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Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**Sixty-eighth session**

Bangkok, 17-23 May 2012

Item 6 of the provisional agenda

Dates, venue and theme topic for the sixty-ninth session of the Commission (2013)**Dates, venue and theme topic for the sixty-ninth session of the Commission (2013)****Note by the secretariat****Summary*

The present document contains information on the possible dates and venue of the sixty-ninth session of the Commission, which is to be held in 2013, and a proposal for a theme topic for that session.

The Commission may wish to make a decision on these matters.

I. Introduction

1. The present document contains suggestions made by the secretariat for the consideration of the Commission at its sixty-eighth session. The Commission may wish to consider the dates, venue and theme topic for its sixty-ninth session, to be held in 2013, and to provide the secretariat with guidance in this regard.

II. Dates and venue

2. Rule 1 of the rules of procedure of the Commission requires it to recommend the date and venue for its next session, subject to the approval of the Economic and Social Council and in consultation with the Secretary-General. In accordance with established practice, at each session, the Commission recommends the convening of the next session in April or May of the following year. The actual dates and venue are then determined by the Executive Secretary in consultation with the members and the Chair of the Commission.

* The late submission of the present document to conference services is due to the need to take into account the outcome of discussions of the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission (ACPR) at its 341st session, held on 29 March 2012, and at an informal session held on 26 April 2012.

3. In addition, rule 1 of the rules of procedure states that sessions of the Commission shall ordinarily be held at the office of the United Nations in Asia and the Pacific, unless the Commission recommends otherwise.

III. Theme topic

4. The secretariat submits the following topic for the consideration of the Commission: “Opportunities to build resilience to natural disasters and major economic crises”.

5. The Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission (ACPR) at its 341st session, held on 29 March 2012, and at an informal session, held on 26 April 2012, considered proposals for a theme topic for the sixty-ninth session of the Commission and decided to submit the above theme topic for consideration by the Commission.

6. The Asia-Pacific region faces multiple crises. The current economic slowdown in developed economies, the reduced demand for regional exports, the higher costs of capital, and the volatility of commodity markets continue to pose threats to the region’s economic growth and development. The high incidence of natural disasters amid existing economic crises exacerbates their social and economic impact. The Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami, the floods in Thailand and neighbouring countries, the earthquake in New Zealand, the floods in Australia and Pakistan are recent examples. Economic damage and losses from disasters in the Asia-Pacific region in 2011 totalled at least \$267 billion,¹ making 2011 one of the most expensive years in history for catastrophes.

7. There is also an increasing trend of natural disasters affecting the region through disruptions to production and supply chains of goods and services, as economies of the region become more integrated.² The impact of the 2011 disasters, in particular, has made it more difficult for the region to navigate through global turbulence. The link between the impact of natural disasters and economic shocks is bidirectional. Economic crises reduce a community’s or country’s resilience to natural hazards, which in turn increases the adverse social and economic impacts of natural disasters. The region therefore needs an effective strategy to build resilience to natural disasters and major economic crises to protect hard-earned development gains made thus far, including progress towards the Millennium Development Goals.

8. The adoption of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters,³ and its subsequent endorsement by the General Assembly in its resolution 60/195 on the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, have been major milestones in identifying the crucial need to build resilience. In its resolution 65/1 on the implementation of the Bali Outcome Document in addressing

¹ ESCAP, *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2012* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.12.II.F.9), p. xi.

² ESCAP, *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2011: Year-end Update* (ST/ESCAP/2612), p. 1-3.

³ A/CONF.206/6 and Corr.1, chap. I, resolution 2.

the food, fuel and financial crises, the Commission requested the Executive Secretary to continue to assist member countries in building their capacity to make appropriate policy responses that mitigate the impact of the economic crises, restore growth and avoid future global shocks. Subsequently, a report of the Secretary-General⁴ emphasized that reducing disaster and other social and economic risks is crucial in order to accelerate progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. Recognizing that multiple crises are becoming more frequent, the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, in adopting the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020,⁵ identified “multiple crises and other emerging challenges” as one of the eight interlinked priority areas for the sustainable development of least developed countries. The Programme of Action is internalized in the programme of work of ESCAP, especially with regard to countries with special needs.

9. The road to resilience involves multi-sectoral approaches with a holistic strategy that promotes appropriate macroeconomic and sectoral policies, enhances national preparedness with institutional capacity and legal foundations, and puts in place the necessary public and private governance structures, including community-based structures for efficient early response, adaptation and coping mechanisms.

