



Administrative Committee on Coordination

ACC/1995/4
19 July 1995

ENGLISH AND FRENCH ONLY

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE ON COORDINATION AT ITS FIRST REGULAR SESSION OF 1995

(International Atomic Energy Agency headquarters,
Vienna, 27 and 28 February 1995)

1. The Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) held its first regular session of 1995 at the headquarters of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna on 27 and 28 February 1995 under the chairmanship of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali. The agenda for the session was as follows:

1. Adoption of the agenda.
2. International drug abuse control.
3. Follow-up to the International Conference on Population and Development.
4. Follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.
5. Questions relating to the status of women in the secretariats of the United Nations system.
6. Administrative questions.
7. Other matters.

2. A private meeting between the Secretary-General and the executive heads of the specialized agencies and IAEA who were present in Vienna was held on 27 February 1995.

3. The present document outlines the issues raised under the agenda items and provides the text of the conclusions and decisions adopted by the Committee.

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I. INTERNATIONAL DRUG ABUSE CONTROL

4. At the outset of the consideration of this item by ACC, the Executive Director of the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) noted that drug control had become a global problem and, in view of the many linkages that existed between drug abuse and multifaceted socio-economic development, was one of the key priorities of the United Nations system. He indicated that the coordinating role of UNDCP in that area was intended to promote coherent system-wide actions.

5. In the ensuing discussion, ACC members noted the mutually interactive impact of drug abuse and socio-economic development. In particular, they emphasized the direct linkages between drug abuse and health and social issues, such as HIV/AIDS, street children, the family, the status of women, education (including that of adolescents) and the livelihood of small farmers. They underlined, in this context, the need to give poor cultivators of illicit crops alternative legitimate sources of livelihood and better access to basic services. The economic problems, such as money laundering, connected with illicit traffic in drugs were noted, as were the problems of governance related to corruption and illegal activities involved in drug trafficking. The interactions between drug abuse and poverty and the impact on the environment of the illicit cultivation and processing of drug-related crops were likewise stressed.

6. ACC members expressed strong support for concerted action by the United Nations system in the area of drug abuse control and agreed on the following:

! Steps should be taken by organizations to identify, on a systematic basis, aspects of their respective programmes with potential major implications for drug abuse control issues, in order to ensure that these implications are taken fully into account in programme elaboration and implementation. In addition, international financial institutions should be urged to strengthen their support to UNDCP and to other concerned organizations and affected countries. The regional commissions should be invited to make issues related to drug control a central part of their concerns.

! Ways should be found to ensure more coherent action and synergy within the United Nations system in dealing with drug abuse control. UNDCP, in line with its mandate, should lead and coordinate activities and offer its expertise and other support in this area. At the same time,

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other organizations should bring their own expertise fully to bear in countering problems relating to drug abuse.

! To these ends:

Concerned organizations should consult regularly at the global, regional and field levels. At the country level, resident coordinators should be invited to create informal inter-agency groups, especially in countries where UNDCP has activities, to ensure that drug abuse control needs are assigned the necessary priority and addressed in a coordinated manner, particularly in the preparation of country strategy notes.

The ACC Subcommittee on Drug Control should act to review, strengthen and render operational the United Nations System-Wide Action Plan on Drug Abuse Control through the elaboration of specific multi-agency sectoral and/or subsectoral plans of action for drug abuse control at global, regional and subregional levels. Each of these joint plans of action should bring together those agencies whose own work touches on the particular issues concerned.

At the same time, the plans of action should form the basis of the coordinated or joint fund-raising efforts that will be required to implement the plans.

Taken together, the plans of action should constitute a truly multisectoral and system-wide approach to the drug abuse problem, as requested by Member States, and should permit the system to do its part in implementing the Global Programme of Action adopted by the General Assembly on 23 February 1990, at its seventeenth session.

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II. FOLLOW-UP TO THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

7. The Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) briefed ACC on the follow-up to the International Conference on Population and Development, which was held in Cairo from 5 to 13 September 1994. She emphasized the inclusiveness of the preparatory process for the Conference, which had involved the full participation of all concerned organizations of the system, as well as regional organizations and a large number of non-governmental organizations. The follow-up to the Conference was being organized in a similar manner. With a view to mobilizing resources, a consultation had been organized with the international financial institutions, United Nations funds and bilateral donor agencies on 20 January 1995. In addition, it was intended that the resident coordinator system and the round table and consultative groups would be used for this purpose. An inter-agency task force had held a first meeting on 13 December 1994. Its objectives included policy development, coordination and monitoring of the progress being made by the system in the implementation of the Programme of Action of the Conference. The task force will also work towards the development of a common framework for the follow-up to the International Conference on Population and Development and other conferences.

