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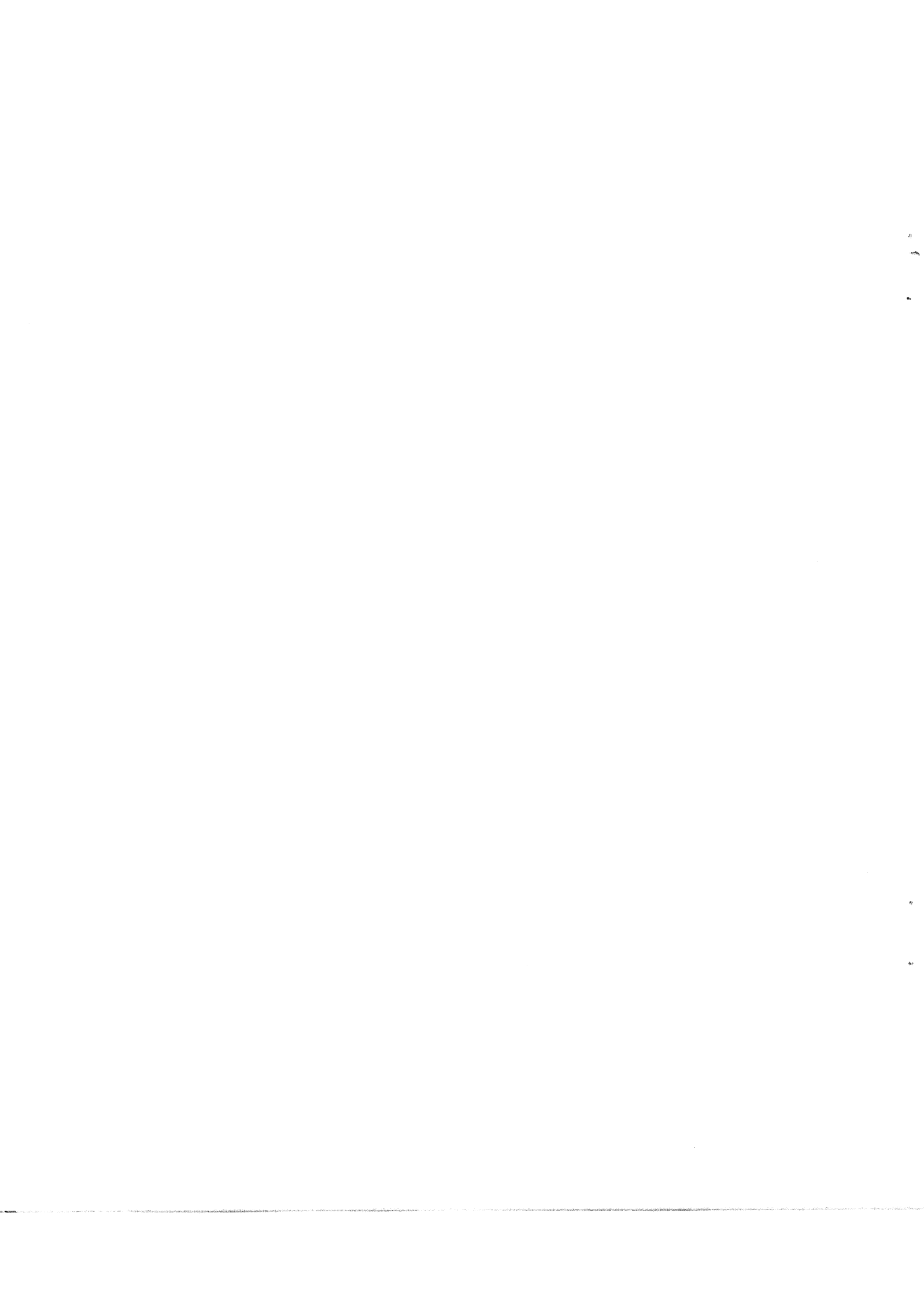
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REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION

Follow-up action at the regional level on United Nations
world conferences and ESCWA regional meetings



I. THE CONFERENCE ON THE CAPABILITIES AND NEEDS OF DISABLED PERSONS IN THE ESCWA REGION

In the context of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons (1983-1992) and the implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development of Jordan, the Regional Bureau of the Middle East Committee for the Welfare of the Blind, the Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND), the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and the Government of the Netherlands, organized the Conference on the Capabilities and Needs of Disabled Persons in the ESCWA Region. The Conference was held in Amman from 10 to 28 November 1989. The three major themes of the Conference were:

1. Full participation of disabled persons in the deliberations and side events of the Conference.
2. Strengthening collaboration among United Nations agencies and bodies in the ESCWA region through a multi-sectoral approach (ESCWA Inter-Organizational Task Force on Disability).
3. Promoting the capabilities and creativity of disabled persons.

