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**Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**  
Committee on Environment and Development**Sixth session**

Bangkok, 9 and 10 December 2020

**Report of the Committee on Environment and Development on its sixth session****I. Matters calling for action by the Commission or brought to its attention****A. Matters calling for action by the Commission**

1. The following recommendation of the Committee on Environment and Development is brought to the attention of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) for its consideration and possible action:

**Recommendation**

The Committee recommends that the activities under the subprogramme on environment and development continue to be based upon and contribute to the achievement of the objectives and priority areas identified in the Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Development for Asia and the Pacific, 2017, and the regional road map for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific.

**B. Matters brought to the attention of the Commission**

2. The following decision adopted by the Committee is brought to the attention of the Commission:

**Decision**

The Committee decides to establish, within existing resources, the Technical Expert Group on Environment and Development to enhance regional exchange and to mobilize technical expertise in support of the Commission's efforts to accelerate environmental and sustainable development action.

3. The Committee requests the secretariat to (a) organize the preparation, as appropriate, of terms of reference of the Technical Expert Group on Environment and Development and submit to member States for consideration and (b) seek nominations of experts from member States three weeks prior, to the first meeting of the Group.

## **II. Organization**

### **A. Opening, duration and organization of the session**

4. The Committee held its sixth session in Bangkok on 9 and 10 December 2020 both in person and online. The session was opened by the Chair of the fifth session of the Committee, Mr. Sonam P. Wangdi, Secretary, National Environment Commission, Bhutan.

### **B. Attendance**

5. The Committee session was attended by representatives of the following members and associate members of the Commission: Armenia; Australia; Bangladesh; Bhutan; Brunei Darussalam; Cambodia; China; Democratic People's Republic of Korea; Fiji; France; Georgia; India; Indonesia; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Japan; Kazakhstan; Malaysia; Maldives; Marshall Islands; Mongolia; Myanmar; Nauru; Nepal; Pakistan; Philippines; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; Sri Lanka; Tajikistan; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Tonga; Turkey; Turkmenistan; and United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

6. A representative of the United Nations Centre for Regional Development attended.

7. Representatives of the following United Nations bodies and specialized agencies and funds attended: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; International Atomic Energy Agency; International Fund for Agricultural Development; International Labour Organization; International Telecommunication Union; International Trade Centre; United Nations Children's Fund; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women); United Nations Environment Programme; secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; United Nations Industrial Development Organization; United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction; and World Health Organization.

8. Representatives of the Asian Development Bank attended.

9. Representatives of the following non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations and other entities attended: Action Group on Erosion, Technology and Concentration; Asia Pacific Research Network; Centre for Policy Dialogue; ESCAP Sustainable Business Network Executive Council; Global Forum on Human Settlements; Institute for Global Environmental Strategies; International Federation of Social Workers; The Resource Centre, Nepal; Rockefeller Foundation; Roots for Equity; Stockholm Environment Institute; Sustainability Platform Asia; United Cities and Local Governments Asia Pacific; World Green Organization; and World Wildlife Fund.

### **C. Election of officers**

10. The following officers were elected:

Chair:	Ms. Suchitra Durai (India)
Vice-Chairs:	Mr. Oleg Shamanov (Russian Federation) Mr. Dicky Komar (Indonesia)

**D. Agenda**

11. The Committee adopted the following agenda:
  1. Opening of the session:
    - (a) Opening statements;
    - (b) Election of officers;
    - (c) Adoption of the agenda.
  2. Environment and development in the aftermath of the coronavirus disease pandemic in the Asia-Pacific region.
  3. Accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific through environmental solutions:
    - (a) Raising climate ambition;
    - (b) Safeguarding ecosystem health;
    - (c) Clean air for all;
    - (d) Cities for a sustainable future.
  4. Consideration of the future focus of the subprogramme, particularly on opportunities to enhance regional cooperation to accelerate environmental actions.
  5. Other matters.
  6. Adoption of the report of the Committee on its sixth session.

**E. Other events**

12. The first executive training on environment and development was held from 23 to 27 November 2020 in conjunction with the Committee session.

**III. Chair's summary**

13. The deliberations during the hybrid session will be summarized in the Chair's summary, which will be available within a week following the conclusion of the session and included as annex II to the present report.

