

## **SUMMARY RECORD OF THE NINTH SESSION OF THE ESCAP BUSINESS ADVISORY COUNCIL (EBAC)**

*UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE CENTRE  
BANGKOK, THAILAND  
19 MAY 2015*

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

The Ninth Meeting of the ESCAP Business Advisory Council (EBAC) was convened on 19 May 2015 at the United Nations Conference Centre in Bangkok, Thailand. The Meeting was attended by 19 EBAC members, 23 associate members, two advisors, and nine observers. From 18 May to 20 May, the Sustainable Business Network task forces also met separately at the United Nations Conference Centre. The Meeting was chaired by **Datuk Seri Mohamed Iqbal Rawther**, EBAC Chair, Group Executive Director, Farlim Group Malaysia, and **Ms. Mia Mikic**, Officer-in-Charge of the, Trade and Investment Division (TID), ESCAP. **Ms. Shamshad Akhtar**, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCAP attended the opening session and made an introductory statement. The official programme of the Meeting and list of attendees are contained in **annex 1** and **annex 2**, respectively.

### **B. OPENING SESSION**

**Ms. Shamshad Akhtar**, in her introductory statement, thanked all attendees for their presence at the Ninth Meeting of EBAC. She also specifically thanked all present members who had attended the EBAC Meeting the previous year, acknowledging the maturity in developing EBAC's agenda. She reviewed the three priorities from the Meeting in May 2014, which were: 1) recruiting a wider range of business leaders to play a role in ESCAP; 2) raising awareness of the mechanisms and modalities for sustainable development; and 3) spearheading private sector resource mobilization efforts for sustainable development. Regarding these priorities, Ms. Akhtar expressed her pleasure at the progress that had been made. Ms. Akhtar also acknowledged various successes of EBAC in the past year, including the Myanmar SME Link and the Handbook on Green Business.

Additionally, Ms. Akhtar stressed the role EBAC had to play in bringing the private sector's perspective and efforts in furthering the UN's sustainable development agenda, looking for EBAC to help lead the Asia-Pacific private sector in pursuing the Sustainable Development Goals, finding and promoting best practices, developing tools and mechanisms to improve corporate sustainability, linking the Sustainable Development Goals to existing practices, engaging in regional advocacy, and working with the finance industry to improve financing for development. She closed her statement by reaffirming how crucial business-sector cooperation is to ESCAP's work on sustainable development. (**Ms. Barbara Meynert**, representing EBAC, presented three statements at the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development [APFSD], held at the UNCC on 21 and 22 May, which are contained in **annex 3**.)

In his opening statement, ESCAP Chair **Datuk Seri Mohamed Iqbal Rawther** thanked Ms. Akhtar for her statement and all the participants for their attendance. He also remarked that EBAC had really expanded in size and that it was encouraging to see that the EBAC Meeting was primarily composed of members of the private sector. Mr. Iqbal stated that at its inception in 2004, EBAC was primarily concerned with policy advocacy; however, it has since moved to a new paradigm that involves both advocacy and action. Given the transition to the Asian Century, Mr. Iqbal said that business involvement in sustainable development was particularly important, and that for companies sustainable development was not so much about short-term profit, but rather about long-term benefit. Mr. Iqbal stated his appreciation for Ms. Akhtar's encouragement for members to take action. He also specifically thanked Ms. Barbara Meynert, Mr. Asif Ibrahim, Mr. George Yuen, and Mr. Carson Wen for their contributions to the Sustainable Business Network.

**Ms. Akhtar** shared some additional thoughts on the future of EBAC. She stated that she would like to see greater EBAC involvement with some of the other programmes at ESCAP, for example, by having staff from other divisions, such as the Social Development Division and Transport Division, interfacing with EBAC. Ms. Akhtar also highlighted the importance of science, technology, and innovation to the sustainable development agenda. More reflection on how to integrate that area with sustainable development is needed, and she suggested the establishment of a new task force to work on this area. Finally, Ms. Akhtar reflected on the fact that, while the profit motive ostensibly creates a disincentive for the private sector to be more socially or environmentally-conscious, in her experience, sustainability was beneficial to businesses. Towards this end, Ms. Akhtar encouraged EBAC to create some messaging (flyers and/or statements online) that could elaborate on the trade-offs for business in focusing on sustainable development. Such messaging could show the obvious obstacles (i.e. cost), while enumerating the more subtle, but nonetheless significant, benefits to companies in engaging in sustainable development.

