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Seventy-eighth session

Bangkok and online, 23–27 May 2022

Item 8 of the provisional agenda*

Dates and venue of and theme topic for the seventy-ninth session of the Commission (2023)

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Note by the secretariat**

Summary

The present document contains information on the proposed dates and venue of the seventy-ninth session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, which is to be held in 2023, and a proposal for a theme topic for that session.

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

I. Introduction

1. The present document contains suggestions made by the secretariat for the consideration of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) at its seventy-eighth session, including the dates and venue of and theme topic for its seventy-ninth session, to be held in 2023.

II. Dates and venue

2. Rule 1 of the rules of procedure of the Commission requires it to recommend the dates and venue of its next session, subject to the approval of the Economic and Social Council and in consultation with the Secretary-General.

3. In addition, in rule 1 of the rules of procedure, it is stated 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.

* ESCAP/78/L.1/Rev.1.

** The present document was submitted late owing to the need to take into account the views of the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission, which were expressed at its 399th session, held on 15 March 2022.

4. It is proposed that the seventy-ninth session be held in Bangkok from 15 to 19 May 2023, taking into account major meetings and holidays during April and May 2023 that could have an impact on both the servicing of and participation in the session.

III. Theme topic

5. The Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission, at its 399th session, held on 15 March 2022, considered a proposal for a theme topic for the seventy-ninth session of the Commission and an outline of issues to be covered in the proposed theme study. A description of the proposed theme topic of “Accelerating climate action in Asia and the Pacific to 2030 and beyond” and an outline of the proposed theme study are provided below.

Accelerating climate action in Asia and the Pacific to 2030 and beyond

6. The Asia-Pacific region has seen remarkable socioeconomic progress in recent decades. High and rapid economic growth, prior to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, brought significant welfare improvements and poverty reduction. Nevertheless, it has created significant environmental and climate-related challenges for the region, many of which are transboundary in nature.

7. The increased variability of weather, increasing temperatures, and more frequent and intense hydrometeorological disasters, such as heatwaves, floods and droughts, have caused displacement of people, negative health impacts and loss of lives, and severe adverse impacts on food systems, ecosystems and the economy. Climate change also exacerbates underlying risk drivers of poverty and inequality – including intergenerational ones – in a vicious cycle.

8. In the years ahead, climate change will continue to reshape the disaster riskscape in Asia and the Pacific. Climate change will slow the progress made in poverty reduction and is already reversing hard-won gains in development. In urban and rural areas some groups are particularly vulnerable, notably women, children, the elderly and those living with disabilities. The combination of natural disasters and climate change, compounded by intersecting social processes, also widens gender disparities. Climate change is also part of a nexus of interacting challenges related to energy prices and security, food security and water scarcity.

9. Analysis by the secretariat prior to the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Glasgow showed that commitments contained in the nationally determined contributions of countries in the Asia-Pacific region, and in particular the Group of 20 regional members and the top 10 regional emitters, were too low, and projected to lead to an increase of 34 per cent in emissions by 2030 compared to 2010, rather than the necessary 45 per cent reduction.

10. Commitments and actions to address climate change need to be significantly enhanced to achieve carbon neutrality in the decade 2051–2060, deliver on the net zero commitments made by many Asian countries, and build back better from the COVID-19 pandemic by adopting a climate- and

environment-responsive approach, immediately curbing greenhouse gas emissions and achieving sustainable consumption and production patterns.¹

11. Given the multifaceted nature of climate change, its causes, impacts, and potential solutions, a multisectoral approach is a must. Moreover, climate change is a multilateral issue and cannot be addressed by individual countries alone. To address it effectively, and to accelerate the needed transition, an inclusive (participation by all countries) and networked (different institutions leveraging their respective expertise) multilateralism is needed, which is cognizant of its intergenerational nature (climate emergency affects future generation more than it affects the current generation).

12. In this context and building on the deliberations of the Commission at its seventy-seventh session on theme building back better from crises through regional cooperation and at its seventy-eighth session on a common agenda to advance sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific, the proposed theme would focus on the transformations that are needed to spearhead the transition to build back better and make countries ready for a net zero future.

