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**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION
FOR WESTERN ASIA**

**REPORT ON THE TWENTY-FIFTH SESSION
26-29 May 2008**

**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL
OFFICIAL RECORDS: 2008**

SUPPLEMENT No. 21

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Summary

The twenty-fifth session of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) was held in Sana'a from 26 to 29 May 2008, pursuant to its resolutions 158 (XIV) of 5 April 1987 on holding the sessions of the Commission on a biennial basis, and 196 (XVII) of 31 May 1994 on the frequency of sessions of the Commission.

Session meetings were held in two segments, one for senior officials and the other for ministers. At the former, consideration was given to the report of the Executive Secretary on the activities of the Commission, management issues, the draft convention on the international multimodal transport of goods in the Arab Mashreq and the request for membership in the Commission by the Sudan. The ministerial segment held two roundtables, the first on financing for development in the ESCWA region and the second on strengthening regional cooperation for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). During the session, ESCWA launched the portal for information gathering and issued a report on the MDGs in the Arab region in 2007.

The session concluded with the adoption of a number of recommendations made by the senior officials' segment and a set of resolutions to be brought to the attention of the Economic and Social Council. This report includes those recommendations and resolutions and a summary of the most important points that were raised in the course of the discussions.

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INTRODUCTION

1. The twenty-fifth session of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia was held pursuant to resolution 158 (XIV) of 5 April 1987 on holding the sessions of the Commission on a biennial basis and resolution 196 (XVII) of 31 May 1994 on the frequency of sessions of the Commission.
2. This report covers the work of the Commission at its twenty-fifth session, which was held in Sana'a from 26 to 29 May 2008. Ten plenary meetings were convened in two segments, one of which was for senior officials, who held six meetings, while the other was for ministers, who held two.

I. ISSUES CALLING FOR ACTION BY THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

3. At its tenth plenary meeting, held on 29 May 2008, the Commission adopted a resolution to be decided upon by the Economic and Social Council, concerning the request for membership in the Commission by the Sudan, the text of which is set forth below:

280 (XXV). Request from the Sudan to become a member of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia,

Referring to its approval, at its twenty-third session, which was held in Damascus from 9 to 12 May 2005, of the request submitted by the Sudan to take part in ESCWA meetings and activities in the capacity of an observer,

Noting that, since approval was granted, representatives of that country have participated in a number of ESCWA meetings and technical activities and that such cooperation has strengthened the relationship between the Sudan and both the ESCWA secretariat and other member countries,

Referring to the letter dated 5 June 2007 addressed to the secretariat by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Sudan, affirming the desire of that country to increase cooperation with ESCWA and its member countries, and requesting to become a member of the Commission,

Taking into consideration paragraph 2 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1818 (LV) dated 9 August 1973 concerning the terms of reference of the Commission, which provides as follows: the members of the Commission shall consist of the States Members of the United Nations situated in Western Asia which at present call on the services of the United Nations Economic and Social Office in Beirut. Future applications for membership by Member States shall be decided on by the Council upon the recommendation of the Commission,

Recalling that the Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia do not discuss the geographical location of countries which may become members thereof or proscribe a member of one regional commission from being at the same time a member of another regional commission,

Recalling also that most of the other regional commissions have as members countries that are not located in the region that they serve,

1. *Welcomes* the request made by the Sudan to become a member of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia;

2. *Requests* the secretariat to put forward to the Economic and Social Council for action the recommendation that the request for membership by the Sudan should be approved.

10th plenary meeting
29 May 2008

II. ISSUES TO BE BROUGHT TO THE ATTENTION OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

4. At its tenth plenary meeting, held on 29 May 2008, the Commission adopted a number of resolutions to be brought to the attention of the Economic and Social Council, the texts of which are set forth below:

281 (XXV). Addressing climate change issues in the Arab region

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia,

Reaffirming the outcome of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, namely, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) which supports initiatives to assess the consequences of climate change,¹

Convinced of the importance of the Ministerial Declaration of the 2007 high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council,² which reaffirms that responses to climate change should be coordinated, with a view to integrating social and economic development therein,

Recalling the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change,³ which noted the scientific consensus that climate change is a reality, and expressed the expectation that the Arab region will be one of the regions that is most vulnerable to the potential impact of climate change, including coastal zone threats, increased water scarcity and worsening drought and desertification,

Recalling also the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol, progress achieved on the associated commitments, and the Bali Road Map and Bali Action Plan,⁴ whereby Member States decided on the need to enhance action for international cooperation in undertaking vulnerability assessments and preparing natural disaster mitigation strategies, in view of the potential risks associated with climate change,

Acknowledging the outcomes of discussions that call upon the United Nations regional commissions to support regional action on climate change adaptation, mitigation, technology and finance,

Mindful of the emphasis given to climate change issues by the Arab Regional Implementation Meeting reports for the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) cycles, and the outcomes of the twelfth to sixteenth CSD sessions and their associated thematic topics related to water, energy, industrial development, climate change, agriculture, desertification, drought and rural development,

Welcoming the Arab Ministerial Declaration on Climate Change that was adopted on 6 December 2007 at the nineteenth session of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment, which affirmed their commitment to adopt national and regional action plans on climate change issues, with a view to assessing possible impacts and developing mitigation and adaptation programmes, and to include climate change-related policies in all sectors within national and regional policies for sustainable development,

¹ *Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August – 4 September 2002* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.03.II.A.1 and corrigendum), chap. I, resolution 2, annex.

² Report of the Economic and Social Council for 2007, Ministerial declaration of the high-level segment “Strengthening efforts to eradicate poverty and hunger, including through the global partnership for development” (A/62/3).

³ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2007, Mitigation of Climate Change*, ISBN 978-0-521-88011-4.

⁴ Decision/COP.13.

Referring to ESCWA resolution 261 (XXIII) of 12 May 2005 on strengthening the cooperation between ESCWA and the League of Arab States in the field of economic and social development,

1. *Requests* the secretariat to prepare an assessment of the vulnerability to climate change of economic and social development in the region, with particular emphasis on fresh water resources;
2. *Encourages* member countries to actively support and participate in the preparation of the aforementioned vulnerability assessment, including by providing required facilities and information;
3. *Requests* the secretariat to take the measures necessary to increase awareness of climate change, in respect of adjusting to and alleviating its impact, and to work with member country Governments and initiate dialogue over the relevant recommendations;
4. *Also requests* the secretariat to develop an Arab framework action plan on climate change, in partnership with the League of Arab States, UNEP/ROWA and other relevant regional organizations;
5. *Requests* the Executive Secretary to make available through the regular budget the resources necessary to implement those activities;
6. *Also requests* the Executive Secretary to report on the findings and recommendations arising from the assessment and any additional action taken in that regard to the twenty-sixth session of the Commission.

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29 May 2008

282 (XXV). Mitigating the impact on development of conflict, occupation and instability in ESCWA member countries

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia,

Guided by the 2005 World Summit Outcome¹ that emphasized the mutually reinforcing interlinkages between development, peace, security and human rights,

Recalling its resolutions 271 (XXIV) of 11 May 2006 on strengthening the role of ESCWA in addressing the impact of conflict and instability within the context of social and economic development and 260 (XXIII) of 12 May 2005 on development and regional cooperation under unstable conditions,

Expressing grave concern with regard to continued occupation, violence, political tensions and conflicts and their negative impact on social and economic development and the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in conflict-afflicted countries and Western Asia as a whole,

Recognizing the need to continue to raise awareness of the negative impact of instability on development and undertake new interventions aimed at strengthening public sector and civil society capacity to attain social and economic development goals, including MDGs, regardless of conflict and political tensions,

Taking note of ESCWA reports that monitor and analyze political, social and economic developments in countries afflicted by conflict and, in particular, the report that reviews the economic and

¹ General Assembly resolution 60/1.

social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan²,

Noting with appreciation the results of various capacity-building initiatives in conflict-afflicted countries that have addressed the improvement of management skills and poverty reduction,

Noting ESCWA efforts to mobilize extrabudgetary resources and forge partnerships with local, regional and international actors,

1. *Welcomes* the establishment in ESCWA of the Development Subprogramme on the mitigation of the impact of conflict and occupation;

2. *Calls on* member countries to:

(a) Intensify efforts to enhance institutional capacities to respond to the challenges associated with conflict and occupation;

(b) Support conflict- or occupation-afflicted countries in overcoming socio-economic and political challenges;

3. *Requests* the ESCWA secretariat to:

(a) Intensify its efforts to raise awareness of the potential impact of conflict and instability on development;

(b) Build on successful ESCWA interventions in conflict- or occupation-afflicted countries through the development and interchange of best practice and adaptation thereof for the use of other member countries;

(c) Contribute to the capacity-building of Government officials, focusing on management skills and strategy planning;

(d) Continue its efforts to mobilize extrabudgetary resources to finance the implementation of capacity-building and other activities;

(e) Enhance partnerships with relevant local, regional and international organizations;

4. *Invites* member countries and donors to support ESCWA in its endeavours to mitigate the impact of conflict and instability and the socio-economic ramifications thereof;

5. *Requests* the Executive Secretary to submit a report to the twenty-sixth session of the Commission on the progress achieved in implementing this resolution.

