

EDD/NEASPEC/SOM(15)/6
10 February 2010

ENGLISH ONLY

**UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC**

Fifteenth Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) of NEASPEC

18 March 2010
Tokyo, Japan

Review of Issues Concerning Institutional Arrangement
(Item 7 of the provisional agenda)

Note by the Secretariat

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I. BACKGROUND

1. Upon the request from the NEASPEC member countries, ESCAP has been acting as an interim secretariat for NEASPEC pending the final decision on the establishment of the permanent (or programme) secretariat. Thus, ESCAP has facilitated consultations of the member countries to make the final decision on the institutional arrangement. The consultations also discussed the contributions of member countries to strengthen the human capacity of the interim Secretariat and the ownership of member countries over NEASPEC.

2. The 12th SOM in 2007 reviewed a proposal from the Republic of Korea (ROK), which expresses its willingness to host the NEASPEC Secretariat and cover the operational costs. However, the meeting did not make the final decision on the proposal but deferred the decision for further consultations. During the subsequent informal consultation after the SOM, the ROK Government indicated the possibility of making an annual contribution of US\$700,000 to cover both operational costs and new activity costs. However, it was not possible to make the final decision as the secretariat did not receive a consensual view on the revised proposal. Three member countries, namely, China, Japan and Mongolia indicated positive positions in support of the revised proposal, while Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the Russian Federation expressed prudent positions.

3. As a result, the 13th SOM in March 2008 had another round of discussions on the ROK proposal. The discussion had to deal with a new issue, the plan of ESCAP for establishing outreach offices in subregions including North-East Asia. Some member countries pointed out the possibility of North-East Asian Subregional Office to undertake major activities in subregional environmental cooperation. Thus, the SOM concluded that the final decision should take the arrangement of the North-East Asia office into account to avoid any overlap of functions.

4. As the establishment of the Subregional Office (SRO) of ESCAP in East and North-East Asia is directly relevant to the secretariat arrangement, the 14th SOM reviewed the progress without any substantive discussions on the subject. Thus, the present document is prepared to provide up-to-date information on the process for the member countries.

II. PROGRESS OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SUBREGIONAL OFFICE IN NORTH-EAST ASIA

5. The establishment of ESCAP subregional office for East and North-East Asia was approved by the General Assembly (resolution 63/260) in December 2008 together with other offices in Central Asia and South Asia. The countries covered under the Subregional Office for East and North-East Asia include China, Democratic People's

Republic of Korea, Japan, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation. The North-East Asian SRO is expected to open in May 2009 in Incheon, Republic of Korea. The North-East Asian Subregional Office will consist of 6-7 professional staff hired with budgets from both the UN Secretariat and the host Government and 6 general six general service staff to be funded by the host country.

6. The function of the Subregional Office is to serve as a link between the subregion and ESCAP headquarter, supporting specific subregional priorities and programmes, operating as subregional nodes for knowledge management and networking, delivering technical assistance activities and establishing close working relations with United Nations country teams within the subregions. In particular, strategic intents of the SRO include the improvement of ESCAP partnership with member countries and strengthening of member states' ownership of ESCAP work.

7. ESCAP held an Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on the SRO in October 2009 in Bangkok in order to identify the priority needs of North-East Asia and the role that could be played by ESCAP through its SRO in meeting those needs. The EGM noted that the MDGs and stakeholder participation were cross cutting issues of relevance to the work of the SRO. Discussions also highlighted the importance of environmental protection, energy and transport as priority areas of work for the SRO. In the context of environmental protection, the operation of NEASPEC was proposed by several experts as a priority work.

8. Furthermore, ESCAP held an Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Meeting (IGM) on the New ESCAP Subregional Offices on 2-4, March 2010 in Bangkok to decide the role of the subregional offices in addressing the priority needs of the respective subregions and develop short- and medium-term work programmes. Concerning the North-East Asian Subregional Office, the IGM recommended sustainable development including NEASPEC as a priority area of its work and agreed that further consultations with the relevant member states were required in order to determine whether the secretariat of NEASPEC could be located within the Subregional Office. The recommendation of the IGM will be submitted to the 66th Commission Session of ESCAP to be held in May 2010 for the final decision.

III. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

9. The Meeting may wish to provide further guidance for the secretariat and member countries on strengthening the role of NEASPEC in subregional environmental cooperation taking into account of the decision of the Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Meeting on the New ESCAP Subregional Offices.

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