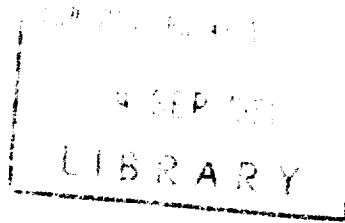




UNITED NATIONS

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL



Distr.  
GENERAL

E/ECWA/127  
16 March 1981

Original: ARABIC

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA

Eighth session  
21-25 April 1981  
Beirut, Lebanon

item 6(c) of the provisional agenda

Regional contribution to the preparations for the United Nations  
Conference on the Least Developed Countries

(Note of the Executive Secretary)

Over thirty countries of the world today live in dismal economic conditions. A wide developmental gap separates them not only from the developed countries but also from the rest of the developing world. Per capita income in these countries is extremely low; in fact the standard of living of large segments of their populations falls below the minimum acceptable level for human beings. Their peoples are captive victims of poverty, hunger, illiteracy, unemployment and endemic and epidemic diseases; they suffer from the want of water, light and salubrious housing and a critical lack of material, human and institutional infrastructures. The traditional sector dominates their economies, which are characterized by low agricultural productivity, insufficient food production, little or no mining of natural resources, a rudimentary manufacturing sector, low export earnings and limited import capability. In addition, these countries suffer from an acute scarcity of trained manpower at all levels, as well as unfavourable geographic and climatic conditions that often obstruct the smooth development of their economies.

The international community has been devoting increased attention to the problems of the least developed countries since the mid-1970s. It has recognized the gravity of the problems of these countries, which, moreover, are being aggravated by the effects of the current world economic crisis. Runaway inflation, the world monetary crisis and the decline in the value of currencies unsupported by strong economies have hit these countries especially hard. When the international community called for a New International Economic Order founded on justice, equality and equal opportunity for all nations; when it launched the North-South Dialogue; and when it drafted the International Development Strategy for the Third United Nations Development Decade, it gave special consideration to the least developed countries. Thus, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a number of important resolutions on these countries. These included resolution 34/210 on special measures in favour of the least developed among the developing countries and resolution S-11/4 on measures to meet the critical situation in the least developed countries.

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) adopted resolution 122(V) in which it called for the formulation of a Comprehensive New Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1980s. That Programme was to contain an Immediate Action Programme for 1979-1981 and a Substantial New Programme of Action for the rest of the decade, to be implemented as part of the International Development Strategy for the Third United Nations Development Decade. Pursuant to an UNCTAD initiative, the General Assembly adopted resolution 34/203, in which it called for the convening of a United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries for the purpose of finalizing, adopting and supporting the Substantial New Programme of Action for the 1980s. In its resolution 35/56 on the International Development Strategy for the United Nations Development Decade, the General Assembly gave a prominent place to the least developed countries, particularly in paragraphs 136-146 of the Strategy document. At the same session, the General Assembly adopted resolution 35/205 in which it decided that the Conference would be held in September 1981. The resolution also invited the organizations, specialized agencies and bodies of the United Nations, including the regional commissions, as well as all countries, regional and international funds and organizations to take all necessary measures in preparation for that Conference and in contributing to

its success, so that the Substantial New Programme of Action for the 1980s to be submitted to the international community would have the agreement of the least developed countries themselves, the potential donors of bilateral and multilateral assistance and the international community as a whole.

The importance of that Conference for the ECWA region springs from the fact that the international community has decided that two ECWA countries, Democratic Yemen and Yemen, meet the standards and criteria it has established for inclusion among the least developed countries of the world. These two countries thus deserve to receive every possible assistance in accelerating their social and economic development.

The specific contributions of the ECWA secretariat to the preparations for the United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries are contained in paragraphs 19 and 20 of document E/ECWA/120.