10th plenary meeting
29 May 2008

**283 (XXV). ESCWA member country compliance with international standards
for enhancing national statistical systems**

² Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/43 and General Assembly resolution 61/184.

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia,

Guided by the 1985 Declaration on Professional Ethics of the International Statistical Institute which stresses the importance of adherence by statisticians to the relevant ethics and best practices,

Committed to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics that were issued by the United Nations Statistical Commission in 1994 with a view to enhancing public trust in official statistics and national statistical systems and establishing statistical systems that are consistent with international concepts, classifications and standards,

Affirming the importance of the Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics and the recommendations that were made at the three Arab statistical forums that were held in Amman in 2003, Muscat in 2005 and Sana'a in November 2007, which called for the statistical profession to be developed and the capacities of statistical systems to be enhanced within general State administration, as an important tool in identifying, monitoring and evaluating the social and economic situation,

Affirming also the Amman Declaration of Statistics, issued by the First Arab Statistical Conference, that was held in Amman in November 2007, which emphasized the importance of autonomous statistical work and adherence by statisticians to the relevant ethics and best practice, and asserted the importance of building professional national statistical systems oriented towards the needs of users,

Guided by the General Data Dissemination System that was issued by the International Monetary Fund with the aim of enabling member countries to measure economic and social developments in an objective and transparent manner,

Guided also by the initiatives undertaken by several countries in the region with a view to increasing the autonomy of the statistical system:

1. *Requests member countries to take the following measures:*

(a) Take all the measures necessary in order to produce high quality official statistics that can be used in international comparisons, by applying international concepts, classifications and standards and activating statistical institutions;

(b) Adopt the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and take action to apply them, ensure the credibility, impartiality and autonomy of statistical institutions and enhance the credibility of statistics at the national, regional and international levels;

(c) Complete the design and implementation of national strategies for statistical development, in accordance with the general orientations issued by Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (Paris 21);

(d) Empower the statistical machinery to publish data in a timely fashion by adhering to the conditions of the General Data Dissemination System that was issued by the International Monetary Fund;

(e) Enhance the position of the national statistical machinery within the national institutional structure and strengthen the structural factors that are connected to the legislative framework and regulatory arrangements in accordance with the Handbook of Statistical Organization that was issued by the United Nations in 2004;

2. *Requests* the secretariat to take the following measures:

(a) Hold training workshops on international concepts, classifications and standards;

(b) Support member countries in adopting and undertaking to apply the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics;

(c) Support member countries in designing and implementing national strategies for statistical development by providing technical assistance, issuing and translating pertinent guidelines, holding workshops and contributing to the organization of Arab statistical forums;

(d) Encourage member countries to participate in and adhere to the General Data Dissemination System and the Special Data Dissemination Standard of the International Monetary Fund;

3. *Requests* the Executive Secretary to follow up on the above recommendations and submit a report thereon to the twenty-sixth session of the Commission.

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284 (XXV). Establishment of the ESCWA regional technology centre

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia,

Referring to the 2005 World Summit Outcome,¹ Economic and Social Council resolution 2004/68 of 5 September 2004 and the Millennium Declaration,² which identified the promotion of science and technology as a United Nations priority,

Reiterating the importance of science, technology and innovation (STI) in accelerating development, building more competitive knowledge-based economies, achieving sustainable development at the national and regional levels, and generating new opportunities for employment, leading to poverty reduction,

Referring to ESCWA resolution 274 (XXIV) of 11 May 2006, which approves in principle the establishment of a technology centre for development and requests the secretariat to take action and submit a report on that matter,

Guided by the conclusions of the ESCWA report on the technology centre that was published in December 2007, entitled *Detailed assessment of regional needs and priorities and identification of implementation mechanisms*, which has been reviewed by panels of experts and the ESCWA Consultative Committee on Scientific and Technological Development and Technological Innovation at its fourth meeting,

Guided also by the Committee's recommendation that steps should be taken to establish a technology centre, which should be affiliated to ESCWA and actively supported and funded by member countries, with an operational structure that is in line with United Nations rules, regulations and best practice,

¹ General Assembly resolution 60/1.

² General Assembly resolution 55/2.

Encouraged by preliminary offers received from member countries to host the centre upon the request of ESCWA, and seeking to increase regional support for such activities:

1. *Requests* the secretariat:
 - (a) To finalize hosting arrangements;
 - (b) To coordinate with member countries over the establishment of a board of governors;
 - (c) To take the necessary measures to draft centre administrative regulations in preparation for approval by the board of governors;
2. *Also requests* the secretariat to set up within ESCWA a multidisciplinary team to support and monitor progress in the operationalization of the centre, to be funded by extrabudgetary resources;
3. *Requests* the Executive Secretary to report on the progress made in the implementation of this resolution to the twenty-sixth session of the Commission.

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285 (XXV). Integrated social policy

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia,

Referring to the 10 commitments of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development,¹ in particular, to commitments 1 and 2 concerning enhancing capacities needed to enable people to participate in designing and implementing social and economic policies and programmes, as appropriate; and the reduction of inequalities, increase in opportunities and access to resources and income, and removal of any political, legal, economic and social factors and constraints that foster and sustain inequality,

Guided by the 2005 World Summit Outcome,² and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs),³

Keeping in mind General Assembly resolution 62/126 dated 18 December 2007, which reaffirms the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (WPAY),³

Recalling ESCWA resolution 277 (XXIV) dated 11 May 2006, concerning social development policies, which calls upon member countries to adopt an integrated social policy approach,

Considering the evolving youth bulge in the ESCWA region and the consequent need for social and economic integration of youth into society,

¹ Report of the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, 6-12 March 1995 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.8), chap. I, resolution 1, annex I.

² General Assembly resolution 60/1.

³ General Assembly resolution 55/2.

³ General Assembly resolution 50/81, annex.

Acknowledging the continuous need of member countries to strengthen their capacities to achieve participatory, equitable and sustainable development in the context of globalization and its impact,

Cognizant of the repercussions of continued conflict, occupation and instability on the social and economic development of certain countries in the ESCWA region,

Referring to the recommendation made by the Committee on Social Development at its sixth session, which was held from 5 to 7 March 2007, that greater attention should be paid to and concrete actions initiated towards institutionalizing integrated social development policies,

Welcoming the increased interest expressed through official requests by a growing number of member countries for advisory services in integrated social policy fields and participatory social policy formulation, implementation and monitoring,

1. *Encourages* member countries to initiate national consultative dialogue aimed at adopting an integrated social policy approach;

2. *Appeals* to member countries to adopt a participatory approach through encouraging partnership between Government institutions, the private sector and civil society organizations in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of social policies;

3. *Encourages* member countries to adopt and institutionalize integrated social policy and seek harmony and balance between economic priorities and social outcomes;

4. *Also encourages* member countries to formulate national youth policies as part of their integrated social policy and national development plans and programmes;

5. *Requests* the secretariat to build upon the experience of promoting integrated social policy in Bahrain, Egypt, the Sudan and Yemen and intensify its endeavours in advocating and enhancing the capacity of member countries to formulate and adopt an integrated social policy approach through the following actions:

(a) Develop and promote the integrated social policy approach among member country decision makers, putting forward practical suggestions on building the capacities of participating countries to design public policies, including social policy, and implement and follow up programmes and evaluate performance; and making available ESCWA analytical, technical and advisory services in the field of social policy and social development;

(b) Enhance and follow up on participatory consultative processes on social policy dialogue between public offices, civil society and private sector;

(c) Assist member countries in implementing the internationally agreed plans of actions and recommendations, including MDGs and WPAY priority areas;

6. *Requests* the ESCWA Committee on Social Development to monitor progress in implementing this resolution and facilitate information and knowledge-sharing by member countries;

7. *Requests* the Executive Secretary to submit a report on the progress made in implementing this resolution to the Commission at its twenty-sixth session.