Special attention was given to the full participation of disabled persons in the deliberations of the Conference. All Conference documents were produced in both Arabic and English Braille for the benefit of blind participants. In addition, Perkins Braille machines were made available during the Conference to permit blind participants to type their own notes. Sign-language interpretation was available to ensure the full participation of deaf persons in the substantive discussions. The Technical President of the Conference was a blind person. The hotel was selected to ensure disabled persons' access to all facilities and services. A bus designed for disabled persons confined to wheelchairs was available throughout the duration of the Conference for transport to and from the airport and to the side events of the Conference.

The Conference was attended by 200 Arab and international experts -- 40 of whom were themselves disabled -- including experts participating in a personal capacity, representatives of Governments, representatives of Arab organizations, mass media experts and some eminent personalities from the region, in addition to representatives of members of the ESCWA Inter-Organizational Task Force on Disability and other United Nations agencies. Special interest in the Conference was shown by the Government of Jordan at all levels. Her Majesty Queen Noor Al Hussein attended the opening and delivered a speech. Queen Noor also attended the final sports day for the disabled and officially closed the Conference. His Royal Highness Prince Raad bin Zaid attended various sessions and all the side events and played a major role in organizing the sports competition for disabled athletes.

During the scientific programme of the Conference, ESCWA and the Task Force members organized a series of disability-related issues including an overview of the problems and needs of disabled persons, prevention and treatment of disabilities, training and education, vocational training and

employment, disability statistics, women and disability, transfer of appropriate technologies for disabled persons, social aspects of disabled persons, and adaptation of the physical environment to the needs of disabled persons. A number of side events during the Conference were aimed at demonstrating the capabilities and creativity of disabled persons. ESCWA organized, in collaboration with the Jordan Sports Federation for the Handicapped, a sports competition for disabled persons. In collaboration with the Jordanian General Union of Voluntary Societies, ESCWA sponsored a concert performed by the Egyptian Al-Noor Wal Amal Orchestra (an internationally recognized orchestra composed of 40 blind women musicians in Egypt). The Conference formulated 55 concrete recommendations including the following:

1. Advanced technologies developed in industrial countries should be adapted to meet local needs and transferred to the region through staff training. The use of computers should be promoted to assist the integration of disabled persons into the community. This process may involve adaptation of hardware to make it accessible to various categories of disabled persons and development of appropriate software packages.

2. At the international, regional and national levels, disabled persons, as members of organizations and in their personal capacities, should participate fully in decision-making processes as equal partners. Appropriate legislation should be enacted to this end.

3. Ongoing issues of disability and the need to achieve the goals of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons require the design of programmes and activities in the field of disability at the national, regional and international levels. These should continue beyond the end of the Decade in 1992, and should be developed and actively implemented by ESCWA, in collaboration with relevant organizations, in order to publish information, undertake research and implement the World Programme of Action. For this purpose, it is recommended that a series of regional technical meetings dealing with various aspects of disability be held before the proposed 1992 Global Conference to mark the end of the Decade.

4. Due importance should be attached both to training media professionals to help them assume their responsibilities towards disabled persons and to organizing training programmes. Intensive efforts should be made through the various media to spread awareness in the community and to promote positive attitudes (and correct negative attitudes) towards disabled persons.

Follow-up activities by ESCWA on recommendations of the Conference

The proceedings of the Conference, containing all country studies and technical studies submitted to the Conference, have been compiled and are available in English (E/ESCWA/SD/1992/2). Also, a videotape showing highlights of the proceedings of the Conference is being edited for distribution.

As part of its follow-up to the Conference, ESCWA intends to organize a cultural event for disabled persons in the ESCWA region, in close collaboration with the United Nations Office in Vienna/Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs and other agencies in the latter half of 1992. This is an immediate follow-up activity of the Conference, with special

emphasis on promoting public awareness on the capabilities of disabled persons. The week will include a series of cultural activities by disabled artists and substantial sessions including: disability legislation in countries of the ESCWA region; and formulation of a long-term strategy towards the year 2010, which will comprise a new set of action-oriented objectives to strengthen both the progress already attained during the Decade and coordination among non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

ESCWA has also included in its 1992-1993 programme of work two technical studies: "Introduction, adaptation and transfer of appropriate technologies for disabled persons in the ESCWA region" and "Second-round monitoring of the implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning disabled persons in countries of the ESCWA region".

