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COMMITTEE ON TRADE

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Item 7 of the provisional agenda

PROCEDURES AND ORGANIZATION OF FUTURE SESSIONS

Committee on Trade: guidelines and procedures

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The Bureau of the Committee, at its meeting on 24 April 2007, requested the Secretariat to prepare and present to the Committee **for approval** a set of guidelines and procedures for the preparation of its annual sessions. This document updates the guidelines and procedures of the Committee on Trade, Industry and Enterprise Development, since renamed the Committee on Trade, which were approved in May 2005 (ECE/TRADE/2005/19). For ease of reference, all existing and proposed guidelines and procedures have been incorporated into this reference document, to be updated as new decisions are made or old decisions modified.

New or revised procedures can be found in sections I, II, IV and VIII.

I. ORGANIZATION OF THE COMMITTEE SESSIONS

1. Annual sessions will be organized according to the following format:

(a) In odd years (2007, 2009, 2011, etc.)

The sessions will:

- (i) Include presentations, based on a set of common guidelines (see section II), by the chairpersons of the Committee's subsidiary bodies on the strategic directions and importance of their work as well as the challenges they face;
- (ii) Approve the strategic frameworks that will form the basis of the result-based budget to be prepared in the following year (in 2007, this will be the strategic framework for 2010-2011);
- (iii) Be organized in conjunction with an event (e.g. a Symposium) that will be co-organized with one of the other UNECE subsidiary bodies;
- (iv) The subsidiary body that co-organizes the event may decide – in consultation with the Bureau of the Committee on Trade – whether or not to hold its own annual session in the same week;
- (v) Elect the Committee Bureau for a two-year term to provide increased continuity and stability. The elections will be held at the end of the session. This will allow the current officers to preside over the session that they have planned.

(b) In even years (2008, 2010, 2012, etc.)

The sessions will:

- (i) Be short (one to two days);
- (ii) Include only short presentations by the chairpersons of the subsidiary bodies, limited to presenting decisions that the subsidiary bodies need the Committee to take;
- (iii) Discuss only those issues which require more immediate input and cannot wait for another session;
- (iv) Approve the programme of work for the budget to be finalized that year (in 2008, that will be the programme of work for 2010-2011).

II. GUIDELINES ON THE PRESENTATIONS OF THE CHAIRPERSONS OF THE SUBSIDIARY BODIES

2. These guidelines have been drawn up to support the use of a common reporting format by the Chairpersons of the Subsidiary Bodies of the Committee for their presentations to the Committee's annual session.
3. The guidelines should not restrict the Chairpersons in their freedom to report any important development under their subsidiary body to the Committee. On the other hand, by focusing the presentation on a single topic, activity or project, rather than presenting all recent developments, the delegates' understanding of these activities will be enhanced.
4. The Chairperson will present a project or a technical assistance activity by the subsidiary body or one of its subgroups. It may be work in progress or work recently completed. The Chairperson should not present the Secretariat's report on recent developments, nor cover all activities undertaken since the last Committee session. However, if delegations have questions about the report on recent developments, time will be made to thoroughly answer them.
5. The Chairperson's presentation will:
 - (a) Identify the unmet needs addressed by the project/activity and documented by a review of statistical indicators, articles from the press or reports of debates in UNECE and other international organizations;
 - (b) Explain the objective of the project, the proposed indicators of achievement and review the different phases;
 - (c) Be in PowerPoint and last no more than 10 minutes.
6. If at all possible, one of the Member States or one of UNECE partners in the financing or execution of the project could intervene to offer their perspective.
7. In addition, the Chairperson will present all decisions that the subsidiary body is requesting the Committee to take, such as requests for the renewal of sub-groups and any important challenges that are foreseen for the next two years.

III. FORMATTING OF DOCUMENTS AND APPROVAL OF THE PROGRAMME OF WORK

8. A clear indication should be placed on the front page of the document of the action, if any, required by Committee (i.e. document for approval, discussion, or information).
9. In the agenda of the Committee session it should be clearly indicated which documents are for approval or discussion and which are for information.
10. The approval process for the Committee's programme of work should be aligned with the United Nations biennium budgeting process, therefore ensuring the direct input of the Committee into this process, reducing the number of document pages submitted to its sessions and improving their structure. This will require the following:

- (a) Approval by the Committee of the programme of work every two years;
- (b) Approval of a very short document with any proposed changes to the already approved programme of work at each session of the Committee.