286 (XXV). Gender statistics for equality and empowerment of women

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia,

Recalling the United Nations Millennium Declaration,⁴ in which Member States resolved, inter alia, to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate sustainable development, and the 2005 World Summit Outcome,⁵ which reaffirmed the need to promote gender equality and eliminate pervasive gender discrimination by taking all the necessary resolute actions,

Reiterating General Assembly resolutions 62/218 of 12 February 2008 and 60/230 of 23 December 2005 on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,

Referring to General Assembly resolution 62/206 of 10 March 2008 on Women in Development, which stresses the importance of collecting and exchanging all relevant information needed on the role of women in development, as well as the need to develop statistics disaggregated by age and sex,

Recognizing the need to improve the situation of women in rural areas and address the lack of timely, reliable, sex-disaggregated data and, in particular, statistics concerning women's unpaid work, for use in informing policy and programme decisions, as highlighted in General Assembly resolution 62/136 of 12 February 2008,

1. *Calls upon* member countries to adopt the set of indicators in the Arab Gender Issues and Indicators Framework as a common set of indicators, and produce the statistics related to those indicators for use in the monitoring and evaluation of strategic policies and work plans in areas related to gender;

2. *Also Calls upon* member countries also to develop a mechanism for the collection, dissemination and analysis of gender-sensitive indicators and sex-disaggregated data by rural, urban and age information for the formulation of gender-related and gender-sensitive policies and programmes;

3. *Encourages* member countries to formulate and implement training programmes to mainstream gender issues and statistics into their statistical systems, with a view to sensitizing data producers and users to the issue of gender equality and women's empowerment;

4. *Calls upon* the secretariat to provide technical support to member countries in the form of advisory services and workshops, and assist member countries in integrating a gender perspective into national strategies for the development of statistics and national statistical system plans of action;

5. *Requests* the secretariat to work with member countries in developing a detailed gender database to act as a gender mainstreaming observatory in all sectors;

6. *Calls upon* the secretariat to mainstream gender statistics, as appropriate, into its programmes and outputs;

⁴ General Assembly resolution 55/2.

⁵ General Assembly resolution 60/1.

7. *Requests* the Executive Secretary to report to the twenty-sixth session of the Commission on the implementation of this resolution.

10th plenary meeting
29 May 2008

287 (XXV). Strengthening statistical capacities for evidence-based policymaking

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia,

Recalling the 2005 World Summit Outcome,¹ in which the General Assembly reiterates its determination to ensure the timely and full realization of the development goals and objectives agreed at the major United Nations conferences and summits, including those agreed at the Millennium Summit, that are described as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs),

Referring to the significance of the impartiality of national statistical offices (NSOs) and of ensuring effective coordination between those offices and other State organs, in accordance with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission in 1994,

Recalling Economic and Social Council resolution 2005/50 of 27 July 2005 on the Damascus Declaration, and the role of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including MDGs,

Also recalling Economic and Social Council resolution 2005/13 of 22 July 2005 on the 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme, which stressed the increasing importance of population and housing censuses in meeting data requirements for follow-up on activities related to the Millennium Summit,

Reaffirming the need to improve institutional statistical frameworks in member countries and intensify efforts aimed at strengthening statistical capacity to produce and disseminate timely and reliable indicators on progress towards national and international development goals, including MDGs, as emphasized by the Commission in resolution 276 (XXIV) of 11 May 2006 on the strengthening of statistical capacity in the ESCWA region,

Reaffirming also the crucial role of the ESCWA secretariat in facilitating the sharing of knowledge between member countries and supporting those countries in strengthening their national statistical capacities for evidence-based policymaking by means of technical cooperation and capacity-building activities aimed at improving the comprehensiveness, quality and comparability of economic and social statistics,

Reaffirming further the need for the secretariat to continue its efforts to mobilize the necessary additional resources in support of member country efforts in that respect,

Having reviewed the report of the ESCWA Statistical Committee on its seventh session, which was held in Beirut from 7 to 9 November 2006,²

Welcoming the recommendation of the Statistical Committee on the setting up of a task force of statisticians that includes NSO directors,

¹ General Assembly resolution 60/1.

² E/ESCWA/SCU/2006/IG.1/12.

1. *Approves* the recommendation of the Statistical Committee that ESCWA region NSO capacity-building needs should be periodically assessed in order to monitor progress;
2. *Encourages* member countries to produce MDG indicators and, in particular, indicators related to poverty, education and health, using surveys and other relevant sources;
3. *Also encourages* member countries to adopt the Common Set of Core Information and Communications Technology Indicators issued by the Global Partnership on Measuring Information and Communications Technology for Development, and make available the data related to those indicators for use in the drafting, evaluation and review of strategic policies and work plans in areas of priority for the development of an information society in the region;
4. *Stresses* the need to strengthen NSO impartiality in order to produce objective data, and improve coordination mechanisms within the statistical system with a view to improving the production and use of statistical data for evidence-based policymaking;
5. *Encourages* member countries to exchange experience and information for best practice in the development of statistical activities and systems;
6. *Commends* the support given by Oman to the Task Force on Population and Housing Censuses and the activities that it has undertaken for the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses;
7. *Calls upon* member countries to accelerate implementation of the 1993 System of National Accounts and its revisions, in order to enable policymakers to monitor economic changes and improve economic performance;
8. *Requests* the secretariat to:
 - (a) Assist member countries in building their capacity to unify concepts and definitions and carry out multi-purpose family surveys and improve their administrative records at the national level through holding workshops and providing technical services;
 - (b) Prepare and submit to the ESCWA Statistical Committee periodic reports on progress made in the development of NSO statistical activities, based on ESCWA region NSO capacity-building needs assessments;
 - (c) Facilitate, through its official webpage on the Internet and the provision of technical consultancy, the interchange between member countries of experience and knowledge, with a view to promoting best practices in the development of statistical systems and activities;
 - (d) Increase its efforts to mobilize extrabudgetary resources to support various activities, including those of the Task Force on Population and Housing Censuses, and implement the 2010 Population and Housing Census Programme.

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288 (XXV). Establishing an Arabic language centre at ESCWA

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia,

Recalling General Assembly resolution 62/225 of 22 December 2006 on the pattern of conferences in which it requests the Secretary General to continue his efforts to ensure the highest quality of interpretation and translation services in all official languages and to make sure that the terminology used in the translation and interpretation services reflects the latest linguistic norms and terminology of the official languages in order to ensure the highest quality;

Recalling also General Assembly resolution 61/266 of 16 May 2007 in which it proclaims 2008 as International Year of Languages,

Recalling further to ESCWA resolution 239 (XXII) of 17 April 2003 on consideration of the establishment within the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia of a United Nations Arabic language centre,

Bearing in mind the comments and proposals made by the Arab countries concerning Arabic language services in the United Nations and, in particular, the letter dated 31 July 2001 addressed to the Secretary General from the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations in his capacity as Chairman of the Arab Group for the month of July 2001,¹ and the proposal of the delegation of Egypt in the annex to the Report of the Committee on Conferences,²

Having considered the report of the Executive Secretary on the activities of the Commission: Follow-up to the establishment of an Arabic language centre at ESCWA, which presents the outcome of the consultation carried out with the parties concerned in the Organization and in the Arab region,³

Having considered also the project document prepared by the ESCWA secretariat which outlines the objectives, functions, proposed activities and required resources of the centre,⁴

Stressing the important contribution that ESCWA can make, in view of its location in the Arab region, to strengthening Arabic language services in the United Nations system, making use of available resources,

1. *Cognizant* of the project document presented to Senior Officials' Segment of the twenty-fifth ESCWA session concerning the establishment of an Arabic language centre at ESCWA, to be involved in the coordination of Arabic terminology, organization of training sessions and building of cooperative relationships with translation institutes and universities, in accordance with the details set forth in the project document, in coordination with the Department of General Assembly and Conference Services;

2. *Encourages* continued cooperation with ESCWA by the focal points designated by member countries for this project;

3. *Requests* the Executive Secretary to explore ways and means to fund the project from extrabudgetary resources;

4. *Also requests* the Executive Secretary to follow-up on the implementation of this resolution and submit a report to the Commission at its twenty-sixth session.

¹ A/56/261.

² A/49/32/Rev.1.

³ E/ESCWA/25/5(Part III).

⁴ E/ESCWA/25/5/CRP.1.

289 (XXV). Supporting the comprehensive development efforts of Yemen

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia,

Appreciative of the comprehensive and sustainable development efforts of Yemen,

Noting with satisfaction the tangible progress that has been made in entrenching economic and financial reform measures in the face of limited resources and the status of Yemen as a least developed country;

1. *Comments* the comprehensive development efforts exerted by the Government of Yemen that are aimed at eradicating poverty and meeting economic and social needs with the extensive involvement of civil society and the professional, academic and political social sectors;

2. *Recommends* that the Commission should provide more support of all types to Yemen with a view to achieving the activities and efforts that are undertaken as part of comprehensive development and national efforts to realize the Millennium Development Goals;

3. *Requests* the Executive Secretary to follow-up on the implementation of this resolution and submit a report to the Commission at its twenty-sixth session.

