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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

**OUTCOME DOCUMENT OF THE REGIONAL PREPARATORY EXPERT GROUP
MEETING OF EURO-ASIAN LANDLOCKED DEVELOPING AND TRANSIT COUNTRIES
FOR THE MID-TERM REVIEW OF THE ALMATY PROGRAMME OF ACTION
BANGKOK, 22-23 APRIL 2008**

SUMMARY

In its resolution 61/212, the General Assembly decided to hold a midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action in 2008. The regional commissions, among others, were mandated to assist in the midterm review at the regional level.

The midterm review for the Euro-Asian region was held in Bangkok on 22 and 23 April 2008 and was attended by 43 participants from landlocked developing countries, transit developing countries, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, and relevant international and regional organizations.

During the meeting, the progress and obstacles in the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action were identified along its five priorities, and suggestions were made with a view to accelerating the implementation of the Programme. After extensive deliberation, the meeting adopted an outcome document containing suggestions in key priority areas of the Programme.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Almaty Programme of Action¹ formulated in 2003 was endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolutions 58/201 of 23 December 2003 and 59/245 of 3 March 2005, as well as in the 2005 World Summit Outcome.² In its resolution 61/212 of 20 December 2006, the General Assembly decided to hold a midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action in 2008.
2. At the regional level, in its resolution 61/11 of 18 May 2005 on the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) reaffirmed its continued support for the full and effective implementation of the specific actions to be undertaken in the five priority areas agreed upon in the Almaty Programme of Action. In its resolution 63/5 of 23 May 2007, the Commission requested the Executive Secretary to provide the necessary support in the preparatory process for the midterm review.
3. Accordingly, the Regional Preparatory Expert Group Meeting of Euro-Asian Landlocked Developing and Transit Countries for the Mid-Term Review of the Almaty Programme of Action was jointly organized by ESCAP and the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) in collaboration with the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States and held on 22 and 23 April 2008.
4. The meeting was attended by 43 participants from landlocked developing countries, transit developing countries, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, as well as from relevant international and regional organizations. The progress was assessed along the five priorities in the Almaty Programme of Action, based on work undertaken by ESCAP and ECE and through presentations from participating countries.
5. The meeting acknowledged that much work had been undertaken at the national, subregional and regional levels by landlocked and transit developing countries in the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action with the support of ESCAP, ECE, relevant international and regional organizations and other development partners, as well as the encouragement of the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States. The meeting also recognized the continuing challenges faced by landlocked countries vis-à-vis integration with the global economy and the need to expedite and strengthen the process of implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action, and thus participants agreed to the outcomes related to the five priority areas, as described below.

¹ Almaty Programme of Action: Addressing the Special Needs of Landlocked Developing Countries within a New Global Framework for Transit Transport Cooperation for Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries (*Report of the International Ministerial Conference of Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries and Donor Countries and International Financial and Development Institutions on Transit Transport Cooperation, Almaty, Kazakhstan, 28 and 29 August 2003* (A/CONF.202/3), annex II).

² See General Assembly resolution 60/1.

II. PRIORITY 1: FUNDAMENTAL TRANSIT POLICY ISSUES

6. Priority 1 of the Almaty Programme of Action sets out the enabling environment that landlocked and transit developing countries need to create in order to establish efficient transit transport systems through genuine partnerships. While some progress has been made in this regard, fundamental transit policy issues that need to be further addressed include: harmonization of legal regimes relating to transport and transit, adoption of an integrated approach to trade and transport facilitation, elimination of physical and non-physical barriers to transit transport, and promotion of integrated training programmes encompassing all levels, from top management to low-level operators, in both the public and private sectors.

