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Management issues: Midterm review of the functioning of the conference structure of the Commission

Midterm review of the functioning of the conference structure of the Commission

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The present document is submitted pursuant to paragraph 7 of resolution 64/1 on the restructuring of the conference structure of the Commission. The purpose of the document is to report to the Commission on whether the conference structure has served the purpose of improving efficiency and attracting higher and wider representation from members and associate members. In preparing the document, the secretariat conducted a review and analysis of documents and assessments of individual meetings held under the conference structure, including survey questionnaires completed by member States. Countries provided further input through informal consultations and several sessions of the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission. Consultations and discussions were also held in a resource group comprising key members of the ESCAP secretariat. The secretariat also utilized its empirical knowledge and experience gained in implementing the new conference structure. The document frames the key issues identified by member States for further consideration and possible action by the Commission. In addition to assessing the impact of the revised conference structure, it contains a brief description of the practices of the other United Nations regional commissions. The document concludes with a set of recommendations that the Commission may wish to consider in its deliberations.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 7 of resolution 64/1 on the restructuring of the conference structure of the Commission; it continues a pattern of periodic review by the Commission of its “conference structure”¹ to ensure that it functions in an efficient and effective manner to respond to the changing needs and priorities of member States.

2. In resolution 64/1, the Commission noted its unique role as the most representative body for the Asian and Pacific region, its comprehensive mandate as the main economic and social development centre of the United Nations system for the Asia-Pacific region, the importance of further cooperation between the Commission and subregional organizations, and the need to achieve synergies and build effective partnerships.

3. In the same resolution the Commission also revised its conference structure, establishing, inter alia, eight committees subsidiary to the Commission and a list of issues to be addressed by them, the frequency and duration of the Commission and committee sessions and the terms of reference of the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission (ACPR).²

¹ For purposes of the present document, the term “conference structure” refers to the Commission, the eight sectoral committees, the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission, the five regional institutions and their governing councils, ad hoc ministerial conferences and other intergovernmental meetings.

² See Commission resolution 64/1 of 30 April 2008, annex III.

4. Furthermore, in operative paragraphs 6 and 7 of resolution 64/1, the Commission requested the Executive Secretary to (a) undertake systematic monitoring and evaluation of the conference structure and its link to the programme priorities of the Commission; and (b) report to the Commission at its sixty-seventh session on the implementation of that resolution, focusing in particular on whether the conference structure served the purpose of improving efficiency and attracting higher and wider representation from members and associate members. These actions would serve as the basis for a midterm review of the functioning of the conference structure to be conducted during the sixty-seventh session.

5. In preparing the document, the secretariat conducted a review and analysis of documents and assessments of individual meetings held under the conference structure, including survey questionnaires completed by member States. Countries provided further input through informal consultations, the 334th and 335th sessions of ACPR and the ACPR retreat held in Hua Hin, Thailand, on 9 and 10 February 2011.

6. Consultations and discussions were also held among a resource group comprising key members of the ESCAP secretariat: the Secretary of the Commission, representatives of operational divisions and staff of the Conference Management Unit, Conference Services Section and United Nations ESCAP Information Services. Recommendations made by the Office of Internal Oversight Services and past evaluations of the regional institutions were taken into account, as was a summary of the working methods of other United Nations regional commissions.

7. Section II addresses the implementation of resolution 64/1 and assesses the impact of the revised conference structure, particularly from the point of view of member States, on whether the revised conference structure has served the purpose of improving efficiency and attracting higher and wider representation from members and associate members.

8. Section III contains a brief description of the practices of the other United Nations regional commissions. Section IV frames key issues identified by member States for further consideration and possible action by the Commission. Section V concludes the report and furnishes a set of recommendations for the consideration of the Commission. Depending on the outcome of its deliberations, the Commission may wish to (a) reaffirm the functioning of the conference structure, as revised in resolution 64/1,³ and conduct a final review at its sixty-ninth session; and (b) make a decision to carry out the specific recommendations identified in paragraph 69.

