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Astana “Green Bridge” Initiative: Europe-Asia-Pacific Partnership for the Implementation of “Green Growth”

As adopted by the sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific on 2 October 2010

I. Preamble

1. The Astana “Green Bridge” Initiative is intended to build on the commitments made to implement the relevant resolutions and recommendations of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation,¹ the Phnom Penh Regional Platform on Sustainable Development for Asia and the Pacific (E/CN.17/2002/PC.2/8), Agenda 21,² the Millennium Development Goals, the sixty-first session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)³ and other United Nations, global, international and regional agreements, as well as the fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific⁴ and its Regional Implementation Plan for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific, 2006-2010,⁵ the sixth Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” (see ECE/BELGRADE.CONF/2007/8), and the Mauritius Strategy

¹ Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (*Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August-4 September 2002* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.03.II.A.1 and corrigendum), chap. I, resolution 2, annex).

² *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigenda), vol. I: *Resolutions adopted by the Conference*, resolution 1, annex II.

³ See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2005, Supplement No. 19* (E/2005/39), chap. IV.

⁴ See ESCAP, *The Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific, 2005* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.05.II.F.31).

⁵ *Ibid.*, annex II.

for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.⁶

2. Regional activities have been initiated by ESCAP and the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) to assist countries in the implementation of the above.

3. It is important to consider the reasons and opportunities for strengthening partnerships between Asia and the Pacific and Europe in carrying out regional processes and activities, while addressing sustainable development, environmental sustainability and shared ecosystems.

4. The Asian and Pacific countries need additional resources, new technologies, and programmes and mechanisms for technology transfer to improve environmental protection.

5. The Astana “Green Bridge” Initiative is modelled on successfully implemented regional initiatives, such as the Kitakyushu Initiative for Clean Environment⁷ and the Seoul Initiative on Environmentally Sustainable Economic Growth (Green Growth).⁸

6. Due account should be taken of the statement of the Interstate Council for Sustainable Development of Central Asia at the sixth Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe”, held in Belgrade in 2007, which noted the expedience of cooperation among countries of the European Union and the Asian and Pacific region.⁹

7. Preparatory activities for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, scheduled to be held in 2012, should be begun, including the development of the Asian and Pacific regional position on the main themes to be discussed—the green economy within the context of sustainable development and the eradication of poverty, and the institutional framework for sustainable development.

II. Background

8. The concept of green growth meets the strategic needs of the countries in the Asian and Pacific and European regions. The green growth approach, which is an innovative strategic framework for achieving sustainable development, was recommended at the fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development as an instrument for

⁶ *Report of the International Meeting to Review the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, Port Louis, Mauritius, 10-14 January 2005* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.05.II.A.4 and corrigendum), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

⁷ Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific 2000, Kitakyushu, Japan, 31 August-5 September 2000: Ministerial Declaration, Regional Action Programme (2001-2005) and Kitakyushu Initiative for a Clean Environment* (ST/ESCAP/2096) (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.01.II.F.12), Part Three.

⁸ Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *The Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific, 2005* (ST/ESCAP/2379) (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.05.II.F.31), Annex III.

⁹ Available from www.unece.org/env/efe/Belgrade/Proceedings/Item5a/KeynoteKyrgyzstanCAI_Ru.pdf.

harmonizing activities on Millennium Development Goals 1 (poverty reduction) and 7 (environmental sustainability).

9. Countries in the Asian and Pacific region are facing a series of persistent and emerging challenges, such as food, energy, financial, economic and climate crises, and poverty, the impacts of which have not been fully overcome. Various reports warn of future crises that may be even more challenging, as they may involve crossing planetary boundaries.

10. Vulnerable livelihoods are under increasing threat and basic needs, such as food, water and energy, are further out of reach for many. Projected environmental change, a skyrocketing demand for resources and increasingly scarce ecosystem services underpin socio-economic uncertainty, signalling the deepening of social divides and vulnerability in the future in the most affected countries. New kinds of ecosystem insecurities are emerging, including those related to water issues.

11. Urbanization in the Asian and Pacific region is inevitable and it is happening on a massive, historically unprecedented scale and pace. This has enormous and interlinked economic, social and environmental repercussions. The way in which cities are planned and developed has implications for decades ahead, as it can lock them into an unsustainable urban development pattern and will have a significant bearing on the future of both regions and the planet as a whole. Over 50 per cent of urban residents living in low-lying coastal zones, cities and towns in Asia and the Pacific are particularly vulnerable to climate change.¹⁰ Moreover, as 35 per cent of urban residents in the region were still living in slums and squatter settlements as of 2005,¹¹ access to housing and basic environmental infrastructure and services is a key persistent issue.

12. As a whole, the Asian and the Pacific region has been improving its resource efficiency in recent years. However, while rapid industrialization and economic growth have led to a reduction in absolute poverty in some countries, they have also led to the unsustainable use of natural resources and contributed to greater CO₂ emissions, ecosystem degradation, and disparities between individuals and regions.

