

**Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific****Seventy-first session**

Bangkok, 25-29 May 2015

Item 5 of the provisional agenda*

**Review of the conference structure of the Commission
in implementation of resolution 69/1****Report on the outcomes of the changes to the conference
structure in implementation of resolution 69/1****Note by the secretariat*****Summary*

The present document is submitted pursuant to paragraph 2 of resolution 69/1 in order to facilitate the review by the Commission of the progress in implementation of the aforementioned resolution. The document provides an overview of the changes to the conference structure enacted on the basis of resolution 69/1, and contains a brief assessment of the outcomes of those changes. The assessment is based on the secretariat's empirical knowledge and experience gained in the implementation of the resolution and previous resolutions on the subject of the conference structure, the findings of further analyses and independent studies and the views and suggestions made by member States and secretariat staff since the sixty-ninth session. The document concludes with recommendations for consideration of the Commission.

I. Introduction

1. The present document is submitted pursuant to paragraph 2 of resolution 69/1, in which the Commission decided to conduct, at its seventy-first session, a review of the progress in implementation of the aforementioned resolution and requested the Executive Secretary to provide a report on the outcomes of the changes to the conference structure, which will serve as a basis for that review.

2. The present document draws from empirical knowledge and experience gained during the implementation of changes made to the conference structure pursuant to resolution 69/1. It also benefited from the findings and recommendations of an independent study conducted by an external team led by Mr. Filemon Uriarte, former Secretary (Minister) of

* E/ESCAP/71/L.1/Rev.1.

** The present document was submitted late owing to the need to take into account the latest comments from the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission.

Science and Technology of the Philippines, which between August and December 2014, undertook a systematic assessment of the implications of the changes to the conference structure, among other things.

3. Section II of the present document contains an overview of the actions taken by the secretariat in implementation of resolution 69/1 and provides a description of the progress made up to the present session.

4. Section III contains recommendations for the consideration of the Commission.

II. Progress in implementation of resolution 69/1

5. Through paragraph 1, the Commission decided to revise its conference structure, with immediate effect, to conform to the pattern outlined in the annexes of the aforementioned resolution. Therefore, in accordance with annex I, paragraph 1 of the resolution, beginning from the seventieth session, the Commission session was reduced to five days, comprising a three-day senior officials segment and a two-day ministerial segment.

6. In response to annex I, paragraph 2, which requested combining the sessions of the Special Body on Least Developed Countries and Landlocked Developing Countries and the Special Body on Pacific Island Developing Countries, and organizing a preparatory meeting prior to the Commission sessions, a preparatory meeting of the Special Body was held prior to the session beginning with the seventieth session. Based on feedback from both member States and secretariat staff concerned with attracting the greatest number of participants at the highest levels, the preparatory meeting has been integrated into the second day of the present session, and the renamed Special Body on Least Developed, Landlocked Developing and Pacific Island Developing Countries will be held on the third day of the session.

7. In order to further elevate the substantive and intellectual level of discussions at the Commission session and in continuation of the secretariat's long-standing usual practice, eminent persons, leaders and ministers of member States, and representatives of other international organizations and civil society organizations were invited to participate in the ministerial round tables and panels held during the seventieth session and its associated special events, such as the special event entitled "Regional Consultation on Accountability for the Post-2015 Development Agenda", which was held during the second phase of the seventieth session. Furthermore, the prime ministers of Bhutan, Timor-Leste and Tonga delivered keynote addresses at the opening of the session.

8. Through annex I, paragraph 5, the Commission fixed the number of simultaneous meetings of the Committees of the Whole at two, already a practice of the Commission for several sessions, to enable smaller delegations to be able to take part in the deliberations. Several member States reported their satisfaction with this arrangement in their responses to evaluation surveys conducted at the seventieth session.

9. In accordance with annex I, paragraph 6, in which it was requested that draft resolutions be submitted at least one week prior to each Commission session, the secretariat circulated to member States through the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission guidelines for preparing and submitting resolutions in order to raise awareness about the timely submission of draft resolutions and facilitate the consideration of such drafts by the

Advisory Committee prior to the Commission session. All resolutions were submitted before the deadline.