The most action-oriented follow-up to the Conference is setting up a Braille production unit for producing relevant ESCWA documents (both in English and Arabic) in Braille for the benefit of blind persons from and outside the region. This project is currently being developed thanks to the generous donation of a Braille printer LED 120 from the Regional Bureau of the Middle East Committee for the Affairs of the Blind and in close technical collaboration with the Bureau.

II. THE ARAB MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT (CAIRO, 10-12 SEPTEMBER 1991)

A. Introduction

1. The General Assembly, in resolution 44/228 convening the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), stressed the importance of holding regional conferences on environment and development with the full cooperation of the regional commissions. It also recommended that the results of such regional conferences be introduced into the preparatory process for the 1992 UNCED, bearing in mind that regional conferences should make important substantive contributions to the Conference.

2. The Conference, which was held in Brazil in June 1992, was mandated by the General Assembly to elaborate strategies to reverse the effect of environmental degradation, in the context of strengthened efforts to promote sustainable and environmentally sound development in all countries. It was also called upon to undertake a variety of measures, including an assessment of the capacity of the United Nations system to assist in the prevention and settlement of environmental disputes.

3. The Arab Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development, held in Cairo in September 1991, was deeply concerned that the Arab region continues to be affected by major threats to the environment as a result of wars, armed conflicts and continued tension arising from the failure to arrive at a just solution to the question of Palestine. These lead to the paralysis of development, destruction of resources and increased environmental degradation. The ministers therefore affirmed the urgent need to arrive at an international solution on the establishment of measures to cope with these dangers.

4. The Conference called upon ESCWA to prepare a document for the 1992 Conference that would fully reflect Arab aspirations, views and interests. It has also decided that documents such as the: (i) "Arab perspective on environment and development" (E/ESCWA/ENVHS/1991/WP.1); (ii) "Proposed programme of action for environmentally sound and sustainable development in the Arab countries" (E/ESCWA/ENVHS/1991/WP.2); (iii) "Operational programmes proposed in the field of environment and development in the Arab countries" (E/ESCWA/ENVHS/1991/WP.2B); and (iv) "Arab Declaration on Environment and Development and Future Prospects" (E/ESCWA/ENV/1992/1), which were the outcome of the Ministerial Conference, should also be part of the regional report to UNCED.

5. The Arab countries are committed to working individually or collectively for the achievement of sustainable development. As members of ESCWA, and of the League of Arab States, they have been instrumental in undertaking several activities towards this end, including:

(a) Preparation of the "Arab perspective on environment and development", which outlines the status and trends of environmental problems in the Arab countries along with their root causes;

(b) Preparation of the "Programme of action for environmentally sound and sustainable development in the Arab countries", which provides a framework of action at the national, subregional, regional and global levels. This programme of action is complemented with operational programmes for implementation in the region;

(c) The convening of the Arab Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in September 1991 and the adoption at the Conference of a declaration which reflects the commitment of the Arab countries to achieving environmentally sound and sustainable development. The Declaration also identifies the specific areas of concern in which the cooperation of international communities is needed.

6. The full report of the Arab Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development has been made available to the secretariat of the 1992 Conference to be issued for distribution at the Fourth Preparatory Committee for UNCED (New York, 9 March - 2 April 1992). This report has been reproduced for distribution at the sixteenth session of the Commission, and contains abstracts of three sub-items under paragraph 5 and the full text of the "Arab Declaration on Environment and Development and Future Prospects" (ESCWA report to the preparatory committee for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (E/ESCWA/16/5/Suppl.1)).

B. Issues for discussion at the 1992 Conference
vis-à-vis the Arab region's concerns

1. General Assembly resolution 44/228 affirmed that the following environmental issues (not listed in any particular order of priority) are among those of major concern in maintaining the quality of the Earth's environment and particularly in achieving environmentally sound and sustainable development in all countries:

(a) Protection of the atmosphere by combating climate change, depletion of the ozone layer and transboundary air pollution;

(b) Protection of the quality and supply of fresh-water resources;

(c) Protection of the oceans and all kinds of seas, including enclosed and semi-enclosed seas, and of coastal areas; and the protection, rational use and development of their living resources;

(d) Protection and management of land resources by, inter alia, combating deforestation, desertification and drought;

(e) Conservation of biological diversity;

(f) Environmentally sound management of biotechnology;

(g) Environmentally sound management of wastes, particularly hazardous wastes, and of toxic chemicals; as well as prevention of illegal traffic in toxic and dangerous products and wastes;

(h) Improvement of the living and working environment of the poor in urban slums and rural areas through eradicating poverty by, inter alia, implementing rural and urban development programmes, as well as taking other appropriate measures at all levels necessary to stem the degradation of the environment;

(i) Protection of human health conditions and improvement in the quality of life.

2. All above environmental and developmental issues of global concern are highly relevant to the Arab region, although the nature and extent of the problems vary because of diversity in terms of physical and socio-economic characteristics among the Arab countries. However, in their input to preparations for the 1992 Conference, the Arab countries will draw particular attention to the following issues:

(a) Protection and management of land resources by combating desertification and by rehabilitating degraded lands;

(b) Development and protection of water resources;

(c) Rural and urban development and improvement in the quality of life;

(d) Environmentally sound management of wastes and toxic and hazardous chemicals;

(e) Improvement of human health, sanitation, and well-being of all inhabitants;

(f) Conservation of biological diversity;

(g) Protection of the atmosphere by combating climate change, depletion of the ozone layer and transboundary air pollution.

3. The issues of climate change and biological diversity are the subject of ongoing global negotiations. However, none of the Arab countries are among the 20 countries responsible for the bulk of emissions of greenhouse gases in the world. The Arab countries are adopting a positive approach in these negotiations.

4. Although the problem of transboundary air pollution is not relevant in all the Arab region at present, it may be of importance on a subregional level. The problem should therefore be evaluated, and adequate agreements and regulatory measures formulated.

5. For further details, please refer to ESCWA's report to the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (E/ESCWA/16/5/Suppl.1).

III. THE SECOND UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES (PARIS, 3-14 SEPTEMBER 1990)*

The second United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) was held in Paris from 3 to 14 September 1990. The main objectives of the Conference, as set out in General Assembly resolution 42/177, were: (a) to review the progress made in implementing the Substantial New Programme of Action for the 1980s for the Least Developed Countries (SNPA); (b) to review the progress made in international support measures, particularly in official development assistance (ODA); and (c) to consider, formulate and adopt, as appropriate, national and international policies and measures for accelerating the development process in the LDCs in the 1990s.

The Conference was attended by representatives from 150 countries, 14 intergovernmental organizations, 12 United Nations offices and bodies, 16 specialized and related agencies and 49 NGOs.

The general debate reflected differences -- and convergence in some cases -- in the positions of different groups of countries. The main conclusions to be drawn from the statements of the LDCs were that the 1980s was a lost decade, as the SNPA failed to achieve any of its major goals, and the ODA target of 0.15 per cent of gross national product (GNP) of donor countries remained unfulfilled. Developing countries also experienced the collapse of the prices of many raw materials, deterioration in their terms of trade, and an increase in their debt-servicing burden and in protectionism, which denied their products access to markets.

Developed countries stressed that the reversal of the present trend and accelerating growth and development require collective efforts, political commitment and sharing responsibility between LDCs and their development partners. While the primary responsibility for development lies with the LDCs themselves, the international community has a vital supportive role to play by: promoting a global economic environment conducive to sustainable, non-inflationary growth; and providing adequate external resources and appropriate technical assistance.

* For the complete report, refer to document E/ESCWA/DPD/1992/2.

The Conference had before it the draft programme of action prepared by the Intergovernmental Working Group on the LDCs, which acted as a Preparatory Committee for the Conference. The draft included a number of outstanding issues, especially in the area of external resources (the ODA target), external debt, external trade, environment, the criteria for classifying LDCs and reference to political and human rights issues.

In an effort to reconcile the differences among various country groups, intensive discussions were held in the two sessional committees which were established by the Conference.

These issues were ultimately resolved after intensive discussions; the only reservation was that of the United States of America on the issue of debt and multilateral institutions and development.

At the closing session, the Conference adopted the Paris Declaration and the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s.