13. Achieving ecologically sustainable and inclusive economic growth that results in sustainable development is now more important than ever before. The green growth approach is increasingly important for building competitiveness, environmental sustainability and resilience, and for managing risk. Many changes and shifts from the ever-increasing quantity of economic growth towards the quality of economic growth are required and are only possible with close partnership and cooperation among government, private sector and civil society actors. Inclusive and adaptive governance approaches will be needed both to achieve this and to build

¹⁰ United Nations Human Settlements Programme, *State of the World's Cities 2008/2009: Harmonious Cities* (London and Sterling, VA, Earthscan, 2008), Table 3.3.1.

¹¹ Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *2009 Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.10.II.F.1), p. 14.

adaptive capacity and resilience to some of the most pressing challenges facing the region.

14. As the host country for the sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific and the seventh Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe”, which is scheduled to be held in 2011, Kazakhstan would like to facilitate the process of bridging environmental policies and best practices between the European and Asian and the Pacific regions, which will stimulate qualitative and quantitative shifts towards greener, more competitive and more inclusive growth.

III. Goal and purposes of the Astana “Green Bridge” initiative

15. The overarching goal of the Astana “Green Bridge” Initiative is to facilitate the establishment of a Europe-Asia-Pacific partnership that will outline the blueprints for a shift from the current conventional development patterns to green growth.

16. The Initiative aims to strengthen intersectoral, intraregional and interregional cooperation using the following approaches:

(a) Catalysing high-level, high-visibility policy dialogues on emerging and persistent issues;

(b) Undertaking normative and analytical research on emerging and cutting-edge policy solutions and tools;

(c) Building the capacity of policymakers to further develop, adopt and implement such policies while taking stock of the best available practices and methodologies, and legislative and economic instruments;

(d) Developing new and strengthening existing mechanisms for technology transfer and investments that will contribute to the preservation of Asian and Pacific ecosystems with global environmental significance;

(e) Developing mechanisms to attract green investments and innovative environmental management approaches, including cross-border adjustments and the application of economic incentives, taxes and fees.

17. The overall implementation of the Initiative will be based on the application of the green growth policy tools developed by ESCAP following the recommendations of the fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development and in partnership with other United Nations agencies and partners, such as the Asian Development Bank, the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the World Health Organization, as well as the Asia-Europe Environment Forum and the instruments of the “Environment for Europe” process.

IV. Thematic and policy areas for cooperation

18. The Astana “Green Bridge” Initiative proposes a number of programmatic areas and activities to operationalize the Europe-Asia-Pacific partnership.

Thematic area 1. Eco-efficient use of natural resources and investment in ecosystem services

19. This thematic area focuses on enhancing the eco-efficiency of natural resource use and investment in ecosystem services.

Policy areas

20. Activities would be carried out in the following policy areas:

(a) Technical, information and expert support for the development and strengthening of transboundary cooperation in environmental monitoring, integrated natural resource management, the use of integrated assessment tools and the planning of ecosystem usage;

(b) Promotion of economic instruments for the protection of biodiversity, including for sustainable fishing, and for the prevention of anthropogenic pollution of land, water and ocean ecosystems, in particular in the context of small islands;

(c) Promotion of best practices for integrated ecosystem management and the implementation of new models of ecosystem management and the efficient use of natural resources;

(d) Development of a monitoring system for the efficient use of natural resources, to be applied in international trade agreements;

(e) Development and implementation of sustainable management practices for nature reserves and parks of global environment significance, together with international organizations and other partners;

(f) Improvement of access to knowledge on available and secure water resource management technologies and mechanisms for the transfer of these technologies.

Thematic area 2. Low-carbon development and adaptation to climate change

21. This thematic area focuses on policy options to improve eco-efficiency and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, including low-carbon green growth development to promote mitigation, and to promote climate change adaptation and resilience.

Policy areas

22. Activities would be carried out in the following policy areas:

(a) Sharing good practices, scientific knowledge, technologies and cutting-edge experience in improving resilience and adaptation to, as

well as mitigation of, climate change, including innovation for energy efficiency;

(b) Provision of a platform and a pool of experts to support the development of regional projects addressing adaptation, mitigation and resilience, while also creating a mechanism for technology transfer;

(c) Sharing information and providing methodical assistance in the development of national policies and strategies for adaptation to climate change, including a review of fossil fuel subsidies.

Thematic area 3. Promotion of sustainable urban development

23. This thematic area focuses on policy options to address current unsustainable urban development patterns.

Policy areas

24. Activities would be carried out in the following policy areas:

(a) Promotion of inclusive and sustainable urban planning and design;

(b) Promotion of green buildings;

(c) Promotion of low-carbon public transport;

(d) Promotion of an eco-efficient water infrastructure and a “wastewater revolution”;

(e) Promotion of sustainable management of urban wastes;

(f) Promotion and development of low-carbon, pro-poor housing and settlements.

Thematic area 4. Promotion of green business and green technology

25. This thematic area focuses on a number of policies that can drive the greening of business, spur eco-efficient innovation and production, enable the transfer of green technologies and green investments, and promote sustainable products and services to enhance people’s livelihoods.