## Annex I

### List of documents

<i>Symbol</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Agenda item</i>
<i>General series</i>		
ESCAP/CED/2020/1	Environmental challenges related to the coronavirus disease pandemic in the Asia-Pacific region	2
ESCAP/CED/2020/2	Realizing environmental benefits through policy convergence and enhanced regional cooperation	3
ESCAP/CED/2020/3	Opportunities to enhance regional cooperation to accelerate environmental actions	4
ESCAP/CED/2020/4	Report of the Committee on Environment and Development on its sixth session	
<i>Limited series</i>		
ESCAP/CED/2020/L.1	Annotated provisional agenda	1 (c)
ESCAP/CED/2020/L.2	Draft report	6
<i>Information series</i>		
ESCAP/CED/2020/INF/1	The role of sustainable mechanization in addressing the impact of the coronavirus disease on agriculture and in building resilience	2
ESCAP/CED/2020/INF/2	Looking into the future: four scenarios for environmental action	3
ESCAP/CED/2020/INF/3	Accelerating regional ocean actions for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific	3
ESCAP/CED/2020/INF/4	Reducing straw residue burning and air pollution through sustainable agricultural mechanization	3
ESCAP/CED/2020/INF/5	Sustainable cities post-coronavirus disease pandemic	3
<i>Information available online</i>		
<a href="http://www.unescap.org/intergovernmental-meetings/committee-environment-and-development-sixth-session">www.unescap.org/intergovernmental-meetings/committee-environment-and-development-sixth-session</a>	Information for participants	
<a href="http://www.unescap.org/intergovernmental-meetings/committee-environment-and-development-sixth-session">www.unescap.org/intergovernmental-meetings/committee-environment-and-development-sixth-session</a>	List of participants	
<a href="http://www.unescap.org/intergovernmental-meetings/committee-environment-and-development-sixth-session">www.unescap.org/intergovernmental-meetings/committee-environment-and-development-sixth-session</a>	Tentative programme	

## Annex II

### Chair's summary of proceedings of the sixth session of the Committee on Environment and Development

#### I. Introduction

1. Owing to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the sixth session of the Committee on Environment and Development was held as a two-day hybrid meeting, four hours per day, on 9 and 10 December 2020. Bangkok-based representatives of members and associate members of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) were provided the option of attending the meeting in person. Given the time constraints of the online session, and to facilitate an exchange of views on the substantive agenda items, country interventions focused on the issues stipulated in agenda items 2–5. The Chair's summary covers the discussions and the proceedings of the sixth session of the Committee.

#### II. Summary of discussions under agenda items 2–5

##### A. Environment and development in the aftermath of the coronavirus disease pandemic in the Asia-Pacific region (Agenda item 2)

2. The Committee had before it the note by the secretariat on environmental challenges related to the coronavirus disease pandemic in the Asia-Pacific region (ESCAP/CED/2020/1) and the information document on the role of sustainable mechanization in addressing the impact of the coronavirus disease on agriculture and in building resilience (ESCAP/CED/2020/INF/1).

3. Representatives of the following members and associate members of the Commission made statements: Bangladesh; Bhutan; China; India; Japan; Malaysia; Maldives; Republic of Korea; and Russian Federation.<sup>1</sup>

4. Representatives of the following United Nations bodies, specialized agencies and funds made statements: International Atomic Energy Agency; and World Health Organization.

5. Representatives of the following non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations and other entities made statements: Asia Pacific Research Network; and International Federation of Social Workers.

6. The Committee benefited from a presentation by the secretariat on environmental challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic in the Asia-Pacific region. The importance of safeguarding the health of the environment to prevent zoonoses, infectious diseases transmitted from livestock and wildlife to humans, was highlighted. The Committee was informed of the planetary health approach which could be used to better understand the environmental drivers behind the emergence of zoonoses and to frame national and regional strategies for a greener, more inclusive and resilient recovery in Asia and the Pacific.

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<sup>1</sup> Their statements are available at [www.unescap.org/intergovernmental-meetings/committee-environment-and-development-sixth-session](http://www.unescap.org/intergovernmental-meetings/committee-environment-and-development-sixth-session).

7. The Committee noted the interrelations between the environment and development and between environmental health and human health and noted that the pandemic was a wake-up call and a unique opportunity to promote genuinely transformative green, resilient and inclusive recovery and to deliver stronger environmental, health, economic and sustainability outcomes.