IV. ANNUAL DOCUMENTS

11. The following documents will be prepared for Committee sessions. The official reports from the annual meetings of its subsidiary bodies will also be presented to the Committee.

- (a) A report by the Bureau on the intersessional work;
- (b) Report on recent developments by each of the subsidiary bodies;
- (c) Report on activities directly under the Committee;
- (d) Report on capacity-building;
- (e) Draft programme of work (once every two years);
- (f) Changes to the programme of work;
- (g) Status reports on planned outputs;
- (h) Draft strategic framework and proposed evaluation plan (once every two years);
- (i) Accomplishment accounts for the biennium (once every two years);
- (j) Report on cooperation with other organizations;
- (k) [Report on intersectional work between the Committee and other UNECE principal subsidiary bodies (PBSs) in support of intersectoral cooperation];
- (l) Symposium background document (odd years only);
- (m) One or two documents on outstanding issues.

V. REPORT APPROVAL PROCESS

12. Prior to the session, the secretariat will send to the permanent missions in Geneva the expected decisions, in all three official UNECE languages.

13. During the annual session of the Committee, the decisions will be projected on a screen in one of the three official UNECE languages, and will be read out (with simultaneous interpretation into the other two languages). At the end of each agenda point, member States will be asked to **agree** to them. To ensure correct translations of the decisions, the Committee will appoint rapporteurs for each of the official languages to verify, after the session, that the translations of the approved decisions correspond to the original text.

14. Before the end of the final day of the session, all decisions made prior to the mid-day pause will be made available to delegations in the three official languages.

15. Not later than five working days after the session, the secretariat will distribute the draft final report to all heads of delegation.

16. Heads of delegation will have one month to submit their comments to the secretariat. Should the report record the position of one particular delegation, only that delegation can suggest modifications to that part of the text. No changes will be allowed to the decisions agreed during the Committee session.

17. If any substantive objections are raised that cannot be resolved between the objecting party and the secretariat, the Bureau will make the final decision as to what should be contained in the report.

18. Fifteen days after the deadline for comments, the report will be sent for translation and publication. However, before the official report is released, the rapporteurs will be given at least two weeks to review the translations of the report in order to ensure that it conforms to the agreed original version.

VI. INTERSESSIONAL DECISION-MAKING

19. It is the responsibility of the Bureau to oversee the implementation of the Committee's decisions between sessions, to plan the annual sessions and to oversee the organisation of the annual sessions.

20. The Bureau will report to each session about its intersessional work.

21. In the case of any changes in the allocation of resources available to the Trade sub-programme, the Bureau would be entrusted with agreeing upon the changes to be made, in consultation with the secretariat.

VII. INTERSESSIONAL APPROVAL PROCESS

22. Between Committee sessions, the Bureau may decide to use this approval process if waiting until the next Committee session would either make the decision irrelevant (for example, in the case of input to a process that ends before the next session) or delay the work unnecessarily (for example, the approval of sub-groups).

23. Documents or proposals may be submitted for intersessional approval in one of two ways:

- (a) The Bureau may decide at a meeting or via electronic consultations to submit any proposal or document for which it believes this procedure to be appropriate;
- (b) The Bureau of a Subsidiary Body may submit a proposal for the approval of a sub-group that will be under its responsibility, provided that the proposal meets the requirements laid out by the Committee for sub-groups.

24. The intersessional approval process would be as follows:

- (a) Distribution of the document by e-mail to heads of delegation;
- (b) A 30-day comment period, which any delegation may request to be extended for an additional 30 days (to allow for adequate consultation);

- (c) Approval will take place if no substantive objections are raised by a delegation (delegations must indicate whether or not they believe their objection to be substantive);
- (d) If a substantive objection is raised, the document/proposal must be submitted for consideration to the next session of the Committee.

25. A report on all intersessional processes and their outcomes will be made at each session of the Committee.

VIII. PROCEDURES FOR SUB-GROUPS UNDER THE COMMITTEE ON TRADE AND ITS WORKING PARTIES

26. The objectives of these procedures are to allow groups to begin work as quickly and efficiently as possible, while at the same time ensuring: (a) adequate governmental oversight and involvement in the work; (b) no overlap with other activities; and (c) the availability of adequate resources to support the work.