10th plenary meeting
29 May 2008

290 (XXV). Call for regional action to accelerate implementation of the Monterrey Consensus in Western Asia

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia,

Referring to General Assembly resolution 62/187 of 19 December 2007 concerning the Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus, in which the Assembly decided to hold the conference in Doha from 29 November to 2 December 2008,

Referring also to ESCWA resolution 270 (XXIV) of 11 May 2006 concerning macroeconomic policy for financial stability,

Referring further to the Monterrey Consensus¹ that was issued by the International Conference on Financing for Development which was held in Mexico in 2002,

Taking into consideration the intensive consultations that took place between experts and specialists at the Consultative Preparatory Meeting for the Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development which was held in Doha on 29 and 30 April 2008,²

¹ Report of the International Conference on Financing for Development, Monterrey, Mexico, 18-22 March 2002 (United Nations publication Sales No. E.02.II.A.7), chap. I, resolution 1, annex.

² E/ESCWA/EDGD/2008/4.

Noting that, notwithstanding the progress that has been made in implementing the Greater Arab Free Trade Agreement, there remains a pressing need to strengthen regional integration in order to enhance the competitive capacities of ESCWA member countries,

Concerned by the turbulence that has recently affected the global economy, involving fluctuations in the exchange rates of the major currencies and inflation and the consequent fall in the purchasing power of the national currencies of member countries, which could destabilize the domestic economic environment that member countries have succeeded in building up over the years,

Noting that, while several member countries have become international investors, and have helped to stabilize the global monetary system, their role in managing that system remains extremely limited,

Appreciative of the assistance that the oil-producing countries provide to developing and, in particular, ESCWA member countries,

Taking into consideration the reports on the progress made in implementing the Monterrey Consensus in member countries,

1. *Adopts* the draft final communiqué annexed hereto that was issued by the Consultative Preparatory Meeting for the Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development which was held in Doha on 29 and 30 April 2008;³

2. *Affirms* the need for developing countries, including ESCWA member countries, to be more involved in the management of the global financial, monetary and trade system;

3. *Calls upon* member countries to continue to support regional integration, including through increased interregional investment and trade;

4. *Also calls upon* member countries to support small and medium-sized enterprises and make available the financial resources necessary to create new youth employment opportunities;

5. *Further calls upon* member countries to continue efforts to eradicate financial and administrative corruption, thereby enhancing opportunities to increase investment, and to make use of available domestic financial resources;

6. *Requests* member countries to exert greater efforts to increase their share of foreign direct investment (FDI) and, in particular, investment that leads to the transfer of modern technology and the development of human resources; and to stress the importance of education and its central role in enabling individuals, eradicating poverty at the family and community levels and achieving wider socio-economic development goals;

7. *Requests* the developed donor countries to honour their undertakings and increase official development assistance in order to assist in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, without placing any conditions on such assistance that could have a negative impact on the capacities of beneficiary countries;

8. *Affirms* the need for member countries to make an effective contribution at the highest possible level to the Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus and harmonize their positions during the Conference in order to ensure that the outcome is consistent with their ambitions and demands;

³ Ibid, chap. I, A.

9. *Requests* the ESCWA secretariat to strengthen cooperation with the relevant regional and international organizations and with the other United Nations regional commissions on Monterrey Consensus-related issues, with a view to supporting the position of the developing countries with respect to the formulation of international rules;

10. *Calls upon* the ESCWA secretariat to follow up the outcome of the Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development and support member countries in studying and analysing new issues arising from that Conference that relate to the region and assist them in devising and pursuing appropriate policies;

11. *Requests* the ESCWA secretariat to support member country efforts to build institutional capacities and, in particular, with respect to FDI, double taxation treaties, international regulation of investment and bilateral investment agreements;

12. *Requests* the Executive Secretary to report on the progress made in implementing this resolution to the Commission at its twenty-sixth session.

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291 (XXV). Frequency of the sessions of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia,

Recalling the Commission decision in resolution 158 (XIV) of 5 April 1987 to hold its sessions biennially rather than annually,

Also recalling successive resolutions adopted between 1992 and 2003 on the establishment of the seven subsidiary bodies of the Commission and the frequency of their sessions,

Referring to the concern expressed at its twenty-fourth session over the lengthy interval between sessions, that led to the decision to establish a technical committee comprising senior officials from member countries, which would meet once every six months with a view to supporting ESCWA in achieving its aims,

Considering the recommendation of the Statistical Committee at its seventh session that a regional working group should be established composed of the directors of statistical offices in the region, to meet in years when the Committee does not, and a similar recommendation, made at its fifth session by the Technical Committee on Liberalization of Foreign Trade and Economic Globalization in the Countries of the ESCWA Region, that two separate expert group meetings should be held during the period between each Committee session, one dedicated to trade issues and the other to regional integration and financing for development,

Considering also the recommendations made by the Committee on Energy¹ and the Committee on Social Development² at their sixth sessions that their sessions should be held annually rather than biennially in order to increase interaction between member countries and between those countries and the secretariat,

Noting that the Technical Committee has so far held only one meeting since it was established,

Having deliberated on the key findings and the way forward in the report of the secretariat on the frequency of the sessions of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies,³ in conjunction with the lessons learned from evaluation of the sessions of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies and the way forward,⁴

¹ E/ESCWA/SDPD/2007/IG.1/7.

² E/ESCWA/SDD/2007/IG.1/8.

Recognizing that the frequency of the sessions of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies cannot be considered separately from programme priorities, ESCWA intergovernmental machineries and other related factors,

1. *Decides* to defer consideration of the relevant recommendations of the Committees on Energy and Social Development, and of the Statistical Committee and the Technical Committee on Liberalization of Foreign Trade and Economic Globalization in the Countries of the ESCWA Region;

2. *Calls on* the secretariat to carry out an in-depth evaluation of the intergovernmental structure of ESCWA in the light of both programme priority, as identified by member countries and ongoing United Nations reforms;

3. *Also calls on* the secretariat to support, closely monitor and assess the contribution of the Technical Committee;

4. *Appreciates* the sharing of lessons learned from the evaluation of the intergovernmental sessions held during the period 2004-2007;

5. *Invites* member Governments to review their internal distribution channels for ESCWA session documents, solicit feedback from the ministries or offices concerned on how distribution channels could be further improved and share the outcome of those reviews with the secretariat;

6. *Requests* the secretariat to:

(a) Improve and continually update the ESCWA website, with the aim of providing easy access for future delegates attending the sessions of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies to session documents and reports;

(b) Activate the member country official focal points identified by those countries;

7. *Decides* to review the outcome of the in-depth evaluation at the twenty-sixth session.

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³ E/ESCWA/25/6(Part I)/Add.2, paras 17-23.

⁴ E/ESCWA/25/6(Part I)/Add.1, paras 13-15.

III. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION AND DISCUSSION

A. REQUESTS BY STATES MEMBERS OF THE UNITED NATIONS AND/OR ITS SPECIALIZED AGENCIES THAT ARE NOT MEMBERS OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA (ESCWA) TO PARTICIPATE AS OBSERVERS IN THE TWENTY-FIFTH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION (Agenda item 5)

5. Requests to participate as observers in the work of the twenty-fifth session were received from three States Members of the United Nations that are not members of ESCWA, namely, Algeria, Djibouti and Tunisia. The Commission approved those requests. It should be noted that both the Sudan and Morocco participate as permanent observers in all Commission sessions, pursuant to the resolutions adopted at its twenty-third and twenty-fourth sessions respectively.

B. POLICY ISSUES IN THE ESCWA REGION (Agenda item 6)

6. At two round tables, the Commission considered this agenda item on the basis of document E/ESCWA/25/4. Two issues constituted the focus of discussions and suggestions.

1. *Financing for development in the ESCWA region*

7. During its first meeting, which was held in Beirut on 16 and 17 January 2008, the Technical Committee agreed to the proposals made by the secretariat regarding the theme of the twenty-fifth session of the Commission. Following that, the issue of financing for development in the ESCWA region was adopted a principal theme for the session.

8. The Commission chose to address that theme at a ministerial round table in view of its importance to the countries of the region, particularly in the context of preparations for the Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus, which is scheduled to be held in Doha from 29 November to 2 December 2008. United Nations regional commissions were requested to provide assistance to member countries in their preparations for that significant conference.