8. The Committee highlighted a number of specific environmental issues of key importance in the region and member States' commitments to address them. Those challenges included climate change, marine litter, air pollution, the protection of biodiversity and terrestrial and marine ecosystems, developing green cities and green energy, waste management, climate smart agricultural technologies for promoting food security, and localization of the Sustainable Development Goals. Member States shared experiences on implementing specific initiatives and approaches to address environmental issues, including the following approaches: ecological civilization, "One Health" and living with nature.

9. The Committee expressed support for using the concept of planetary health to guide the development and implementation of green and sustainable recovery policies in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It was also noted that more time for substantive discussions was needed, together with the consideration of other similar frameworks.

10. The Committee expressed the view that cooperation among all relevant stakeholders was critical to combating pandemics globally, regionally and at the national level and that ESCAP could play an important role, as a platform for regional cooperation on the environment and development, in supporting recovery from the pandemic, building upon its existing work. Representatives stressed that the first priority for the region was to strengthen the response to climate change, in line with key global agreements, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement.

11. A representative of an international organization highlighted the importance of the planetary health concept, the need to strengthen the resilience of health systems in the region and the importance of environmental protection for positive health outcomes. A representative from another organization expressed interest in supporting regional action to address emerging environmental issues. Representatives from major groups and other stakeholders highlighted the need for urgent collaborative and whole-of-society climate action, as climate change was a social justice issue, and the role of social workers in climate action. They underscored the importance of the means of implementation in addressing systemic barriers related to the environment and development and the need to strengthen policy coherence and stakeholder engagement in policy processes.

12. The Committee noted the importance of strengthening regional cooperation and expressed support for the establishment of a technical expert group on environment and development, with inclusive and transparent work modalities, to enhance the effectiveness of current collaboration among member States between sessions of the Committee.

**B. Accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific through environmental solutions**  
(Agenda item 3)

**Raising climate ambition**

(Agenda item 3 (a))

**Safeguarding ecosystem health**

(Agenda item 3 (b))

13. The Committee had before it the note by the secretariat on realizing environmental benefits through policy convergence and enhanced regional cooperation (ESCAP/CED/2020/2) and the information documents entitled “Looking into the future: four scenarios for environmental action” (ESCAP/CED/2020/INF/2) and “Accelerating regional ocean actions for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific” (ESCAP/CED/2020/INF/3).

14. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: Bangladesh; France; Japan; Kazakhstan; Malaysia; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; and Timor-Leste.<sup>2</sup>

15. A representative of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization made a statement.

16. A representative of Roots for Equity made a statement.

17. Though initially stalled by the COVID-19 lockdowns during the first half of 2020, the cumulative greenhouse gas emissions in Asia and the Pacific had risen to just below 35 gigatons of carbon dioxide by the end of the year and was almost equal to the regional record of 36.7 gigatons of carbon dioxide in 2019. Greenhouse gas emissions were projecting to grow to 50 gigatons of carbon dioxide by 2060, revealing that the commitments on nationally determined contributions of the countries in the Asia-Pacific region are falling short of the Paris Agreement targets. However, several countries in the region have announced carbon neutrality targets, including Bhutan, which pledged to remain carbon neutral, Fiji, Japan, the Marshall Islands, New Zealand and the Republic of Korea, all of which committed to neutrality by 2050, and China, which committed to neutrality by 2060. Singapore also committed to halve its emissions by 2050 and to attain zero emissions in the second half of the century. The region had failed to meet any of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. Safeguarding ecosystems health would improve human resilience to COVID-19 and other zoonotic diseases. Further strengthening of regional cooperation for cleaner and sustainable oceans, in synergy with climate action, was needed.

18. The Committee acknowledged that the impacts of climate change were already posing increasing challenges for the region, including challenges related to rising temperatures and drought, melting glaciers, heavy rainfalls and floods and related diseases, mudslides, rising sea levels, devastating bush and forest fires, and prolonged unhealthy air pollution levels, which were taking a heavy toll on the most vulnerable in the society. In that regard, raising climate ambition with regard to mitigation and adaptation that was aligned with green, inclusive, pro-poor post-COVID-19 recovery strategies was critical for

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

mitigating disaster risk, avoiding economic damage and loss of human lives, and safeguarding ecosystem health, among others.