8. ACC members welcomed the prompt action taken to initiate an effective follow-up to the Conference by the United Nations system and expressed their full commitment and support for this process. The need for coordinated action, particularly at the country level, was emphasized. The role of non-governmental organizations and the need to strengthen cooperation with them was stressed.

9. ACC adopted the following statement under this item:

ACC statement on the follow-up to the International
Conference on Population and Development

ACC underscores the importance of shared responsibility within the United Nations system for the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. In this connection, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 49/128, the organizations of the United Nations system should review and, where necessary, adjust their programmes and activities in line with the Programme of Action and should take appropriate measures to ensure its full and effective implementation, taking into account the specific needs of,

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and resource constraints faced by, developing countries. In this context, ACC emphasizes the need to address resource constraints of the organizations of the system in the follow-up to the Conference.

ACC reiterates the need for coordination among United Nations agencies and organizations at the country level, through the resident coordinator system and the country strategy notes, where they exist or are in preparation. Furthermore, ACC emphasizes the recommendation of the Programme of Action for the international community to assist interested Governments in organizing appropriate national-level follow-up, including national capacity-building for project formulation and programme management, as well as strengthening of coordination and evaluation mechanisms to assess the implementation of the Programme of Action. ACC further calls upon all concerned organizations of the system to strengthen their partnerships with non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations and other major groups active in the population and development field with a view to maximizing the impact of their programmes and projects at the country level.

ACC recognizes the need for a common framework for follow-up to the International Conference on Population and Development and other major international conferences in the economic and social sectors held in recent years or to be held in the coming year in order to assist countries in the coordinated implementation and monitoring of the programmes of action adopted by those conferences. Such a common framework should be designed to promote a coordinated response by the United Nations system to cross-cutting and interrelated recommendations emanating from those conferences. It should also reduce the burden of reporting on countries and United Nations system organizations with regard to implementation. ACC welcomes, in this context, the convening, with UNFPA as the lead agency, of an inter-agency mechanism with the objectives of policy development, coordination and monitoring of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development by the United Nations system. This inter-agency mechanism should also aim at assisting in the development of a common framework for the implementation of the Programme of Action of the Conference. In this connection, ACC requests that the inter-agency mechanism work towards the development of such a common framework and submit its report, through the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ), to ACC at its second regular session of 1995.

10. In addition, ACC adopted the following decision:

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ACC considers that the existing ACC standard classification of population activities may need to be reviewed in light of the International Conference on Population and Development. The current classification scheme was established in June 1977, after the 1974 World Population Conference in Bucharest. Since the 1994 Conference in Cairo considerably enlarged the conceptualization of population and introduced a number of new concepts (e.g., reproductive health), it may be advisable to review and update the classification scheme that governs reporting on population activities within the United Nations system. The inter-agency mechanism referred to above should initiate this review, on the basis of an updated classification to be prepared by UNFPA, in consultation with the agencies and organizations concerned, which should then be reviewed by CCPOQ.

III. FOLLOW-UP TO THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

11. ACC was briefed by the Chairman of the Inter-agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD) on the progress being made in the follow-up by the United Nations system to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). He noted that the decentralized system of task managers was functioning well and a number of joint inter-agency initiatives had been launched in such areas as climate change, chemical safety, technology, water, the sustainable development of small island States, information exchange and sustainable development indicators. There was, however, no mechanism for funding these initiatives. Coordination at the country level needed to be strengthened and a coherent response developed where linkages existed with other major conferences. The problem of the burden of reporting should also be addressed.

12. ACC members welcomed the IACSD efforts to develop a well-coordinated response to Agenda 21. It was suggested that the question of additional financing for the follow-up to UNCED should be further addressed by IACSD with a view to providing an input to the review of the implementation of Agenda 21 by the General Assembly at its special session in 1997. Since no task manager had been designated for the sectoral issue, "Atmosphere", to be considered by the Commission on Sustainable Development in 1996, it was suggested that an appropriate mechanism should be put in place to prepare the relevant reports.

13. ACC adopted the following statement to the Commission on Sustainable Development:

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ACC Statement to the Commission on
Sustainable Development

The Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) reaffirms its commitment to Agenda 21 and to support for the Commission on Sustainable Development. It wishes to reiterate that new and additional financing remains a critical condition for the successful implementation of Agenda 21. It underscores the need for greater balance between development and environmental aspects in the follow-up processes of UNCED. ^{1/} It welcomes the recent efforts of IACSD, in accordance with the conclusions of ACC at its second regular session of 1994, to move from a reporting stage to a more operational and action-oriented approach in the response of the United Nations system to Agenda 21.

