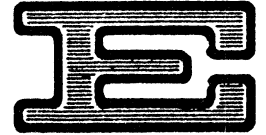




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**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION
FOR WESTERN ASIA**

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Amman

Item 5(b) of the provisional agenda

**REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION**

**FOLLOW-UP ACTION ON THE RESOLUTIONS OF THE
COMMISSION AT ITS FIFTEENTH SESSION**

- (x) Resolution 175 (XV) on strengthening the role and performance of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION
FOR WESTERN ASIA
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1. With regard to operative paragraph 1 of the resolution under reference the secretariat wishes to report as follows:

(a) The Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives, an advisory body comprising the heads of member States' diplomatic missions in Iraq was duly set up and met periodically during 1989 and 1990. It proved a valuable experience. The Committee, established to help the Executive Secretary solve problems connected with the work of the Commission, functioned well as a sounding-board and as a mechanism to obtain member States' views on issues on a continuous basis. After the regrouping of the Commission in Amman, a similar arrangement was made. A number of meetings have taken place and continuation of this practice is envisaged;

(b) Member States and institutions of the region have continued to make use of the Commission as a medium for cooperation, coordination, operational research and project execution. However, it cannot be claimed that this use has been optimal, given inter alia the temporary repatriation of the Commission's international staff, lasting one year. Now that the secretariat has found its feet again, interrupted activities have been resumed and contacts reestablished. It is intended to continue this process with vigour, to transcend the current transient stage in the Commission's life and to carry out what has been planned. It is hoped meanwhile that member States and institutions of the region will not hesitate to make optimum use of the Commission as a medium for cooperation, coordination, operational research and project execution in the economic and social fields;

(c) Since the resolution was adopted, further concrete cooperation has taken place with regional funds and institutions, some of it new. Mention may be made inter alia of the activities undertaken with the Islamic Development Bank and with AGFUND (E/ESCWA/16/8/Suppl.1).

In building upon those efforts, it is hoped that other funds and institutions will follow suit. It is also hoped that member States will wish to replenish the resources of the Trust Fund for ESCWA Regional Activities, which have been used up at a rapid rate in recent years. Reference is made to E/ESCWA/16/7/Add.2, which is part of the documentation for this session;

(d) The ESCWA secretariat continues to have the benefit of the services of competent nationals of member States. However, these are the same States as before, and distribution has not become more evenly spread across the region. Nor have member States seconded civil servants for service in the secretariat. With the Gulf crisis, the temporary repatriation of the international staff of ESCWA from Baghdad and the current recruitment freeze, circumstances have not been favourable for new professional staff to join ESCWA; it is hoped that this will soon change, now that ESCWA activities have fully resumed.

It is hoped that member States will wish to give continued attention to this matter, including the secondment of some of their civil servants to work in the secretariat.

2. With reference to operative paragraph 2 of the resolution, it may be noted that United Nations Headquarters on occasion facilitated the recruitment of staff members from over-represented countries, especially female candidates. However, the 1989 retrenchment exercise was applied system-wide; no exception was made for ESCWA.

3. As to operative paragraph 3, since adoption of the resolution, an internal restructuring has been put into effect in the ESCWA secretariat with a view to effectiveness and efficiency. This has been on a trial basis; the discussion with Headquarters on the issue has been interrupted by the Gulf crisis. In the meantime, the issue has come to the fore in a wider frame, namely the restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields and the consequent reorganization of the Secretariat taking place at present. Of course, the role of the regional commissions of the United Nations is an integral part of this subject matter being considered in global and regional forums. A resolution aimed inter alia at strengthening the regional commissions has been adopted by the resumed forty-sixth session of the General Assembly (resolution 46/235 of 13 April 1992: see below); ideas to this effect have been invited from the commissions. In this connection two aspects can be distinguished: the internal and the external. Where the former is concerned, reference was made above to the restructuring of the ESCWA secretariat that has been discussed with Headquarters. The external aspect has a longer history: we may wish to go back in this regard to the grounds for founding regional commissions as a regional arm of the United Nations entrusted with the task of promoting development and regional cooperation. This rationale has found authoritative confirmation at various times since, notably in General Assembly resolution 32/197 of 20 December 1977, stipulating strengthened relations between the regional commissions and the organizations of the United Nations system and delegation of the necessary authority to the commissions, with adequate budgetary and financial provision. Both General Assembly resolution 46/235 of 13 April 1992 and General Assembly resolution 45/264 of 13 May 1991 make reference to this resolution, the relevant provisions of which have not thus far been fully carried out.

4. It may be possible to build upon the experience gained in ESCWA with the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives by strengthening that body's role as a medium of communication with Governments and for considering outstanding issues together. Moreover, it seems to the ESCWA secretariat that benefit could be gained from mutual consultation on issues of concern, at least on a yearly basis. To this end the secretariat proposes that, with the Commission session staged in even years, the Technical Committee meet in the year before the Commission session is held. The arrangement proposed is envisaged within the financial resources available to the Commission.

With regard to the request to the regional commissions contained in General Assembly resolution 46/235 to provide recommendations for consideration by the Assembly at its forty-seventh session, reference is made to the report submitted under agenda item 9, "Restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic and social fields: role and functions of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia".