken to reduce the energy intensity of the gross domestic product (GDP) and to increase the share of public transport in urban areas.

28. The senior officials expressed support for regional dialogue on energy security and energy efficiency. Several delegations stressed that the proposal to consider a regional carbon mitigation agreement and process similar to, though in detail different from, the UNFCCC, contained in paragraph 72 of the document E/ESCAP/MCED(6)/6 could undermine the negotiation process within UNFCCC. Any such proposal was therefore considered unacceptable.

29. The representative of Fiji noted that several urban development programmes, including slum upgrading and other programmes aimed at low-income communities, had been identified in that country. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, measures for air pollution control had been taken in its eight major cities.

30. One delegation recalled Principle 2 of Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, reaffirming the sovereign right of each country to exploit its own resources pursuant to its own environmental and developmental policies.

31. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, actions to promote sustainable agriculture included measures aimed at reducing the pesticide use per acre of land or per kilogram of produce, as well as increasing the crop per drop ratio and double it in 10 years' time. Moreover, measures were being taken to improve cooperation with the private sector to promote investments in biodiversity.

32. Several delegations noted that Asia and the Pacific was the most important region not only in terms of population but also in terms of mountainous ecosystems, and emphasized the need to give more attention to mountainous ecosystems, which had so far been neglected and were particularly vulnerable to the expected impact of climate change. That delegation emphasized the need to devise, within the next five years, mechanisms for avoiding conflicts that might arise between countries due to future water shortages.

D. Draft ministerial declaration

(Agenda item 5)

33. The Meeting had before it the draft ministerial declaration on environment and development in Asia and the Pacific, 2010 (E/ESCAP/MCED(6)/WP.1).

34. While recognizing the importance of moving towards a low carbon development path, several delegations emphasized that providing access to affordable energy, in support to poverty eradication and the achievement of Millennium Development Goals, was their priority.

35. The Pacific small island developing States emphasized that the draft outcome documents of the Conference and the concept of green or low carbon growth offered new solutions and concrete actions and represented an alternative strategy for pursuing sustainable development in the Pacific. Green growth had already been endorsed at the subregional level. Because of the risks faced, the Conference should extend its support for those subregions or countries that were ready to make a transition to green growth. Senior officials identified specific proposals for follow-up for that subregion.

36. Recognizing the importance of achieving sustainable development in the region, and recognizing the diverse development needs and capabilities of countries, the senior officials devoted a great effort to reach a consensus on priority issues to be reflected in the Ministerial Declaration. After intensive deliberations, the senior officials reviewed and amended the draft (for details, see E/ESCAP/MCED(6)/L.3).

E. Draft regional implementation plan for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific, 2011-2015

(Agenda item 6)

37. The Meeting had before it the draft regional implementation plan for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific, 2011-2015 (E/ESCAP/MCED(6)/WP.2), which was aimed at turning the “shared vision” on sustainability into action on the ecological efficiency of development in the region on the basis of existing efforts related to sustainable development and of the commitment expected to emanate from the sixth Ministerial Conference. It identified programme areas at the regional, subregional and national levels that might be necessary to support the process, as well as regional and subregional initiatives for which various international partners had committed to provide support.

38. Partner organizations United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) indicated their availability and intention to support the regional implementation plan through technical cooperation, capacity-building and by key projects in the proposed programme areas.

39. The representative of UNIDO emphasized that organization’s commitment to executing the regional implementation plan. The main areas of UNIDO support included enhancing the ecological efficiency of economic growth and improving energy resources management for sustainable development. The senior officials noted the commitment from UNIDO to promote and accelerate sustainable industrial development in developing countries and economies in transition through technical support and the sharing of knowledge and best practices.

40. The representative of UNEP highlighted its efforts to support a shift towards a greener growth paradigm, coupled with the need for a reform of the international governance system so that the global community could respond more effectively to the threats facing the ecosystem. The senior officials noted the commitment of UNEP to extend its support to member States to make the green economy a reality in economic planning and development strategies.