ACC is actively engaged, through IACSD, in formulating and developing specific proposals for joint programmes and initiatives within the framework of Agenda 21. Specifically, following up on a decision taken at the fourth session of IACSD, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), in cooperation with the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development of the United Nations Secretariat, organized the Round Table on Technology Transfer, Cooperation and Capacity-Building, which was held from 6 to 8 February 1995 with the objective of gaining donor country support for inter-agency and intersectoral strategies for the transfer of environmentally sound technologies. Representatives of developing countries, donor Governments, United Nations agencies and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations participated. A forerunner of this initiative is the recently launched UNIDO/UNEP National Cleaner Production Centres Programme, which is currently being introduced in seven developing countries.

Another successful joint effort is the World Climate Programme. Led by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and its Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU) and other relevant organizations are preparing an integrated proposal to Governments for additional funding for the Programme. In addition, in response to chapter 19 of Agenda 21, an interorganization programme on the sound management of chemicals is being established, with the participation of the World Health Organization (WHO), UNEP, the International Labour Organization (ILO), FAO, UNIDO and the Organisation for Economic

Cooperation and Development (OECD). The agreed-upon memorandum of understanding is currently being circulated for signature. ACC urges all countries, in particular donor countries, to actively support these joint initiatives, which can go far in mobilizing the resources necessary to implement Agenda 21.

Additional instances of United Nations system coordination and joint action in the area of sustainable development, discussed at the most recent session of IACSD (1-3 February 1995), include the Global Water Assessment Task Force, a consultative mechanism for information exchange on environmentally sound technologies and system-wide coordination in the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. Furthermore, the system has joined efforts in the development of a core set of indicators for sustainable development.

ACC shares the concerns raised by various intergovernmental bodies that the UNCED follow-up process needs to better address the development dimension of Agenda 21. There is also concern that the process might be concentrating excessively on meetings and reporting rather than on concrete achievements at the national level. In this regard, ACC emphasized the importance of United Nations system follow-up of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and Drought for translating Agenda 21 into meaningful action for poverty alleviation and environmental conservation at the local level.

Regarding the substantive aspects of the work of the United Nations system in the Commission on Sustainable Development, ACC fully supports the participation of task managers in the Commission itself and its ad hoc working groups and the inter-sessional activities of the Commission, which is beneficial to both United Nations organizations and Governments. It is expected that new initiatives will strengthen working arrangements among United Nations organizations and among donor and recipient Governments and will lead to additional financial support for the implementation of Agenda 21.

The agencies and programmes of the United Nations system recognize the importance of focusing on the formulation of sustainable development strategies at the national level in support of country-driven processes. They have therefore joined efforts to analyse how sectoral strategies related to the mandates of specific agencies can best contribute to and support the overall sustainable development strategies recommended in

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Agenda 21. These efforts will give direction to the assistance provided by the United Nations system to Governments in support of national goals and priorities.

Issues currently under consideration in IACSD include the possible streamlining of reporting requirements. ACC welcomes initiatives aimed at:

(a) The streamlining of reporting by Governments to the United Nations system, including reporting in relation to conventions and treaties;

(b) The streamlining of reports to the various governing bodies related to the implementation of Agenda 21 or to sustainable development issues at large.

ACC is of the opinion that the Commission on Sustainable Development has an important role to play in this field, including with regard to streamlining its own reporting requirements, as the current arrangements seem to overstretch the capacities of both Governments and the United Nations system and carry the risk of duplication. It is felt that the need for an integrated approach at the national level, driven by national priorities, must be the starting-point in a discussion on streamlining reporting requirements.

In conclusion, it may be stated that the implementation of Agenda 21 has given rise to new and stimulating means of cooperation among United Nations organizations and has also led to new opportunities for direct assistance and collaboration with national Governments, other intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations.

ACC report to the Governing Council of the
United Nations Environment Programme

14. In introducing the draft report of ACC to the UNEP Governing Council, the Executive Director of UNEP underscored that the report was of a different character from previous reports as it was policy-oriented and focused on a clear and specific theme - the United Nations system-wide Earthwatch.

15. ACC approved the draft report and its recommendations. For the text of the report, see the annex to the present document.