7. The Almaty Programme of Action states that international conventions on transport and transit, as well as regional and bilateral agreements, ratified by landlocked and transit developing countries are the main vehicles by which harmonization, simplification and standardization of rules and documentation can be achieved. ECE develops and maintains a broad range of legal instruments, regulatory norms and standards. In its resolution 48/11, ESCAP recommends accession to seven conventions that provide minimum level of international harmonization. The Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia Project Working Group on Transport and Border Crossing has also recommended that its member countries accede to six additional international conventions administered by ECE. Subregional agreements have a role to play and, if aligned with the international conventions, they can be stepping stones to international harmonization of standards and norms. The following measures are required:

- (a) Harmonization of legal regimes in transport and transit:
 - (i) ECE should continue to encourage accessions to and more effective implementation of the 56 international conventions, agreements and other internationally legally binding instruments it administers. In the context of transport infrastructure, the E-road and E-railroads already extend to Central Asia, providing common standards for road and railroad infrastructure;
 - (ii) ECE and ESCAP should further intensify capacity-building assistance provided to countries, including training programmes directed at policymakers and industry, in order to raise awareness and understanding of the process and implications of accession to international conventions on transport facilitation. This understanding is required if countries are to accelerate the level of accession and implement the conventions effectively. The United Nations Office of Legal Affairs should provide assistance as required, including the featuring of relevant conventions in the 2008 Treaty Event;
 - (iii) The ESCAP secretariat, in cooperation with the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) should continue to provide technical and

financial support for the negotiation of an agreement among the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation member States, four of which are landlocked countries, to facilitate international road transport;

- (iv) The ESCAP secretariat may also provide technical assistance to countries of the Greater Mekong Subregion, including one landlocked country, in the implementation of annexes and protocols to the Greater Mekong Subregion Cross-Border Transport Agreement³ initiated and supported by ADB;
- (v) In close cooperation with the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), the ESCAP secretariat should provide ECO member countries, of which seven are landlocked developing countries, with technical assistance in implementing the ECO Transit Transport Framework Agreement⁴ with a view to facilitating transit and transport;
- (b) Integrated approach to trade and transport facilitation:
 - (i) The ECE and ESCAP secretariats should continue to assist countries in establishing and strengthening national coordination mechanisms for trade and transport facilitation and to assist in organizing subregional and regional forums to provide opportunities for the sharing of knowledge and best practices, and to work towards harmonization of trade and transport rules and documents;
 - (ii) ECE and ESCAP should assist countries upon request in developing benchmark performance indicators for border crossing along their main international road and rail corridors;
- (c) Route analysis and time/cost-distance methodology:

The ESCAP and ECE secretariats should continue to assist countries in identifying and addressing physical and non-physical bottlenecks through the analysis of transport routes, including Euro-Asian transport links and the transport network of the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia, using the ESCAP time/cost-distance methodology. Governments, freight forwarding associations and other stakeholders are encouraged to share data for further analysis. Based on route data and analysis, ESCAP and ECE will continue to work with landlocked and transit developing countries as well as other international and regional organizations and development partners to promote the intermodal transport corridor concept and assist countries in formalizing cooperation along such corridors.

³ The Agreement between and among the Governments of the Kingdom of Cambodia, the People's Republic of China, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Union of Myanmar, the Kingdom of Thailand, and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam for the Facilitation of Cross-Border Transport of Goods and People. See *GMS Cross-Border Transport Agreement*, Asian Development Bank, <http://www.adb.org/GMS/Cross-Border/agreement.asp> (accessed 16 May 2008).

⁴ See www.ecosecretariat.org.

III. PRIORITY 2: INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE

8. While progress has been made by landlocked and transit developing countries in developing transport infrastructure networks, further work needs to be done in order to complete the missing links, improve the infrastructure, promote intermodal transport and develop integrated transport corridors and logistics services. The continued implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action beyond the midterm review will contribute towards the vision adopted by the Ministers of Transport of Asia and the Pacific in November 2006 in developing an international, integrated, intermodal transport and logistics system (see E/ESCAP/63/13, para. 2). The following measures are required to expedite progress in infrastructure development and maintenance:

- (a) Further development of transport networks:
 - (i) ESCAP should continue to develop, upgrade and maintain the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway networks by working with bilateral and multilateral donors as well as funding agencies and by enhancing institutional capabilities for the mobilization of additional funding from traditional and non-traditional sources, including public-private partnerships;
 - (ii) ESCAP and ECE, together with the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), should continue the implementation of an interregional project entitled “United Nations Development Account project on a public-private partnership alliance programme for capacity-building in infrastructure development and provision of basic services” to enhance the capacity of Governments to promote, operate and manage such projects;
 - (iii) ESCAP should operationalize the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway networks through the organization of truck caravans along the highway routes and demonstration runs of container block trains along the railway routes;
 - (iv) ECE and ESCAP should continue to assist landlocked and transit developing countries in promoting the Euro-Asian Transport Linkages project by enhancing capacities to deal effectively with their transit transport requirements;
 - (v) ECE should continue to promote Trans-European Motorway and Trans-European Railway projects in Central and Eastern Europe and, together with ESCAP, promote the Euro-Asian Transport Linkages project as excellent forums for harmonized development of transport infrastructure and for close cooperation in long-term investment planning;
 - (vi) ECE and ESCAP should continue to provide support to the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia Project Working Group on Transport and Border Crossing in developing and operationalizing the road and rail networks in the corresponding region;

- (b) Intermodal transport and logistics:
 - (i) ESCAP and ECE should promote the intermodal transport corridor concept and assist countries in formalizing cooperation for efficient operation of such corridors;
 - (ii) ECE should continue its capacity-building initiatives, such as developing a glossary of intermodal transport as well as peer review reports on intermodal transport;
 - (iii) ESCAP should provide assistance for the development of intermodal interfaces, such as dry ports and inland container depots, and for clustering economic activities around the intermodal interfaces to bring development inland;
 - (iv) ESCAP should assist landlocked and transit developing countries in establishing sustainable training programmes in multimodal transport and logistics;
 - (v) ECE should undertake the development of transport and logistics indicators, which in the first phase will be the development of a common methodology.

IV. PRIORITY 3: INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND TRADE FACILITATION

A. Accession to the World Trade Organization and market access

9. National trade- and market-oriented economic reforms have produced positive results in terms of economic growth and enhanced integration of landlocked and transit developing countries into the global trading system, thus alleviating geographical disadvantages of being landlocked to some degree. Nevertheless, 8 out of the 14 landlocked countries in the Euro-Asian region are still not members of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Furthermore, while landlocked countries have signed a number of preferential trade agreements, including with each other and with key transit developing countries, the opportunities for enhanced market access and new South-South trade have yet to fully materialize. Continued efforts at the multilateral level aimed at facilitating development-friendly conditions for the accession of landlocked and transit developing countries to the World Trade Organization are suggested, as are further domestic institutional reforms that will enable landlocked and transit developing countries to cope with unavoidable adjustment costs in an economically coherent and socially sustainable way.

10. In response to remaining policy challenges associated with enhancing market access and trade opportunities, the ESCAP and ECE secretariats will continue to work with the governments and other stakeholders in landlocked and transit developing countries as well as with international organization partners, such as WTO, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, and the International Trade Centre, on enhancing market access for the goods and services of producers from landlocked and transit developing countries through:

- (a) The provision of training programmes on trade policy reform and economic policy coherence;

- (b) The tracking and analysis of changes in market access for these countries;
- (c) The development of on line databases, analytical tools and trade information sources, such as the Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Agreements Database, as well as the provision of platforms for sharing best practices in trade policy reforms and trade facilitation, such as the Macao Regional Knowledge Hub on trade policy and the Asia-Pacific Forum on Efficient Trade;
- (d) The promotion of accessions to the Asia-Pacific Trade Agreement so as to enhance the integration of landlocked and transit developing countries into the regional economy and promote land linkages for the landlocked developing countries;
- (e) The development of local and regional capacity for trade and trade policy analysis based on the experience ESCAP has had with the Asia-Pacific Research and Training Network on Trade;
- (f) The building the capacity of landlocked developing and transition economies to implement the ECE commercial agricultural quality standards, manage regulatory harmonization and prepare for accession to WTO.

