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REPORT OF THE MEETING OF SENIOR OFFICIALS ON ENVIRONMENTAL
COOPERATION IN NORTH-EAST ASIA

Seoul, 8-11 February 1993

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I. ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING

1. The Meeting of Senior Officials on Environmental Cooperation in North-East Asia, organized by ESCAP in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), was held at Seoul from 8 to 11 February 1993.

A. Attendance

2. The Meeting was attended by representatives of the following members of ESCAP: China, Japan, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation.

3. The following United Nations bodies and intergovernmental organization were represented: UNDP, UNEP and the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

B. Opening statements

4. In his inaugural address to the Meeting, His Excellency Mr. Chang-Hee Roe, Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea expressed the need for joint efforts among the North-East Asian countries to deal with common environmental problems. In reviewing the success of the socio-economic development activities of countries in North-East Asia. His Excellency pointed out that it was necessary to undertake environmental assessment and to identify a suitable mechanism for coordinating subregional programmes. His Excellency expressed appreciation of the joint efforts of UNDP, UNEP and ESCAP for organizing the Meeting and assured of the readiness of the Republic of Korea in forging subregional cooperation.

5. The Executive Secretary of ESCAP, in his message to the Meeting, emphasized the need for subregional cooperation and collaboration in addressing the environmental problems and issues, including those which do not respect national boundaries. He said that the North-East Asian countries should be cautious in their efforts by going step by step, with simple and easy-to-comprehend activities, at the

initial stages. He assured the Meeting that with the continued cooperation of UNDP and UNEP, ESCAP would join the efforts of the North-East Asian countries to build up a strong environment programme for the subregion.

6. The representative of UNDP said that he supported the initiatives taken by the North-East Asian countries for regional cooperation and referred particularly to energy efficiency and water and air pollution control, which would benefit most from the joint undertakings. In reaffirming its full support, UNDP was prepared to make available additional resources both financially and in kind, which could lead to strengthening cooperative and to the setting up an institutional framework.

7. The representative of UNEP reiterated his organization's commitment to further cooperation and contribution towards the development of programmes in the Asian and Pacific region. UNEP also attached considerable importance to the development of a North-East Asian regional environment programme as an addition to other existing subregional programmes developed by UNEP with the cooperation of other United Nations and intergovernmental organizations, including ESCAP. He referred to chapter 38 of Agenda 21, which dealt with international institutional arrangements, and the part UNEP was expected to play in promoting subregional and regional cooperation. He said that in order to meet that requirement, UNEP would continue its support and cooperation for the development of that subregional programme and looked forward to drawing up a draft North-East Asian regional environmental programme for addressing the common environmental concerns of the participating countries.

C. Election of officers

8. The following officers were elected: In-Hyuk Kwon (Republic of Korea), as Chairperson, and four Vice-Chairpersons as follows: A.A. Averchenkov (Russian Federation), Samdanguin Banzragche (Mongolia), Masao Kawai (Japan), Zhong Shukong (China). Masao Kawai (Japan) was elected Rapporteur of the Meeting.

D. Adoption of the agenda

9. The Meeting adopted the following agenda:
 1. Opening of the Meeting.
 2. Election of officers
 3. Adoption of the agenda.
 4. Regional environmental conditions and trends in North-East Asia:
 - (a) State of the environment;
 - (b) National policies and programmes.
 5. Experience of regional environmental cooperation programmes.
 6. North-East Asian regional environment programme:
 - (a) Priority issues for cooperation in North-East Asia;
 - (b) Prospects for environmental cooperation in North-East Asia;
 - (c) Programme outline.
 7. Institutional and financial implications
 8. Other matters.
 9. Adoption of the report.

II. REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS AND TRENDS IN NORTH-EAST ASIA

(Item 4 of the agenda)

10. The Acting Chief of the Division of Industry, Human Settlements and Environment, introducing item 4 of the agenda (IHE/ECNEA/1), said that the document was essentially based on the national reports to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992 and other recent information. In view of the remarkable growth rates achieved in the subregion over the past few decades, and to sustain that growth and development, the ESCAP secretariat was highlighting energy as the priority area of concern. Since most countries of the region depended mainly on coal and oil for their

energy needs, air pollution was considered the environmental issue needing the most urgent attention. He also highlighted capacity building as an important cross-sectoral theme.