19. The Committee welcomed the pledges to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 from France and the Republic of Korea, as well as from subnational governments, such as the Sakhalin region of the Russian Federation, and the national commitments to accelerated climate action by others. They included various policies, legal frameworks and political leadership at the highest levels in support of a just transition to decarbonization of all sectors (energy, industry and transport), low emissions green development and recovery in response to COVID-19, through increased renewable energy shares, emission trading schemes and carbon pricing, electrified transport, low-carbon industries, hydrogen energy, a circular economy, carbon capture, including through sizable tree planting action, mainstreaming adaptation measures in national law, development planning, and climate risk insurance schemes.

20. Supportive measures for climate action mentioned included consensus building, awareness building and education, capacity-building on sustainable lifestyles, and engaging the business community. Aspects of ensuring a just transition were also highlighted, including the need to pay attention to issues of vulnerability and risks on multiple fronts – including those arising from geographic challenges and rising poverty. Several resilience-building measures were noted, including economic risk assessment, management and communications, identification of vulnerability hotspots, comprehensive disease surveillance, climate risk insurance and monitoring, increased access to financing for vulnerable areas, and strengthening of health-care facilities to deal with humanitarian crises, with an emphasis on children and women in rural areas.

21. The Committee noted with appreciation member States' contributions to regional and international cooperation on accelerating climate action and safeguarding ecosystems, including regional and subregional programmes, studies and events, such as the North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation, the Seoul Initiative Network on Green Growth, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)-Republic of Korea Carbon Dialogue, the Asia-Pacific Climate Change Adaptation Information Platform, the Seventh Asia-Pacific Adaptation Forum and the Acid Deposition Monitoring Network in East Asia. It also noted support for the Green Climate Fund, Osaka Blue Ocean Vision, including the increasing innovation to address marine plastic pollution in ASEAN countries, the Group of 20 implementation framework for marine plastic litter, and United Nations environment processes.

22. The Committee welcomed the capacity development support provided by the secretariat to enhance the reporting capacity of member States in Central Asia and of other member States with regard to the Paris Agreement greenhouse gas emissions inventory and transparency reporting requirements. The support was provided in partnership with the Institute for Global Climate and Ecology of the Russian Federation through a dedicated online portal. Member States looked forward to further support from the secretariat and development partners.

23. The Committee reflected on priorities in relation to plastic pollution and the related topic of the health of ocean ecosystems. Some of the actions taken by member States included a circular economy road map for plastics and a policy to address marine litter. The Committee noted that the upcoming United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, which would begin in 2021, was an opportunity to accelerate the application of ocean science for “The ocean we need for the future we want”. The Committee further noted



the call made by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission to member States asking them to prioritize the application of ocean science and to increase interaction with all relevant stakeholders to co-design solutions. The Committee expressed its appreciation to the secretariat for its work regarding the health of the ocean. The secretariat was encouraged to continue and synergize efforts with United Nations programmes and agencies.

24. Representatives from major groups expressed concerns regarding the combined COVID-19 and climate impacts on small and landless farmers or those with insecure land tenure in particular. The following calls for action in international environmental governance frameworks were brought to the Committee's attention: calls for measures to recognize and protect environmental defenders, who were facing increasing danger despite their contributions to sustainable development; calls for action on the environmental impacts of free trade agreements; calls for food and seed sovereignty; calls for enhanced protection of small and landless farmers, indigenous people, women and others; and calls for the prevention of corporate control of agriculture.

### **Clean air for all**

(Agenda item 3 (c))

### **Cities for a sustainable future**

(Agenda item 3 (d))

25. In addition to document ESCAP/CED/2020/2, the Committee had before it the information documents on reducing straw residue burning and air pollution through sustainable agricultural mechanization (ESCAP/CED/2020/INF/4) and on sustainable cities post-COVID-19 pandemic (ESCAP/CED/2020/INF/5).

26. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: Bangladesh; France; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Japan; Malaysia; Maldives; Mongolia; Republic of Korea; and Russian Federation.<sup>3</sup>

27. Representatives of the following United Nations bodies, specialized agencies and funds made statements: United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat); and United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction.

