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I. Introduction

A. Institutional arrangement

1. The Commission at its seventy-first session decided to establish the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management as a regional institution of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) through the adoption of resolution 71/11 on the establishment of the Centre.
2. The Centre will be located in Tehran. In accordance with the statute of the Centre attached to resolution 71/11, the activities of the Centre shall be in line with relevant policy decisions adopted by the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission and contribute to the organizational goals of ESCAP. The Centre shall be subject to the financial and staff regulations and rules of the United Nations and the applicable administrative instructions.

B. Mandate

3. In Commission resolution 71/11, the secretariat was requested to take all the necessary measures to ensure that the Centre is established promptly, including the conclusion of a headquarters agreement between the host country and the United Nations.
4. In Commission resolution 72/7, the secretariat was also requested to accord priority to sand and dust storms as a great transboundary challenge and to work, including through the Centre, to promote regional and interregional networking on sand and dust storms. In this regard, disaster-related work on transboundary sand and dust storm issues is being carried out as part of the programme of work of the Centre.
5. As a subsidiary body of the Commission, the Centre is aligned with and contributes to the strategic framework and programme of work of ESCAP. The secretariat took the necessary steps for the establishment of the Centre in the Islamic Republic of Iran and

developed the Centre's workplan for inclusion in the ESCAP programmes of work for the biennium 2016-2017 and biennium 2018-2019. The objectives and activities of the Centre contribute to subprogramme 5 on information and communications technology and disaster risk reduction and management.

6. The strategic focus of subprogramme 5 is to improve capabilities of member States to create more disaster-resilient societies. With the establishment of the Centre, these efforts will be further augmented by capacity-building in disaster information management organized by the Centre. The Centre is mandated to work with ESCAP members and associate members and other relevant stakeholders to reduce the risks, damage and losses resulting from disasters through capacity-building and strengthened regional cooperation in disaster information management.
7. The objective of subprogramme 5 for the biennium 2016-2017 is to enhance the contribution of disaster risk reduction and management strategies to the achievement of inclusive, sustainable and resilient development in Asia and the Pacific. The expected accomplishment most relevant to the Centre is as put forth in (b) improved knowledge and awareness of member States of effective strategies and policies in disaster risk reduction and management, including their gender dimensions, for inclusive, equitable, sustainable and resilient development.
8. The Centre will further contribute to the objective of subprogramme 5 for the biennium 2018-2019 by way of addressing the expected accomplishments (a) strengthened regional mechanisms to effectively address shared challenges and opportunities in disaster risk reduction and management for resilient and sustainable development; (b) enhanced evidence-based policies on disaster risk reduction and management for resilient and sustainable development, including gender perspectives; and (c) strengthened capacity of member States to use disaster risk reduction and management for resilient and sustainable development.

II. Alignment of the programme of work of the Centre to regional needs for disaster information management

9. Natural disasters continue to threaten sustainable development in the Asia-Pacific region. Many of these disasters are transboundary in nature. Asia and the Pacific is the most disaster-prone region in the world. The Asia-Pacific region is also home to two of the most seismically active fault belts which spread across national boundaries. The impacts of these disasters constitute a serious threat to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those related to poverty eradication and food security.
10. The forthcoming *Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2017* systematically analyses disaster risks and the impacts of natural disasters as follows.¹
11. Economic impacts from natural disasters have been substantial, imposing huge economic losses to the affected countries. The total regional economic damage from natural disasters between 1970 and 2016 reached approximately \$1.3 trillion (in 2005 United States dollars). Floods and storms, earthquakes, tsunamis and droughts were responsible for 98.6 per cent of total economic damage in the region.
12. From 2000 to 2016, countries in the South and South-West Asia subregions reported more than 260,000 deaths. Earthquakes were responsible for more than 70 per cent of fatalities, with around 187,000 fatalities. Droughts and floods affected 692 million and 428 million people respectively.
13. During the same period, North and Central Asia lost close to 60,000 lives, with more than 13 million people affected and economic damage amounting to \$9.8 billion. Droughts affected close to 8.4 million people and impacted economic damage amounting

¹ Detailed analyses on the impacts of disasters are discussed in the forthcoming *Asia Pacific Disaster Report 2017*. Based on data from the International Disaster Database of the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters, available from <http://emdat.be/> (accessed on 4 July 2017).

to \$2.1 billion. Earthquakes and floods resulted in severe economic damage, respectively \$0.9 and \$3.9 billion.

14. The impacts of sand and dust storms are widespread across the Asia-Pacific region. The arid and semi-arid plains of Central Asia experience a high frequency of dust as well as salt storms. Salt storms arise due to the salinization rates experienced by the lakes in the subregion. Most countries in South and South-West Asia are also exposed to the risk of sand and dust storms with the exception of the Southern part of the Indian peninsula. Local sources and hotspots of sand and dust storms are found in all the subregions in Asia, but many sand and dust storms in Asia originate in West Asia and North Africa.
15. The 2015/2016 El Niño, one of the strongest episodes observed in the last 50 years, triggered severe weather anomalies, ranging from increased frequency of floods and higher intensity of cyclones to prolonged drought.
16. The impacts of disasters on the economy and people are aggravated by extreme weather events triggered by the effects of climate change. More vulnerable people and assets are increasingly exposed to climate extremes. The likelihood of increased extreme events and weather-related disaster risks that cut across borders has made regional cooperation among geographically contingent countries important.
17. The region's second most seismically active zone is the Alpine-Himalayan orogenic belt. Another active fault line threatens Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan.
18. In an increasingly vulnerable region, information and knowledge management are essential for improving disaster risk management. Data and information become valuable in risk identification, risk assessment and risk prevention as well as for improving preparedness and response in the event of disaster. Data and information are most critical for accurate damage and loss assessment and post-disaster needs assessment that need to