11. The Meeting considered that the document on environmental conditions and trends in North-East Asia provided a good basis for discussion and for developing activities for regional cooperation. There was, however, scope for improving content and for a more balanced presentation of various problem areas and achievements. The secretariat noted various comments and suggestions and additional information for updating the document.

12. The Meeting noted that ESCAP was preparing a regional report on the state of the environment in Asia and the Pacific every five years. The next one would be published in 1995. The Meeting requested the ESCAP secretariat to consider including in it a some subregional focus.

13. The Meeting also noted that regional cooperation should be based on the mutuality of interest and the political will through which each country should cooperate in the alleviation of environmental problems. The Meeting suggested that regional cooperative efforts, while focusing on a few top priority areas, should place the emphasis on practical activities that would yield tangible results. The suggestion was made that, initially, one or two substantive areas could be identified for demonstrating the usefulness of cooperation, keeping doors open for expanding the scope in the future.

III. EXPERIENCE OF EXISTING REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL COOPERATION PROGRAMMES

(Item 5 of the agenda)

14. The representative of UNEP, introducing the document (IHE/ECNEA/2), indicated that it reflected the background and the outline of the existing subregional

environmental programmes that had been developed by UNEP in cooperation with other United Nations agencies. He elaborated on the three subregional environment programmes: the ASEAN Environment Programme (ASEP), the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) and the South Asian Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP). He also briefly outlined five of the UNEP regional seas programmes: East Asian Seas, South Asian Seas, Kuwait Action Plan (covering the Persian Gulf), South Pacific and North West Pacific. He reviewed the status of the development of the North West Pacific Action Plan (NOWPAP), which covered the coastal and marine environmental problems of five of the countries in the region.

15. The Meeting noted that North-East Asia was a unique subregion in Asia and the Pacific in view of its diversity of development. Regional cooperation efforts should be specifically tailored to meet the requirements of the region, as models adopted in other subregions might not be directly applicable to the North-East Subregion.

16. The Meeting was of the view that the cooperative programme for the subregion should be developed on a step-by-step basis around agreed priority areas. The Meeting also observed that while identification of priority areas could be a motivating factor, there was a need for an overall strategy for regional environmental cooperation and some kind of support arrangement to carry forward the agreed programme.

17. The Meeting also took note of the roles played by UNDP, UNEP and ESCAP in such cooperation. The respective representatives briefly informed the Meeting about their ongoing projects and activities in that subregion. They expressed a strong desire to further strengthen their activities in supporting initiatives already under way in promoting regional cooperation in environment in North-East Asia.

18. The representative of ADB said that fostering regional cooperation was one of the mandates of the Bank. The Bank's approach to promoting regional cooperation

consisted of three phases. First, emphasis was placed on increasing countries' understanding and awareness of the potential of regional cooperation, which is to be achieved by taking stock of available information, supplemented by in-depth studies as required. Second, programmes and projects with regional or subregional implications were clearly identified. Third, the Bank financed selected pilot projects of regional and subregional importance.

19. The representative also outlined the nature of regional programmes and selected national projects being undertaken by the Bank in Asia; particularly those in the Bank's member countries in the North-East Asian region. He reaffirmed that the Bank would be pleased to play its role in the areas where the Bank was best suited to do so.

IV. NORTH-EAST ASIAN REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME: PRIORITY ISSUES AND AREAS FOR SUBREGIONAL COOPERATION

(Item 6 of the agenda)

20. The Acting Chief of the Division of Industry, Human Settlements and Environment of ESCAP, introducing agenda item 6 (IHE/ECNEA/3), said that the document referred to the six cross-sectoral issues identified for possible regional cooperation in North-East Asia. Those areas had been identified based on the need to continue the remarkable achievements in socio-economic development on the one hand and to contain serious environmental problems arising therefrom, on the other hand. An indicative list of potential activities had also been suggested in each area, from which selection might be made to match the priority needs of the region. A suggestion was also made that a mission could be fielded immediately following the Meeting to hold consultations with the countries on the development of the project proposals.