9. The round table was attended by heads of delegations and high-level speakers and experts in the field of financing for development. The discussion was opened by Mr. Jomo Kwame Sundaram, Assistant Secretary-General at the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, who reviewed the developments that have occurred since the adoption of the Monterrey Consensus and outlined the new challenges that are faced by countries in implementing internationally agreed-upon development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

10. Those challenges are linked to the mobilization of resources, in view of a new concept stipulating that the percentage of investment leads to an increase in savings rates and that development is achieved through good governance. The challenges are linked to the increase in resource flows towards factors that strengthen stability, enhance the capacities of production sectors in order for trade to become a source of growth and an engine for development, and reduce the conditions of official development assistance (ODA), with a view to enabling each developing country to choose a suitable national policy and relieve the burden of debt, which is a severe obstacle to development. The Assistant Secretary-General stressed the need to reform the international financial system, particularly in light of the current financial crisis, and reaffirmed the importance of ESCWA member countries in representing the stance of the region at the forthcoming Doha meeting with regard to emerging issues.

11. The representative of the secretariat presented a report on the implementation of the Monterrey Consensus in member countries, as contained in E/ESCWA/25/4(Part I)/A. The report contains a review of the progress that member countries have achieved in implementing the Monterrey Consensus, and the problems faced by those countries in implementing the leading actions of the Consensus in various fields, namely: (a) mobilizing domestic financial resources for development; (b) mobilizing international resources for development; (c) international trade as an engine for development; (d) increasing international financial and technical cooperation for development; (e) external debt; (f) enhancing the coherence and consistency of the international monetary, financial and trading systems in support of development. The report also includes recommendations addressed to decision-makers in member countries regarding the various principal measures stipulated in the Monterrey Consensus, in order to assist countries in taking the decisions and actions deemed necessary for implementing those measures.

12. As part of the initiatives that ESCWA took in order to encourage financing for development in the region and assist member countries in implementing the Monterrey Consensus, the representative of the secretariat of the Commission presented document E/ESCWA/25/4(Part I)/B, which is a report on the regional preparatory meeting that took place on 29 and 30 April 2008 for countries participating in the Follow-up International Conference. The report deals with the recommendations and outcomes reached at the preparatory expert group meeting on various issues related to financing for development, and includes a draft declaration on the priorities of member countries. It requests that the Commission approve that draft and bring it to the attention of the Secretary-General of the United Nations in order for it to be incorporated into the documents submitted to the Follow-up International Conference in Doha.

13. During the discussions, delegates focused on the new issues that had emerged since the adoption of the Monterrey Consensus. They called for new measures to be taken for increasing self-sufficiency in the production of foodstuffs, enlarging areas for agriculture and fishing in order to benefit from the rise in food prices and reduce foodstuff imports, modernizing administration, rationalizing expenditure and enhancing strategic South-South cooperation.

14. Delegates commended the progress achieved in implementing the Monterrey Consensus. The conference constituted a turning-point in the path of international cooperation because it gathered many interested parties in addition to the United Nations and laid the foundations for a spirit of constructive cooperation. The United Nations regional commissions demonstrated their efficiency in preparing for the conference. The Follow-up Conference in Doha will be the first opportunity in more than six years to assess accomplishments, address challenges and determine necessary measures for the future. Both donor and recipient countries adopted the Monterrey Consensus, with a view to enhancing sustainable development and alleviating poverty. The United Nations is requested to activate the global programme in that regard.

15. Delegates expressed the hope that the discussions at the Follow-up conference will lead to a clarification of the problems encountered by some countries in the ESCWA region, establish effective regional and international partnerships for assisting those countries, make specific suggestions for reducing unemployment and creating job opportunities, and implement development programmes.

16. Speakers stressed the importance of protecting the investment environment from political risks and formulating national plans and obligations in order to allocate assistance according to national priorities. They also emphasized the importance of mid-term planning and national programmes for determining mid-term priorities and spending, and the need for all institutions to submit integrated proposals for reforms, encompassing all sectors.

17. Speakers noted that the issue of financing for development is one of the main challenges faced by the region and is closely linked to the achievement of the MDGs. They pointed out the importance of offering

technical support to member countries in order to assist them in the implementation of the Monterrey Consensus, the need to pursue good governance policies both nationally and internationally and the necessity of strengthening relations between developed and developing countries, with a view to ensuring the full participation of developing countries.

18. The heads of delegations expressed the interest of their countries in implementing the measures of the Monterrey Consensus, welcomed the Follow-up Conference, which is scheduled to be held in Doha, and voiced their hope for benefiting from lessons learned in order to achieve goals and overcome obstacles. Moreover, they emphasized the importance of strengthening regional and international cooperation, fulfilling development obligations and allocating a percentage of gross national product (GNP) to ODA.

2. Regional cooperation for achieving the Millennium Development Goals

19. The Commission considered this item at a ministerial roundtable in which heads of delegations and high-level speakers and experts participated. The Executive Secretary opened the meeting dedicated to the issue of achieving the MDGs, introducing a report entitled “The Millennium Development Goals in the Arab region 2007: youth perspective”, which was prepared jointly by the United Nations agencies in the region and the League of Arab States, with ESCWA responsible for coordination. He expressed his hope that the report would be of interest to policymakers, development experts and the general public both inside and outside the region, and that it would encourage cooperation between all interested parties for achieving the MDGs.

20. The representative of the secretariat presented the report that focused on the condition of young people in the Arab region, who are aged between 15 and 24 years old and who constitute over 20 per cent of the total population. The report deals with main issues, including education and work; political, social and cultural participation; environmental sustainability and youth health. The report shows severe disparity in living conditions between the countries of the region. It indicates that countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have made progress in achieving most of the MDGs, while the least developed Arab countries and those countries suffering from conflict and/or occupation, namely, Iraq and Palestine, face severe difficulties in that regard.

21. Another representative of the secretariat gave a presentation on strengthening regional cooperation for achieving the MDGs, referring to document E/ESCWA/25/4(Part II), which outlines the experiences of development cooperation in other regions of the world in order that can be beneficial to ESCWA, particularly with regard to health, education and the environment.

22. The representative of Qatar, with the support of representatives from other member countries, emphatically remarked that, in the context of citing examples under MDG 3, which seeks to promote gender equality and empower women, the report inaccurately stated that “inheritance laws restrict property rights for women”. In fact, according to inheritance laws in the countries of the region, the amount that women inherit varies depending on responsibility: sometimes women inherit more than men, sometimes the same amount, and sometimes less.

23. Responding to those points, the Executive Secretary assured delegates that ESCWA would take note of that valuable observation, and that it would send the necessary clarifications to all member countries.

24. During the roundtable, delegates suggested devising a comprehensive cooperation plan in order to address the problem of youth unemployment by developing education curricula and generating employment opportunities. They noted that the scale of aid offered to developing countries had decreased, and highlighted the importance of donor countries honouring their commitments, with a view to increasing development aid and providing the necessary resources in a systematic and reliable manner.

25. Delegates indicated that globalization is not adequately beneficial to developing countries. They emphasized the importance of achieving equality between the sexes by strengthening the participation of women in the various fields of work and bearing in mind the issue of women's advancement in financial planning. They considered respect for the principle of equality between the sexes in development work and the provision of financial resources to be the basic conditions for achieving such equality. They also emphasized the importance of providing a favourable regional and global environment for enhancing development opportunities in Arab countries, particularly in those which suffer from conflict and/or occupation.

C. REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION
(Agenda item 7)

26. The Commission considered this agenda item on the basis of document E/ESCWA/25/5, which is composed of six parts.

1. *Programme performance report for the biennium 2006-2007*

27. The representative of the secretariat gave a presentation on ESCWA programme performance during the biennium 2006-2007, based on document E/ESCWA/25/5(Part I), which sets out the results achieved in the seven subprogrammes and the obstacles and challenges to their implementation.

28. In the course of the discussion, delegates addressed the issue of social capital, the responsibility of the private sector in development and maintaining sustainability. They highlighted the need to support ESCWA in assuming its role of enhancing the representation of the region on the global level within a clear and unified vision; indicated the importance of assessing the developmental impact of ESCWA achievements; requested that further efforts be made with regard to financial resources; and emphasized the need to transfer expertise and build capacities in member countries, in order for them to benefit from ESCWA programmes.

29. Delegates dwelled on the quality of studies prepared by ESCWA and underlined the need for more analysis in such studies and the inclusion of country experiences from both inside and outside of the region. They emphasized the need to clarify the concept of integrated social policy, with a view to enabling countries to formulate such policies, and stressed that policies related to the advancement of women cannot be implemented in the absence of true commitment and the necessary funding. Delegates were of the view that ESCWA should make use of independent institutions in evaluation tasks in order to ensure objectivity and should be guided by good practices in defining its future activities.

30. In response to the points raised by delegates, the Executive Secretary expressed his satisfaction with the transparency of the debates and assured delegates that all comments would be taken into consideration. He pointed out that ESCWA continues to play its role of enhancing the representation of member countries at the global level and that it would continue to issue reports about its activities to member countries. He also stressed that ESCWA has worked hard to publish analytical studies that are consistent with international standards, and added that, since its establishment in 1973, ESCWA has published many valuable studies that have contributed to achieving development in member countries. The Executive Secretary referred to the difficulties involved in obtaining statistics from some member countries, which impede accurate evaluation.