II. Implementation of resolution 64/1

9. The revised conference structure began functioning in the second half of 2008, when the first sessions of the sectoral committees were held under their new terms of reference.⁴ Since then, the Commission held its sixty-

³ In addition to the requests contained in operative paragraphs 6 and 7 of resolution 64/1, the Commission requested the Executive Secretary to undertake other actions related to the revision of the conference structure. The secretariat's response to those issues is contained in E/ESCAP/67/3.

⁴ Commission resolution 64/1 of 30 April 2008, annex II, contains a list of issues to be addressed by the committees subsidiary to the Commission.

fifth session in Bangkok, its sixty-sixth session in Incheon, Republic of Korea, and the sectoral committees have all met at least once under the new structure.⁵ Meanwhile, the meetings of the Special Bodies on Least Developed and Landlocked Developing Countries and on Pacific Island Developing Countries have been successfully integrated into the senior officials segment of the Commission session, with the status of the special bodies having been made commensurate with the Committees of the Whole.

10. In accordance with operative paragraph 6 of resolution 64/1, the secretariat has undertaken systematic monitoring and evaluation of the conference structure by collecting data through survey questionnaires distributed at both of the Commission sessions held since the adoption of that resolution. Responses were received from 66 per cent of the member States that had representatives in attendance at those sessions (35 of 47 States in 2009 and 28 of 48 States in 2010).

11. Survey questionnaires were also distributed at the sessions of the eight sectoral committees held between 2008 and 2010, and responses were received from 67 per cent of the member States with representatives attending those committee sessions.

12. The secretariat has maintained dialogue with ACPR on the outcome of each session of the Commission and committees, and has also undertaken an internal “lessons learned” review after each session.

A. Overall role of the Commission

13. As mentioned above, the preambular paragraphs of resolution 64/1 noted the Commission’s unique role as the most representative body for the Asian and Pacific region and its comprehensive mandate as the main economic and social development centre of the United Nations system for the Asian and Pacific region. The resolution also noted the importance of further cooperation between the Commission and subregional organizations and the need to achieve synergies and build effective partnerships.

14. In this context, respondents to the survey questionnaires suggested that there had been a steady rise in the view that the Commission was being recognized as the most representative body for the Asia-Pacific region. They cited several contributing factors: a more focused programme of work, incorporating the vision of inclusive and sustainable development; and improved quality of the substantive outputs, including analytical and normative work, and capacity-building. Other views were that the Commission had provided the regional architecture to track economic and social decisions, share good practices among the different subregions and cast the debate on issues that fall within the social and economic agenda to enable growth with equity in the Asia-Pacific region. Further, the secretariat had also strengthened partnerships with subregional organizations, contributing in particular to the connectivity agenda of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and engaging in a range of initiatives with the Economic Cooperation Organization, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia.

⁵ In 2010 the Committees on Social Development; Transport; Information and Communications Technology; and Statistics held their second sessions.

15. Supported by its eight subprogrammes, ESCAP has sought to achieve three development results: (a) Governments of member States would have more effective, inclusive and sustainable development policies for addressing development from a multidisciplinary perspective in order to narrow development gaps and build resiliency; (b) global processes would be shaped by a stronger coordinated regional voice, and countries would be supported in implementing international commitments; and (c) regional cooperation mechanisms and institutional frameworks would be in place to promote regional integration and inclusive development.

16. According to feedback from member States relating to the conference structure and its link to the programme priorities of the Commission, virtually all countries concur with the view that the Commission and its revised conference structure are relevant (97 per cent) and fulfil the role described in its terms of reference (90 per cent). The majority also consider that topics covered by the Commission and committees reflect the current needs and priorities of the region (87 per cent).