ACC recommendations to the Governing Council of the
United Nations Environment Programme

ACC draws the attention of the Governing Council to the importance of Earthwatch as a United Nations system-wide activity and an essential component of information for decision-making, as agreed in Agenda 21. It emphasizes the role of UNEP in providing leadership and direction to the United Nations system-wide Earthwatch, to support inter-agency coordination of observation, assessment and reporting activities and to assist in the joint programming and integration of results that will make Earthwatch an effective effort of the United Nations system to provide the international environmental information required for decision-making. It therefore recommends to the Governing Council and all interested organizations of the United Nations system that sufficient resources be allocated to Earthwatch and capacity-building for information gathering to implement this responsibility effectively.

ACC considers that the Governing Council may wish to address ways of promoting ready access to the environmental information essential for ensuring a coordinated and efficient approach to informed decision-making for sustainable development, including the implementation of a United Nations system-wide Earthwatch. The UNEP secretariat might be requested to convene an ad hoc governmental expert group on the issue to further clarify the matter.

ACC recommends that UNEP and the other organizations involved in the system-wide Earthwatch continue to develop approaches to the linking of socio-economic and environmental assessment and reporting, and that the Earthwatch Working Party give further attention to the conceptual issues involved. In this connection, ACC also recommends that UNEP and all concerned organizations of the United Nations system participate actively in the process under way to initiate a Development Watch and to ensure its close interlinkage with Earthwatch as parts of an integrated system of information for decision-making, as recommended in Agenda 21.

IV. QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE
SECRETARIATS OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

16. In introducing this item, the Secretary-General noted that the data before ACC indicated clearly that the improvement of the status of women in the secretariats of United Nations organizations was a system-wide concern. The

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item provided an opportunity to exchange views on strategies that had worked and to consider ways to surmount the obstacles.

17. ACC welcomed the Secretary-General's initiative to include a specific item on its agenda, in view of the widely shared concern at the slow progress made in improving the status of women in the organizations of the system. It was agreed that progress in achieving a better gender balance in the secretariats of the system had been limited, particularly with respect to the proportion of women at senior and policy-making levels.

18. ACC members expressed their commitment to the advancement of women as a policy priority. In reviewing developments in their respective organizations, they noted that the key requirements to effect change included determined managerial commitment and action at the highest level; a clear strategy, including specific, short-term targets; emphasis on effective monitoring and accountability of managers; appropriate training; measures to encourage the mobility of women staff; and the creation of a supportive working environment conducive to equal participation of men and women in the work of the organizations.

19. While certain constraints were identified, including the role of Governments in submitting candidatures; downsizing of organizations; the need to reconcile competing policy priorities, particularly equitable geographical distribution; the paucity of women candidates in certain technical fields; and the lack of employment possibilities for spouses, it was agreed that determined efforts should be made to advance the status of women at all levels and, in particular, to increase the number of women in managerial positions.

20. The importance of urging Governments systematically to give priority to the submission of women candidates was stressed. It was noted that experience had shown that it was possible to recruit women in a wide range of disciplines. There was agreement on the need to take measures to encourage inter-agency mobility of women staff, to facilitate employment of spouses, and to increase the flexibility of the system in dealing with work/family issues. It was considered critically important to increase the number of women staff in the field, where the majority of beneficiaries were women.

21. It was agreed that ACC would keep the matter under consideration, and the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions (CCAQ) was requested to report to ACC on implementation at regular intervals.

22. ACC adopted the following statement, which will be transmitted to the Fourth World Conference on Women, as well as to the General Assembly and other governing bodies of the organizations of the system:

ACC statement on the status of Women in the
secretariats of the United Nations system

The members of ACC reaffirm their strong commitment to ensuring that the advancement of women is a policy priority within the organizations of the common system and to taking necessary measures to improve the status of women in their respective secretariats. Key to the achievement of gender equality goals is management commitment at the highest levels.

ACC is conscious that progress to date has, with some exceptions, been limited. While the overall proportion of women has increased in most organizations, the number of women in senior and policy-making positions remains low. A concerted effort needs to be made to implement existing policies fully, as well as to develop new initiatives to increase the participation of women at senior levels.

In the development of action plans, in the context of the overall human resources management strategies of the organizations of the system, emphasis will be placed on clear, specific, short-term targets, preferably at the level of organizational units. Efforts will be made to increase the flexibility with which the system deals with women candidates, to remove obstacles to their recruitment, retention, promotion and mobility, and to create a supportive environment. In addition to developing specific policies and monitoring mechanisms, executive heads intend to hold senior managers accountable for the implementation of these policies at the level at which the targets are set.

In light of the above, consideration will be given by members of ACC to the following to facilitate the recruitment of women:

(a) The feasibility of treating all women staff members of common system organizations as internal candidates in applying for vacant posts in any organization of the system;

(b) Requesting organizations to utilize their field presence to prospect for women candidates in all disciplines;

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(c) In cases where Member States are to submit candidatures, urging Governments to submit at least one or more qualified female candidates for each position.

In order to encourage the mobility of women, consideration will be given to:

(a) Developing a system for inter-agency mobility of women staff to increase their experience;

(b) Facilitating the employment of spouses through amending the organizations' staff rules, where necessary;

(c) Encouraging the further development of employment opportunities for spouses, encompassing not only the common system and other governmental and intergovernmental organizations, but also, to the extent possible, the non-governmental and multinational sectors, as well as introducing relevant provisions in host country agreements and organizing efforts in each United Nations location to promote employment of spouses, led in the field by resident coordinators and in each headquarters city by a lead agency.

With respect to the promotion of a supportive work environment and to the fostering of the necessary attitudinal changes, organizations will consider the introduction of measures that will lead to a climate conducive to the equal participation of men and women in the work of the organizations. Such measures will be related inter alia to the work/family issues currently under review, such as flexible working hours, part-time work, job-sharing schemes, child care and special leave arrangements.

In addition, those organizations that have not already done so are encouraged to introduce appropriate policies and procedures to combat sexual harassment.

While the focus of these measures remains the advancement of women at all levels, ACC is conscious that particular attention must be paid to increasing the number of women in senior managerial positions.

V. ADMINISTRATIVE QUESTIONS

23. During the consideration of this agenda item, ACC heard statements from the representatives of the Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations

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(FICSA) and the Coordinating Committee for Independent Staff Unions and Associations (CCISUA) and had an exchange of views with them, as well as with the Chairman of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC). In response to questions, the Chairman of ICSC outlined some of the constraints being experienced by ICSC in undertaking the study on the Noblemaire principle. He stated that the Commission was scheduled to meet from 1 to 19 May 1995, when it would take up the matter and said that ICSC would complete the study, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 49/223, in time for its consideration at the second regular session of ACC for 1995 and by the General Assembly at its fiftieth session.

24. Several participants deplored the failure of ICSC to make progress in the completion of the study on the application of the Noblemaire principle, as urged by ACC at its second regular session of 1994.

25. ACC reiterated its strong desire that the General Assembly should take action on the matter at its fiftieth session later this year, and in this connection requested CCAQ to provide a report to ACC at its second regular session of 1995 in order to facilitate the preparation of an appropriate ACC position on the ICSC recommendations for submission to the General Assembly. ACC also recommended that executive heads should consider bringing the issue to the attention of their respective governing organs.

26. It was recalled that consideration was being given to a meeting of CCAQ as a whole in order to examine broader issues relating to the functioning of ICSC and other inter-agency financed bodies.

27. Regarding the issue of the security and safety of the United Nations system staff, ACC expressed the view that all staff members serving with the organizations of the United Nations system, including those engaged in regular or emergency activities not constituting part of a United Nations peace-keeping operation, should also be covered by the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel. ACC reiterated its position that the security policies affecting locally recruited staff should also be reviewed and suggested that CCAQ should examine the issue.

VI. OTHER MATTERS

African economic recovery and development

28. The Secretary-General recalled that, in order to follow up the consideration of this subject at the second regular session of ACC of 1995, he had suggested, in his letter to executive heads dated 9 February 1995, the establishment of a small ACC Steering Committee and a number of ad hoc groups to be coordinated by designated lead agencies to develop further initiatives with a view to enhancing United Nations system support for Africa. He had asked the Administrator of UNDP to hold consultations with ACC members during the course of the current session with a view to working out the composition of the Steering Committee and the ad hoc working groups and to make other necessary arrangements to enable this mechanism to initiate work as soon as possible. The Steering Committee should submit its recommendations to ACC at its second regular session of 1995. He also suggested that maximum advantage should be taken of the 1995 high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council to project some new ideas and initiatives.

29. The Administrator of UNDP briefed ACC on his preliminary consultations and indicated that he would continue these consultations in order to finalize the arrangements necessary to launch the Steering Committee and its ad hoc working groups. He suggested that the working groups should develop action-oriented initiatives and aim to submit short initial reports to the Steering Committee by late April in order to feed into the preparations for the 1995 high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council.

30. ACC members welcomed the Secretary-General's initiative and noted the preliminary results of the consultations held by the Administrator of UNDP. It was stressed that the follow-up mechanism should be time-bound and flexible in character. It should not duplicate but should draw upon the work under way within the United Nations system and in relevant African institutions. A number of suggestions were made with regard to the composition and objectives of the Steering Committee and the ad hoc working groups.

31. ACC decided to include African economic recovery and development as an item on the agenda of its second regular session of 1995 and requested the Steering Committee to complete its work and submit proposals for follow-up action to ACC at that session.