31. In that regard, the representative of the secretariat pointed out that the Commission understands the importance of analytical studies and requested that the Secretariat of the United Nations provide ESCWA with the necessary budget for conducting such studies. He also stated that the Commission calls on member countries with successful experiences to document their success for the benefit of other countries. He stressed that the Commission was cooperating with other United Nations and regional organizations in order

to confront the crises of food and climate change, and explained that ESCWA has established joint committees and implemented projects for sharing experience with respect to trade and the environment in Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, and with regard to energy in Qatar. He stressed that ESCWA has sought expertise from foreign institutions and has been guided by the opinions of member countries and those who benefit from its services in its evaluation of its activities.

2. Follow-up to the implementation of the resolutions adopted by the Commission at its twenty-fourth session

32. Under this sub-item, the representative of the secretariat presented document E/ESCWA/25/5(Part II) and summarized the activities undertaken by ESCWA pursuant to the resolutions adopted at the twenty-fourth session of the Commission, which was held in Beirut from 8 to 11 May 2006. Member country delegates took note of the relevant activities that have been completed and those that are still being carried out. The list of those resolutions is set forth below:

- (i) The role of ESCWA in the light of the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document and the subsequent change process: resolution 269 (XXIV);
- (ii) Macroeconomic policy for financial stability: resolution 270 (XXIV);
- (iii) Strengthening the role of ESCWA in addressing the impact of conflict and instability within the context of social and economic development: resolution 271 (XXIV);
- (iv) Youth employment in ESCWA member countries: resolution 272 (XXIV);
- (v) Follow-up to the development of the Information Society in Western Asia: resolution 273 (XXIV);
- (vi) The establishment of the ESCWA Technology Centre: resolution 274 (XXIV);
- (vii) Technical cooperation, partnership development and resource mobilization: resolution 275 (XXIV);
- (viii) Strengthening statistical capacities in the ESCWA region: resolution 276 (XXIV);
- (ix) Social development policies: resolution 277 (XXIV);
- (x) Increasing the role of women in decision-making with respect to conflict prevention and peace building: resolution 278 (XXIV);
- (xi) Follow-up to implementation of components of the Integrated Transport System in the Arab Mashreq: resolution 279 (XXIV).

33. The representative of the secretariat also presented document E/ESCWA/25/5(Part II)/Supp.1, which includes a specific plan of action for developing partnerships and mobilizing resources and was prepared by the secretariat pursuant to resolution 275(XXIV) concerning technical cooperation, partnership development and resource mobilization. The Commission is requested to adopt that plan of action, with a view to its implementation.

34. Moreover, the secretariat presented document E/ESCWA/25/5(Part II)/Supp.2, which contains a report on strengthening the role of national statistical systems in applying the United Nations Fundamental

Principles of Official Statistics, pursuant to resolution 276 (XXIV) concerning strengthening statistical capacities in the ESCWA region and implementing the recommendations of the sixth session of the Statistical Committee, which was held in Beirut from 7 to 9 November 2006.

3. Follow-up to the establishment of an Arabic language centre at ESCWA

35. The secretariat representative introduced this item based on document E/ESCWA/25/5(Part III), and explained that ESCWA had prepared a project document that included a detailed outline of the goals of the proposed Centre and the scope of its work, activities and expected outcomes. It also included a time-frame for those activities and an indication of the resources needed for implementation.

36. Delegates referred to the multiplicity of Arabic terminology and the importance of coordinating it, while focusing on conceptual clarity, developing skills and incorporating information technology. They also underscored the importance of the role of the centre in facilitating relevant discussion and debate amongst experts in member countries and establishing a network of experts and translators, with a view to agreeing on precise definitions of new controversial terminology that appear every year. In that regard, delegates stressed the need for coordination between ESCWA and the League of Arab States.

37. In its reply to those remarks, the secretariat explained that the Centre would play a central role in coordinating terminology, enhancing translation into Arabic in international organizations, providing continuous training, establishing expert networks and making use of information technology, with a view to meeting the request of member countries, which has been repeated in numerous resolutions and several observations, on the need to prioritize Arabic translation.

4. The technical cooperation programme

38. Under this sub-item, the representative of the secretariat introduced the technical cooperation programme based on documents E/ESCWA/25/5(Part IV)/Add.1 and E/ESCWA/25/5(Part IV)/Add.2. He explained that the goals of that programme included strengthening integration between analytical and normative activities and field-work and practical activities, and building member country capacities in priority areas by offering consultative services and facilitating the exchange of experience and best practices via knowledge networks.

39. During the discussion, delegates applauded the services offered by ESCWA to member countries in terms of technical cooperation, and stressed the need to extend the time period of consultative tasks in order to further benefit from them, considering that the time allocated to such tasks is insufficient for determining and addressing needs.

40. Delegates also emphasized the importance of the evaluation of consultative services by countries receiving those services. Proposed means of such evaluation include organizing regular meetings for donor parties, during which work progress and means of increasing the real benefits of technical cooperation would be discussed; supplying ESCWA with observations and comments on the impacts of the technical cooperation programme; preparing yearly reports on the delivery and outcomes of such projects in member countries; seeking foreign expertise to evaluate the results of consultative tasks and verify the soundness of the methodology used; and seeking guidance from the feedback of those countries which receive such services.

41. Delegates further stressed the need to acquaint countries with such projects and point out the fields covered by ESCWA services, with a view to showing countries how to make use of them.

42. Responding to the points made by delegations, the representative of the secretariat stated that the responsibility of evaluating the technical cooperation programmes and reviewing their outcomes is one of the components of the work plan, given that such evaluation is conducted transparently and on the basis of

reliable information which is derived from the opinions and comments of member countries, as provided in the questionnaires distributed by ESCWA in that regard.

43. The secretariat indicated that ESCWA seeks to extend the time period for consultative tasks through an inter-disciplinary task force. Responsibility in that regard is shared by ESCWA and member countries, in view of the fact that such cooperation is needed for providing consultative services which meet the criteria of quality and diversity of programmes.

44. The secretariat explained that ESCWA receives requests from member countries regarding consultative services in accordance with the priorities defined by countries at expert meetings and the sessions of ESCWA and its subsidiary bodies.

5. Financial status of the commission

45. The representative of the secretariat reviewed the financial status of the Commission, based on document E/ESCWA/25/5(Part V). He touched upon the distribution of allocations and expenses according to the sections of the regular budget, and the allocation of extrabudgetary resources. He stressed the need to secure greater extrabudgetary resources to support ESCWA programmes and activities, as is the case in all regional commissions.

46. In the course of the debate, delegates referred to the need to mobilize additional extrabudgetary resources and achieve sustainability therein, in order for ESCWA to supplement its regular budget, and acquire the flexibility necessary for carrying out the requests of member countries with respect to providing consultative services and achieving diversity in operational activities within the continuing subprogrammes.

47. Delegates also stressed the importance of formulating strategies for mobilizing resources which guarantee ESCWA extrabudgetary financial resources, along the lines of other regional commissions.

6. Reports of the sessions of the subsidiary bodies of ESCWA

48. The Commission considered this agenda sub-item on the basis of document E/ESCWA/25/5(Part VI), which requests that ESCWA adopt the recommendations that were made by the seven subsidiary bodies in their sessions that were held between the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth sessions of the Commission, as contained in the following reports:

- (i) Report of the Statistical Committee on its seventh session, E/ESCWA/SCU/2006/IG.1/12;
- (ii) Report of the Committee on Energy on its sixth session, E/ESCWA/SDPD/2007/IG.1/7;
- (iii) Report of the Committee on Social Development on its sixth session, E/ESCWA/SDD/2007/IG.1/8;
- (iv) Report of the Committee on Women on its third session, E/ESCWA/ECW/2007/IG.1/7;
- (v) Report of the Committee on Water Resources on its seventh session, E/ESCWA/SDPD/2007/IG.2/7;
- (vi) Report of the Committee on Transport on its eighth session, E/ESCWA/GRID/2007/IG.1/5;
- (vii) Report of the Technical Committee on Liberalization of Foreign Trade and Economic Globalization in the Countries of the ESCWA Region on its fifth session, E/ESCWA/GRID/2007/IG.2/7;
- (viii) Report of the Committee on Transport on its ninth session, E/ESCWA/GRID/2008/IG.1/7.

49. The Commission endorsed the recommendations made by the subsidiary bodies in those reports, with the exception of any recommendations or resolutions adopted during the current session that differ from those contained in the aforementioned reports.

D. MANAGEMENT ISSUES
(Agenda item 8)

50. The Commission considered this agenda item on the basis of document E/ESCWA/25/6(Part I), which comprises three sub-items, namely: streamlining the work of the Commission, proposed amendments to the work programme for the biennium 2008-2009, and revised draft strategic framework for the biennium 2010-2011.

1. *Streamlining the work of the Commission*

51. Under this agenda sub-item, the Commission considered three documents. In presenting the first document, E/ESCWA/25/6(Part I)/Add.1, the secretariat outlined the lessons learned from the evaluation exercise of eighteen sessions held by ESCWA and its subsidiary and explained the methodological bases of the evaluation of the management of those sessions. The aim of the evaluation was to make use of the opinions and observations of member countries, with a view to identifying procedures that need improvement, best practices and the future course of action.

52. During the discussion, some delegates noted the need for studies with broader scopes in order to address such multi-faceted issues as enhancing the exchange of information between ESCWA and member countries and devising means by which ESCWA can contribute contribution to improving regional coordination. Delegates referred to the need for a unified stance for member countries with respect to unexpected international issues, which could be achieved through the sessions of ESCWA and its subsidiary bodies.

53. Delegates recommended that a comprehensive evaluation of ways of strengthening participation, follow-up, coordination and funding be conducted. They proposed the development of a guide to filling out the questionnaires of the evaluation in order to clarify ambiguous matters and facilitate understanding. They proposed the publication of a periodical bulletin for each sector which would be distributed to participants in subsidiary body meetings, with a view to informing about achievements and planned future activities.

54. ESCWA expressed its intent to take into consideration all the valuable observations made by delegates and any comment that contributes to improving communication and coordination between ESCWA and member countries.

55. In presenting the second document, E/ESCWA/25/6(Part I)/Add.2, the representative of the secretariat described how the Commission and its subsidiary bodies work. He explained the importance of the sessions of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies in facilitating dialogue, strengthening interaction between the secretariat and member countries, and defining the functions of ESCWA according to the needs and priorities of member countries.

56. The secretariat assessed the possibility of increasing the frequency of the sessions of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies, the result of which was that member countries preferred that ESCWA use its resources to provide services, not to increase meetings, and that greater integration in ESCWA services and meetings would depend on the willingness of member countries to participate in such meetings and services.

57. The secretariat presented three options regarding the working mechanisms and frequency of sessions of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies and outlined the administrative and financial implications of each one.

58. In the course of the discussion, delegates referred to the establishment of the Technical Committee, which holds its sessions every six months, and stressed that it should provide support to the ministerial sessions. They decided on the third option presented by the secretariat, which involves keeping the current frequency of sessions and continuing to hold a senior officials' segment before the ministerial segment, pending the completion of an evaluation of the pros and cons of other proposals. Eventually, that evaluation will be presented to the Technical Committee which will submit recommendations, in light of which a decision on the matter will be taken at the forthcoming session. Delegates also decided to seek guidance from the experiences of other commissions and organizations in that regard.

59. In response to the remarks of the delegates, the secretariat stated that the choice regarding the frequency of Commission sessions lay in the hands of member countries, and emphasized that increasing the number of sessions was necessary in order to achieve the desired interaction between the Commission and member countries and to allow adequate time and efforts for discussing emerging issues and following them up, in the manner followed by other regional commissions.

60. The secretariat presented document E/ESCWA/2008/C.1/1, and noted that the meeting of the Technical Committee was a preparatory meeting for the session, in which the main topics of discussion were chosen, including financing for development achieving the MDGs. It stressed that increased communication between countries would lead to improved performance and enhanced efficiency.

61. The Commission took note of the report of the first meeting of the Technical Committee.

2. Proposed amendments to the work programme for the biennium 2008-2009

62. Under this sub-item, the secretariat presented document E/ESCWA/25/6(Part II), which contains the proposed amendments to the work programme for the biennium 2008-2009, with a view to including in it emerging global and regional issues and new mandates entrusted to ESCWA.

63. Delegates remarked that some important activities had been removed without justification, while some other activities had been cancelled without being replaced by others. They pointed out that those removed were in such important fields as raising awareness, the advancement of women and development indicators.

64. The secretariat explained that the proposed cancellation of some activities was aimed at focusing on the quality and not the quantity of outputs, especially with regard to information material.

65. The Commission adopted the proposed amendments to the work programme for the biennium 2008-2009.

3. Revised draft strategic framework for the biennium 2010-2011

66. Under this sub-item, the representative of the secretariat presented document E/ESCWA/25/6 (Part III), which contains the revised draft strategic framework for the biennium 2010-2011, and gave a brief summary of the goals and expected achievements of each of the seven subprogrammes. He noted that the activities will be determined at a later stage and will be sent to member countries for review and comment.

67. The representative of the secretariat explained the process of preparing the strategic framework in accordance with the provisions of the regular budget and in view of the challenges faced by member countries and their priorities. He focused on those fields that coincide with the priorities of the region, including the advancement of women, technology, knowledge sharing, and South-South cooperation. He noted that the secretariat received constructive proposals from member countries, which were useful in defining country priorities in various subprogrammes and will contribute to improving the efficiency of the work of ESCWA and enhancing its achievements.

68. In the course of the discussion, delegates referred to the need to give greater importance to this agenda sub-item in the organization of work and to formulate a plan of action and joint mechanism that enable countries to submit proposals and observations within a sufficient time-frame a no less than three months.

69. In its response to the remarks of the delegates, the secretariat referred to the possibility of amending the strategic framework according to the priorities and concerns of member countries.

70. The Committee adopted the revised draft strategic framework for the biennium 2010-2011, taking into account the observations of delegates.

E. ADOPTION AND SIGNATURE OF THE CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL
MULTIMODAL TRANSPORT OF GOODS IN THE ARAB MASHREQ
(Agenda item 9)

71. This item was discussed in a closed meeting for ministers and heads of delegation, who expressed their deep appreciation and thanks to the ESCWA secretariat for its efforts in preparing the draft convention on international multimodal transport of goods in the Arab Mashreq. In view of a similar text of the convention tabled at the League of Arab States, and in the hope of unifying efforts, participants agreed to the request that the necessary coordination and consultation between the ESCWA secretariat and the secretariat of the League of Arab States be undertaken in order to submit a single text of the convention to member countries, to be considered for adoption and signature at the next meeting of Arab Transport Ministers, scheduled to be held in October 2008.

F. CONSIDERATION OF THE REQUEST FOR MEMBERSHIP
IN THE COMMISSION BY THE SUDAN
(Agenda item 10)

72. The Commission adopted a resolution recommending the acceptance of the request made by the Sudan to become a member of the Commission and will submit the recommendation to the Economic and Social Council for action. It expressed the hope that Sudan will be an active member in all future activities and meetings of the Commission. The representative of the Sudan made a statement in which he expressed his thanks and gratitude for the acceptance of the Sudan as an ESCWA member. He also conveyed his country's hope for close cooperation with ESCWA, and its readiness to give its utmost support to the work of ESCWA both economically and socially.

G. DATE AND VENUE OF THE TWENTY-SIXTH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION
(Agenda item 11)

73. It was decided that the twenty-sixth session of the Commission will be held in Beirut in April 2010.

H. OTHER BUSINESS
(Agenda item 12)

74. No proposals were received under this agenda item.

IV. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON ITS TWENTY-FIFTH SESSION

75. At its plenary closing session, held on 29 May 2008, the Commission adopted the draft report on its twenty-fifth session, on the understanding that the agreed amendments would be incorporated therein.

V. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. DATE AND VENUE

76. The Commission held its twenty-fifth session in Sana'a from 26 to 29 May 2008. The Commission convened ten plenary meetings, during which it discussed the items on its agenda.

77. During the session, a special meeting was held to launch the ESCWA portal for gathering information, known as ISPER (Information Society Portal for the ESCWA Region), in which the Executive Secretary noted that the portal was the fruit of efforts made by ESCWA with regard to developing an information society. He expressed his hope that the website would provide decision makers and researchers with ample information concerning the progress of ESCWA member countries in establishing an information society and would assist in devising plans, improving performance and building partnerships in a context of globalization and a knowledge-based economy. During the meeting, a presentation on the components of the website and how to use it was made. The website can be accessed at: isper.escwa.org.lb.

78. The report entitled "The Millennium Development Goals in the Arab Region 2007: youth perspective" was presented during the discussion of agenda item 6.

B. OPENING OF THE SESSION

79. The two-segment session was opened in two stages. The senior officials' segment was opened on the morning of Monday 26 May 2008, while the ministerial segment was opened on the morning of Wednesday 28 May 2008.

