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Sixteenth Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) of NEASPEC

1-2 September 2011

Seoul, the Republic of Korea

**REPORT OF THE SIXTEENTH SENIOR OFFICIALS MEETING
OF THE NORTH-EAST ASIAN SUBREGIONAL PROGRAMME FOR
ENVIRONMENTAL COOPERATION**

1. The sixteenth Senior Officials Meeting of NEASPEC was held in Seoul on 1-2 September 2011. The Meeting was organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) Subregional Office for East and North-East Asia (SRO-ENEA) and generously hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Republic of Korea.

I. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

2. The 16th Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) was the first after the relocation of the secretariat from the ESCAP Headquarters in Bangkok, Thailand, to ESCAP Subregional Office for East and North-East Asia (SRO-ENEA) in Incheon, Republic of Korea, and the change of secretariat status from interim to permanent. In this regard, the Meeting recognized that NEASPEC has arrived at a new milestone in its institutional development and should utilize this momentum to further strengthen subregional environmental cooperation.

3. In addition to the review of programme and institutional arrangements, the Meeting had an opportunity to reflect on the global, regional and national preparatory processes for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) and hold discussions on its principal themes.

4. **Project on Nature Conservation in Transboundary Areas:** The Meeting noted the progress in the implementation of this project, the importance of it as a flagship project of NEASPEC and its potential to further facilitate cooperation among member States on nature conservation. The Meeting underscored the need to ensure synergies with relevant bilateral, multilateral and global programmes. Concerning the geographical scope of the project, the Meeting requested the secretariat to include the protected areas of Mongolia that are adjacent to its borders with China and the Russian Federation. The Meeting also decided to consider expansion of the target species by including water birds and marine mammals in the course of developing subsequent activities. The Meeting invited Japan and the Republic of Korea to join the project through participating in capacity building.
5. **Project on Mitigation of Transboundary Air Pollution from Coal-fired Power Plants:** The Meeting noted the progress in the implementation of this project and underscored its linkages with ongoing national initiatives for reducing air pollution from coal-fired power plants. In particular, the Meeting noted the contribution of this project to the development of new emission standards in Mongolia. The Meeting noted the contributions of this project in improving local air quality across the subregion. The Meeting highlighted the significance of the continuation of knowledge transfer activities, wide dissemination of the project results and collaboration with relevant mechanisms including Joint Research Project on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollutants (LTP) and Acid Deposition Network in East Asia (EANET).
6. **Project on Mitigation of Dust and Sandstorms:** The Meeting noted the contribution of the project in supporting local communities, facilitating bilateral and multilateral cooperation and complementing national initiatives including Mongolian Greenbelt project. The Meeting welcomed the planned future activities, namely, training programme for Mongolian experts in China and a NEASPEC side event during the 10th session of the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Convention on Combating Desertification (UNCCD COP-10). Many member States expressed their wish to participate in the side event. Member States highlighted the need to obtain assistance from relevant international agencies and national institutions for scaling up the training programme.
7. **Eco-efficiency Partnership:** The Meeting noted the planned activities on low carbon, green cities, and the carbon footprint programme. The Meeting requested the secretariat to develop knowledge sharing activities in close consultation with member States, and prepare a detailed concept paper regarding the proposed “Green University Award” programme for review and decision by member States. The Meeting also invited the member States to recommend national institutions which could jointly develop and implement activities of Eco-efficiency Partnership.
8. **Subregional inputs to the Rio+20 process and subregional activities in support of the themes of Rio+20:** The Meeting had an in-depth review of processes and substantive issues of Rio+20. The Meeting requested the secretariat to revise the draft Summary of

Chair based on the comments made by member States and to circulate it to member States for the final approval. The Meeting requested the secretariat to arrange the submission of the Summary to the Regional Preparatory Meeting in Asia and the Pacific to be held in October 2011.

9. **Consideration of new NEASPEC project proposals:** The Meeting approved the proposal of the Russian Federation on “Review of Existing and Required Capacities for Addressing Adverse Environmental Impacts of Transboundary Air Pollution in North-East Asia”, which will be conducted during the period between 16th and 17th SOM with the financial contribution of the Russian Federation. The Meeting supports the proposal of the Republic of Korea to convene an Expert Consultation Meeting to further elaborate the project proposal on “Strengthening Subregional Cooperation to Address Environmental Challenges related to Transboundary Marine Pollution” for decision at the next SOM. The Meeting took note of the proposal of the Republic of Korea on conservation of endangered migratory bird species and their flyways in the subregion and asked the Republic of Korea to make a proposal at the next SOM in consultation with the NEASPEC secretariat and other relevant international agencies and member countries.