The Paris Declaration defines five priority areas to inspire action by the LDCs, namely:

- (a) Conducting a macro-economic policy taking into account market signals;
- (b) Developing human resources, respecting human rights and applying effective population, health, education, training and employment policies;
- (c) Reversing the trend towards environmental degradation;
- (d) Promoting rural development;
- (e) Developing diversified productive sectors based on private initiative, effective public enterprise, regional cooperation and increased access to international markets.

The Paris Declaration also stressed the need to reinforce the LDCs' efforts with external support measures, including the need to increase ODA, debt relief and improvement of the international economic climate.

The salient features of the programme of action are the following:

1. Assessment of the socio-economic situation in the 1980s. This part of the programme of action involves assessing the overall performance of the economies of the LDCs, as well as policies and measures undertaken at the national level in key areas, and the external environment facing the LDCs, particularly in trade, resource flows and debt.
2. Four basic principles that should guide the relationships between the LDCs and their partners. The four principles are: (i) success of the programme depends on shared responsibility; (ii) the LDCs have the primary responsibility for the formulation and effective implementation of appropriate policies and priorities for their growth and development; (iii) the strengthened partnership for development necessitates adequate support from LDCs' development partners; and (iv) commitments undertaken should be measurable and sufficiently transparent to enable monitoring and assessment of the programme of action for the 1990s.

3. Global framework including the following elements: the macro-economic policy framework; financing growth and development; external indebtedness; external trade; and strengthening economic and technical cooperation between the LDCs and other developing countries.

4. Mobilizing and developing human capacities in the LDCs. In this section, the programme of action stressed that policies for mobilizing and developing human resources should focus on full involvement, integration and participation of all groups, especially women, in the development process and the strengthening of human capital, in particular through access to basic and adequate social services, giving special priority to education.

5. Development and modernization of the economic base. In this section, LDCs are requested to create the necessary conditions to encourage development in all sectors of economic life and facilitate and encourage the emergence and expansion of the role played by private initiative.

6. Arrangements for implementation, follow-up, and monitoring and review. Effective monitoring and follow-up at national, regional and global levels are essential for the successful implementation of the programme of action. At the national level, this calls for the strengthening of the country review process as a means for policy dialogue and aid coordination between LDCs and their development partners. Country review groups should be organized on a more systematic basis and include all concerned donors.

At the regional level, the regional commissions are entrusted with monitoring economic cooperation between LDCs and other developing countries, particularly those in the same region. Cluster meetings should be organized, preferably every two years under the aegis of the regional commissions, in order to improve and strengthen existing cooperation arrangements at the regional and subregional levels. The regional commissions should also ensure that the needs and problems of the LDCs are addressed as part of their ongoing work and should continue to contribute to the follow-up process.

At the global level, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) will continue to serve as the focal point for the review and appraisal of the implementation of the programme of action, and the follow-up at the global level, and to provide support at the regional level. In this connection, the UNCTAD Intergovernmental Group should conduct a comprehensive mid-term review of the situation of the LDCs. It is also desirable that the Committee for Development Planning (CDP) expedite its review of the criteria for designating the least developed among the developing countries. It is also recommended that this review introduce a dynamic element in the application of the criteria.

Conclusions

Elaborate and intensive pre-Conference preparations; improved understanding on the part of the international community of the concept and of the realities of LDCs; reduced international tensions and rapprochement in economic and political ideologies; and more realistic positions and demands -- and less rhetoric -- on the part of developing countries and LDCs among them all contributed to a successful outcome of the Conference.

This is reflected in the agreed upon and concerted measures contained in the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s, and in the commitment to implement this programme as set out in the Paris Declaration.

However, the programme of action remains basically a compromise between different country groupings, and at times among country members of the same group. Such divergence has been most apparent in the positions taken on the issue of ODA and willingness to make definite commitments in that regard. Significant differences also emerged with respect to international debt strategy, debt-relief measures, and the international trading system.

The political dimension is also very much in evidence in the programme of action. The programme is replete with references to: respect for human rights; democratization; decentralization of decision-making and involvement of all people at all levels, especially women; and initiatives to evolve market-oriented economies which encourage the private sector and private enterprise while allowing a supportive role to a reduced and rationalized public sector. These concepts were propagated essentially by the United States, with support from other major developed countries, and their acceptance was facilitated by the emerging rapprochement between East and West. The success of LDCs' efforts and support from their would-be development partners were linked to progress on these fronts. Many LDCs already signalled their acceptance in the policy statements made before the Conference. Of the major countries, only China took exception, to defend the public sector and to insist on LDCs' sovereign rights to choose their development path and strategy.