21. The Meeting noted that since the current efforts for regional cooperation had been promoted after easing of the relations in the region and were still in the early

stages, it might be advisable not to be overly ambitious in selecting too many areas for cooperation.

22. The Meeting noted that it was desirable to promote subregional cooperation in different areas as part of an integrated strategy. The Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 from UNCED (Earth Summit) could provide the required framework for such a strategy.

23. The Meeting suggested that a specific activity to be undertaken in any area should have a strong regional component, with most of the countries participating in and contributing to it. During the discussion on identifying potential projects for regional cooperation within the priority areas, the Meeting agreed that such projects should be specific, well focused and practical, and should provide direct benefits to the subregion as a whole, keeping in view the mutuality of interest. Projects should be identified keeping in view the existing bilateral or multilateral efforts already under way in the region.

24. Environmentally sound and sustainable development (ESSD) technology was a potential cross-sectoral area in which regional cooperation could be promoted within the framework of Agenda 21. It was suggested that the UNEP International Centre for Environmental Technology at Osaka and Shiga, in Japan, could contribute positively to this end, particularly to capacity-building efforts.

25. The representative of China was of the view that energy issues, in particular clean coal combustion technology, should receive high priority. The representative of Japan suggested that the monitoring and surveying of air pollution, including acid rain; a network for exchange of information and research results; and joint study and training on specific subjects should receive priority attention for regional cooperation.

26. The representative of Mongolia was of the view that the following should be considered for regional cooperation: air pollution, waste disposal and recycling; networks in protected areas and parks of international significance; the study of rare

animals and plants, anti-desertification and reforestation measures; international conventions on water pollution prevention and information exchange on control, equipment and technologies in environmental pollution.

27. The representative of the Republic of Korea expressed the desire that energy efficiency, air pollution information and monitoring network, forest decline and capacity building should receive due attention for regional cooperation.

28. The representative of the Russian Federation said that the priority issues were to pollution prevention management and regulation, ESSD technologies, energy development, ecosystem management and capacity building. He outlined a number of activities in those areas, in order of importance. It was proposed that the Meteorological Synthesizing Centre - East in Moscow and the Chinese Environmental and Meteorological Monitoring Centre might be used for making calculations on air pollution, including acid rain, in the subregion, with necessary support from participating countries, ESCAP and various international organizations.

29. The Meeting identified three initial priority areas within which specific projects for regional cooperation should be developed and considered at the next senior officials meeting. The three areas agreed to were as follows: (a) energy and air pollution; (b) capacity building; and (c) ecosystem management, in particular deforestation and desertification. The opinion was also expressed that for the data to be accurately interpreted, intercalibration exercises should also receive attention in the regional cooperative effort. The coastal/marine pollution problem was cited as another priority issue and it was felt that the issue could be covered within the framework of the UNEP North West Pacific Action Plan.

V. INSTITUTIONAL AND FINANCIAL ASPECTS OF
SUBREGIONAL COOPERATION

(Item 7 of the agenda)

30. The Acting Chief of the Division of Industry, Human Settlements and Environment of ESCAP, introducing item 7 (IHE/ECNEA/4), said that it was important to have some form of institutional arrangements to ensure viability, continuity and efficiency in the formulation and implementation of activities. He suggested that, for effective coordination, each country should designate a focal point. He also suggested that the Meeting might wish to consider whether ESCAP, in cooperation with UNDP, UNEP and ADB, should continue to provide the professional and general support until such time as senior officials came to some agreement on the institutional structure. He requested the Meeting to provide guidance on the modalities of consultations for development of the programmes.

31. As the Meeting was a first attempt at the intergovernmental level for promoting regional cooperation, a cautious approach should preferably be adopted in building institutional structures for regional cooperation. Consultations should be continued at the senior official level for developing programmes until such time as institutional arrangements are in place.

32. The Meeting requested that in the intervening period the ESCAP secretariat, in cooperation with UNDP, UNEP and ADB, should continue to provide professional and secretariat support for development of regional cooperation.

