

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Special Body on Pacific Island Developing Countries
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FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC**

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to extend to you a warm welcome to this Eighth Session of the Special Body on Pacific Island Developing Countries. I also wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge the presence of Mr Anwarul Chowdhury, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.

Let me begin by thanking the Government of China for kindly hosting this Special Body Session. Our host country is one of the fastest growing economies in the world and you will agree that this is a good opportunity for those who have not been to China to witness at first hand the kind of economic and social development that is taking place. In contrast, economic performance of Pacific island countries has not kept pace with population growth. Strong economic growth in China offers prospects for increased trade and investment flows for Pacific island countries. For them to take advantage of such opportunities, they need to work on some key policy issues such as maintaining prudent fiscal management, developing physical infrastructure and promoting good governance. These issues are briefly highlighted in the *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2004*.

I believe that the sharing of development experiences among the countries of the ESCAP region is important. In this connection, I would like to draw your attention to ESCAP's South-South Cooperation programme, formally known as the TCDC programme. This programme is implemented with the support of several member countries including our host country, and I am pleased to note that many Pacific island countries have benefited from it.

The Special Body provides an important avenue for Pacific island countries to identify their development priorities so that appropriate actions can be taken by ESCAP and relevant agencies to assist these countries address them. You will recall that past Special Body sessions covered subjects such as sustainable development, trade and investment, transport and tourism and the rights of children and people with disabilities. The theme for the current session is urban development which was endorsed by the Commission at its last session and finalized in consultation with Pacific island countries.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Recent studies indicate that urban poverty is increasing in Pacific island countries. Many cities in the Pacific have large areas of squatter communities. The responses to these new communities on the part of central and local governments, and the law enforcement agencies are varied. I might add that urban management issues are not unique to Pacific island countries. Therefore, these countries can draw on the experiences of their counterparts in the Asia-Pacific region when considering appropriate measures and policy responses to these new challenges.

I am pleased to note that ESCAP has collaborated with UN-Habitat, the Urban Governance Initiative of UNDP and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat in convening the Pacific Workshop on Urban Management last year in Fiji. The outcome of the Workshop was the adoption of the Pacific Urban Agenda which is the first item for discussion this morning.

ESCAP is committed to assisting its member governments in the Pacific address poverty and sustainable development issues in an effective and sustainable manner. That is why I initiated a number of key institutional changes to strengthen the focus of the Special Body and the work of UN-EPOC. These issues will be taken up for discussion under Agenda item (5) tomorrow.

As I pointed out earlier, the Special Body plays an important role in facilitating periodic reviews of key issues faced by Pacific islands countries and therefore its functions should be further strengthened. This can be achieved through the effective participation of policy makers in the work of the Special Body in mobilizing ideas for promoting policy options, strengthening capacity for poverty reduction and sustainable development, and formulating strategies to address emerging social issues. To this end, I have recommended the convening of the biennial sessions of the Special Body on PIDCs alternately between Bangkok and the location of UN-EPOC.

We all agreed that greater ownership of UN-EPOC and its work activities by Pacific island countries is essential in ensuring the support and effective participation by them in the Commission's activities. To this end, I am pleased to inform member governments that I have established the Advisory Council of UN-EPOC, which will hold its inaugural meeting tomorrow. During its subsequent biennial sessions the secretariat will seek the advice and guidance of the Advisory Council on the work programme priorities of UN-EPOC. I therefore call on Pacific island countries to make fuller use of the Advisory Council to ensure that UN-EPOC's activities respond to their priority needs.

Let me re-iterate that the bulk of ESCAP's assistance to Pacific island countries continues to be channeled through UN-EPOC, and supplemented by activities from Bangkok. Several of these activities were conducted in the Pacific region and some of them were exclusively national in nature. For 2004-2005 biennium UN-EPOC will continue to implement its work programme in alignment with the expected accomplishment of the Poverty and Development subprogramme.

At the same time, some of the activities to be implemented from Bangkok for the benefit of Pacific island countries in the 2004-2005 biennium include work in such areas as energy and water resources, trade policy, trade facilitation, market access, and transport development.

I am pleased to inform the distinguished delegates that ESCAP's commitment to UN-EPOC and its work activities is reflected in the establishment of a new Subprogramme on the Development of Pacific Island Developing Countries and Territories in 2006. The objective of this subprogramme is to build policy and management capacity in the Pacific through facilitating the design and implementation of policies that focus on poverty reduction, managing the impact of globalization, and addressing emerging social issues. ESCAP's commitment to revitalization will include efforts to create higher impact programmes and enhance the overall capacity of UN-EPOC in order for it to assume substantive responsibility for this subprogramme.

Finally, I believe that the impact of globalization on Pacific island countries will increase, and emerging social issues in key sectors will become more pronounced. The geographical isolation and small population of countries in the Pacific calls for a considerably strengthened regional coordination mechanism. I have therefore decided and ESCAP is in the process of relocating UN-EPOC from Port Vila to Suva in order to ensure cost-effectiveness in the Centre's operations, and to increase emphasis on regular cooperation with donor agencies and regional organizations, most of which are located in Suva.

Excellency, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish you every success in your deliberations.

Thank you.