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Thirteenth Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) of NEASPEC

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Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

NEW ARRANGEMENTS OF NEASPEC SECRETARIAT
(Item (7) of the provisional agenda)

Note by the secretariat

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I. Consultation Process on Secretariat Arrangement

1. Upon the request from the NEASPEC member countries, ESCAP has provided secretariat and technical supports for NEASPEC since its inception in 1993. As the member countries clearly viewed the secretariat service as an interim arrangement pending the establishment of the permanent (or programme) secretariat, ESCAP has facilitated consultations of the member countries on its establishment.

2. In particular, the 3rd, 4th, 7th, 8th and 12th Senior Officials Meetings from 1996 to 2006 discussed the institutional issue of NEASPEC as a key agenda and reviewed all potential options of the Secretariat. The 7th SOM agreed to seek for proposals of member countries for hosting the secretariat, but it was the 12th SOM that finally received a proposal for the establishment of the NEASPEC Secretariat.

3. The 12th SOM in 2007 reviewed a proposal from the Republic of Korea (ROK), which expresses its willingness to host the NEASPEC Secretariat and make an annual contribution of US\$ 400,000 to cover the operational costs. However, the meeting did not make the final decision on the proposal but deferred the decision for further consultations.

4. During the informal consultation in the run-up to the 63rd Commission Session of ESCAP in May 2007, the Republic of Korea pledged an additional contribution of US\$300,000 for NEASPEC activities.

5. The consultation was based on two options of a new secretariat arrangement, i.e. (1) the **programme secretariat** which will be directly governed and operated by the member countries while ESCAP would continue providing technical support, and (2) the **programme (or project) office of ESCAP** to be located in the ROK and thus operated under the direct supervision of ESCAP.

6. However, it was not possible to make the final decision as the secretariat did not receive a consensual view on the revised proposal. Three member countries, namely, China, Japan and Mongolia indicated positive positions in support of the revised proposal, while Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the Russian Federation expressed prudent positions.

II. Need for the Final Decision

7. As it was reviewed by the secretariat paper, "Institutional and Financial Mechanisms of NEASPEC: Review and Options" (ESDD/NEASPEC/SOM(12) /EGM), the most common approach to institutionalizing subregional environmental programme is the operation of programme secretariat and the strong ownership of member countries over their respective programme. Such programmes include South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) and South Asia Cooperative Environmental Programme (SACEP) and ASEAN.

8. The previous discussions show that NEASPEC countries clearly understand the interim nature of the current secretariat arrangement, which has been continuing for over 10 years without any concrete plan to finalize it. It has been pointed out that

ESCAP as a regional commission may not be appropriate to serve only for one subregion for an unlimited period.

9. It has been noted that NEASPEC has a great potential in coordinating subregional actions, but its potential may not have been fully utilized due to limited human and financial resources. Thus, ESCAP wishes the member countries to make a concrete decision on a new secretariat arrangement in order to substantially enhance human and financial capacity of NEASPEC.

III. Issues for Consideration

10. The Meeting may wish to agree on a new secretariat arrangement.

11. Based on the agreed arrangement, the Meeting may wish to decide upon a further consultation process for developing a detailed plan of the arrangement.

12. The Meeting may wish to receive statements of member countries on the strategic directions of NEASPEC focusing on its role in addressing subregional environmental challenges, new programme areas and implementation modalities in order to develop the future direction of NEASPEC.

13. The Meeting may wish to decide upon an appropriate procedure for preparing an ESCAP resolution on NEASPEC for its adoption at the 64th Commission Session in 2008 in order to renew the existing ESCAP resolution adopted in 1997.

Annex: (Draft) Resolution of ESCAP on NEASPEC
To be adopted by the 64th Commission Session of ESCAP, 2008

64/ XX. North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation

The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific,

Recalling its resolution 49/7 on Implementation of Decisions of the General Assembly on the UNCED, including Agenda 21, in Asia and the Pacific and the resolution 50/8 on the Strengthening of Subregional Economic Cooperation in North-East Asia, including Environmental Cooperation for Sustainable Development,

Recalling also its resolution 53/3 of 30 April 1997 on the Framework for the North-East Asian Subregional Programme of Environmental Cooperation, which requests the Executive Secretary to continue ESCAP efforts to promote subregional environmental cooperation in North-East Asia, *inter alia*, by providing technical and financial support for the implementation of the Framework and approved priority projects, as well as to continue to provide secretariat support to the Meeting of Senior Officials in the interim period pending the final decision on the future institutional arrangements of the Programme, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Environment Programme, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank,

Recognizing the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, as adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg, 2002, which urges to assist in the mobilization of technical and financial assistance for the implementation of regionally and subregionally agreed sustainable development programmes and projects,

Acknowledging the contribution of ESCAP to the establishment and operation of NEASPEC by providing technical support for the implementation of the Framework and secretariat support to the Meeting of Senior Officials of NEASPEC since its inception in 1993,

Noting a series of extensive discussions of NEASPEC since the inception to resolve the interim arrangement for secretariat support and financial resources, and enhance the mechanism of NEASPEC to be more responsive and effective in dealing with subregional environmental challenges.

1. *Welcomes* the decision of NEASPEC member countries at the 13th Senior Officials Meeting of NEASPEC on 19-20 February 2008 in Mongolia on a new secretariat arrangement to supercede the current arrangement of the institutional mechanism and strengthen the NEASPEC activities, thereby developing the programme into a comprehensive mechanism for environmental cooperation in North-East Asia;

2. *Welcomes* also the proposal of the Government of the Republic of Korea for hosting the secretariat to strengthen the institutional capacity of subregional environmental cooperation, and the willingness of the Government to provide financial contributions to cover administrative costs and implementation of NEASPEC activities.

3. *Requests* the Executive Secretary to assist in NEASPEC member countries in transition to the new secretariat arrangement and continue ESCAP's technical support for the joint efforts of NEASPEC member countries for addressing subregional environmental challenges; and

4. *Encourages* NEASPEC member countries to strive for strengthened institutional and financial mechanisms for effective subregional responses to global, subregional and national environmental challenges.