33. The Meeting noted that the following focal points had been designated by various member countries:

China	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Japan	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Mongolia	Ministry of Nature and Environment

Republic of Korea Science and Environment Division,
 Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Russian Federation Ministry of Environmental Protection and
 Natural Resources

34. In connection with the next meeting of senior officials, the ESCAP secretariat was requested to prepare a document that would collate, analyse and synthesize information on ongoing programmes and projects of bilateral sources and multilateral agencies and transmit it to the participating countries. In the meantime, the member countries were requested to transmit to the ESCAP secretariat their preferences with regard to the activities they wished to promote for regional cooperation in the three priority areas. The ESCAP secretariat would then analyse the various submissions and develop a few brief project profiles in line with international practices, on the basis of commonalities of interest and in consultation with UNDP, UNEP and ADB. The meeting of senior officials could thereafter be convened in the fourth quarter of 1993 to discuss various proposals. The Meeting requested the Government of China to consider hosting the meeting, for which funding support needed to be made available. It requested the secretariat to transmit the necessary documents to the Governments well in advance of the next meeting.

35. A request was made to the ESCAP secretariat to make further efforts to secure the participation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in subsequent meetings of senior officials.

36. One representative said that on an informal basis, academic, technological and other forms of exchanges should be encouraged on environmental cooperation in the subregion.

37. The Meeting noted with gratitude that funding support for the development of the project profiles and organization of the next meeting of the senior officials might be available out of UNDP sources, including "Capacity 21".

38. The Global Environmental Facility partners (the World Bank, UNDP, UNEP) should be invited to participate in developing the subregional environmental programme.

39. The Meeting expressed appreciation to UNDP, UNEP, ESCAP and ADB for their support and cooperation in arranging the Meeting. It also thanked UNDP for its offer of financial, technical and managerial support to develop a detailed programme of action, to assist in the organization of the next meeting of senior officials, as well as in the implementation of activities. The Meeting also urged UNEP, ADB and the World Bank to extend the necessary financial and technical support in developing and implementing activities for subregional cooperation.

VI. OTHER MATTERS: RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MEETING

40. The Meeting made the following recommendations:

- (1) Regional cooperation should be promoted in North-East Asia, in line with "Agenda 21", which was adopted at UNCED. In view of the wide diversity of socio-economic conditions and levels of development, the areas of regional cooperation should meet the specific requirements of the subregion. Keeping in view the mutuality of interest and resource constraints, in the spirit of cooperation and accommodation, the following three priority areas should be concentrated on initially:
 - (a) Energy and air pollution;
 - (b) Ecosystem management, in particular deforestation and desertification;
 - (c) Capacity building.

- (2) Consultations at the senior official level should be continued, and the ESCAP secretariat, in cooperation with UNDP, UNEP and ADB, should continue to provide professional and secretariat support for furthering the activities of regional cooperation in North-East Asia until the time is appropriate for making institutional arrangements.
- (3) The ESCAP secretariat in consultation and cooperation with UNDP, UNEP and ADB, along with their technical, professional, managerial and financial support should take follow-up action to prepare and organize the second meeting of senior officials. The World Bank should also be requested to collaborate in this task.
- (4) In order to facilitate preparation of documentation for the second meeting of senior officials, countries should transmit, by the end of March 1993, to the ESCAP secretariat their preferences with regard to the type of regional activities that should be undertaken in the priority areas for consideration and appropriate decision at the next meeting of the senior officials. Meanwhile, the secretariat, in cooperation with UNDP, should compile, analyse and synthesize the information on ongoing programmes and projects of bilateral sources and multilateral agencies, in the three areas and transmit the outcome to the countries by end of May 1993.
- (5) ESCAP members and associate members should indicate to the secretariat, by the end of March 1993, their preference for the timing of the next meeting of senior officials. The Government of China has been requested to consider hosting that meeting in the fourth quarter of 1993, based on the financial support to be provided by UNDP.

41. The Meeting expressed its deep and sincere appreciation to the Government of the Republic of Korea for its generous financial assistance, excellent host facilities and elaborate arrangements in the organization of the Meeting.

VII. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT

42. The report was unanimously adopted by the Meeting on 11 February 1993.