10. **Issues Concerning the Institutional Arrangement of NEASPEC:** The Meeting decided that the Chair of the current SOM will continue his/her functions until the next SOM in order to enhance effective communication between member States. The Meeting also discussed the need to clearly define rules of procedure, official titles of NEASPEC secretariat staff and other related matters. Member States requested the secretariat to carry out an analytical study of similar subregional programmes and entities with a view of benefitting from their experience as the member States wish to deepen and broaden NEASPEC’s engagement. The member States also asked the secretariat to fully explore the synergies between current and proposed activities to ensure optimum utilization of resources.

11. **Core Fund:** The Meeting expressed its deep gratitude to China for its continued annual contribution to the Core Fund of USD 50,000, the Russian Federation for its additional contribution of USD 60,000 to project account and the Republic of Korea for its commitment to contribute USD 100,000 to the Core Fund in 2011. The representative of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), as one of the implementing agencies of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), offered its support to advance proposals from NEASPEC to GEF.

12. **The Seventeenth SOM:** The Meeting received the proposal of the Government of China for hosting the 17th Senior Officials Meeting of NEASPEC. The venue, exact dates and the provisional agenda will be decided through further consultations with the secretariat and member States and announced in due course.

13. The Meeting expressed sincere gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Korea for generously hosting the Meeting and for its warm hospitality and excellent

arrangements for the Meeting. The Meeting also expressed gratitude to the secretariat for the arrangement of the SOM.

II. PROCEEDINGS OF THE SIXTEENTH SENIOR OFFICIALS MEETING

A. Attendance

14. The Meeting was attended by delegations from China, Japan, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation, representatives of the UN system agencies, international organizations and civil society organizations¹.

B. Opening session

15. The Senior Officials Meeting was opened by the Director of the UNESCAP Subregional Office for East and North-East Asia. Referring to the decision of the 67th ESCAP Commission Session held in May 2011 that confirmed the mandate of SRO-ENEA to serve as the NEASPEC Secretariat and changed the nature of secretariat from interim to permanent, he expressed confidence that these measures will substantially strengthen the significance and the efficiency of NEASPEC. He also informed the Meeting that proximity to the Governments and major counterparts in member States played crucial role in recent progress in implementing joint activities of NEASPEC and commencement of projects on multiple themes that include nature conservation in transboundary areas, mitigation of dust and sandstorms, air pollution from coal-fired power plants and eco-efficiency partnership. Finally, he expressed hope that the 16th Senior Officials Meeting will mark a new starting point for scaling up tangible actions of NEASPEC and making NEASPEC become an action-oriented multilateral body for all major stakeholders in North-East Asia.

16. The representative of the host country, Republic of Korea, delivered welcoming remarks. In his address, he emphasized the significance of NEASPEC as a framework to put joint efforts in addressing the diverse issues of sustainable development. He acknowledged environmental challenges confronting the NEASPEC member countries while stressing that the countries of the subregion made immense achievements in economic and social development. In this regard, he emphasized the need to pursue cooperative efforts and measures beyond those that the countries undertake domestically, and requested all countries to work together in implementing NEASPEC projects for more tangible results.

C. Election of officers

17. The Meeting elected the following officers:

¹ Please see Annex I – List of participants for details.

Chair: Mr. Heung-Kyeong Park (Republic of Korea)
Vice-Chair: Mr. Zhaohua He (China)
Rapporteur: Mr. Masaya Sagawa (Japan)

D. Adoption of the agenda

18. The Meeting adopted the following agenda:
 1. Opening of the meeting.
 2. Election of officers.
 3. Adoption of agenda.
 4. Policy issues for sustainable development in North-East Asia (statements by the delegations from member countries and international organizations).
 5. Review of programme planning and implementation:
 - i. Nature Conservation in Transboundary Areas;
 - ii. Mitigation of Transboundary Air Pollution from Coal-Fired Power Plants in North-East Asia;
 - iii. Mitigation of Dust and Sandstorms;
 - iv. Eco-efficiency Partnership in North-East Asia.
 6. Review of national and subregional activities and processes in preparation of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20):
 - a) Review of the national preparatory process for Rio+20;
 - b) National policies and subregional activities related to the theme of Rio+20: (a) green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication and (b) the institutional framework for sustainable development;
 - c) Subregional inputs for the regional preparatory process.
 7. Consideration of new NEASPEC project proposals.
 8. Review of issues concerning the institutional arrangement of NEASPEC.
 9. Review of the Core Fund.
 10. Venue, date and provisional agenda of the seventeenth SOM.
 11. Other matters.
 12. Adoption of the conclusions and recommendations of the meeting.