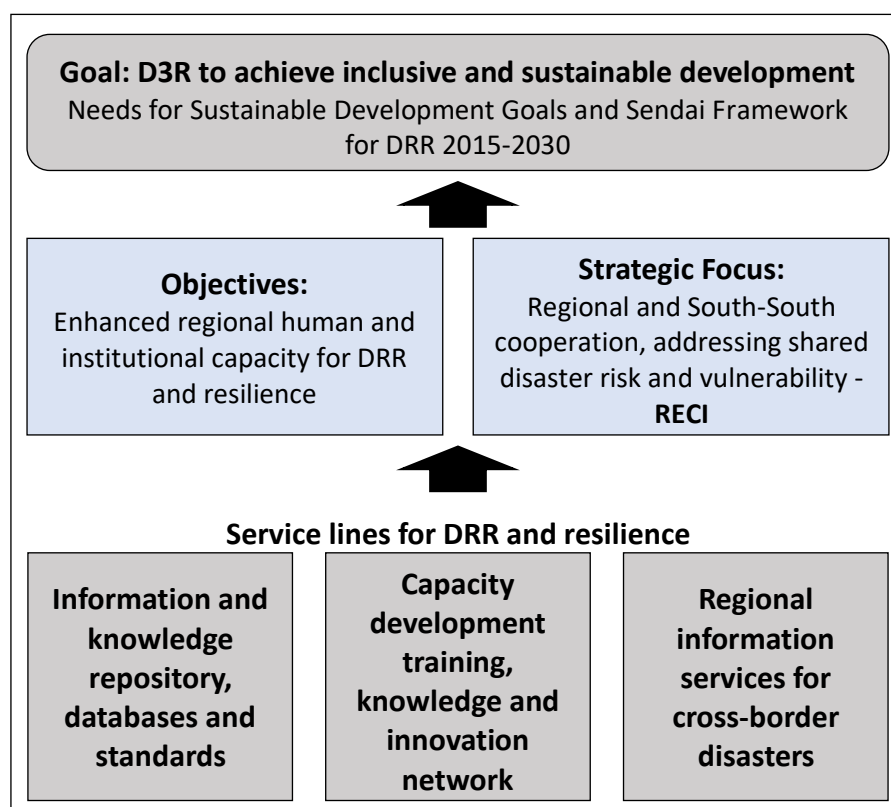
take into account risk reduction measures in the recovery and reconstruction processes and build back better. Similarly, disaster loss databases are important for accounting damage and losses caused by large-scale and small-scale recurrent disasters.

19. In response to the needs for disaster information management, the Centre, in developing its strategic plan, programme direction and programme of work, was guided by global and regional agreements and international frameworks which were adopted to guide sustainable development over the next two decades, in particular the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 and the Paris Agreement.
20. Disaster risk reduction and resilience building are cross-cutting themes of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Disaster information is instrumental for achieving specific disaster risk reduction-related targets of the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere; Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable; and Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. Building resilience is mainstreamed in many sector-related goals. The Centre's information and knowledge management products and services will also be relevant to address the resilience components of relevant Sustainable Development Goals, such as Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture; Goal 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation; and Goal 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.
21. The Sendai Framework highlighted the need for agreed regional and subregional strategies and mechanisms for cooperation and for progress to be reviewed by regional and global platforms. Regional priorities are identified in the Sendai Framework as

follows: (a) understanding disaster risk; (b) strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk; (c) investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience; and (d) enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to “build back better” in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

22. In the Asia Regional Plan for Implementation of the Sendai Framework, adopted at the seventh Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction held in New Delhi from 2 to 5 November 2016, regional collaboration and cooperation are fostered to effectively mitigate disaster risks and contribute to greater resilience in the region. In its two-year action plan (2017-2018), regional cooperation and related North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation mechanisms are recognized as being crucial.
23. Likewise, in Commission resolution 71/12 on strengthening regional mechanisms for the implementation of the Sendai Framework, the secretariat was requested to foster regional cooperation to address shared disaster risk. Furthermore, in its resolution 72/7, the Commission requested the secretariat to work on regional cooperation to combat sand and dust storms in Asia and the Pacific.
24. The Tehran Ministerial Declaration, adopted at the International Conference on Combating Sand and Dust Storms held in Tehran from 3 to 5 July 2017, recognized the role of the Centre for developing human and institutional capacity through strengthened regional cooperation in disaster information management.
25. Resolution 73/7 on enhancing regional cooperation for the implementation of the Sendai Framework encouraged members States and international organizations to provide support to the Centre and to cooperate for the achievement of its objectives and the implementation of its work programme.
26. As outlined in resolution 71/11, the main objectives of the Centre are to reduce damage and loss resulting from natural hazards by developing human and institutional capacities and capabilities of countries and organizations of the region in disaster information

management, supporting disaster risk reduction and strengthening regional cooperation in disaster information management. It is expected that the Centre's programme will contribute to the achievement of the above-mentioned disaster risk reduction-related targets and goals of the 2030 Agenda and the global targets and four priorities for action of the Sendai Framework.



III. Progress in implementation of the programme of work of the Centre

27. The programme of work of the Centre has been implemented through a multipronged strategic approach that includes concluding the agreements and administrative procedures for the establishment of the Centre in Tehran, establishing the governance and programme of work of the Centre, raising its visibility, and strengthening capacity of disaster information management for disaster risk reduction policymakers and experts of member States.