17. The sixty-sixth session of the Commission, in particular, demonstrated the participation and engagement of member States: 48 members and associate members were represented at that meeting, with 27 participants at the ministerial level,⁶ including four Heads of State and Government. A total of 195 interventions were made by delegations during the deliberations at that session.

B. Improving efficiency under the revised conference structure

18. The secretariat has continuously monitored the functioning of the revised conference structure and has also acted on the advice of the chair of the sixty-fifth session to further streamline the Commission's proceedings, which has led to, among other things, a greater focus and consolidation of documents prepared for the Commission (from 38 documents for the sixty-fourth session in 2008 to 30 documents for the sixty-fifth session in 2009; 26 documents for the sixty-sixth session in 2010; and 20 documents for the sixty-seventh session in 2011). At the sixty-sixth session of the Commission, parallel meetings of the Committees of the Whole were reduced from three to two, thus improving efficiency in the conduct of the meetings, reducing costs and enabling countries with small delegations to cover the deliberations. A results-based reporting approach, rather than an activity-based one, has been emphasized, leading to more focused documents that enable countries to make informed decisions at the Commission and committee sessions.

19. Apart from general positive feedback, some member States provided additional comments on how to further improve aspects of the revised conference structure in order to strengthen its efficiency, as well as attract even higher and wider representation from members and associate members. Those views are summarized below.

20. Of the member States, 94 per cent (59 of the 63 members with representatives attending the Commission session that responded to the questionnaire) indicated that the benefits of their attendance at Commission sessions justified the resources they had invested to do so; they cited the

⁶ Ministerial-level representatives comprise ministers, vice-ministers, deputy ministers, assistant ministers or their equivalents.

ministerial round tables, other high-level panels and the deliberations of the special bodies as the most successful features of the meetings. Through the survey questionnaires and at ACPR sessions, other States expressed the view that the number of discussions could possibly be reduced. The time allocated to side events (panels, round tables, forums) could be spent on extending plenary sessions of the senior officials segment in an effort to make them more interactive and not serve as platforms for countries to read out prepared statements.

21. Some delegations felt that the overall relevance and outcome of the Commission sessions could be improved by providing opportunities for developing countries, particularly those with special needs, to meet with developed or donor countries to discuss possible technical assistance projects or other activities of mutual interest emerging from the theme study. Similar views were expressed regarding the implementation of development agendas agreed at other forums.

22. Member States expressed the common view that more time was needed to hear from all delegations, although some said that the general debate could be conducted more efficiently. It was also suggested that subregional and thematic interactions between countries should be encouraged and facilitated.

23. While 95 per cent of respondents said that the pre-session documents conveyed clear messages concerning the issues on the Commission's agenda, countries mentioned the need for more narrowly focused discussions in order to clearly indicate the concrete and specific outcomes expected to be achieved at the Commission sessions. Early preparation and dissemination of documents, including draft resolutions, was also mentioned as a factor contributing to better outcomes (65 per cent agreed there was sufficient time to review draft resolutions).

24. Countries expressed the need to provide participants attending ESCAP meetings for the first time with either training or briefings to ensure their full engagement and contribution to the sessions. It was suggested that the secretariat might wish to explore the provision of assistance to member States in drafting resolutions, or providing them with briefings on what is expected in country statements/interventions so they could stay on topic more effectively.

25. Comments regarding the organization and servicing of Commission sessions touched on the need for the secretariat to transmit documents to member States well ahead of meetings to enable them to be considered properly. Member States also noted the importance of having early discussions on the theme topic for the forthcoming session. Additionally, delegations expressed a desire for more frequent consultations with the secretariat prior to Commission sessions.

26. Views similar to those summarized above were expressed regarding the committee sessions. While delegations were pleased to have opportunities for unofficial talks and to hear exchanges of views/experiences unique to member States, they felt the committee sessions could be "managed better", although no specific suggestions had been made. Some respondents said that committee sessions could be used as forums for decision-making rather than as a place simply to exchange information.