E. Policy issues for sustainable development in North-East Asia

(Agenda item 4)

19. The representative of China pointed out that environmental sustainability, which has a long-term impact on economic development, has become a very important but extremely difficult task for the international community, especially for developing countries. In particular, he noted that North-East Asia faces a number of severe environmental challenges, highlighting water shortage, land degradation, desertification, sandstorms, climate change and others. In this regard, the representative acknowledged that NEASPEC has been playing a positive role in improving knowledge sharing, environmental protection and sustainable development in the subregion. He further identified three main areas to be emphasized under the NEASPEC framework: (1) identify priority fields to improve knowledge sharing of environmental policies and good practices of environmental protection in the subregion; (2) fully implement current NEASPEC programmes on mitigation of transboundary air pollution, dust and sandstorms prevention, and development of cooperation mechanism for transboundary nature conservation; (3) develop an effective framework for technology transfer and financial support for developing countries in the subregion. The Chinese delegation elaborated that its Government strives to address environmental problems through adopting a number of strategic plans, such as protection of ecosystems and environment and promotion of the resource-efficient economy and environment-friendly society.

20. The representative of Japan expressed appreciation of the Government of Japan of the support received from the member States following the devastating disaster in March 2011. He informed the Meeting that the Government has introduced new policies to save energy and will further develop policies to provide incentives for installation of renewable energy on a large scale in light of the lessons drawn from the recent nuclear accident. Concerning biodiversity, he highlighted that the Government of Japan makes efforts to support the follow-up actions to the adoption of the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing² and the post-2010 targets (Aichi Targets), and the establishment of the Intergovernmental science-policy Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) by contributing funds to the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) for supporting the elaboration of the national biodiversity conservation strategies in developing countries and to the Global Environment Facility (GEF) for capacity

² *The Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization to the Convention on Biological Diversity* is an international agreement adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity at its tenth meeting on 29 October 2010 in Nagoya, Japan. The Nagoya Protocol will be open for signature by Parties to the Convention from 2 February 2011 until 1 February 2012 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

development. He also noted that Japan supports the activities of the Acid Deposition Monitoring Network in East Asia (EANET).

21. The representative of Mongolia stressed the efforts of the Government to further improve environmental legislation and biodiversity protection. He also briefed the Meeting on the National Council for Sustainable Development which focuses on elaboration and implementation of short and long term national sustainable development goals. The delegate added that in 2008 Mongolia adopted a new national development strategy based on principles of the Millennium Development Goals and is currently pursuing efforts to develop national green development strategy in cooperation with UN agencies and international organizations. With respect to the rising subregional challenge of urbanization, he provided the example of Ulaanbaatar, where air pollution presents a major environmental concern. Moreover, he underlined the increasing threat of desertification and land degradation in the country due to mining activities and climate change. In this regard, he stressed that Mongolia is specifically vulnerable to climate change due to its fragile ecosystems. In conclusion, he noted that developing countries require strong support of advanced countries through technology transfer and capacity building to fulfil their sustainable development efforts.

22. The representative of the Republic of Korea briefed the Meeting on the policies and actions taken by the Government to promote green growth domestically and internationally. He noted that the Government set its five-year national plan on green growth and a mid-term target to curb greenhouse gas emissions by 30% compared to the Business As Usual (BAU) level by 2020. He underlined that the establishment of the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI) and the East Asia Climate Partnership programme contributes to promoting global and regional cooperation to address climate change in developing countries and sustainable growth in Asia. He expressed also that the Government wishes to expand the scope of cooperation within NEASPEC and highlighted that NEASPEC should contribute to the preparation process of the Rio+20 by consolidating political will and determination in the subregion.

