



DIALOGUE OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARIES OF THE REGIONAL COMMISSIONS WITH THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY SECOND COMMITTEE

“The UN at 75 – Regional Cooperation: A building block of multilateralism and shared prosperity in the era of Covid-19 and beyond”

75TH Session of the UNGA, Monday, 19 October, 10:00 AM-12:00 PM

OBJECTIVES

Building on the theme of the Second Committee *“Building back better after COVID-19: ensuring a more equitable global economy, inclusive societies and sustainable recovery”* and against the background of the 75th Anniversary of the UN, the Dialogue will demonstrate how regional cooperation constitutes a critical building block of multilateralism and present regional perspectives on how regional action can be leveraged to build back better after Covid-19 and meet the promise of the 2030 Agenda.

Key objectives will be:

1. To present insights on and discuss how regional cooperation and integration have contributed to decades of economic and social development in the regions and to building collective responses to global crises and sustainable development challenges;
2. To showcase how the Regional Commissions, based on the trust and knowledge of the countries they serve, continue to advocate policy solutions, catalyze action and help to build partnerships across development goals, thus laying the basis for long term cooperation in the regions.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

For Member States and stakeholders to gain appreciation of the critical contribution of regional cooperation and UN Regional Commissions to an effective and inclusive multilateralism and of the opportunities to build back better after Covid-19 through regional cooperation and integration.





FORMAT

The Chair of the General Assembly Second Committee (Ambassador Amrit Bahadur Rai, PR of Nepal to the UN) will deliver opening remarks. The Executive Secretaries of the five UN Regional Commissions will make presentations (10 mins each). Interactive rounds of discussion with the floor will follow. Director/Regional Commissions NY Office will moderate.

PROGRAMME

- 10:00 Opening remarks, **Chair Second Committee, H.E. Ambassador Amrit Bahadur Rai, Permanent Representative of Nepal to the UN.**
Welcoming remarks, **Moderator, Mr. Amr Nour, Director Regional Commissions New York Office.**
- 10:05 Presentations by the Executive Secretaries of the Regional Commissions:
- **Executive Secretary ESCAP and USG Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana;**
 - **Executive Secretary ESCWA and USG Ms. Rola Dashti;**
 - **Executive Secretary UNECE and USG Ms. Olga Algayerova;**
 - **Executive Secretary ECLAC and USG Ms. Alicia Bárcena;**
 - **Executive Secretary ECA and USG Ms. Vera Songwe (Coordinator of the five Regional Commissions).**
- 11:00 Round of interventions from the floor.
- 11:40 Responses from the Executive Secretaries of the Regional Commissions.
- 11:55 Concluding remarks by the Moderator.
Closing remarks by the Chair.

BACKGROUND

The 75th anniversary of the UN delivered a renewed commitment to reinvigorate multilateralism. As the Declaration adopted by Member States proclaims, the Covid-19 pandemic has manifested itself as the “largest global challenge in the history of the United Nations” and “multilateralism is not an option but a necessity as we build back better for a more equal, more resilient and more sustainable world”. The 75th anniversary also comes at a critical juncture as we embark on the Decade of Action and Delivery for sustainable development. In a world confronted with growing inequality within and among countries, environmental threats and climate related challenges, the Decade of Action and Delivery for sustainable development is an historic opportunity to build back better and greener. Most recently, the SDG Moment (18 September) was a forceful reminder of the power of collective action, including regional cooperation, to address the severe





economic and social impacts of the pandemic and deliver on a comprehensive and integrated set of universal goals.

Throughout the history of the UN, some of the strongest and most coherent and effective responses to global crises have been initiated at the regional level. For example, during the food, fuel and financial crises in 2008, when serious gaps in international economic governance were revealed and national responses proved ineffective, the regional level provided the technical and political arenas for analysis and collaboration. Results ranged from the development of regional “safety measures” to buffer external shocks, such as currency reserve alternatives (e.g., the Chiang Mai initiative) and macroeconomic policy coordination, to the regional representation in global processes (e.g. the African Union in the G-20).

The Regional Commissions have historically been at the core of these efforts as part of the evolving institutional landscape of the regions. In the case of ESCAP, from the support to regional connectivity with the development of Asian Highway project in the 1950s, and the birth of the Asian Development Bank in 1960, to encompassing social development issues in the 80s to pioneering the concept of green growth. With UNECE advancing norms and agreements on critical transboundary issues (transport, air pollution, water) thus providing the backbone for regional integration in challenging political and historical contexts. Further, ECLAC’s dynamic and pioneering thinking always at pace with sweeping changes in the global and regional economic and political landscape, on questions such as macroeconomic adjustments to debt or the ongoing contribution to the debate on sustainability, to positioning social equality at the center of economic growth. ECA has been at the front row seat in Africa’s development agenda for more than six decades: from the establishment of the Organization of the African Unity to the creation of the African Development Bank and today plays a pivotal role in advancing both the regional Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda and supporting the realization of the Africa Continental Free Trade Area as an engine for both. And, in the case of ESCWA, providing a critical framework for regional congress and collaboration, in a region ravaged by conflict and in constant coordination with key regional actors as the LAS and the GCC.

As many crises of the past, the COVID-19 pandemic has also demonstrated in unambiguous terms the value proposition of the regional dimension of development. The regional level is vital in dealing with cross- border problems. It is at this level that reconnecting economies, reversing the disruption of trade and transport links, harnessing the potential of digital technologies, and addressing transboundary risks offer more immediate benefits. The Regional Commissions are leading innovative solutions and responding to the Covid-19 with initiatives such as the coordination of regional positions by ministers of Finance and other sectoral ministers; regional





initiatives on debt sustainability; a wealth of research and analysis on impact and policy responses; a rich array of tools and resources available to MSs and the UN development system; and a robust regional and multilateral cooperation pillar of the UN Socio-economic response.

FOCUS AREAS/QUESTIONS

Against the background outlined above, the following questions are suggested to frame the Dialogue:

- As we commemorate the 75th anniversary of the UN and look back at the role of regionalism in shaping multilateral responses to global challenges, how can regional action contribute to reinvigorating multilateralism today?
- How can regional cooperation and integration be leveraged to support a robust global and national response to the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic?
- How are Regional Commissions leveraging lessons learned from impacts and responses to the Covid-19 crisis to further strengthen regional integration efforts and build future resilience?

Questions on specific angles of the response to Covid-19:

- How can regional cooperation support research and analysis and peer learning to address gaps in health and social protection systems and develop targeted responses in favor of the most vulnerable?
- How can the regional level support resilience-building in supply chains and help advance trade digitization? What examples of measures have been developed in the regions to support investments flow to the most vulnerable, including to mechanisms for supporting MSMEs?
- How can the potential of regional cooperation and integration be harnessed in support of financing for development and long-term economic recovery?
- How are regions responding to monetary and financial constraints such as debt sustainability?
- How does regional cooperation and regional normative frameworks contribute to tackling transboundary risks and strengthening environmental resilience?
- How are the Regional Commissions supporting regional and country efforts in the response to COVID-19 in the areas highlighted above and beyond?

