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**UNITED NATIONS**

**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC**

Twenty-seventh Senior Officials Meeting (SOM-27) of NEASPEC

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Beijing, China

**REVIEW OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION**

(Item 5(e) of the provisional agenda)

**Desertification and Land Degradation**

*Note by the Secretariat*

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ANNEX I: Background paper: A Brief Overview of Desertification and Land Degradation in North-East Asia

ANNEX II: (draft) Activity Plan for desertification and land degradation in 2024-2025

## I. BACKGROUND

1. Desertification and land degradation (DLD) poses severe challenges to sustainable development in North-East Asia, with far-reaching impacts on soil health, air and water quality. Acknowledging the threats that DLD presents to local communities, their livelihoods and the environment, NEASPEC member States have introduced and implemented a range of policies and programmes to address these issues.

2. To support these efforts, NEASPEC facilitated capacity building, knowledge sharing and training programmes on combating DLD from 2011 to 2013. In 2016, at SOM-20, NEASPEC launched the North-East Asia Multi-Stakeholder Plan on Combating DLD (NEAMSP), establishing a subregional cooperation platform to further strengthen collective action.

3. Recognizing the synergies in the work programme between NEASPEC and the Northeast Asia Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought Network (DLDD-NEAN), member States reviewed NEASPEC's approach and agreed on a subregional approach that focuses on addressing the causes, drivers and impacts of DLD, while supporting capacity building and promoting the sharing of knowledge and experiences among member States.

## II. PROGRESS OF THE ACTIVITIES ON DESERTIFICATION AND LAND DEGRADATION

4. In accordance with the activity plan approved in SOM-26, the Secretariat, in 2024, studied the causes, drivers and impacts of DLD and prepared a background paper, "A Brief Overview of Desertification and Land Degradation in North-East Asia" (Annex I), which had the following findings.

**Findings of a Brief Overview of Desertification and Land Degradation in North-East Asia**

5. The paper notes that DLD still poses a significant challenge to achieving sustainable development goals in North-East Asia, although arid and semi-arid areas have slightly decreased in recent decades. In China, the situation has improved in recent decades, but there are still areas requiring further attention. In Mongolia, the rate of desertification has slowed down since 1990, while climate change and socio-economic factors continue to put pressure on arid and semi-arid areas. In the Russian Federation, many parts of arid and semi-arid areas have experienced decreased vegetation.

6. Changes in socio-economic conditions associated with population increases and economic growth have affected DLD through intensified demand for land-based resources. Among others, the number of livestock has risen significantly in recent decades, especially in Mongolia and the northern provinces of China in line with the rapidly increasing meat consumption. While total water withdrawals showed mixed trends in North-East Asia, municipal water withdrawals in China more than doubled from 2000 to 2020. Mining has also driven significant environmental challenges with substantially increased coal production in the arid and semi-arid areas of China since 1990.

7. Climate change adds uncertainty. While total annual precipitation in most arid and semi-arid areas of North-East Asia is likely to increase slightly, the accelerating temperature increases could lead to intensifying desertification by decreasing soil moisture and increasing evaporation.

8. The paper recommends further study on the possible impacts of socio-economic conditions and climate change at the local level. Strengthening regional and multi-sectoral cooperation is also necessary since the DLD impacts various stakeholders across North-East Asia.

### **III. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION**

9. Member States may wish to propose collaborative activities on DLD in North-East Asia in line with the seventeenth session of the Conference of Parties (COP17) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, which will be held in Mongolia in 2026.

10. The Meeting may wish to review and approve the proposed activity plan for 2025 (Annex II).