B. Trade facilitation

11. It is recognized that the cumbersome customs procedures, excessive documentary requirements, and inadequate institutions and infrastructure create major delays and obstruct the integration of landlocked countries into international and regional trade. While the majority of landlocked developing countries and transit countries have implemented trade facilitation reforms aimed at simplifying trade regulations, procedures and documents, more efforts are needed, focusing on the following four areas:

- (a) Harmonizing regulatory requirements, procedures and documentation for imports, exports and transit with international conventions and standards (such as the International Convention on the Simplification and Harmonisation of Customs Procedures (as amended) of the World Customs Organization (the revised Kyoto Convention), the United Nations Layout Key for Trade Documents [ISO DP 6422] and the United Nations Trade Data Elements Directory [ISO 7372]);
- (b) Creating or reinforcing an effective institutional framework for the implementation of trade facilitation measures;
- (c) Modernizing customs information systems and shifting to risk assessment and advance cargo information;
- (d) Enhancing cooperation between the neighbouring countries through harmonized trade regulations and joint border-crossing posts, where feasible, or at least harmonizing the working hours of adjacent border crossing posts as articulated in the ECE International Convention on the harmonization of frontier controls of goods.⁵

⁵ United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1409, No. 23583.

12. To ensure that landlocked developing and transit countries progress in these four areas, ESCAP and ECE, in collaboration with other international organizations and partners, will continue to provide capacity-building support based inter alia on the United Nations Development Account, fifth and sixth tranches, and other extrabudgetary projects undertaken with international or regional partners. Capacity-building will include the following activities:

- (a) Assistance in negotiating on trade facilitation in the context of the WTO;
- (b) Building a public-private cooperation mechanism for an effective implementation of trade facilitation measures, taking into account United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business Recommendation No. 4 on National Trade Facilitation Bodies, the ESCAP *Study on National Coordination Mechanisms for Trade and Transport Facilitation in the UNESCAP Region*⁶ and other relevant ESCAP and ECE studies and tools;
- (c) Assistance with accession to and implementation of international conventions and use of standards and best practices in trade and transport facilitation, in particular those developed by the United Nations, including the use of the ECE and UN/CEFACT standards and recommendations on the establishment of single-window systems for export and import clearance and trade data harmonization;
- (d) Establishment of an Asia-Pacific Forum on Efficient Trade that encompasses expert networks to, inter alia, introduce and use electronic trade documentation aligned with United Nations standards.

V. PRIORITY 4: INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT MEASURES

13. The Almaty Programme of Action places the primary responsibility for its implementation with landlocked and transit developing countries. It points out that countries need to create conditions in which resources can be generated, attracted and effectively mobilized to address their development challenges, including those that result from being landlocked. The Almaty Programme of Action also acknowledges the magnitude of establishing and maintaining an efficient transit system and the role of the development partners in assisting countries with this task. It provides the international community with a clear mandate to work together in specific areas relating to fundamental transit, transport infrastructure and facilitation, and international trade and trade facilitation.

14. A significant amount of work has been undertaken at the regional and subregional levels by international and regional organizations assisting Euro-Asian landlocked and transit developing countries in implementing the Almaty Programme of Action and achieving their development goals.

15. Further emphasis should be placed on official development assistance and the mobilization of financial and technical resources, including the private sector, in undertaking the actions identified under priorities one, two and three above. This would enable landlocked and transit developing countries to optimize the momentum created by the Almaty Programme of Action.

⁶ United Nations publication, Sales No. 08.II.F.11.

VI. PRIORITY 5: IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW

16. Countries appreciated the preparatory work undertaken at the regional level by ESCAP, ECE, the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, the organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, other relevant international and regional organizations and development partners in the preparation of the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action and requested that review meetings be organized periodically at the subregional level in order to maintain the momentum of the implementation of the Programme.

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