10. Protecting the most vulnerable sections of societies from slipping deeper into poverty is at the core of any holistic strategy to attain resilience. The poor and the vulnerable, particularly women and children, are hardest hit by disasters and take much longer to recover. Both the range and effectiveness of the limited buffers that the poor and vulnerable have are inadequate. In addition, crises of any form push poor households into a vicious cycle of poverty. They are forced to respond with measures that keep them poor in the long run: reducing the number and quality of meals, postponing health-related expenditures and withdrawing children from school. These actions lead to lower future income-earning potential for current and future generations, resulting in persistent poverty. Building resilience will contribute to achieving the Millennium Development Goals and protect the gains that have been made on this front.

11. Enhancing regional cooperation is an essential component of this holistic strategy because countries are increasingly faced with crises that cross borders, due mainly to the strengthening of the process of economic integration. Having a mutually reinforcing strategy to build resilience and share lessons, practical knowledge and experience across countries is therefore of paramount importance.

12. The proposed theme study will examine the whole spectrum of policies and processes that are associated with building resilience, with a multi-sectoral emphasis on policy formulation, mainstreaming the building of resilience into development strategies, and putting in place appropriate institutions to promote adequate public, private and community-based structures to respond to and cope with various forms of crises. The study

⁴ “Keeping the promise: a forward-looking review to promote an agreed action agenda to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015” (A/64/665).

⁵ *Report of the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, Istanbul, Turkey, 9-13 May 2011* (United Nations publication, Sales No. 11.II.A.1), Chap. II.

will also identify potential mechanisms for regional financial and monetary cooperation that can help build resilience against natural disasters and external economic shocks. Issues of global economic governance will also be considered. The study will pay particular attention to policy options that could protect and empower the poor and vulnerable, prevent them from falling deeper into poverty, and empower them to withstand all forms of crises. Lessons learned and good practices from the region and elsewhere will be highlighted. Recognizing the centrality of regional cooperation in the process, the theme study will highlight the areas where regional cooperation, in particular South-South cooperation, has a role to play. The role of ESCAP in building resilience at the national, subregional and regional levels will be explored.

13. The proposed theme topic reflects one of the most pressing contemporary development challenges that the region faces. In addressing emerging challenges, the theme study will contribute substantially to the strategic framework of ESCAP for the biennium 2014-2015 and to the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015 as well as the post-Hyogo Framework for Action process. Involving the divisions, subregional offices and regional institutions of ESCAP, it will also foster convergence and synergy among the substantive divisions of ESCAP.

Previous theme topics

14. For reference, a list of the theme topics of previous Commission sessions is contained in the annex to the present document.

Annex

List of theme topics of previous Commission sessions*

Session	Year	Theme topic
40	1984	Technology for development
41	1985	Technology for development
42	1986	Human resources development
43	1987	Human resources development
44	1988	Human resources development
45	1989	Restructuring the developing ESCAP economies in the 1990s
46	1990	Restructuring the developing ESCAP economies in the 1990s
47	1991	Industrial restructuring in Asia and the Pacific, in particular with a view to strengthening regional cooperation
48	1992	Regional economic cooperation in the ESCAP region: prospects, priorities and policy options
49	1993	Expansion of investment and intraregional trade as a vehicle for enhancing regional economic cooperation and development
50	1994	Infrastructure development as key to economic growth and regional economic cooperation
51	1995	Strengthening of regional cooperation in human resources development with special reference to the social implications of sustainable economic growth in Asia and the Pacific
52	1996	Sustainable development and poverty alleviation in Asia and the Pacific
53	1997	Asia and the Pacific into the twenty-first century: opportunities and challenges for ESCAP
54	1998	Asia and the Pacific into the twenty-first century: status of and prospects for social development
55	1999	Asia and the Pacific into the twenty-first century: information technology, globalization, economic security and development
56	2000	Development through globalization and partnership in the twenty-first century: an Asia-Pacific perspective for integrating developing countries and economies in transition into the international trading system on a fair and equitable basis
57	2001	Balanced development of urban and rural areas and regions within the countries of Asia and the Pacific
58	2002	Sustainable social development in a period of rapid globalization: challenges, opportunities and policy options

Session	Year	Theme topic
59	2003	Integrating economic and social concerns, especially HIV/AIDS, in meeting the needs of the region
60	2004	Meeting the challenges in an era of globalization by strengthening regional development cooperation
61	2005	Implementing the Monterrey Consensus in the Asian and Pacific region: achieving coherence and consistency
62	2006	Enhancing regional cooperation in infrastructure development, including that related to disaster management
63	2007	Development of health systems in the context of enhancing economic growth towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific
64	2008	Energy security and sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific
65	2009	Towards sustainable agriculture and food security in the Asia-Pacific region
66	2010	Addressing challenges in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals: promoting a stable and supportive financial system; and green growth or environmentally sustainable economic growth, including through technology and financing
67	2011	Beyond the crises: Long-term perspectives on social protection and development in Asia and the Pacific
68	2012	Enhancing regional economic integration in Asia and the Pacific

* Fortieth through sixty-eighth sessions.