### **C. INTRODUCTION TO THE UN FRAMEWORK ON WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

Ms. Cai Cai, Chief of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Section of the Social Development Division of ESCAP, gave a presentation on the challenges facing women entrepreneurs in the region and ESCAP's efforts to help overcome these obstacles. The presentation began with Ms. Cai Cai detailing the variety of ways in which women suffered from inequality in the workforce. This included significant gender gaps in labour force participation (including a 50 percentage point gap in South Asia, a subregion that witnessed declining female labour force participation in the past decade), similar gaps in employment, high female employment in the more poorly-paid agricultural sector, as well as the higher proportion of women in vulnerable employment. She added that women also face a gender wage gap, sexual harassment and abuse, horizontal occupational segregation, lack of social protection, vertical occupational segregation ("the glass ceiling"), and restricted access to/control of economic assets. Ms. Cai Cai stated that although this problem afflicts women, it has broader ramifications, because overcoming the above obstacles would make tremendous headway in reducing poverty and increasing national economic output.

Based on the results of her Section's research, Ms. Cai Cai had four main recommendations for addressing the most pressing issues facing women entrepreneurs. With regard to policy development coordination and implementation, it is important to create gender-responsive policies and programmes, identify lead agencies and establish mechanisms that focus on women-led SMEs, and streamline processes for business registration. In the area of access to finance and credit, it is necessary to engage with financial institutions to develop standards for fair and equal treatment, and to enhance access to financing mechanisms at all stages of business development. For capacity development, there is a need to create training initiatives for women, facilitate experience-sharing among networks of women entrepreneurs, and provide childcare support for mothers. To address socio-cultural factors, organizations should collect data on domestic roles and dynamics of family decision-making for better policy development. Ms. Cai Cai stated that there are three main roles for the business community: developing innovative financing mechanisms to enhance women entrepreneurs' access to credit and capital; provide women with networking, mentoring, and training opportunities; and facilitate multi-stakeholder public-private dialogue and partnerships.

**Datuk Seri Mohamed Iqbal Rawther** followed up by pointing out that the presentation gives an overall view of gender in the region, but difficulties could occur in trying to apply the norms of one country across a vast region.

**Ms. Robyn Meredith** stated that increasing the number of women on boards could lead to substantial progress in the goal of gender equality in business. Ms. Meredith suggested pledges for EBAC members to sign, supporting equality for women on boards. She asserted that as the Sustainable Business Network increases in size, a particular focus should be given to adding new female members, which could thus help the SBN begin to equalize its gender balance. In regard to women's networking, Ms. Meredith said that it was more important to facilitate networking between men and women than women only networking with each other.

**Mr. Tariq Rangoonwala** affirmed his personal commitment to promoting employment for women. However, he said that it is important for the governments with which the UN interfaces to also show their commitment by actively pursuing gender equality within their ranks.

**Ms. Kris Schneider** related that in her experience, there was a dearth of qualified women for roles in her company. Therefore, it is crucial to address social norms in order to empower women to pursue high-level employment.

**Ms. Rokia Rahman** voiced her support for Ms. Meredith's point about the importance of women networking with men. She also discussed the impact of micro-credit which had saved many women from poverty, but the larger effect was social change, because women could prove to themselves that they can succeed in business.

**Mr. Thomas Thomas** made the point that there should be focus not just on the quantity of work for women, but on the quality of work, so that women are not stuck in low-paying jobs.

#### **D. PROGRESS AND REVIEW OF THE EBAC WORK PLAN 2015**

**Mr. Marc Proksch**, Chief of the Business and Development Section, Trade and Investment Division, ESCAP, began by giving his appreciation for the open discussion in the previous session, saying that it exemplified EBAC's role as a forum for the business community to speak their minds, provide advice, and share the reality on the ground. Regarding the future nature of EBAC, Mr. Proksch noted that EBAC's original reason for existence was to serve in an advisory capacity; a size of 30-50 members is suitable for this role but with the addition of associate members, EBAC would become too big to perform its core function of providing advice. Thus, EBAC should continue to control its size, while the task forces under SBN would carry out more active, hands-on work.

Mr. Proksch outlined a number of issues for discussion by the EBAC members on the terms of reference of EBAC and SBN, and in particular EBAC and SBN membership criteria and guidelines which had been distributed in a revised document (**annex 4**). He proposed that in order to avoid confusion there would be no more associate members of EBAC; instead, there would be EBAC members and SBN members only. SBN would be referred to as the ESCAP Sustainable Business Network or ESNB. Additionally, there would be a requirement for active membership—members inactive for a long period of time would be removed from EBAC. Mr. Proksch also explained the proposed term limits. Under these limits, membership in EBAC would be for three years, with the possibility to renew for an additional three years. After this period, the member would be removed from EBAC, but free to be an SBN member. The term limits would include an allowance for exceptionally active members to extend beyond the six year period. In discussing the relationship between EBAC and the SBN, Mr. Proksch reiterated that there was no hierarchy between the two entities; they were simply different entities with different roles and terms of references. Mr. Proksch urged the task forces to strive for a balanced geographic and gender representation. He also encouraged the task forces to find sponsors to help fund and promote their activities.

**Datuk Seri Mohamed Iqbal Rawther** observed that Mr. Proksch's proposals were drawn from the discussions at the Eighth Meeting of EBAC in Colombo, and that he. Iqbal was therefore inclined to endorse the proposed TORs unless any members had specific concerns. He also stated that EBAC was striving for high-profile members, but that their addition would not jeopardize the position of any current members. He noted that there had been some relatively high-profile members in the past who are no longer involved, so EBAC should examine why those previous members might have withdrawn. Mr. Iqbal added that the number of areas of involvement through task forces could be extended from eight to nine or ten.

**Ms. Barbara Meynert** agreed that the TORs should be endorsed as written. She also backed the principle that the SBN and EBAC be considered equals, averring that it is a success for EBAC that it had successfully incubated another organization. Ms. Meynert voiced her support for term limits, but said that perhaps there should not be any allowances to extend members beyond two terms. She also stated that anyone on a task force must be an active member, meaning that inactive members should be removed from their task force. **Mr. Proksch** replied that SBN membership requirements are spelled out in the TORs, so members not meeting the requirements would indeed be removed.

There was some discussion regarding the process of EBAC rejuvenation and how membership term limits would be imposed. **Mr. Nitij Pal** and **Ms. Robyn Meredith** suggested imposing membership term limits retroactively, so that current members who had already served for six years would be removed in the near future. **Mr. Proksch**, however, stated that he was reluctant to shorten the terms of current members who had been active, so the term limits should start for everyone from 1 June 2015. He did note that inactive members would be removed shortly, which would create space for some new voices in EBAC in the very near term. **Mr. Iqbal** also raised the idea that EBAC might have a graduated retirement system (e.g. just one-third of the membership retires from EBAC, with a certain period of time before the next major removal of members). This would help ensure continuity in EBAC's activities.

Regarding the separation between EBAC and the SBN, **Mr. Proksch** reminded the Meeting that currently only EBAC members can be task force chairs, which is a regulation that the EBAC members might wish to revisit in due time. **Mr. Iqbal** replied that having the task force chairs be members of EBAC helped to maintain a link between the two entities. **Mr. Proksch** advised that since the Board of the SBN will still be the EBAC Board, this may be sufficient to keep a link between the groups. Mr. Proksch also brought up the current task force membership limit of 25 people, saying that he did not want to see a limit on SBN membership in principle but that task force size should be limited in order to remain functional.

In the discussion about the name of the SBN, **Ms. Meynert** reiterated her support for two separate but equal entities, thus: the *ESCAP* Business Advisory Council and the *ESCAP* Sustainable Business Network. She added that referring to the SBN as ESNB would give the SBN much more weight, since its name would demonstrate the link with UNESCAP. **Mr. Carson Wen** agreed with this view, stating that the SBN worked through the umbilical cord of ESCAP.

**Mr. Iqbal** recommended accepting the entirety of the new TORs. He also added his agreement with Mr. Proksch's view that membership limits should not be imposed retroactively. The TORs were then accepted by the assembled membership with no dissension.