27. As for the extent to which the bodies under the conference structure feed into the work of the Commission, member States and others identified the issue of how the five regional institutions could be better integrated. The secretariat is in the process of addressing a suggestion by the Office of Internal Oversight Services that the secretariat should recommend to the Commission that it further review and rationalize the governance structure of the regional institutions in order to revitalize their activities and provide for their continued relevance and viability.

28. Similarly, the evaluation of the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development (APCICT) contained a recommendation that the Commission might wish to review the role and mandate of the APCICT Governing Council (and that of other governing councils) with a view to clarifying the Council's role as one of an "advisory" nature or as one of a "governing" nature, or "both" (see E/ESCAP/66/18). The evaluation also noted that, if such a governance review was carried out, "it should be done in the context of reviewing the Commission's overall conference structure". This recommendation is in line with others made in the context of past evaluations of other ESCAP regional institutions (see E/ESCAP/64/28 and Corr.1 and E/ESCAP/1299).

C. Attracting higher and wider representation from members and associate members under the revised conference structure

29. Ministerial-level attendance at both Commission sessions has held steady: for the 2009 session, 25 representatives at that level attended and for the one in 2010, 27 representatives, including four Heads of State, did so.

30. For the Commission and committee sessions, two common threads dominated member States' feedback in the survey questionnaires: (a) advance preparations, such as early distribution of the agenda and relevant pre-session documents, would enable delegations and their counterparts in capitals to identify the "correct" and/or "appropriate" participants; and (b) deliberations with a clear and narrow focus would also encourage higher and wider participation.

31. Other respondents suggested that provision of financial assistance for some qualifying delegations would enable participation by more member States. In attempting to boost participation, another approach would be to emphasize the importance of advocacy efforts to increase public awareness of the Commission as an important intergovernmental forum and to sensitize policymakers about the work of ESCAP.

32. Some member States cited the following as factors in deciding on the composition of their delegations to the Commission: their view of ESCAP as a key regional forum, their commitment to participate at the ministerial level and a particular session's theme topic and its relevance to national interests.

33. Feedback relating to committee meetings mostly mirrored that which concerned Commission sessions, although respondents also mentioned that committee sessions were scheduled too closely to non-ESCAP meetings; it was suggested that the sessions be scheduled further apart. It was also suggested that including agenda items that required decision-making at committee sessions could lead to higher representation from line ministries.

34. More than 80 per cent of member States, however, acknowledged that, in their first year of working under the new conference structure, the committees had generally fulfilled their terms of reference as outlined in resolution 64/1.

35. Some suggestions for improvement included the possibility of having the secretariat organize training programmes or workshops for officials from the capitals on how Governments could benefit from United Nations conferences and meetings in order to give them a better understanding of multilateral conferences and how Governments could better use regional organizations such as ESCAP.

36. Delegations also suggested that more frequent consultations ahead of the committee sessions in forums such as ACPR could result in more focused deliberations.

III. Practices of other regional commissions

37. While each of the five United Nations regional groupings has its own needs and each regional commission has its own working culture, an analysis of their Commission sessions illustrated the different modalities and approaches that might be considered in further streamlining ESCAP sessions.

38. With regard to the frequency of Commission sessions, ESCAP and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) meet annually, while the other commissions meet biennially. The ECA and ESCAP sessions last six days; that of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) lasts for four days; and the sessions of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the Economic Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean (ECLAC) last just three days. (About 10 years ago, both ECE and ECLAC shortened the duration and decreased the frequency of their sessions.)

39. While the organizational arrangements of the Commission sessions differ from one to another, all the regional commissions, other than ECLAC, hold meetings in two parts: ECE has a high-level segment and a general segment; ECA has a Committee of Experts and a Conference of Ministers; and ESCWA has a senior officials segment and a ministerial segment. On substantive issues, the other regional commissions have moved away from considering issues pertinent to each of their subprogrammes; instead they deliberate on a few key issues. The regional commissions also seek to provide countries with the opportunity to bring to the table, in an interactive manner, issues that concern them. ECE and ECLAC facilitate this process through several panel discussions, with ECLAC in particular encouraging ministerial engagement through high-level panels. At its last Commission session, ECLAC organized five panels on different topics.