Dates and venues of forthcoming meetings

32. ACC noted the following programme of meetings of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD), the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ) and the Consultative Committee on Administrative

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Questions (Financial and Budgetary Questions) (CCAQ(FB)) and the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions (Personnel and Administrative Questions) (CCAQ(PER)).

IACSD	Geneva	5-7 July 1995
CCPOQ	New York	21-25 August 1995
CCAQ(FB)	New York	28 August-1 September 1995
CCAQ(PER)	Montreal	24-28 April 1995
	New York	17-21 July 1995

33. ACC confirmed that its second regular session of 1995 would be held at United Nations Headquarters in New York on 12 and 13 October 1995.

34. Substantive items on the agenda of the session would include: African economic recovery and development; follow-up to international conferences; follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development; administrative questions, particularly personnel issues, with special attention to the review of the application of the Noblemaire principle; and issues relating to the functioning of ICSC and JIU and related inter-agency consultative processes.

35. An invitation was extended to hold the first regular session of ACC in 1996 at United Nations Environment Programme headquarters in Nairobi.

Notes

1/ See also para. 5 of the report of IACSD on its fourth session (ACC/1994/17).

Annex

**ACC REPORT TO THE GOVERNING COUNCIL OF THE UNITED
NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME ON INTERNATIONAL
COOPERATION IN THE FIELD OF THE ENVIRONMENT:
UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM-WIDE EARTHWATCH**

Introduction

1. This report is submitted to the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) by the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 2997 (XXVII) of 15 December 1972 on institutional and financial arrangements for international environmental cooperation and 32/197 of 20 December 1977 on the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system. The topic selected for this report is the UNEP-led system-wide Earthwatch.

2. One of the major achievements of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) process was the general acceptance that environment and development were closely interrelated and must be considered together. This idea is embodied in the concept of sustainable development. Since the Conference, the challenge has been to give this concept practical application. One major area where the United Nations system can do this is in the implementation of chapter 40 of Agenda 21 (Information for decision-making). The Secretary-General's report to the Commission on Sustainable Development on the implementation of chapter 40 of Agenda 21 (E/CN.17/1995/18) addresses the general problem of providing adequate information for decision-making on sustainable development. The present report, however, focuses on the inter-agency dimension of the implementation of chapter 40.

3. With its high levels of population growth and resource consumption, the world is rapidly moving towards currently perceived planetary limits, for which the growing global environmental problems are warning signals. While there has been some progress, the overall trends are still negative. It is possible that as these problems grow, they could increasingly interact with negative feedback as global environmental stresses increase, if remedial action is not taken. The basic capacities of the planet to support human activity are being damaged. There is an evident trade-off between the level of material development and human well-being that will ultimately be sustainable on this planet, and the care that we take of economic assets, natural resources, environmental life-support systems and human capital. These in turn are influenced by our

population size, technology and levels of resource consumption and waste production. Information for decision-making, in order to provide a basis for sustainable development, requires the integration of all these environmental, economic and social dimensions at the global, regional and national levels.

Earthwatch

4. Earthwatch was first proposed at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm in 1972, as a United Nations system-wide mechanism coordinated by UNEP to monitor major global disturbance in the environment and to give early warning of problems requiring international action. Since UNCED, the organizations participating in Earthwatch have focused Earthwatch on the priority requirements of Agenda 21 and on the delivery of information for decision-making, as outlined in the report of the Secretary-General to the Commission on Sustainable Development on chapter 40 of Agenda 21 (E/CN.17/1995/18) and in the report of the Executive Director of UNEP to the UNEP Governing Council in response to General Assembly resolution 48/192 on strengthening international cooperation in the monitoring of global environmental problems. The first meeting of the inter-agency Earthwatch Working Party, held in Geneva on 1 and 2 June 1994, redefined the mission of the United Nations system-wide Earthwatch as being to coordinate, harmonize and integrate observing, assessment and reporting activities across the United Nations system in order to provide environmental and appropriate socio-economic information for national and international decision-making on sustainable development and for early warning of emerging problems requiring international action. A number of specific activities designed to make the system-wide Earthwatch more operational were also identified.

5. The review of the system-wide contributions to Earthwatch has revealed the important role played by many agencies and organizations in different aspects of environmental observation, assessment and information for sustainable development. Over 30 significant inter-agency programmes were identified, together with a large number of related activities of United Nations system organizations. Even a partial costing suggests that the total financial effort represented by these activities is well over \$50 million. Together they have great potential for meeting many of the requirements of the United Nations system-wide Earthwatch. However, many of these activities have been developed

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in response to specific agency mandates or sectoral problems. A considerable effort will be required to reinforce these activities so as to develop their full potential, to cross-link them and strengthen collaboration where appropriate, and to integrate the results into a coherent Earthwatch process able to respond to the needs and expectations of the international community.