27. The procedures:

- (a) Are the minimum required;
- (b) Conform to the guidelines established by the UNECE Executive Committee (Ex Com) (see ECE/EX/1, *Guidelines for the establishment and functioning of working parties within UNECE*, and ECE/EX/2, *Guidelines for the establishment and functioning of teams of specialists within UNECE*);
- (c) Implement the ECE decision that “the parent body must ... submit the proposed establishment of a team of specialists to the Executive Committee for approval” (ECE/EX/2, para. 3(a));
- (d) Foresee that sub-groups may be established both under the Committee’s subsidiary bodies and directly under the Committee.

28. Subsidiary bodies of the Committee are free to establish additional requirements that they themselves might wish to see respected with regard to the establishment of sub-groups under their authority.

A. Main characteristics of a sub-group¹

29. The main characteristics of a sub-group are as follows:

- (a) It addresses a specific area of activities under the broader theme covered by the parent body;

¹ Sub-groups can be named, for instance, “teams of specialists”, “advisory groups”, “ad hoc groups” or “task forces”.

- (b) Its central function may be of an advisory or operational nature, or a combination of both, depending on the tasks assigned by the parent body;
- (c) It usually has a two-year duration but can be extended after careful evaluation by the parent body of the work achieved and the need to perform additional tasks;
- (d) In line with the Guidelines for the establishment and functioning of the teams of specialists within ECE (ECE/EX/2), its meetings do not require full interpretation and translation, unlike the meetings of the formal ECE intergovernmental bodies.

B. Main characteristics of an ad hoc task force

30. Ad hoc task forces have the same characteristics as sub-groups except that they are set up for one year or less, with a precise mandate for a limited number of specific outputs. Their mandate is not renewable.

31. At the end of its mandate an Ad hoc task force must submit to its parent body a detailed report on the work accomplished, with a content and format that is suitable for presenting to the Committee.

32. Subsidiary bodies may establish ad hoc task forces, so long as they respect the overall regular budget resources available.

C. Membership and Officers in sub-groups

33. Membership comprises governmental experts and may also include, in compliance with the United Nations rules and practices in this respect, specialists or representatives of international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector.

34. The parent body will determine the procedure for the nomination of candidates. To the extent possible, a balanced geographical representation should be maintained in these teams.

35. Sub-groups and ad hoc task forces should have a Chairperson, and, if deemed necessary, one or two vice-chairpersons. The officers may be appointed by the parent body or elected by the sub-group/task force.

D. Decisions by the Committee and subsidiary bodies regarding sub-groups

36. The Committee must recommend the establishment or renewal of all sub-groups and inform the Executive Committee of any discontinuation (ECE/EX/2, para. 3(f)).

37. Decisions by the Committee to recommend the establishment or renewal of sub-groups and decisions by the Committee's subsidiary bodies to request the establishment or renewal of a sub-group, can be made in any one of the following manners:

- (a) By consensus at an annual session;
- (b) By delegation of the decision to the Bureau of the body concerned;
- (c) By any other intersessional approval mechanism.

38. It is the responsibility of the parent body to ensure that its sub-groups do not duplicate work already being done within the UNECE or in other international organizations.

E. Request for approval of a new sub-group

39. A request for the establishment of a new sub-group must be submitted to the Committee. The request must contain the following information:

- (a) The scope of the proposed sub-group's work and the achievements expected;
- (b) A description of the sub-group's value-added (i.e. why the proposed work is being done by this sub-group instead of somewhere else);
- (c) The sub-group's membership and nomination procedures;
- (d) The resources required for the work and where they will come from;
- (e) A date at which completion of its work is expected ("sunset" clause). This date should not exceed two years from the date of approval of the new sub-group by the Committee.

40. The Committee and the Executive Committee must have approved the request to establish it before the sub-group begins to meet. If there is an immediate or urgent task, the subsidiary body may establish an ad hoc task force for that task.

41. Depending upon what would result in the quickest decision, the request from the subsidiary body should be submitted for approval either to the Committee's annual session or to its intersessional approval process, or delegated to the Bureau of the body concerned.