40. The other regional commissions have also streamlined the adoption of meeting reports, adopting only one report, if any. ECA adopts a ministerial declaration and ECLAC adopts only agreements. ECE adopts a report at the end of its meeting. It has streamlined the preparation of that report by having a rapporteur work with the secretariat to incorporate feedback from its member States and prepare the different sections of the final report.

41. A table comparing the practices of all five regional commissions is contained in the annex to the present document.

IV. Issues for consideration and possible action by the Commission

42. Since the Commission is positioned as the most representative body for the Asia-Pacific region and is possessed of a comprehensive mandate as the main economic and social development centre of the United Nations system for Asia and the Pacific, what does the Commission seek to achieve during its meetings?

43. Since the Commission's annual session provides a forum for countries in Asia and the Pacific to debate major global issues from a regional and subregional perspective, how can the Commission session enable countries to develop regional positions capable of influencing global policy debates and decision-making? How can the countries meeting during the Commission session arrive at regional solutions to common development challenges? Finally, how can the Commission help countries to implement agreed international commitments and the priorities established by the Secretary-General?

44. Concurrently, the Commission session can serve as a platform for making key decisions relating to economic and social issues of concern to the Asia-Pacific region. It can adopt resolutions calling on its member States to take action to address the major issues of the day and it can provide direction regarding the work of the secretariat. This balance between "debate and decisions" needs to be properly calibrated in order to serve the needs of the ESCAP member States more effectively.

45. The quality of the discussions at the Commission session also has a bearing on how it achieves its objectives. The secretariat has continued to seek ways to respond to the desire of members to improve the interactive nature of the deliberations held under the conference structure, including the committee sessions and the Commission session itself.

46. Through the Commission and committee survey questionnaires, the 334th and 335th sessions of ACPR and the ACPR retreat, member States identified several issues that could be considered further and discussed by the full Commission in order for the Commission to achieve its maximum effectiveness and efficiency. During the ACPR retreat in particular, member States had the opportunity to hold in-depth discussions on the four categories of issues summarized below.

A. The format of the Commission session

47. There are many different ways in which the Commission session could be organized, including how frequently it is held and the duration of each session. The sessions have already been streamlined by reducing the number of parallel meetings of the Committees of the Whole from three to two, thereby enabling countries with small delegations to participate effectively in the deliberations and gain efficiency. Any proposed adjustment to the frequency or duration of the Commission session would require related adjustments and consideration of several factors, including (a) the organization of the Commission session, including the number of days allotted to the senior officials segment and the ministerial segment;

(b) the need to focus the deliberations of the senior officials segment on key issues, including the outcomes of the sectoral committees; (c) reporting from the senior officials segment to the ministerial segment, including the prospect of reporting only matters calling for action by the Commission or brought to its attention (from the committee reports, for example) and the draft resolutions and decisions recommended by the senior officials; and (d) strict adherence to the time allocated for country statements and an examination of alternative modalities for delivering country statements, including a summary of country statements (since participants usually provide the secretariat with a written copy of the statement).

48. The general view is that annual sessions of the Commission are desirable in view of the unique status of the Commission as the only representative pan-regional forum for dialogue between officials at the ministerial level in the fast-changing global economic environment. An annual session also serves the useful purpose of enabling ministers to engage with their counterparts bilaterally while simultaneously moving forward the Commission's agenda. This notwithstanding, it may be prudent to explore the prospect of biennial sessions of the Commission due to current and projected budgetary constraints.