6. Through the efforts of the inter-agency Earthwatch Working Party and the work of UNEP as IACSD task manager for Earthwatch, the inputs of all the agencies and organizations of the United Nations system to Earthwatch have been identified, and mechanisms have been created to strengthen collaboration and joint programming. One major component of Earthwatch is the set of global observing systems with multi-agency sponsorship that are being developed for climate, oceans and terrestrial areas to make previously diffuse and scattered monitoring efforts more coherent, operational and focused on key issues of global change and sustainability.

7. United Nations system organizations participating in Earthwatch are counting on UNEP to carry out its coordinating function in this area and to provide the necessary leadership to a more integrated system-wide Earthwatch, through a combination of active participation and networking. In particular, if UNEP reinforces linkages among expert information forums on the one hand and decision makers on the other (at national and regional levels, and within international policy arenas such as the Commission on Sustainable Development), then a significant contribution shall have been made. ACC stresses the importance it places on Earthwatch being a system-wide effort that requires the full participation and support of UNEP.

8. The need for and expectations of Earthwatch have evolved since its conception over 20 years ago. It is no longer sufficient just to alert the world to emerging and important environmental trends and problems. Environmental factors have to be integrated into political and economic decision-making mechanisms and become as fundamental as economics in determining sustainable development. This will require the development of a flow of environmental data, producing indicators for policy action to improve environmental protection and resource management, which in turn will involve adjustments in the economic development process. This flow of information must be rapid, so that timely data and indicators are available when decision makers need them. Much of this must take place at the national level, but it is also relevant at the global level, where Earthwatch is the mechanism to provide this information.

9. Earthwatch should pay special attention to the need for balance among the requirements and capacities of various groups of countries in environmental observation, assessment and reporting activities to ensure a reliable, accurate and objective flow of information at the international level. This will require special emphasis on efforts to fill the gaps in the global coverage of these activities through capacity-building in information gathering and assessment that will allow the full participation of all countries in the observation and assessment processes.

10. The United Nations system-wide Earthwatch should not only work to deliver more integrated information for decision-making at the international level through cooperation among the sectoral agencies, but should also promote assistance to national Governments to achieve a similar integration of information at the national level, bridging the many departments and ministries that should be involved. The tools and methodologies now being developed in Earthwatch will be useful in this regard.

11. The principal users of Earthwatch will thus include not only the various intergovernmental decision-making bodies that have been created to adopt policy measures and management actions in the various fields of environment and development, but also decision makers in national Governments who are required to know the international context within which their national actions must take place in our increasingly interrelated world. Earthwatch should also continue to supply information to the general public to build support for the actions that are taken.

12. One problem increasingly being faced by all the agencies participating in Earthwatch which may require the policy attention of the Governing Council is that information for public purposes is increasingly becoming less accessible. One constraint is the increasing cost of information, as distinct from normal charges for connections or communications. Non-governmental organizations, and even government departments, are trying to find ways to cover the costs of their information services. Data and information sales are seen as one option to achieve this. In some countries, public services are being privatized. Since business users of data can usually pass the costs on to their customers, data charges are often set to what the private sector can afford to pay. Public services and United Nations agencies cannot afford excessive charges, and almost no policy maker has a budget for obtaining the information required for decision-making. Present market approaches, however, do not recognize that the usefulness and value of information is often increased through universal availability. There is also a problem of the conflict of interest in access to information between the particular and the public good, such as with information

held on damaging activities or dangerous properties in materials, whose release could threaten the reputation of the holder or the market for a product.

13. Governments are also sensitive to the release of information that may be perceived to be detrimental to legitimate national interests. This sensitivity can be accentuated by the fear of bias in the use of the information, for instance to favour particular economic systems, cultural models or styles of development, or to give an advantage to particular national or commercial interests. Yet in the common interest of the global community, objective environmental information is vital. As a matter of policy, the United Nations institutions must be the guarantor of the objectivity and reliability of information at the international level. Access by the United Nations system to the information required for an effective Earthwatch also needs to be promoted.

Addressing the interface between environment
and development information

14. The changing role of Earthwatch was reflected in the deliberations of the Earthwatch Working Party, where the participating agencies did not consider it appropriate in the post-UNCED period to consider the environment in isolation from human activities, since decision-making for sustainable development requires the integration of environmental, economic and social information. The Working Party therefore suggested as one option that a "Development Watch" should be created with which Earthwatch could interact closely, as proposed in chapter 40 of Agenda 21.