F. Methods of work and reporting requirements for sub-groups

42. At its first meeting, a sub-group adopts a work plan for a two-year period, clearly defining its objectives and activities and making a time schedule for their implementation.

43. Sub-groups must report on an annual basis to their parent body.

44. At the end of its two-year mandate, a sub-group must submit to its parent body a full report on the work accomplished, and any conclusions reached, in a language and format that is suitable for presenting to the Committee.

45. Members of the sub-group, with the support of the secretariat (as resources permit), undertake the substantive work, in particular the preparation of substantive documentation for the meetings and the reports for the annual session of the parent body.

G. Role of the secretariat

46. The secretariat, with the support of the members of the teams of specialists/sub-groups, has the responsibility for:

- (a) Handling official contacts, including correspondence, with governmental and non-governmental experts, as well as experts from international agencies involved;
- (b) Assisting in the scheduling of meetings and other activities for adoption by the group;
- (c) Cooperating with the members of the team in organizing missions, workshops, seminars and training in member countries;
- (d) In cooperation with the Chairperson of the sub-group, preparing the report on its accomplishments at the end of the two-year period and for any new period of extension.

H. Renewal of a sub-group

47. If a sub-group requests a renewal of its mandate, the parent body must submit a request for renewal to the Committee or, in the case where the parent body is the Committee, the sub-group would do this directly.

48. The request for renewal should contain the following:

- (a) A full report on what the sub-group has accomplished, including its achievements and conclusions, and an evaluation by the parent body of the value of the work accomplished and the potential value of continued work. In the case of sub-groups reporting to the Committee, the evaluation would be made by the Committee's Bureau;
- (b) Any changes proposed in the scope of the work;
- (c) The work planned to be undertaken during the next period;
- (d) A review of the membership;
- (e) A date at which completion of its work is expected ("sunset" clause). This date should not exceed two years from the date of approval of the renewal by the Committee;
- (f) An indication of any additional resources required for the work and where they will come from.

49. Should the parent body consider that a particular sub-group has a standing character by nature of its continuing activity, it can, on an exceptional basis, propose to the Committee that it submit a proposal to the Ex Com to exempt that sub-group from the "sunset" clause, giving appropriate justification. (ECE/EX/2, para. 3(h))

50. Even if a sub-group is given a standing character, it must nevertheless report on an annual basis to its parent body and provide a full report every two years to the Committee, including an evaluation by the parent body of the value of the work accomplished. In the case of sub-groups reporting to the Committee, the evaluation would be made by the Committee's Bureau. (ECE/EX/2, para. 3(h))

I. Groups under “Sub-groups”

51. An approved sub-group may set up task teams, work groups, etc. (using whatever nomenclature they wish) in order to accomplish specific tasks, so long as these “task teams” are organizational methods for a sub-group to accomplish its objectives and do not constitute formal “bodies”.

J. Guidelines for Naming Conventions for Sub-Groups

52. Any sub-group established directly under the Committee on Trade shall be named following these guidelines. The subsidiary bodies under the Committee are strongly encouraged to use the guidelines for the naming of new sub-groups under their responsibility. The guidelines are not intended to be of a retroactive nature.

53. The recommended nomenclature² is as follows:

- (a) Sub-groups with a mandate for two years:
 - (i) Advisory groups (for those developing recommendations or policy advice);
 - (ii) Teams of specialists (for those undertaking operational or technical activities);
- (b) Sub-groups set up for one year or less, with a precise mandate for a limited number of outputs - ad hoc task forces;
- (c) Sub-groups may set up teams, work groups, etc. (using whatever terminology they wish, with the exception of “Commission”, “Committee” and “Working Party”, which are reserved for the official intergovernmental bodies). However, these “groups under sub-groups” must be for the accomplishment of specific tasks and an organizational method for a sub-group to accomplish its objectives. They do not constitute formal “bodies”.

54. Existing groups may wish to consider changing their names to conform to the present recommended standard nomenclature.

² In the case of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards, an exception exists because its “specialized sections” are actually “permanent” official bodies, requiring official, parliamentary documentation and interpretation. This is because the specialized sections were actually working parties prior to the 1997 reform and the results of their work forms the basis of national regulations in their respective areas.