49. Responding member States also felt that inviting a few Heads of State/Government to the Commission session, as had been done at the sixty-sixth session, was a very fruitful practice that should be continued; a full-fledged summit, however, was considered to be impractical.

50. On the duration of the Commission session, the current practice of meeting over six working days within a seven-day period was thought to work best for the time being, as any reduction in the number of meeting days would necessitate a reorganization of the substantive deliberation, and this option would require further study.

51. Apart from reviewing and giving direction concerning the work programme of the secretariat, respondents felt that Commission sessions should focus on theme topics, other issues of contemporary relevance for the economic and social development of the region and policy challenges. They also felt that the theme topic for the subsequent session should be discussed well ahead of time and member States should have the opportunity to propose theme topics for consideration by ACPR.

52. In view of the different levels of responsibility, the practice whereby reports are approved by senior officials before they are endorsed by ministers, as is currently done, was considered appropriate.

53. Overall, member States also felt that country statements served a useful purpose in affording a national perspective; they also enabled member States to highlight steps they had taken to address the issues on the session's agenda. However, better time management by the chair might help in making more effective use of the time allocated for making those statements.

54. While it was felt that the delegates attending Commission sessions benefited from the events taking place concurrently during those sessions, an excessive number of side events should be avoided. Due consideration should be given, however, to hosting the Asia-Pacific Business Forum in conjunction with the Commission session in order to bring a business perspective to the discussion.

B. The committees, regional institutions and other bodies under the conference structure

55. The issues listed above for the Commission session are equally applicable in a review of the functioning of the eight sectoral committees, the regional institutions and their governing councils, and other bodies under the conference structure.

56. The respondents felt that the meeting pattern of all eight committees should continue under the current format, but a reduction in the number of days of each session could be considered if this could be achieved without changing current report preparation, translation and adoption procedures.

57. In addition, committee sessions should be scheduled evenly throughout the year in order to provide sufficient preparation time, avoid overlap with other important intergovernmental meetings, including the annual session of the Economic and Social Council, and facilitate the composition of national delegations. In all cases, the respondents felt that the work of the committees should feed effectively into the decision-making of Commission sessions.

58. ACPR could consider reshaping the list of issues addressed by the Committee on Information and Communications Technology, specifically: moving the component “ICT applications for disaster risk reduction” to the Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction, which should help resolve misunderstandings that constantly occur due to the overlap of those committees’ thematic areas.

59. Member States and evaluators indicated a need to revisit the governance structure of the regional institutions, particularly the linkages/reporting lines between the governing councils and the sectoral committees, and the role of the technical committees vis-à-vis the governing councils and the sectoral committees.

60. There was broad agreement that regional institutions should be further integrated into the work of the relevant subprogrammes of the secretariat and that the secretariat could study the relevance of regional institutions to each subprogramme and committee and review budget allocations to improve support for the regional institutions through such mechanisms as staff exchanges and joint projects to support their work.

61. Expanding membership in the governing councils could encourage the effectiveness and legitimacy of the members’ work and enable them to attract more resources.

62. Governing council sessions could be held just prior to committee sessions so that the councils could report directly to the committees, although such a step might necessitate a related adjustment in the statutes of the regional institutions. With the focus of some regional institutions being relevant to more than one committee, it is also important that a mechanism exist to enable the report of the governing council of a regional institution concerned to be considered by all interested committees. The work of the regional institutions is already integrated within the discussion of the respective subprogrammes during the Commission session.

63. With regard to ACPR, member States felt that a set of clear rules and procedures was needed; consideration could be given to implementing an improved “monitoring function” in order for ACPR to follow up on decisions (with an updated webpage); and the participatory role of ACPR needed to be strengthened.

