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**MATTERS ARISING FROM THE FIFTY-EIGHTH SESSION  
OF THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**

(Item 5 of the provisional agenda)

Note by the secretariat

This document presents the results of the fifty-eighth session of UNECE, which are relevant to the Committee's activities. The Committee is invited to take note of the Commission's conclusions and requests and respond to them as appropriate.

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. The Economic Commission for Europe held its fifty-eighth session in Geneva from 4 to 6 March 2003. At the session, the Commission took decisions in several areas relevant to the work of the Timber Committee. These decisions included substantive issues, strengthening the Organisation – review of the intergovernmental structure and a review of technical assistance and operational activities.
  
2. Recommendations of a more general nature were made with regard to sustainable development in the UNECE region at the two roundtables held during the Commission's session: Round Table I: "Progress in national strategies for sustainable development" and Round Table II: "Strategy implementation - the role of international cooperation". Among the priorities or areas addressed by countries were the following: decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation; changing production and consumption patterns; science and technology development; fighting poverty and ensuring social cohesion; improving quality of life and well being of the people; health; sound management of natural resources; sustainable energy policy; environmental protection; research, technology and innovations; land use, urban planning and development; environment-friendly mobility.
  
3. All Commission documents including the annual report may be downloaded from the ECE website ([http://www.unece.org/commission/2003/58th\\_index.htm](http://www.unece.org/commission/2003/58th_index.htm) ).

### **A. Substantive issues**

All Principal Subsidiary Bodies should:

- a) Continue to regularly review their strategic directions and priorities. In particular, during the budget submission year, future directions for the programme of work should be discussed in preparation for the next programme budget and medium-term plan cycles.
  
- b) Make a regular review of forthcoming activities in order to consider what might be dropped and replaced by new activities.
  
- c) Ensure a balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development into all sectors of activities.
  
- d) Further develop their intersectoral cooperation and activities, e.g. by scheduling bureau meetings of two or three PSBs in the same week in order to hold a joint meeting of these PSB bureaux.
  
- e) Further incorporate cross-sectoral concerns into the work of all sub-programmes: gender, security and ICT (in addition to sustainable development already addressed under b).

### **B. Strengthening the Organisation – review of the intergovernmental structure**

All Principal Subsidiary Bodies should undertake a regular review of their structure. In particular:

- a) Some future streamlining and restructuring of the subsidiary bodies and related groups need to be considered, to ensure their continued relevance and effectiveness.
  
- b) Sunset clauses should be introduced when appropriate, with an evaluation of the work achieved at the end of the period.

- c) The frequency of meetings and number and length of reports produced should be reviewed.

### **C. Technical cooperation**

Technical cooperation activities need to be reviewed and streamlined with the involvement of the PSBs. In this review, PSBs should pay particular attention to the following conclusions of the Commission:

- a) The priority setting mechanism for technical cooperation activities needs to be strengthened to ensure that technical assistance projects are carried out in response to real needs of member countries and that they are within the ECE expertise and do not overlap with the work of other organizations. (See in particular, paragraphs 35-36 of the paper on UNECE Reform (E/ECE/1399), part V of which addresses these issues as well as those outlined below.)
- b) Technical cooperation should focus on the adjustment of transition economies of non-acceding countries, with emphasis given to less advanced, low-income countries with economies in transition.
- c) Along this line, technical cooperation activities in relation to Central Asia, Southeast Europe and the Caucasus should be strengthened.
- d) Financial assistance should be made available to low-income countries with economies in transition to enable them to participate in ECE activities such as workshops and seminars.
- e) Evaluation of technical cooperation activities, though recognized as being difficult and complex and requiring resources, is important and necessary.

**4. *On the occasion of the strategic review of the joint programme of work, to be discussed under item 8 of the provisional agenda, the Committee will be invited to put into practice the recommendations under sub-headings A, B and C.***

### **Inter-sectoral and cross-sectoral activities**

5. Increasingly the Committee is taking an inter-sectoral approach and/or addressing cross-sectoral issues. Examples are:

- *Inter-sectoral approach*
  - ECE/FAO Roundtable on Trade, Environment and Forests on the theme Working Together for Sustainable Development, 9 July 2003
  - Policy forum on forests, wood and energy
  - The European Forest Sector Outlook Study (EFSOS), notably the policy study and main report

- *Cross-sectoral issues*<sup>1</sup>
  - Sustainable development: entire programme
  - Gender: follow up to the seminar on women in forestry, proposed formation of a team of specialists under the Joint FAO/ECE/ILO Committee
  - ICT: periodic Joint Committee seminar on ICT in the sector, Timber Committee Secretariat's participation in ECE ICT Task Force.

**6. *The Committee is invited to take note of the Commission's recommendations, and to agree to review them all during the Strategic Review.***

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<sup>1</sup> There were no Timber Committee activities related to security issues.