**Mr. Masato Abe** closed the discussion by giving some background on the purpose of the TORs. He explained that as EBAC is growing in size and scale of operations, having these rules in place allows the staff at ESCAP to take action more quickly on EBAC-related issues. He could now guarantee better service from ESCAP in support of EBAC. Mr. Abe also explained that the new TORs would enable the termination of inactive EBAC members (roughly 15 to 20 members), which would help the organization's rejuvenation. Regarding the possibility of a membership fee, discussed at the EBAC Meeting last year, Mr. Abe said that ESCAP staff had not pushed this issue because they feel that they receive substantial in-kind contributions, in the form of time, energy and travel by members. Thus, ESCAP would not press on this issue, but EBAC members could examine such a possibility themselves if they thought it merited discussion. Regarding Mr. Abe's final point, **Mr. Mahburbur Rahman** recalled that EBAC had previously talked about each member contributing \$1000. **Mr. Iqbal** confirmed that the issue had been raised in the past, but that it should be left for discussion at a future meeting.



The Meeting adopted the revised terms of reference and guidelines and membership criteria for EBAC and ESNB as contained in **annex 4**.

## E. BRIEFINGS BY TASK FORCE CHAIRS<sup>1</sup>

### Task Force on Green Business

**Mr. Carson Wen**, Chair of the Task Force informed the Meeting of the activities undertaken by the Task Force, most notably the Lighting Lives project. Lighting Lives involved donating over 1,000 solar lights and many solar chargers to Timor Leste. This culminated in a well-received official event in Dili to commemorate the project, which was attended by Dr. Noeleen Heyzer, Special Advisor to the UN Secretary General on Timor Leste and Professor Kishore Mahbubani, Dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy of the National University of Singapore, as well as Prime Minister of Timor-Leste, H.E. Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão. There is now an online platform that allows people to donate cash and products to the project. The Task Force has put together content and case studies for the Guidebook for Best Practices in Green Business, which should be out in June or July 2015. Currently, the Task Force was working on its “Green Index” for East Asia, which will focus on the problem of food waste—a major issue in the region. Mr. Wen will give a more detailed report on the progress at the next meeting of EBAC. Prior to the EBAC Meeting, the Task Force on Green Business met together with the Task Force on Digital Economy due to their common visions and overlap in membership.

### Task Force on Banking and Finance

**Mr. George Yuen**, Chair of the Task Force, stated that the Task Force had built upon its recent publication, “The 3Cs for Responsible Banking in Asia and the Pacific: Corporate Governance, Corporate Social Responsibility and Corporate Sustainability”, which was launched in Colombo last November. The purpose of the 3Cs is to link business with the greater community. Technology, leverage and innovation combine to help foster entrepreneurship, which yields value creation in the form of both profit maximization and social returns. The Task Force organized a seminar in cooperation with and hosted by KPMG in Hong Kong, China on 7 May 2015 about the 3Cs which was attended by Marc Proksch and Soo Hyun Kim of TID/BDS at the invitation of Mr. Yuen. Similar seminars may be organized in other locations in the future.

### Task Force on Trade and Transport Facilitation

**Mr. Tariq Rangoonwala**, Chair of the Task Force, spoke extensively on the importance of the Convention on International Transport of Goods Under Cover of TIR Carnets (referred to as the TIR Convention), as well as the Task Force’s work on this issue. Mr. Rangoonwala mentioned the 21-22 April conference, Global Facilitation Partnership for Transportation and Trade, held in Geneva, which focused on implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), which, regarding certain articles, had agreed that the TIR Convention provided the best guidelines. Mr. Rangoonwala stated that it was important to continue to raise awareness about TIR and that the Task Force was doing exactly that. The Task Force had completed a study on Pakistan’s accession to the TIR Convention. Additionally, Mr. Rangoonwala announced that the Task Force would be working with the International Road

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<sup>1</sup> Reports of the Task Force meetings are contained in **annex 5**

Union (IRU) to develop a new report within the coming months on the benefits of TIR. He requested that ESCAP collaborate with the IRU on this report and said that he would be circulating it to EBAC soon.

#### Task Force on Disaster Risk Reduction

**Mr. Asif Ibrahim**, Chair of the Task Force, primarily discussed the event organized by the task force the morning before the EBAC Meeting. The event, “Making Sendai Work for Business: A Roundtable Discussion on Disaster Resilience” held at the UNCC was a success and had participation from many different stakeholders (see the report in **annex 6**). Part of its main purpose was to gather recommendations for the Task Force on how businesses could adapt to the Sendai Framework and help it to be successful. The Sendai Framework is the blueprint for disaster risk reduction from 2015 to 2030, adopted at the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai, Japan, in March 2015. The Framework acknowledges the crucial role of the private sector in order to achieve its aims. The Task Force planned to organize a workshop in Bangladesh within the next three months, to inform the private sector about Sendai and about increasing resilience against disasters. After this workshop, more events are planned across the region.