23. The representative of the Russian Federation highlighted the significance of the concept of sustainable development within the UN framework and underlined that the Russian Federation attaches great importance to issues related to sustainable development. In this context, she elaborated on the efforts of the Russian Federation to integrate sustainable development into long term economic and social development strategies of the country. Furthermore, she stressed that NEASPEC serves as a practical arm of UNESCAP in North-East Asia focusing on environmental matters and that this intergovernmental mechanism has been involved in implementation of projects that target common environmental challenges of the subregion. The Russian delegation also presented a comprehensive outline of the environmental regulatory and legal frameworks of the country and briefed on the priorities of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE) regarding further enhancement of the state ecological control and

audit. Among the recently identified priorities of MNRE the delegation cited elimination of the accumulated long-term ecological damage and strengthening of the environmental regulatory system.

F. Presentations and discussions on substantive agenda items

(Agenda items 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9)

24. The Meeting had presentations from the secretariat on agenda item 5: Review of programme planning and implementation; agenda item 8: Review of issues concerning the institutional arrangement of NEASPEC; and agenda item 9: Review of the Core Fund, followed by interventions from member States. The relevant agencies from the member States delivered presentations on agenda item 7: Consideration of new NEASPEC proposals. In addition to that, the national delegations, representatives of UN agencies and civil society organizations delivered presentations under agenda item 6: Review of national and subregional activities and processes in preparation of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). The conclusions and recommendations resulting from the discussions are included in the Report of the Meeting, and key points of discussions under agenda item 6 are contained in the Summary of the Chair.

G. Venue, date and provisional agenda of the seventeenth Senior Officials Meeting

(Agenda item 10)

25. The Meeting discussed the venue, date and agenda of the seventeenth Senior Officials Meeting. The Meeting expressed its appreciation to the Government of China for generously offering to host the next Meeting. The proposed dates, venue and the provisional agenda would be announced by the secretariat in consultation with the host Government in due course.

H. Other matters

(Agenda item 11)

26. The Meeting expressed deep appreciation to the Government of the Republic of Korea for generously hosting the sixteenth Senior Officials Meeting and for its warm hospitality and the excellent arrangements of the Meeting.

I. Adoption of the report
(Agenda item 12)

27. The Meeting adopted the conclusions and recommendations of the Senior Officials Meeting on 2 September 2010. The report of the Meeting was finalized and adopted by circulating it among the member States after the Senior Officials Meeting.

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Annex I. Chair's Summary: National and Subregional Activities and Processes in Preparation of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20)

1. SOM-16 reviewed national and subregional activities and processes in preparation of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) to be held in Rio de Janeiro during 4-6 June 2012 and exchanged views of member States, international organizations and civil society organizations (CSOs) on both themes of the Conference – a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, and the institutional framework for sustainable development.
2. The Meeting recognized that North-East Asia has achieved remarkable progress in social and economic development and environmental sustainability since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in 1992. At the same time, the subregion faces significant environmental challenges including water scarcity, air pollution, desertification and marine pollution as well as new and emerging challenges such as extreme weather events and climate change, volatility of food prices, global financial instabilities, etc.
3. The member States shared information on their efforts in the preparation of national inputs to Rio+20 and expressed their priorities in this regard. Most countries in the subregion established multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral national committees/working groups to coordinate national processes towards Rio+20.
4. Particularly, the delegation of China informed the Meeting about the work of the National Preparatory Committee for Rio+20. The delegation also stressed that Rio+20 plays an important role in reinforcing political commitment to sustainable development and should take stock of previous commitments, including the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. In addition, the delegation stressed that the global community should continue to follow the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities” in adopting further measures to promote sustainable development globally.
5. The delegation of Japan updated the Meeting about the inter-ministerial framework and the National Preparatory Committee for Rio+20. The delegation stressed that Rio+20 serves as an occasion for international community to clearly express its commitment to the transition to a green economy and encourage each country to adopt concrete policies concerning green economy. Touching upon the social aspects of sustainable development, the delegation stressed the importance of the “human security” concept which focuses on individuals and effectively ensures equity amongst them. Further, the delegation expressed its position that the outcome document of Rio+20 to be presented as “a focused political document,” should be a concise political declaration focusing on the two themes of Rio+20. Further, the delegation added that Rio+20 should

provide meaningful insights to formulating international development goals after 2015 by sharing its vision for sustainable development in the 21st century

6. The delegation of Mongolia informed the Meeting about the establishment of the inter-ministerial Working Group for Rio+20. The delegation expressed its view that almost after two decades following UNCED in 1992 the concept of sustainable development is not yet fully understood globally and the three pillars that it embodies are not well integrated. In addition, the delegation shared the plans of Mongolia on elaboration of the National Green Economy Strategy which aims to shift the development of the country from “brown” to “green”.