Policy areas

26. Activities would be carried out in the following policy areas:

(a) Sustainable/green public procurement;

(b) Creation of an enabling environment and mechanisms to promote green technologies and investments in innovation at the national and international levels;

(c) Promotion of an eco-friendly pricing system, including green tax and budget reform;

(d) Development of a circular economy, stimulated by government-initiated investments and procurement, eco-industrial parks,

and sustainable waste management—waste-for-wealth and waste-as-resource-for-products;

(e) Promotion of corporate social responsibility and decent green jobs;

(f) Promotion of eco-efficient innovation through public investment in research and development.

Thematic area 5. Promotion of sustainable lifestyles and improvement of quality of life

27. This thematic area focuses on policy options that promote a shift from inefficient and intensive industrialization patterns to low-carbon green growth and that will create long-term benefits for the quality of life of society for generations ahead and reduce the ecological deficit to future generations through the exchange of sustainable consumption and production practices between the regions of Europe and Asia and the Pacific.

Policy areas

28. Activities would be carried out in the following policy areas:

(a) Sustainable production policies targeting producers:

(i) Improve the use of life cycle analysis, resource efficiency and material flow assessment on the level of enterprises;

(ii) Improve the use of strategic and integrated environmental assessments on the level of national planning;

(iii) Further develop and apply eco-efficiency indicators for policy formulation stimulating eco-efficient productivity.

(b) Sustainable consumption policies targeting consumers:

(i) Promote and further develop alternative development measures to be used in conjunction with the traditional gross domestic product and to assess the performance of government, the business sector and other sectors;

(ii) Develop information disclosure, eco-labelling and sustainable green advertising as tools to create an informed consumer.

(c) Sharing of knowledge and best practices through the Regional Help Desk on Sustainable Consumption and Production in Asia and the Pacific.¹²

¹² Jointly established by the United Nations Environment Programme and ESCAP and launched in May 2006. Available from www.scp-help.org.

V. Follow-up activities

29. As a follow-up to the sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development, the Astana “Green Bridge” Initiative will commence with the holding of additional consultations with ESCAP member States (associate members are also welcome) from Asia and the Pacific and countries of the European region, international organizations, and ESCAP, ECE, the European Union, the Asia-Europe Environment Forum and other partners to develop the work programme and activities of the Initiative for the period 2011-2020.

30. In addition, and to support activities under the Initiative, the Government of Kazakhstan, in cooperation with interested partners, is offering to host a “Green Bridge” office. The office will also promote the implementation of a Europe-Asia-Pacific partnership for Green Growth.

31. Kazakhstan, in partnership with interested members and associate members of ESCAP, will present the proposed Europe-Asia-Pacific partnership and an implementation plan for the “Green Bridge” Initiative for endorsement at the seventh Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe”, to be held in Astana in 2011.

VI. Funding

32. Financing for the follow-up activities to operationalize the Astana “Green Bridge” Initiative will be mobilized on a voluntary basis through the Government of Kazakhstan, ESCAP and ECE member States, and the international donor community, including such organizations as the Asian Development Bank, the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the United Nations Development Programme, as well as the private sector.

33. Kazakhstan will provide the financial support, as a contribution to facilitating a Europe-Asia-Pacific partnership, for the establishment of the “Green Bridge” office in close cooperation with ESCAP, ECE and other interested parties, which will also provide information dissemination and media activities during the implementation of the Initiative, taking into account the priorities of the national green development programme of Kazakhstan, Zhasyl Damu. At present, Kazakhstan is focused on two priority components within thematic areas one and two, namely:

- (a) Eco-efficient use of water resources and ecosystems;
- (b) Low-carbon development and adaptation to climate change.

VII. Recommendations

34. Based on the thematic and policy areas proposed above, and to stimulate the further greening of the economy and the growth of the Asian and Pacific region through the implementation of the Astana “Green Bridge” Initiative, the ministers may wish to:

- (a) Endorse the establishment of a programme of Europe-Asia-Pacific partnership as a mechanism for the implementation of the Astana “Green Bridge” Initiative;

- (b) Endorse the functions of the partnership, which are to provide a forum for dialogue among European, Asian and Pacific countries and to identify priorities, strategies and policies for furthering sustainable development in preparation for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, to be held in 2012, as well as during the preparatory process for the seventh Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe”, to be held in 2011;
- (c) Support the holding of the first meeting of the partnership in Kazakhstan and the development by the meeting of the proposed follow-up activities, as well as a two-year work programme;
- (d) Request the Government of Kazakhstan, in partnership with the Governments of France, Germany, the Netherlands, the Republic of Korea and Kiribati to present a Europe-Asia-Pacific partnership and the Astana “Green Bridge” Initiative at the seventh Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe”, to be held in Astana in 2011;
- (e) Encourage ESCAP members and associate members to make a determined and concerted effort to assist in the implementation of the Astana “Green Bridge” Initiative.
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