#### Task Force on Digital Economy

**Mr. Barbara Meynert**, Chair of the Task Force, updated EBAC on the Task Force’s activities and the outcome of its meeting, which was held together with the meeting of the Task Force on Green Business. The most significant outcome of the meeting was the Task Force on Digital Economy’s debate on its TOR. The Task Force resolved to use new technologies to support emerging countries in the region, particularly their SMEs, to gain a competitive advantage and leapfrog ahead of competitors. Ms. Meynert also updated EBAC on the launch and website redevelopment of the Myanmar SME Link. She also announced new initiatives under discussion. This includes plans to adopt an SME Association in Thailand with a view to enhancing their efficiency in using emerging technologies (supported by JP Morgan). The Task Force was also looking into creating a white paper on the digital divide for SMEs, examining why some have succeeded in harnessing emerging technologies and others have not.

#### Task Force on MSMEs and Social Enterprise

**Mr. Sailendra Narain**, Chair of the Task Force, discussed the Task Force’s initiatives to promote the social enterprise concept through the “Young Business Leaders’ Programme”. This would be an Internet-based seminar, planned to be held next month. Mr. Narain added that Mr. Mahavir Prashad Poonia, Director General of the Government of India’s National Technical Teachers Training and Research Institute (NTTTRI), was developing a programme to teach socially responsible business principles in New Zealand and the Pacific islands. He also discussed the brochure on Socially Responsible Business which had been circulated to EBAC members. In July, Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India would inaugurate the Uzbekistan-India Entrepreneurship Development Centre. Mr. Narain was currently in discussions to have a conference on socially responsible business at that time to be held at the centre. Mr. Narain also gave a presentation on the Market Development Programme, in which the Task Force would develop a programme geared towards helping export-oriented SMEs in the region. They would approach six governments of developing economies for cooperation, then identify one or two sectors in each of the six countries/clusters, make a needs-based assessment and plan the

networking arrangements with national and international agencies, plan the financial contribution from the national government and other countries and finally arrange for the support of MNCs for setting up a supply chain system. Mr. Narain then brought up SMARTEX, a website designed to showcase Vietnamese companies, as well as connecting them with information and with other companies with which they can do business. SMARTEX is currently trying to develop the programme in six sectors in Viet Nam

#### Task Force on Innovation and Competitiveness

**Mr. Akash Bhavsar**, Chair of the Task Force, emphasized the importance of intellectual property (IP) and innovation to trade and sustainability. He showed a video on the “Life Saving Dot”, a product that dispenses iodine through bindis. Mr. Bhavsar indicated that this product was an example of the best practices that he would like to promote. In terms of mapping best practices, he added that it was important to recognize individual heroes too. Mr. Bhavsar stated that the Task Force planned to identify IP issues that affect cross-border trade. There were also plans to launch a free e-platform where users can upload challenges they face and other users can submit possible solutions, thus encouraging a cross-pollination of ideas. The Task Force also would be publishing a white paper on IP best practices. Mr. Bhavsar also expressed interest in holding hackathons in the coming year that could help solve problems faced by businesses.

#### **F. PREPARATIONS FOR ASIA-PACIFIC BUSINESS FORUM 2015**

**Ms. Robyn Meredith**, Chair of the Task Force on APBF, announced that the Task Force had come to a decision on the location and date of APBF 2015:

*Date: Monday 2 November to Tuesday 3 November*  
*Location: UN Conference Centre, Bangkok*

On Sunday 1 November, the SBN Task Forces would hold their meetings separately, to be arranged individually by each Chair. The plenary ESNB would meet on the morning of Monday 2 November followed by the Tenth Meeting of EBAC in the afternoon. APBF 2015 would officially begin on Monday night with a gala dinner. Following this, the Forum would be held all day on Tuesday 3 November.

There will be five panel topics at the APBF. Since there are a greater number of Task Forces than there will be panel topics, the panels will be more broadly representative of all the

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