

Hundred and seventy-first session

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**ORGANIZATION OF A UNESCO REGIONAL MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
ON THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF RENEWABLE ENERGIES
IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN CENTRAL ASIA
(Kazakhstan, first half of 2006)**

SUMMARY

This item has been placed on the provisional agenda of the 171st session of the Executive Board at the request of Kazakhstan.

An explanatory note and a proposed decision are set out below.

Decision proposed: paragraph 10.

EXPLANATORY NOTE

INTRODUCTION

1. During the general policy debate at the 32nd session of the General Conference of UNESCO in 2003, Kazakhstan called on UNESCO to pay greater attention to issues relating to the development of renewable energies, in particular in rural areas of Central Asia. That appeal subsequently took the form of a proposal by the Kazakh authorities to hold in Kazakhstan a UNESCO regional conference on “The strategic role of renewable energies in sustainable development in Central Asia” in order to give an impetus to the use of such forms of energy in the region. The idea of a conference was received with interest by the Director-General of UNESCO and by Kazakhstan’s neighbours.

2. On 2 March 2005, at UNESCO’s Headquarters, a consultative meeting was held of representatives of China, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, the Russian Federation, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, attended by members of the UNESCO Secretariat, to discuss this initiative. At the end of the meeting, the countries participating supported Kazakhstan’s proposal. They suggested that consideration be given to holding such a conference in the first half of 2006 at the level of ministers responsible for environmental protection and energy matters and that the question of organizing such a conference be placed on the agenda of the 171st session of the Executive Board to secure the necessary involvement of UNESCO.

RENEWABLE ENERGIES AS A TOOL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL ISSUES FOR THE CONFERENCE

3. All discussions on sustainable development stress the importance of preserving natural energy and water resources. Their management and the protection of ecosystems are among UNESCO’s principal priorities and are inseparable from the use of renewable energy sources, as demonstrated at the 2002 Johannesburg Summit and as reaffirmed by the Member States of UNESCO, in particular within the framework of the World Solar Programme 1996-2005.

4. Renewable energies feature among the key factors of sustainable development, a field heightened in importance by the launching of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014). Technologies based on these energies will no doubt have, in the medium and longer term, a crucial role to play in the survival of all humankind. Renewable energies, such as solar and wind energy, are particularly in demand in rural areas where people have no access to sources of fossil energy or to hydroelectric power.

5. Central Asia is a clear-cut example of a region in which the harnessing of renewable energies constitutes an urgent need. Although it has substantial oil and gas reserves, Central Asia, on account of its vast extent, has huge rural areas beyond the reach of any electricity grid and many villages, lacking power, subsist in alarming health, educational and socio-economic conditions. This is particularly obvious in the region of the Aral Sea, recognized as an ecological disaster area by the international community. As the sea has dried up, the seabed has in part become a huge salt desert. Between 15 and 75 million tonnes of sand and dust are blown away each year over a distance of up to 250 kilometres. In 15 years, the region has thus recorded a 3,000 % increase in chronic bronchitis and in kidney and liver diseases, in particular cancer. Infant mortality is among the highest in the world. In addition to these ecological and health tragedies, there is an economic crisis. Traditional sea-related occupations have disappeared. The region has been hit hard by unemployment, local

communities are being destabilized and are breaking down owing, in part, to the lack of sources of energy.

6. To meet the needs of communities in rural areas in Central Asia that are affected by the lack of sources of electric power, drinking water supplies, electricity for schools, health centres, communication centres and other public infrastructure, and to ensure that renewable energies have a meaningful place in the national energy strategies of the countries of the region, Kazakhstan, supported by other Central Asian States and neighbouring countries, proposes that UNESCO organize a regional conference on renewable energy.

7. UNESCO is a key partner in this task, having regard to the skills garnered by the Organization in relation to renewable energies, above all in taking up the challenges of sustainable development and poverty eradication, and UNESCO's constant endeavour to carry out activities in this field.

8. The proposed regional conference, which Kazakhstan wishes to host and co-organize, would make it possible to focus the international community's attention on the acute energy problems experienced by rural areas in Central Asia, zooming in specifically on the Aral Sea area and on the solutions that renewable energies can provide. It would also give impetus to the formulation of national action plans and the regional action plan on the subject. The conference would assist in identifying needs for renewable energies in rural Central Asia and in mobilizing international donors for specific projects. It is to be noted, moreover, that Central Asia has never before been the venue of an international forum on renewable energies.

9. It is proposed that the theme of the conference be "The strategic role of renewable energies in sustainable development in Central Asia" and that the conference be held at the level of ministers responsible for environmental protection and energy matters in Central Asian countries, in particular, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Mongolia. It would welcome governmental experts from neighbouring countries, such as Afghanistan, China, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Russian Federation and Turkey, and experts from countries that have great experience in harnessing renewable energy sources and in formulating national policies in that field. It is also desired that representatives of international financial institutions and of public and private sector enterprises should attend. The proposed timeframe for the conference is the first half of 2006.

Proposed draft decision

10. In the light of the above, the Executive Board may wish to adopt a decision along the following lines:

The Executive Board,

1. Bearing in mind United Nations General Assembly resolution 54/215 of 22 December 1999 which established a direct link between the importance of renewable energies and sustainable development and the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg in 2002, in particular the Plan of Implementation in which renewable energies are considered to be a major instrument of sustainable development and poverty eradication,
2. Recalling 32 C/Resolution 14,
3. Recalling also 155 EX/Decision 4.1 in which it recommended that specific action be taken to include renewable energies in the Programme and Budget (C/5),

4. Referring also to paragraph 45 of the same decision in which it considered that UNESCO should continue its action in relation to the Aral Sea basin,
5. Welcomes the initiative taken by Kazakhstan and supported by the Member States concerned with a view to the organization of the UNESCO regional ministerial conference on the theme “The strategic role of renewable energies in sustainable development in Central Asia” in Kazakhstan in the first half of 2006;
6. Thanks the Director-General for the high profile given to renewable energies;
7. Invites the Director-General:
 - (a) to look into and define arrangements for the Organization’s intellectual and financial involvement in the implementation of this project;
 - (b) to submit to it at its 172nd session a report on action taken to implement this project and on any progress made in the preparations for the conference.