7. The delegation of the Republic of Korea briefed the Meeting on the national research projects that were initiated to formulate national inputs to Rio+20. As the host of the Asia-Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting for Rio+20, the Republic of Korea welcomed the inputs of SOM-16 to the regional process. With regard to the green economy theme, the delegation reiterated that green economy can serve as a tool to bridge existing gaps between developing and developed countries, especially in light of current global environmental challenges.

8. The delegation of the Russian Federation informed the Meeting about the establishment of the inter-ministerial and multi-stakeholder Working Group of experts which is tasked with drafting national inputs to Rio+20. Stressing the previous efforts of ESCAP member States towards the preparation to Rio+20, the Russian delegation recalled the significance of the Astana Ministerial Declaration adopted during the 6th Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific held in 2010. The delegation further stressed the importance of achieving sustainable development in long-term perspective and shared with the Meeting information on the efforts of the Russian Government to adjust the legal environmental framework.

9. The Meeting noted that the member States of the subregion have already put in place a number of groundbreaking rules, regulations, policies and programmes relevant to the themes of Rio+20. Examples include:

- China - adoption of bold quantified targets for energy and resource efficiency and air pollution reduction as part of the 12th Five Year Plan in the context of promotion of circular economy and the resource saving society;
- Japan – green innovation policies under the New Growth Strategy, promotion of sustainable consumption and production patterns through 3Rs (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) policy and eco-points accrual mechanism;
- Mongolia - mobilization of the national efforts to develop the National Green Economy Programme and related policies and legislation;
- The Republic of Korea – the adoption of the Low Carbon, Green Growth strategy as the main development paradigm and elaboration of the short term and long term targets related to it;

- The Russian Federation - adjustment of the legal framework to transit to the new regulatory system and provision of economic incentives in the environmentally protected areas as well as in the field of waste management strengthening of environmental control, monitoring and auditing, including increased penalties for negative impact on environment, elimination of accumulated ecological damage and promotion of energy saving and efficiency.
10. The Meeting noted possible areas of mutual interest for subregional cooperation. These areas include: mainstreaming sustainable development into national development plans; exchanging information and best practices on environmental legislation, regulation and development of economic instruments; and promoting multi-stakeholder involvement in sustainable development.
11. The Meeting provided various perspectives on both themes of Rio+20. The participants exchanged views on the concept of green economy. For some, the concept of green economy provides tools to achieve sustainable development in coping with the ongoing financial, fuel and food crises. For others, the concept is unclear and it raises concerns that there could be conditionalities in trade, development, technology and financial assistance.
12. Regarding the theme of institutional framework for sustainable development, the Meeting noted that governments should scale-up their efforts to mainstream sustainable development into their national development agenda, for example, through an effective coordination mechanism for national efforts on promoting and integrating the three pillars of sustainable development. The Meeting also took note of the view that the issues of sustainable development need to be addressed at multiple levels with attention to horizontal and vertical integration and with participation of various stakeholders.
13. The Meeting noted the need for the United Nations to take the leading role in facilitating global efforts for sustainable development, and in this context, the need for further strengthening the roles of and the coordination among the Economic and Social Council, the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) and United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) in promoting sustainable development.
14. Some representatives from civil society organizations (CSOs) expressed the view that discussions on green economy to be clearly defined. Sustainable development in the context of balanced treatment of economic and social pillars – how can poverty eradication, social justice, livelihoods security etc., be addressed at the same time. Concerning the tremendous economic, social, and environmental costs of manmade and natural hazards, some representatives also suggested that “resilience” should be revisited by all countries as one of the key concepts underpinning integration of all dimensions of sustainable development.
15. Some representatives of CSOs also called for the creation of a new architecture of financial support for developing countries (such as the North-East Asian Fund for

Sustainable Development), technology transfer (North-East Asian Institute for Technology Transfer) and knowledge sharing mechanisms on subregional, regional and global levels. The Meeting also underlined that NEASPEC should act as a key part of subregional environmental cooperation.

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