10. In annex I, paragraph 7 the Commission decided to revise the format of its report to be composed of the decisions and resolutions of the Commission and a separate record of proceedings. This practice was undertaken for the first time at the seventieth session.

11. In annex I, paragraph 20, the Commission requested that the Advisory Committee meet with sufficient frequency both in formal and informal meetings on topical subjects, especially prior to the Commission session, and that the number of formal meetings of the Advisory Committee per calendar year not be less than six or more than twelve. Since the seventieth session, there have been six formal meetings of the Advisory Committee.¹ In addition, several informal meetings were organized to discuss various issues, including the conference structure review, the theme topic for the seventy-second session of the Commission, the convening of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development and the working groups on regional economic cooperation.²

12. Since the sixty-ninth session, the secretariat has organized briefings by the subregional offices and regional institutions during meetings of the Advisory Committee in accordance with annex I, paragraph 22 in which the Advisory Committee was requested to periodically review the work of the subregional offices and regional institutions. In the same paragraph, the Commission also requested that the secretariat facilitate the Advisory Committee's active follow-up and reporting on the implementation of ESCAP resolutions by member States. In response to that request, the secretariat developed and circulated a draft template for reporting by member States, and has continued to hold discussions both with member States and within the secretariat to further strengthen its current practices.

13. In response to paragraph 3 of resolution 69/1, the secretariat has submitted to the present session document E/ESCAP/71/33, which contains further study and analysis, as well as the programmatic, organizational and budgetary implications, of the issues identified in the paragraph as further reforms to the conference structure. An informal working group of the Advisory Committee was established for consultations among member States on the various proposals.

14. In response to paragraph 4 (a), the secretariat has combined the annual theme study and the *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific* into one published volume for both the seventieth and seventy-first sessions. Empirical evidence and experiences gathered by the secretariat show that combining the publications has led to lower access and referencing rates, and significantly hampered awareness-raising efforts by the secretariat. The Commission, therefore, may wish to consider reverting to the previous practice of publishing the two volumes as separate publications effective from the seventy-second session onwards, with a sufficient gap between their publication dates.

15. The secretariat has held internal discussions concerning the technical feasibility and possible implementation modalities for enhancing the participation of non-Bangkok-based representatives in sessions of the Advisory Committee through video and teleconferencing, as requested by the

¹ See also Advisory Committee's report to the Commission, E/ESCAP/71/35.

² Ibid.

Commission in paragraph 4 (b). Since current technology does not effectively accommodate this, the secretariat will continue to assess the feasibility of implementing this reform as newer technologies emerge, and will report to the Advisory Committee in due course.

16. In response to paragraph 5, the secretariat has strengthened its practices and processes for involving development partners and, in particular the relevant organizations of the United Nations development system, to support the Commission in promoting sustainable development in the Asia-Pacific region, including through side events and exhibitions with the participation of the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism, which has a membership of 30 United Nations and affiliated entities, including the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank. The Chairs of the Commission also wrote personal letters to selected development partners, informing them of the outcomes of the Commission and of the resolutions and decisions that the Commission had adopted.

III. Conclusion

17. The implementation of resolution 69/1 has led to a multitude of reforms, which have increased the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of the Commission and its conference structure, and has strengthened the conference structure's capacity to contribute effectively to fulfilling the Commission's mandate as the main economic and social development centre in the United Nations system for the Asian and Pacific region.

18. It is anticipated that the Commission will adopt a resolution on its conference structure on the basis of the recommendations contained in E/ESCAP/71/33. In addition, based on the assessment contained in paragraph 14 of the present report, the Commission may wish to decide that, effective from the seventy-second session onwards, the annual theme study and the *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific* be produced as separate publications, with a sufficient gap between their publication dates to enable more focused attention to the two products and their contents.