



**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COUNCIL**

Distr.
LIMITED
E/ESCWA/23/9
5 April 2005
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

Twenty-third session
Damascus, 9-12 May 2005

Item 12 of the provisional agenda

**DATE AND VENUE OF THE TWENTY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE
COMMISSION AND OF SUBSIDIARY BODIES OF ESCWA**

Note by the secretariat

Summary

Rule 1 of the Rules of Procedure of the Commission stipulates that the sessions shall be held normally in April every other year, at a time to be determined by the members of the Commission. Consequently, during each session, the Commission recommends the date and venue of the next session.

The Commission is invited to review this document and provide advice to the secretariat regarding the existing timing of legislative sessions, bearing in mind the recommendations made in the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the management of the governance structures of the regional commissions.

A. INTRODUCTION

1. This document provides the Commission with the opportunity to review the existing timing of legislative sessions with the aim of increasing the involvement of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies in programme planning. Additionally, it responds to the recommendations of OIOS, as approved by the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session, which requests the secretariats of the five regional commissions to ensure that the calendars of their annual/biennial sessions are “harmonized with the submissions of the biennial programme plan (a component of the strategic framework) or the proposed programme budgets to the Headquarters Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts”.*

B. ASSESSMENT OF PROGRAMME REVIEWS CONDUCTED BY LEGISLATIVE BODIES

2. There are seven subsidiary bodies within ESCWA, namely: Committee on Water Resources, Committee on Energy, Committee on Social Development, Committee on Transport, Technical Committee on Liberalization of Foreign Trade and Economic Globalization in the Countries of the ESCWA Region, Statistics Committee and the Committee on Women. Pursuant to ESCWA resolution 228 (XXI) of 11 May 2001, all these subsidiary bodies with the exception of the Committee on Transport hold their meetings on a biennial basis. In line with ESCWA resolution 229 (XXI) of 11 May 2001 the Committee on Transport holds annual sessions.

3. Since the structural reform of ESCWA in 2002, which adopted the new thematic programme, the programme plans (biennial strategic framework) and the proposed programme of work (a component of the biennial programme budget) have been reviewed by the legislative bodies, as shown in the table below.

Programme plan	Legislative body	Remarks
Proposed programme of work for the biennium 2004-2005	Commission (twenty-second session, 14-17 April 2003)	ESCWA programme of work
Proposed strategic framework for the biennium 2006-2007	Committee on Transport (fifth session, 2-4 March 2004)	Subprogramme 4. Regional integration and responding to globalization, pertaining to transport sector
Proposed programme of work for the biennium 2006-2007	Committee on Transport (sixth session, 22-24 February 2005)	Subprogramme 4. Regional integration and responding to globalization, pertaining to transport sector
	Technical Committee on Liberalization of Foreign Trade and Economic Globalization in the Countries of the ESCWA Region (fourth session, 7-8 March 2005)	Subprogramme 4. Regional integration and responding to globalization, pertaining to trade and financing for development sectors
	Committee on Social Development (fifth session, 29-31 March 2005)	Subprogramme 2. Integrated social policies
	Commission (twenty-third session, 9-12 May 2005)	ESCWA programme of work

4. During 2004, the secretariat submitted a draft strategic framework for the period 2006-2007 to the Advisory Committee and the national focal points with the aim of facilitating the mandated intergovernmental review of programme planning documents. All the feedback from member countries that was received on time was conveyed to the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) and contributed towards the Secretary-General’s proposed strategic framework for the period 2006-2007 on economic and social development in Western Asia.

* See “Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on its audit of the regional commissions”, 6 May 2004.

C. ADJUSTMENT REQUIRED FOR ESCWA LEGISLATIVE SESSION SCHEDULE

5. In December 2003, the General Assembly decided to replace the four-year medium-term plan with a two-year strategic framework to serve as the basis for the programme planning of the United Nations and its entities. Under this new arrangement, the programme narratives of the biennial programme budget are set to the objectives, expected accomplishments and indicators of achievement provided in the biennial strategic framework. Within that context, a series of intergovernmental reviews of the proposed strategic framework is required in even years and similar reviews of the proposed programme budget in odd years. Additionally, a clear division of labour was introduced for CPC and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ). While CPC is responsible for reviewing the strategic framework in even years, ACABQ concentrates its review on the proposed programme budget in odd years.