1. Senior Officials' segment

80. The chairman of the senior officials' segment of the twenty-fourth session of the Commission, Mr. Ahmad Bin Habib Salah, Economic Consultant at the Ministry of Economy in Saudi Arabia, made the opening statement of the senior officials' segment at the twenty-fifth session the Commission, in which he referred to the success achieved by ESCWA in most of its programmes for the biennium 2006-2007, notwithstanding the circumstances confronting it. He added that those difficulties required that member countries support ESCWA, which has fulfilled its functions with great efficiency.

81. Mr. Omar Badr Al-Dafa, Executive Secretary of ESCWA, made a statement in which he welcomed delegations and commended their role in ensuring the success of the session. He noted that the session was of particular importance because it was being held in Yemen, which provided an opportunity to support this country of long history in its efforts for revitalization and progress. He welcomed the fact that the session was considering the request for membership in the Commission made by the Sudan.

82. The Executive Secretary stressed the importance of monitoring and evaluation in order to improve performance and develop planning and referred to a report published by ESCWA on lessons learned in evaluating the sessions of ESCWA and its subsidiary bodies. He also mentioned the project document currently before the Commission for the establishment of an Arabic language centre at ESCWA, which aims

to improve the quality of Arabic documents, and thereby encourage member country representatives to participate more actively in United Nations conferences.

83. Moreover, the Executive Secretary mentioned the agreement for strategic partnership with the Economic Commission for Africa sub-regional office for North Africa which would expand the geographical scope of ESCWA's work and enhance regional integration. He concluded his statement by thanking the Government of Yemen for generously hosting the session.

84. Upon his election as Chairman of the senior official's segment of the twenty-fifth session of ESCWA, Mr. Mohammad Ahmed Al-Hawri, Chairman of the Technical Committee at the Ministry of Planning and Technical Cooperation in Yemen, made a statement in which he welcomed the convening of the session in Yemen. He mentioned that over the past three decades, Yemen had achieved success in economic and social development, buttressed by adopting the economic reform programme in the mid-1990's with the help of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which helped it to realize financial and monetary stability and pave the way for sustainable economic growth. He also noted that development in Yemen still faced great challenges, including a rise in the population growth rate, an increase in poverty rates and the aggravation of water problems. He commended the role of ESCWA in its development-oriented service to member countries in general and Yemen in particular, through programmes of technical support and capacity-building.

2. Ministerial segment

85. The chairman of the ministerial segment of the twenty-fourth session, Mr. Khalid Bin Mohammad AlGosaibi, Minister of Economy and Planning of Saudi Arabia, made the opening statement of the ministerial segment of the twenty-fifth session, in which he underscored ESCWA's efforts to implement its programmes in an unstable security situation that had forced it to evacuate its staff and deploy them to several work locations. He applauded ESCWA for the success it achieved in enhancing cooperation with member countries through the work of its subsidiary bodies, which play an active role in strengthening ties between ESCWA and decision makers in member countries. Moreover, he declared that Mr. Abdul Kareem Alarhabi, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs and Minister of Planning and Technical Cooperation in Yemen, would assume the chairmanship of the twenty-fifth session.

86. The Executive Secretary read out a message from the United Nations Secretary-General to the session. In the message, the Secretary-General stated that ESCWA, in its capacity as a neutral body upholding global values, was able to help the region of Western Asia in facing new economic and social challenges. He affirmed his confidence that ESCWA, through its research work and its support of Governments in the region, is able to help countries that still lag behind in achieving the MDGs to compensate for lost time. He noted that the request for membership in the Commission by the Sudan manifested the confidence of member countries in the role of ESCWA and their commitment to regional integration.

87. The Executive Secretary made a statement in which he thanked the Government of Yemen for its excellent hospitality and commended the active role played by His Excellency Mr. Khalid Bin Mohammad AlGosaibi, Minister of Economy and Planning of Saudi Arabia and Chairman of the twenty-fourth session of ESCWA. He stressed the importance of diversifying the economy, developing institutions, creating effective partnerships between Governments and the private sector, generating youth employment opportunities, and increasing the participation of women in economic, social and political life. He emphasized the determination of ESCWA to assist Yemen in making progress towards achieving the MDGs by means of consultancy services, training programmes and capacity-building in cooperation with the United Nations Development Team in Yemen, international and regional organizations and Arab funds.

88. Mr. Ali Muhammad Mujawwar, Prime Minister of Yemen, made a statement in which he conveyed the greetings of the sponsor of the session, President Ali Abdullah Salih, and commended the role of regional and international organizations, especially ESCWA, in serving the countries of the region in general and Yemen in particular. He reviewed the efforts made by Yemen to achieve economic and social development, enhance modernization policies, mobilize resources, develop education and health, empower women and increase GDP.

C. PARTICIPATION

89. The session was attended by representatives of the 13 ESCWA member countries; representatives of Tunisia, Algeria and Djibouti in the capacity of observers; and representatives of Morocco and Sudan in the capacity of permanent observers. Other observers included representatives of United Nations programmes, bodies and institutions; representatives of international organizations, non-governmental organizations and other organizations; and a number of experts. The list of participants comprises annex 1.

D. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

1. *Senior Officials' segment*

90. Rule 12 of the Rules of Procedure of the Commission provides that member countries shall assume the chairmanship of the sessions of the Commission on a rotating basis, in the Arabic alphabetical order. It also provides that the Commission shall, at the beginning of each session, elect from among the representatives of its members two Vice-Chairmen and a Rapporteur, who shall remain in office until such time as their successors shall be elected and eligible for re-election.

91. Accordingly, Mr. Mohammad Ahmed Al-Hawri, Chairman of the Technical Committee at the Ministry of Planning and Technical Cooperation in Yemen, was elected as Chairman of the meetings of the Senior Officials' segment; Ghaith Asi Zraiqat, of the Directorate of American Relations and International Organizations at the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation of Jordan, and H.E. Mr. Adel Ali Al-Khal, Director of International Organizations and Conferences at the Foreign Ministry of Qatar, were elected as Vice-Chairmen. Mr. Loai Abdulhafez Shabbanna, Chairman of the Palestinian Central Statistics Bureau, was elected as Rapporteur.

2. *Ministerial segment*

92. H.E. Mr. Abdul Kareem Alarhabi, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs and Minister of Planning and International Cooperation in Yemen, assumed the chairmanship of the ministerial segment of the twenty-fifth session of ESCWA. Mr. Ahmed Bin Abdullah Al-Mahmoud, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Qatar, and H.E. Mr. Ahmed Ali Jaradat, Jordanian Ambassador to Yemen, assumed the positions of Vice-Chairmen, while H.E. Mr. Samir Abdullah, Minister of Planning and Labour of Palestine, assumed the position of Rapporteur.

E. CREDENTIALS

93. In accordance with rule 11 of the Rules of Procedure of the Commission, the credentials of the representatives were submitted to the Executive Secretary, examined by officers and found to be in order.

F. AGENDA

94. At its first meeting, the Commission adopted the agenda as set forth in document E/ESCWA/25/1. The agenda adopted was as follows:

1. Opening of the twenty-fifth session.
2. Election of officers.
3. Adoption of the agenda.
4. Proposed organization of work.
5. Consideration of requests by States Members of the United Nations and/or its specialized agencies that are not members of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) to participate as observers in the twenty-fifth session of the Commission.
6. Policy issues in the ESCWA region:
 - (a) Financing for development in the ESCWA region;
 - (b) Regional cooperation for achieving the Millennium Development Goals.
7. Report of the Executive Secretary on the activities of the Commission:
 - (a) Programme performance report for the biennium 2006-2007;
 - (b) Follow-up to the implementation of the resolutions adopted by the Commission at its twenty-fourth session;
 - (c) Follow-up to the establishment of an Arabic Language Centre at ESCWA;
 - (d) The technical cooperation programme;
 - (e) Financial status of the Commission;
 - (f) Reports of the sessions of the subsidiary bodies of ESCWA.
8. Management issues:
 - (a) Streamlining the work of the Commission:
 - (i) Lessons learned from the evaluation exercise of the ministerial session and subsidiary bodies;
 - (ii) Frequency of the sessions of the subsidiary bodies of ESCWA;
 - (iii) First meeting of the technical committee.
 - (b) Proposed programme changes for the biennium 2008-2009;
 - (c) Revised draft strategic framework for the biennium 2010-2011.
9. Signature of the Convention on International Multimodal Transport of Goods in the Arab Mashreq.

10. Consideration of the request for membership in the Commission by the Sudan.
11. Date and venue of the twenty-sixth session of the Commission.
12. Other business.
13. Adoption of the report of the Commission on its twenty-fifth session.

95. At the same meeting, the Commission adopted the proposed organization of work for its twenty-fifth session, as set forth in document E/ESCWA/25/L.2, with the proviso that the amendments that had been agreed upon should be incorporated therein.

G. DOCUMENTS

96. A list of the documents presented to the Commission during the twenty-fifth session is provided in annex II.