41. The representative of ADB highlighted the history of support which ADB had been providing the region through environmental lending and technical assistance. The key intervention modalities of ADB included public sector lending, policy reform, institutional strengthening, promoting private sector participation and investments to improve the environmental sustainability of key development sectors, such as energy, water, transport, agriculture and natural resources. Financing provided by ADB was increasingly focused on promoting environmental sustainability. The representative of ADB confirmed that support for green growth in the region would continue, and offered the Bank’s support to the execution of the new regional implementation plan for sustainable development, particularly by: (a) promoting transitions to sustainable infrastructure; (b) improving natural resource management and ecosystem integrity; and (c) enhancing environmental governance and management capacities.

42. Keeping in mind the importance of the Regional Implementation Plan, the Senior officials made great efforts to overcome the differences in their expectations from the plan and priorities for activities to be included in

the plan. While some delegations stressed the need to maintain a broad approach to sustainable development without over-emphasizing green growth in the regional implementation plan, other delegations maintained that green growth should be specified, given the outcomes of the previous MCED, among other reasons.

43. Several delegations highlighted specific requirements and shortcomings that would need to be addressed as the region moved forward to implement green growth and other approaches to sustainable development. Several other delegations pointed out that further progress would require creating an enabling environment in terms of regulations, investment, technology and capacity development. A number of delegations pointed out that policy and planning capacities, especially in the energy and water sectors and in land use valuation, would need to be developed further. Some delegations noted the importance of partnership in the application of green growth. Several delegations emphasized the need for transfer of technological and financial resources, in particular for clean and renewable energy infrastructure and for supporting businesses in adopting green practices.

44. Some delegations pointed out that progress towards sustainable development would require a change in the perception that environmental sustainability was an obstacle to growth. Thus, there was a need to provide information to convince the people that green growth could provide jobs and alleviate poverty. These delegations also pointed out the different strategies that would be required for different groups in society, depending on their incomes and existing consumption patterns.

45. After extensive negotiations, the senior officials amended the draft regional implementation plan for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific, 2011-2015 (for details, see E/ESCAP/MCED(6)/L.4).

F. Draft Astana “Green Bridge” Initiative (Agenda item 7)

46. The Meeting had before it document E/ESCAP/MCED(6)/10, which was introduced by the Government of Kazakhstan. The proposal of Kazakhstan, the Astana “Green Bridge” Initiative, built on the successful examples of the Kitakyushu Initiative and the Seoul Initiative on Green Growth, which had been adopted at the fourth and fifth Ministerial Conferences, respectively. The draft Astana Initiative proposed a partnership between Asia and the Pacific and Europe in order to implement green growth and effect the related technology transfer in five thematic areas: eco-efficient use of natural resources and investment in ecosystem services; low carbon development and adaptation to climate change; promotion of sustainable urban development; Promotion of green business and green technology; and promotion of sustainable lifestyles and improvement of quality of life. The proposal highlighted the unique opportunity to build on a common vision of environment and development, merging the finest achievements of both regional processes. Among the first steps towards implementing the Initiative would be the establishment of a green bridge office in Astana to provide all partners with technical support and to disseminate information on best practices and achievements related to the thematic priorities of the Initiative.

47. The Meeting welcomed the Astana “Green Bridge” Initiative proposed by the Government of Kazakhstan and discussed the procedure to

consider the Initiative and its implementation arrangements. The Meeting emphasized the need to secure adequate funding for the implementation of the Initiative and to allow member States and other interested parties to take part in it effectively. One delegation from the Pacific called for the implementation arrangements of the Initiative to enable effective involvement by Pacific countries.³

48. The meeting agreed to endorse the Astana "Green Bridge" Initiative, which would reflect technical revisions proposed by the Government of Kazakhstan (for details see E/ESCAP/MCED(6)/L.5/Rev.1)

III. Organization of the Conference

A. Opening of the Conference

(Agenda item 1)

49. The sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific 2005 was held in Astana from 27 September to 2 October 2010.