6. This new programme planning approach had no impact on the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), given that these Commissions hold annual sessions. Similarly, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) was not affected since its Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development convenes annually. However, ESCWA and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) are required to review their current situations with regard to the schedules of their respective sessions.

7. Having gained experience through the first cycle of the new programme planning process, the secretariat is of the view that the existing timing of legislative sessions needs adjustments to increase the involvement of member countries in programme planning. As the highest governing body of ESCWA, the Commission needs to be actively involved in the review and approval of the biennial strategic framework. Equally, within that approved framework, the subsidiary bodies of ESCWA must be more closely involved in reviewing the biennial programme of work.

D. RECOMMENDATIONS

8. Based on the above, the Commission is invited to consider the following proposals by the secretariat:

(a) The twenty-fourth session of the Commission should be convened in spring of 2006 instead of 2007. This proposed change could allow member countries to review collectively the proposed strategic framework for 2008-2009, prior to consideration by CPC. Furthermore, during that session, the Commission could discuss ways of improving the work of legislative bodies and of increasing the involvement of the member countries in legislative sessions;

(b) Committees that currently meet biennially should be convened during the fourth quarter in even years and the first quarter in odd years. In the case of the Committee on Transport, which meets annually, sessions should be held in the first quarter of every year. Dates and agendas of all those sessions should be decided in close consultation between the secretariat and member countries. Moreover, these sessions should be scheduled to facilitate the review of the proposed programme of work, pertaining to their respective subprogrammes, and to minimize the time gap between the sessions of the respective committees (see the annex for the proposed timetable of legislative sessions for the period 2000-2009);

(c) The role of the Advisory Committee needs to be strengthened in terms of advising the secretariat on such issues as programme planning and the agendas of legislative sessions. Additionally, the Advisory Committee should be actively involved in the preparation of the twenty-fourth session of the Commission and of the sessions of the subsidiary bodies. Within that context, the secretariat plans to use the quarterly meetings of the Advisory Committee in 2005.

Annex

PROPOSED TIMETABLE OF LEGISLATIVE SESSIONS FOR THE PERIOD 2000-2007^{a/}

Legislative body	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004 ^{b/}	2005 ^{c/}	2006 ^{b/}	2007 ^{c/}	2008 ^{b/}	2009 ^{c/}
Commission	-	May 21 st session	March Special session	April 22 nd session	-	April 24 th session	April 25 th session	-	April 25 th session	-
Committee on Water Resources	November 4 th session	-	November 5 th session	-	December 6 th session	-	-	January 7 th session	-	January 8 th session
Committee on Energy	-	October 3 rd session	October 4 th session	-	October 5 th session	-	December 6 th session	-	December 7 th session	-
Committee on Social Development	-	March 3 rd session	July 4 th session	-	-	March 5 th session	-	February 6 th session	-	February 7 th session
Committee on Transport (annual sessions)	-	February 2 nd session	March 3 rd session	January 4 th session	March 5 th session	March 6 th session	February 7 th session	February 8 th session	February 9 th session	February 10 th session
Technical Committee on Liberalization of Foreign Trade and Economic Globalization in the Countries of the ESCWA Region	-	April 2 nd session	-	February 3 rd session	-	March 4 th session	-	March 5 th session	-	March 6 th session
Statistics Committee	-	April 4 th session	October 5 th session	-	October 6 th session	-	November 7 th session	-	November 8 th session	-
Committee on Women	-	-	-	December 1 st session	July 2 nd session	-	November 3 rd session	-	November 4 th session	-

Notes:

a/ Sessions from 2006-2009 are merely indicative and will be finalized through consultation with the members of the Commission, taking into account other regional and global meetings planned and official public holidays.

b/ Strategic framework year.

c/ Programme budget year.