28. The Committee was informed by the representative of UN-Habitat about the Programme's partnership with ESCAP to promote sustainability with cities in the region by integrating climate resilience measures into urban planning frameworks and municipal service delivery systems as part of the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

29. The Committee was informed about policy solutions to address high levels of air pollution in the region, which impacted environmental sustainability and human health and well-being, most prominently in urban areas. Representatives highlighted the importance of supporting new regional advocacy platforms on the issue, such as the Asia-Pacific commemoration of the International Day of Clean Air for blue skies. One representative highlighted the effective partnership with the North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation as well as the importance of applying innovative satellite technologies to monitor air pollution measures through a new partnership with ESCAP, which leveraged the Geostationary

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Environment Monitoring Spectrometer. Another representative showcased a “One Health” framework for evidence-based environmental decision-making to respond to common regional challenges of air pollution, ecosystem degradation, unsustainable resource use and capacity gaps at the local level. Representatives stressed the critical role air pollution measures played in raising ambitions with regard to nationally determined contributions under the Paris Agreement and accelerating scientific nature-based climate actions to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goal 13.

30. The Committee highlighted the important role that urban centres played in the sustainable development of the region. Representatives recognized the importance of city-level actions to support a resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. One representative welcomed the partnership with the secretariat for the publication *Future of Asian and Pacific Cities: Transformative Pathways towards Sustainable Urban Development*, which was launched at the Seventh Asia-Pacific Urban Forum, which was convened in Penang, Malaysia, in October 2019 by ESCAP and UN-Habitat. A representative noted with appreciation the support provided by ESCAP for the establishment of the Penang Platform for Sustainable Urbanization, which launched the first *Asia-Pacific Regional Guidelines on Voluntary Local Reviews*. Those guidelines were being used by six cities in the region.

31. Representatives also shared good practices in implementing progressive regulations, measures and funding models for the urban construction and housing sectors. One representative shared information about efforts to sustainably upgrade existing cities while supporting the development of new urban centres. Smart city development was further seen as an innovative approach to accelerate local progress on sustainable urban development. One representative had held an online high-level meeting to support the regional exchange of good practices. A representative from the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction highlighted the need to support cities with knowledge, capacity-building support, financing and planning tools to enhance urban resilience actions for the local implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 in the region.

**C. Consideration of the future focus of the subprogramme, particularly on opportunities to enhance regional cooperation to accelerate environmental actions**  
(Agenda item 4)

32. The Committee had before it the note by the secretariat on opportunities to enhance regional cooperation to accelerate environmental actions (ESCAP/CED/2020/3).

33. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: France; Japan; Russian Federation; Thailand; and United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.<sup>4</sup>

34. The representative of the World Health Organization made a statement.

35. The representative of the Asia Pacific Research Network made a statement.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

36. The Committee was informed about opportunities to strengthen cooperation and accelerate environmental actions through focused attention on the environmental domains discussed at the session. The Committee was also provided an overview of the secretariat's work in the areas of environment and development, including its contribution to areas that should be mainstreamed in the work of all the committees in accordance with the conference structure of the Commission.

37. The Committee welcomed the idea of establishing a technical expert group on environment and development as one way to enhance regional exchange and mobilize technical expertise in support of the Commission's efforts to accelerate environmental and sustainable development action. Some representatives suggested that the technical expert group be used to support the work on nationally determined contributions, nature-based solutions and coastal resilience. One representative highlighted that regional and global cooperation on environmental issues was very important to the green recovery and stated that the establishment of the technical expert group should be considered carefully to avoid overlapping with other existing frameworks and should not create an extra burden to member States and that the member States should have time to consider its terms of reference before making any decisions.

38. Representatives of the United Nations bodies and major groups and other stakeholders expressed interest in participating in the technical expert group.

**D. Other matters**  
(agenda item 5)

39. The representative of Timor-Leste made a statement.

40. The representative of the Asia Pacific Research Network made a statement.

41. The Executive Secretary of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity provided updates on the status of the development of the new post-2020 global biodiversity framework expected to be adopted at the fifteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, scheduled to take place in Kunming, China, in 2021.

42. The Regional Director and Regional Representative of the United Nations Environment Programme Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific updated the Committee about the preparations for the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly.

43. The Regional Ambassador for Asia-Pacific and South Asia of the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change briefed the Committee about the Climate Ambition Summit (held on 12 December 2020) and about the road to the twenty-sixth session, which was expected to result in new and ambitious commitments for nationally determined contributions and a strong call for climate action.

44. The head of the Subregional Office for East and North-East Asia of ESCAP gave a presentation entitled “North-East Asia Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation: subregional response to the 2030 Agenda”. The Programme’s work in five areas was highlighted: air pollution, biodiversity and nature conservation, low-carbon cities, land degradation and marine protected areas, and contributions to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

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