13. First, the way progress is measured must be transformed. Most of the parameters and indicators used today to measure success focus on economic and financial performance. This has allowed environmental destruction and social inequalities to grow unchecked. There is an urgent need to look beyond the expansion of economic output, as measured by gross domestic product, and financial capital as yardsticks of success and develop indicators and alternative measurement approaches that give a more comprehensive picture of prosperity. Data governance and investment need to be strengthened to enable countries to calculate and use such indicators. The System of Environmental-Economic Accounting provides a framework to facilitate the integration of environmental and economic statistics in line with the System of National Accounts.

14. Second, how energy is generated, distributed and used must be transformed. Asia and the Pacific is, more than any other region, highly reliant on fossil fuels. How it transitions away from fossil fuels will be a pivotal issue for the region and the world in the coming years in light of the current and future climate impacts and the sustainable development benefits possible through an energy transition. The region needs to phase out fossil fuel subsidies, develop carbon pricing and adopt key best practice policies to enhance the share of variable renewable energy and accelerate investment – particularly in wind and solar energy, as well as energy efficiency.

15. Third, transport systems and supply chains need to be transformed. The transport sector is a key enabler of economic growth but remains a leading emitter of greenhouse gases and pollution. As a major consumer of fossil fuels, transport sector emissions are expected to rise at a faster rate than in other sectors. Decarbonizing regional supply chains entails a combination of approaches from reducing carbon emissions through mode-specific policies to promoting the shift to more-sustainable modes of transport, such as rail and waterborne transport, the electrification of transport and achieving the optimal integration of transport modes.

16. Fourth, what is traded and how it is traded must be transformed. While transportation and increased economic activity due to trade tend to increase greenhouse gas emissions, trade is also crucial for spreading green technologies. Liberalizing trade in environmental goods and services, ensuring infrastructure and adequate institutional setup for cross-border trade, setting

¹ Commission resolution 77/1.

emission standards and addressing wasteful subsidies can help to develop climate-smart trade and investment frameworks.

17. Lastly, financial systems and financing mechanisms, both public and private, must be transformed to promote a low-emission economy. Financial systems attuned to the importance of this transition and innovative and digital financing strategies can facilitate the channelling of financial resources directly to climate action and the Sustainable Development Goals, including through green or sustainability bonds, debt-for-climate swaps, and financial institutions' disclosure of climate-related risks.

18. These transformations would allow countries to recover more sustainably from the pandemic, get on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and shift to a sustainable development pathway beyond 2030, towards carbon neutrality. Drawing on policy scenarios, good practices and experiences from the region, the proposed theme would allow member States to discuss policy options and areas of regional cooperation required to accelerate the climate action in Asia and the Pacific to 2030 and beyond.

IV. Previous theme topics

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

V. Issues for consideration by the Commission

20. The Commission may wish to consider the dates and venue of its seventy-ninth session, to be held in 2023, and to provide the secretariat with guidance in this regard.

21. The Commission may also wish to consider the proposed theme topic "Accelerating climate action in Asia and the Pacific to 2030 and beyond" and the outline of the proposed theme study.

Annex

List of theme topics of previous Commission sessions

<i>Session^a</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Theme topic</i>
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
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

<i>Session^a</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Theme topic</i>
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
69	2013	Opportunities to build resilience to natural disasters and major economic crises
70	2014	Regional connectivity for shared prosperity
71	2015	Balancing the three dimensions of sustainable development: from integration to implementation
72	2016	Science, technology and innovation for sustainable development
73	2017	Regional cooperation for sustainable energy
74	2018	Inequality in the era of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
75	2019	Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality
76	2020	Promoting economic, social and environmental cooperation on oceans for sustainable development
77	2021	Building back better from crises through regional cooperation in Asia and the Pacific
78	2022	A common agenda to advance sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific

^a From the fortieth to the seventy-eighth sessions.