50. In his opening statement, the Director of the Environment and Development Division of ESCAP expressed appreciation to the host country, Kazakhstan, for its hospitality and excellent preparations for the Conference. He stated that the region had become vulnerable to converging economic, resource depletion, and environmental challenges. Fundamental transformation of current economic growth patterns was needed to mitigate future risk. He noted that that paradigm shift would be effective only if embraced and pursued collectively by the region as a whole, and reiterated the commitment of ESCAP in assisting member States in that endeavour.

51. H.E. Mr. Nurgali Ashimov, Minister of Environmental Protection of Kazakhstan, welcomed participants to Astana, noting that Astana was at the centre of the Eurasian region. He noted that the representatives would discuss several outcome documents, among them the Astana "Green Bridge" Initiative, which would open prospects for partnerships in the implementation of the outcomes of both the Asia-Pacific and the Environment for Europe processes. He noted the challenges faced by senior officials with respect to the preparation of the documents so that the ministers could approve decisions and plans in confidence. Those decisions and plans, he noted, would form the basis for future action.

B. Attendance

52. The Senior Officials Segment of the Conference was attended by representatives of the following members and associate members of ESCAP: Afghanistan; Armenia; Azerbaijan; Bangladesh; Bhutan; Brunei Darussalam; Cambodia; China; Fiji; Georgia; India; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Japan; Kazakhstan; Kiribati; Kyrgyzstan; Lao People's Democratic Republic; Malaysia; Maldives; Marshall Islands; Mongolia; Myanmar, Nauru; Nepal; Philippines; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; Samoa; Singapore; Sri Lanka; Tajikistan; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Tonga; Turkey; Turkmenistan; Tuvalu; Uzbekistan; Vanuatu; and Viet Nam.

³ For details of the Initiative as submitted to the ministerial segment, see E/ESCAP/MCED(6)/L.5.

53. Observers from the Czech Republic, Germany and Switzerland were present.

54. Representatives of the following United Nations bodies and specialized agencies also attended: United Nations Development Programme; United Nations Economic Commission for Europe; United Nations Environment Programme; United Nations Industrial Development Organization; World Health Organization; and World Meteorological Organization.

55. Representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations also attended: Asian Development Bank and European Union.

56. Representatives of the following non-governmental organizations, other entities and observers also attended: the Commonwealth of Independent States; Society for Conservation and Protection of Environment; Global Green Growth Institute and Institute for Global Environmental Strategies.

57. The senior officials agreed that the key outcome documents of the Conference, namely the ministerial declaration on environment and development in Asia and the Pacific, the Astana “Green Bridge” Initiative, and the regional implementation plan for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific, 2011-2015, would be reviewed and revised in working group sessions open to the participation of all country representatives.

C. Election of officers

58. The Meeting elected H.E. Mr. Nurgali Ashimov (Kazakhstan) Chairperson; H.E. Mr. Mattlan Zackhras (Marshall Islands), Mr. Mohammad Shaheduzzaman (Bangladesh) and Ms. Keobang A. Keola (Lao People’s Democratic Republic) Vice Chairpersons; and Mr. Kim Yong Jin (Republic of Korea), Rapporteur.

59. The Meeting also agreed that H.E. Ms. Eldana Sadvakassova (Kazakhstan) would be designated as co-Chairperson specifically to support the negotiation of texts.

D. Agenda

60. The senior officials adopted the following agenda:

1. Opening of the Conference:
 - (a) Opening addresses;
 - (b) Election of officers;
 - (c) Adoption of the agenda.
2. Sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific: trends, challenges, opportunities and policy perspectives.
3. Review of the implementation:
 - (a) The recommendations of the fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific, 2005;

- (b) The Seoul Initiative on Green Growth;
 - (c) The Kitakyushu Initiative for a Clean Environment.
4. In-depth review of critical environment and development challenges and response strategies in Asia and the Pacific.
 5. Draft ministerial declaration.
 6. Draft regional implementation plan for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific, 2011-2015.
 7. Draft Astana “Green Bridge” initiative.
 8. Other matters.
 9. Adoption of the report of the senior officials.

E. Other matters

61. No other matters were discussed.

F. Adoption of the report of the senior officials

62. The senior officials adopted their report at 0930 hrs, on 1 October 2010.

Annex

List of documents

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