15. Already, a number of efforts are being made to develop the methodologies for linking and integrating environment and development information at the regional and global levels to produce policy-relevant outputs, in cooperation among United Nations system organizations and with non-governmental organizations and the scientific community. For instance, UNEP and the Statistical Office and Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development of the United Nations Secretariat are cooperating with the SCOPE project on indicators of sustainable development. UNEP is exploring the usefulness of models, scenarios and projections through cooperation with the Dutch National Institute of Public Health and Environment (RIVM), the World Resources Institute, the International Institute of Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) and the Stockholm Environment Institute and is involving a number of research centres in developing countries in these initiatives. The World Bank is also building its information system with reference to sustainable development. Particular attention is being paid to developing approaches

suitable to countries of all sizes, regions, cultures, economic systems and levels of development.

16. In response to chapter 40 of Agenda 21, a cooperative effort among the agencies has also begun to prepare proposals on Development Watch for the Commission on Sustainable Development. The United Nations, UNDP and UNEP, inter alia, will play a key role in this effort to develop methodologies and indicators for subsequent consideration by Governments and use by countries in assessing the sustainability of their own development at the national level. The challenge for Development Watch will be to select the data and indicators that best measure the status and results of development in ways that are useful for policy and decision-making, going beyond the traditional economic indicators to cover more completely the issues raised in Agenda 21. A major focus of this effort will be to contribute to the development of a work programme for the Commission on Sustainable Development to produce a core set of indicators for sustainable development, to be developed by the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development and the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat in close cooperation with UNEP. This will be a difficult task requiring reliable data, agreement on standard definitions and methodologies, and definition of a set of indicators for each of the major issues for which Agenda 21 set goals. Careful attention must be paid to balance so that all countries can select the indicators that are appropriate to their own culture, resources and level of development. The resulting indicators will need to combine economic, social and environmental factors to produce indicators for sustainable development. Such indicators, combined with other information on sustainability, should help to stimulate and guide the national policy-making process. In recognition of this, there will be an emphasis on the need to include capacity-building as an integral part of the development of indicators, information and delivery systems.

17. Earthwatch will need to contribute to this process of defining and, where necessary, providing the environmental information needed to combine with economic and social data. It will also provide a global perspective to complement and reinforce the efforts of each nation to determine the sustainability of its own development, since some elements of sustainability inevitably extend beyond national borders.

18. Together, these efforts aim to achieve the kind of management system for sustainable development that we now use for economic development. The world needs national and global data, assessment and early warning systems for the environment and sustainability comparable to those now governing the operation of economic decision-making. Linking Earthwatch, with its focus on the global

environment, and Development Watch, through which countries can assess their own progress towards sustainability, will give a more complete picture of the trends in sustainable development. The two approaches (global and national) should produce joint outputs on the progress, possibilities and limits of sustainable development. The assembly, within the framework of Earthwatch and Development Watch, of data and assessments to produce indicators and projections using integrated conceptual frameworks, systems studies and models will assist the development of more future-oriented international policy in an increasingly complex and integrated world.

ACC recommendations to the UNEP Governing Council

1. ACC draws the attention of the Governing Council to the importance of Earthwatch as a United Nations system-wide activity and an essential component of information for decision-making as agreed in Agenda 21. It emphasizes the role of UNEP in providing leadership and direction to the United Nations system-wide Earthwatch, to support inter-agency coordination of observation, assessment and reporting activities and to assist in the joint programming and integration of results that will make Earthwatch an effective effort of the United Nations system to provide the international environmental information required for decision-making. It therefore recommends to the Governing Council and all interested organizations of the United Nations system that sufficient resources be allocated to Earthwatch and capacity-building for information gathering to implement this responsibility effectively.
2. ACC considers that the Governing Council may wish to address ways of promoting ready access to the environmental information essential for ensuring a coordinated and efficient approach to informed decision-making for sustainable development, including the implementation of a United Nations system-wide Earthwatch. The UNEP secretariat might be requested to convene an ad hoc governmental expert group on the issue to further clarify the matter.
3. ACC recommends that UNEP and the other organizations involved in the system-wide Earthwatch continue to develop approaches to the linking of socio-economic and environmental assessment and reporting and that the Earthwatch Working Party give further attention to the conceptual issues involved. In this connection, ACC also recommends that UNEP and all concerned organizations of the United Nations system participate actively in the process under way to initiate a Development Watch and to ensure its close interlinkage with Earthwatch as parts of an integrated system of information for decision-making, as recommended in Agenda 21.