C. Relevance and alignment of Commission documents

64. In the light of the desired outcomes for the Commission sessions, the secretariat is continually seeking ways to reduce the number of documents issued for intergovernmental meetings to only those that would enable the work to be conducted effectively and efficiently under the conference structure. This streamlining process has resulted in the consolidation and reduction of Commission documents by one third, from 30 documents in 2009 to 20 in 2011. Reports have also been consolidated wherever possible, with one document covering the implementation of resolutions and another document consolidating all the issues and challenges related to inclusive and sustainable economic and social development in Asia and the Pacific under the eight subprogrammes. Member States also voiced support for the following steps to be taken: (a) further streamlining the number of documents and their contents; (b) further consolidating reports, for example, committee reports could serve as background or information documents, with only the key recommendations from each committee session compiled into its own document for consideration by the Commission; (c) producing reports that are concise, direct and easy to understand, and directly related to the outcome of the meeting, containing the necessary references and links to background documents and reflecting consensus and recommendations; (d) moving towards a paperless Commission session by ensuring that all documents are available online and that no more than two sets of documents are printed and sent to each member State, including one in the official language of its preference, and notifying member States via e-mail of the availability of the documents online.

D. Commission resolutions and the decision-making process

65. Resolutions and decisions are often the most tangible outcome of Commission sessions; 15 resolutions were adopted at the sixty-sixth session of the Commission, for example. While member States agreed that resolutions were necessary, both as a reflection of the Commission’s deliberations and to provide the secretariat with guidance, some delegations questioned the need for so many resolutions and the purpose they served. Some respondents also resisted the notion that there should be a limit to the number of resolutions adopted each year.

66. The key question raised by countries concerned the implementation of resolutions and the mechanisms for holding countries accountable. Since resolutions are not binding on member States, one suggestion was for resolutions to have an operative paragraph calling on States to report on implementation. Another option was to give the secretariat the task of monitoring implementation and reporting on the progress of member countries, using information gathered through questionnaires. There was also the question of assisting States in dealing with the challenges they might encounter in implementing resolutions.

67. Respondents pointed out another issue for the Commission to examine: the process by which resolutions were prepared/drafted, negotiated and adopted. There was a general feeling that the ACPR Informal Working Group on Draft Resolutions should remain at the centre of this process, as some form of consultative mechanism prior to adopting the draft proposals clearly was necessary.

68. It is on this point that a clear set of rules and procedures for ACPR may be useful, for example, in dealing with the timeliness of submissions, reporting implementation of the resolutions and other issues.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

69. Resolution 64/1 has built-in flexibility to accommodate potential organizational changes related to efficiency gains. Based on the comments reflected above and depending on the outcome of the Commission's deliberations at the current session, the Commission may wish to:

(a) Reaffirm the conference structure and express its satisfaction with the functioning of the conference structure, as revised in resolution 64/1, and conduct a final review at its sixty-ninth session;

(b) Decide to carry out any or all of the following recommendations:

(i) Work towards a paperless Commission session and request the Executive Secretary to submit a report on this subject, which could serve as the basis for a decision at its sixty-eighth session which would take effect as of the sixty-ninth session of the Commission;

(ii) Request ACPR to work with the secretariat to formulate a set of clear rules and procedures for ACPR;

(iii) Maintain the current meeting pattern of the subsidiary structure, in which four of the eight sectoral committees meet each year, until the final review of Commission's conference structure, including its subsidiary structure, at its sixty-ninth session;

(iv) Request the Executive Secretary to explore practical and cost-effective ways of convening the Asia-Pacific Business Forum in conjunction with the Commission session in order to furnish a business perspective for the discussion;

(v) Request the Executive Secretary to carry out further study and analysis on the following issues and submit the findings and recommendations to the Commission at its sixty-ninth session in order to facilitate the final review of the conference structure of the Commission with regard to:

a. The duration of the Commission session, in order to gain efficiencies in time and cost;

b. The frequency of Commission sessions;

c. Reshaping the list of issues to be addressed by the Committee on Information and Communications Technology, namely moving the component “ICT applications for disaster risk reduction” to the Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction;

d. The governance structure of the regional institutions, including the respective roles and relevant mandates of the Commission, the committees and the governing councils.

Annex

Comparison of sessions of the five regional commissions

Regional commissions	Frequency	No. of days	No. of documents	Members and associate members	Participation	Structure
ESCAP Sixty-sixth session	Annual	6 days (13-19 May 2010)	33 (26 official documents + 7 information documents)	62	- 48 members and associate members, plus Czech Republic, South Africa and Holy See - 7 United Nations organizations - 3 specialized agencies - 6 intergovernmental organizations - 5 NGOs - 3 other entities	The session is divided into two segments: 1. Senior officials segment (13-15 May/3 days) covers opening session and: (a) Special body (b) Review of substantive issues/subprogrammes (c) Management issues (d) Activities of ACPR (e) Dates, venue of next session (f) Approval of report of senior officials segment (g) Working Group on Draft Resolutions (in parallel) 2. Ministerial segment (17-19 May/3 days) covers: (a) High-level panel (b) Ministerial round table (c) Country statements (d) Adoption of report
ECE Sixty-third session	Biennial	3 days (30 March to 1 April 2009)	6 (5 official documents + 1 information document)	56	- 55 members and associate members, plus Holy See - European Union 18 United Nations organizations - 11 NGOs	The session is divided into two segments: 1. High-level segment (30-31 March/2 days) covers opening session and 2 agenda items on: (a) Economic development in ECE region (b) Climate change (with 3 panel discussions for each item) 2. General segment (1 April/1 day) covers 6 agenda items on: (a) Review of ECE reform (b) Reform of the “Environment for Europe” process (c) Other issues calling for action by Commission (d) Election of officers (e) Adoption of reports

Regional commissions	Frequency	No. of days	No. of documents	Members and associate members	Participation	Structure
ECA Forty-third session (Annual joint meeting with Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development)	Annual	6 days (25-30 March 2010)	11	62	N/A	The session is divided into two sections: 1. Committee of Experts (25-28 March/4 days) covers opening session and 6 sessions on: (a) Overview of recent economic and social developments in Africa (b) Assessment of progress on regional integration in Africa (c) Africa regional review of progress towards Millennium Development Goals and African common position on the Goals (d) Follow-up on outcomes of major United Nations-African Union conferences and summits, including the 2009 joint annual meetings of the African Union Commission and ECA (e) Presentation and discussion on theme of the conference (f) Statutory issues The section includes side events. Conference of Ministers (29-30 March/2 days) covers opening session and 8 plenary sessions
ECLAC Thirty-third session	Biennial	3 days (30 May to 1 June 2010)	38 (8 working documents + 30 reference documents)	53	N/A	The session consists of: – Opening ceremony (30 May) – Consideration of report of activities of Commission for 2008-2009 (30 May) – Presentation of draft programme of work 2012-2013 (30 May) – Special lecture by Director-General of UNIDO – 5 panel sessions on specific topics – Committee on South-South cooperation (30 May) – Special sessions – Executive Secretary's presentation of documents and high-level seminar on them (31 May – 1 June) Review and adoption of agreements and closing (1 June)

Regional commissions	Frequency	No. of days	No. of documents	Members and associate members	Participation	Structure
ESCWA Twenty-sixth session	Biennial	4 days (17-20 May 2010)	22 (21 official documents + 1 information document)	14	- 14 member States - United Nations organizations, intergovernmental organizations and NGOs (no. not specified)	The session is divided into two sections: 1. Senior officials segment (17-18 May/2 days) covers opening session, and: (a) Report of Executive Secretary on activities of Commission (b) Committee on Drafting Resolutions (held in parallel) (c) Management issues (d) Revised draft strategic framework 2012-2013 (e) Progress on ESCWA Technology Centre for Development 2. Ministerial segment (19-20 May/2 days) covers: (a) Policy issues in ESCWA region (b) Date and venue of next session (c) Other matters and adoption of report