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REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION

PROGRESS MADE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR THE BIENNIUM 1992-1993

Report on

promotion of cooperation among ESCWA countries for
the setting up of a centre for space science
and technology education

Introduction

1. The purpose of the present report is to inform the participants in the seventeenth session of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) of the progress achieved in implementing the project for the setting up of a regional centre for space science and technology education (to be referred to henceforth as the Regional Centre). This report follows up on the report presented to the Commission at its sixteenth session on the subject.^{1/} The preparations for the implementation of this project have been carried out with the participation of the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs.

2. The principal aim of the Regional Centre would be to train scientific personnel in remote sensing, including satellite meteorology, the application of remote sensing in agriculture, environmental protection and assessment of damage resulting from natural disasters, as well as enhancing educational curricula and technical and scientific education. The Regional Centre would also assist agencies that use remote sensing for the management of natural resources and the environment in solving resource-related and environmental problems in their own countries.

3. As noted in the report presented to the Commission at its sixteenth session in 1992, the project will be implemented in four phases defined in the work plan for the project.^{2/} The first phase focuses on identifying the prospective host institutions, holding negotiations with them and selecting project personnel and consultants. In order to achieve these objectives an evaluation mission was planned, to be conducted jointly by the Office for Outer Space Affairs, ESCWA and a senior expert on space science and technology.

4. The second phase will include preparing an inventory of scientific and technical educational materials, designating experts, acquiring equipment and materials, installing equipment and laboratory facilities, and training support personnel in the use and maintenance of equipment and laboratory facilities.

5. During the third phase, the Regional Centre will be put into operation and training programmes for teachers of natural sciences and environment, and workshop programmes for primary and secondary schoolteachers will be organized and carried out.

6. In the fourth phase, pilot projects will be implemented to assist teachers in using the information they acquired in their teaching and research activities. Evaluation workshops will also be held during this phase to assess the impact of the activities of the Regional Centre. The project document presented to the Commission at its sixteenth session^{3/} sets out in detail the development objectives and the immediate objective, the background and justification, the programme and output and the administrative structure

^{1/} See E/ESCWA/16/3(Part I)/Add.5 and Suppl.1.

^{2/} See E/ESCWA/16/3(Part I)/Add.5/Suppl.1.

^{3/} Ibid.

of the Regional Centre, as well as the contribution and responsibilities of the parties participating in it, the responsibilities of the executing agencies, the work plan and organizational structure of the Regional Centre.

A. Offers for hosting the Centre

7. Preparations for the establishment of the Regional Centre continued during the period 1992-1993. ESCWA and the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs received offers to host the Regional Centre from four ESCWA member countries, namely the United Arab Emirates, the Syrian Arab Republic, Jordan and Egypt. The offers of these countries contained a preliminary description of the facilities that they would provide for the Regional Centre, in addition to support cadres and the contribution which their scientists would make to the work of the Centre, including equipment for interpreting remote sensing data and computer facilities.

8. The institutions which initially offered to host the Regional Centre are the following:

(a) The Centre for Remote Sensing, United Arab Emirates University, Al Ain, United Arab Emirates;

(b) The Royal Jordanian Geographic Centre, Amman, Jordan;

(c) The National Agency for Remote Sensing, which is attached to the Prime Minister's Office, Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic;

(d) The National Authority for Remote Sensing and Space Sciences, Ministry of Scientific Research, Cairo, Egypt.

B. Work performed during 1992-1993 in preparation for the evaluation mission

9. The Commission translated and distributed to all concerned parties in the region a document issued at United Nations Headquarters^{4/} which contained the objectives and work plan of the Centre, the stages of implementation and its administrative and organizational structure.

10. Representatives of the Commission made a preliminary visit in April 1993 to the United Arab Emirates University in Al Ain, which was then still interested in hosting the Regional Centre.

C. Evaluation mission

11. Following consultations with the prospective host countries it was agreed in consultation with the concerned countries to undertake a formal evaluation mission in June to examine the facilities offered by the host countries.

^{4/} "Centres for Space Science and Technology Education: capability development in and data management for environmental assessment and natural resources management; updated project document" (A/AC.105/534), 7 January 1993.

12. At the request of the United Arab Emirates University, Al Ain, the evaluation mission was postponed to October 1993. This date had to be altered later as it coincided with the date for implementing the United Nations decision to transfer the Office for Outer Space Affairs from New York to Vienna as part of the United Nations restructuring process. It was difficult for the Office for Outer Space Affairs to participate in the mission during the period scheduled. Therefore, the Office requested the postponement of the evaluation mission to the second half of March 1994.

13. Egypt, the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan continued to express interest in hosting the Regional Centre when the evaluation mission was launched in March 1994. The evaluation team, therefore, visited the prospective host institutions in these countries between 16 and 26 March 1994. The mission involved an intensive programme of visits by the representatives of the Office for Outer Space Affairs, and ESCWA as well as the Senior Expert on Space Science and Technology, engaged by the Office for Outer Space Affairs. The visits were made to laboratory and training facilities dedicated to the application of space-related technology.

14. Discussions were held in all three countries by representatives of government departments which make use of space science and technology. Preliminary meetings in the three prospective host countries were attended by a representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) office.

15. All three prospective host institutions visited indicated the extent of support they would be able to give towards its establishment. Furthermore, it was apparent that each of the institutions visited did possess certain strong points which should be appropriately utilized.

16. It was made clear, at meetings conducted during the mission, that both ESCWA and the Office for Outer Space Affairs could only play a technical and consultative role in promoting the establishment of the Regional Centre. The representatives of the UNDP offices in the three prospective host countries, however, pledged the support of their respective offices to the application of the prospective host institutions in these countries and indicated their willingness to support fund-raising.

D. Remarks and recommendations

17. Following the review of the facilities visited and discussions among the members of the evaluation team, the following tentative remarks and recommendations may be made:

(1) A detailed draft report will be compiled by the senior space science and technology expert on the basis of the discussions and visits conducted during the mission. A draft of the part concerning each country will be forwarded to the prospective host institution for comments and suggestions. The modified individual drafts will then be combined in a unified report which will be made available to all three prospective host institutions.

(2) The Office for Outer Space Affairs will prepare curricula for the Regional Centre in order: (a) to take into account the expanded scope of the Regional Centre, which is to include important aspects of space science and

technology in addition to remote sensing applications; and (b) to elaborate the requirement for cooperative efforts involving higher education and research in space science and technology at the national and regional levels. These curricula will form the bases for drawing up more detailed lists of equipment and facilities to be made available for the Regional Centre's operation.

(3) The enlarged scope of the Regional Centre and the relatively limited resources available to the prospective host institution concerned are the main factors which would favour the formation of a regional network of institutions for space science and technology education rather than the establishment of a centralized regional institution. The suggested regional network should encompass, at the outset, the institutions currently applying to host the Regional Centre, but should be open to other national and regional institutions involved in space science and technology education and research.

(4) It may be useful to note that ESCWA will continue its support of efforts aimed at the establishment of the Regional Centre and that once the Centre is established the future role of ESCWA should involve its representation on the board of directors of the Regional Centre. In that capacity, ESCWA will aim to ensure the conformity of the Regional Centre's plans to regional priorities.