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**STATEMENT BY MR. SULTON RAKHIMZODA,
FIRST DEPUTY MINISTER OF ENERGY AND WATER RESOURCES,
REPUBLIC OF TAJIKISTAN, AT THE CONCLUDING MEETING OF
THE 23rd OSCE ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM**

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**Water governance in the OSCE area – increasing security and stability
through co-operation**

**Session III: Water governance and co-operation at transboundary level:
lessons learnt for water diplomacy**

Mr. Chairperson,
Distinguished Forum participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is impossible to imagine the implementation of sustainable water governance under the negative influence of outside factors and challenges without modern mechanisms and instruments that are based on the employment of both new advanced technologies and suitable policies and approaches.

In this context, one of the key elements are information systems, databases and geographic information systems, which enable data to be accessed in a timely manner in order to make quick decisions and apply appropriate, transparent water governance.

In the second half of the twentieth century, serious changes took place in the Aral Sea basin in terms of the governance, use and protection of its water resources. The exploitation of large areas of land for irrigation and the related construction of a large irrigation system led to changes in the river flow. This resulted in an environmental disaster: the drying up of the Aral Sea. Today the region is facing new challenges, including climate change, which, according to experts, will also lead to serious changes in the medium- and long-term to the present situation with regard to the basin's water resources.

Of course, under such conditions, the role, quality and transparency of information systems and rapid information exchange must increase significantly. How should such systems be established and developed, and what needs to be done to ensure their sustainable and successful operation?

Distinguished participants,

At first glance, the process of establishing and managing information systems seems simple. In reality, it is a long and difficult process that also requires suitable approaches and an appropriate framework.

First and foremost, it involves the processing of data, that is raw material. Such data should be accurate, reliable and, to an agreed extent, transparent. Thus, a sophisticated hydrologic network is required. In this context, data on key inter-State gauging stations is particularly important.

During the Soviet period, a rather large hydrologic network was established in the Aral Sea basin, providing data on almost all rivers in the region. Of course, today the whole of this system is not in full operation, although most of the main stations do work and provide data. However, the quality and reliability of the data leaves much to be desired. Each year during the growing season, we come up against this problem. Almost every season we take joint measurements in the Syr Darya river basin and the question of the data's accuracy always arises. Nevertheless, at the end of each season, a well-rounded figure appears in the reports of the Syr Darya basin water organization for the imbalance. This also applies to the Amu Darya river basin, where it is especially typical of the middle and lower reaches. For example, analysis of data from the Amu Darya water basin organization showed that the total imbalance for 2008 to 2010 in just one part of Kelif-Samanbay was 32.1 km³, or more than 10 km³ per year, which is equal to approximately 22.2 per cent of the Amu Darya's discharge at the Kelif site, more than 130 per cent of Tajikistan's total water intake, around 50 per cent of Turkmenistan's water intake or around 45 per cent of Uzbekistan's water intake. Furthermore, it should be noted that during the Soviet period, total losses across the entire Amu Darya river basin, including from the riverbed and reservoir, amounted to around 4 km³ annually.

Secondly, this process involves establishing an appropriate legal basis by concluding an inter-State agreement on data exchange and defining and agreeing on the list, format and procedure for the provision of data either free of charge or at a fee.

At present, the only agreement like this that exists is one from 1999 on the exchange of hydro-meteorological data among Central Asian hydro-meteorological services. Attempts to develop and conclude an intergovernmental agreement on the development and operation of a national, basin and regional database for the integrated use and protection of Aral Sea basin water resources from 2005 to 2007 were not successful. In April 2014, members of the Inter-State Commission for Water Co-ordination took the decision to conduct an internal review of a draft of an updated version of the aforementioned agreement. Analysis shows that slow progress is being made in this regard.

Once the agreement has been signed, the list, format and procedure for the provision of data should be determined and agreed upon. This is the issue that still needs to be addressed in the region. At present, data is being exchanged within the framework of the two basin water organizations, but the list and format of such data was established in an unregulated manner and there is still no concrete legal instrument to regulate this issue. Furthermore, the reporting mechanism also differs between these two basin water organizations.

In this context, of no little importance are the issues of the rights of the parties (data producer, operator, owner, user) and economical mechanisms for mutual data exchange and system support and maintenance. Moreover, one of the main issues is still of course managing the information system and database, as well as ensuring equal access to and the transparency of data. Previous unsuccessful attempts to create a regional database and information system have already highlighted the need to resolve these issues at an early stage of the process.

Thirdly, our region's experience shows that without the establishment and strengthening of the information systems and databases of national water management organizations, the basins of small rivers and the two basin water organizations, it is impossible to establish and develop sustainable regional information systems and databases. Regional and basin databases and information systems are like an information tree, the roots of which are the databases and information systems of the basins of small rivers at the national level and the basins of small transboundary rivers. Without these roots, a regional database and information system cannot be established. The experience of the past few years and the failed experiment to create the Central Asian Regional Water Information Base (CAREWIB) information system are further evidence of this.

Of course, it remains undisputed that the parties must co-operate constructively and be willing to take real steps based on the principles of mutual trust, balanced consideration of the interests of all parties involved and fair access to information.

The shortage of information on the use of water and land resources and on the social and economic situation in the Aral Sea basin still poses an obstacle to the adoption of strategic and long-term decisions on water governance and the implementation of water policies agreed within the Inter-State Commission for Water Co-ordination.

As stated above, specific work is being carried out in this regard, but all parties must speed up the process in order to reach agreement on its further development.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Now I should like briefly to focus on Tajikistan.

As many of you know, Tajikistan's water sector is undergoing reform. The first step of separating the tasks of policy and regulation from industrial and economic activities has already been taken. The next stage of reform is the transition to a basin approach to water governance.

At present, work is under way with our main development partners, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the European Union, to establish river basin organizations and basin councils, develop basin plans, and prepare appropriate laws and regulations to regulate relations between various water users, in addition to other activities at the basin level.

One important task within these activities is the establishment and development of information systems and databases at the basin and national levels, without which it is hard to imagine achieving sustainable water governance. The first step in this regard will be the development of an appropriate framework that reflects the main ideas and areas of focus.

Accordingly, instruments on determining the list, format and procedure for the provision of data and regulating other issues (the rights of the parties, operators, economic aspects, etc.) will then be developed.

Furthermore, we intend for the format and potential interface of these systems to be identical to those of other Aral Sea basin countries, in order to facilitate exchanges and further development of information systems and databases at the regional level.

We are at the very beginning of this process. We are sure that the right approach at this stage, as well as the support of our development partners, will ensure success in the speedy establishment and development of national and basin information systems and databases in Tajikistan.

We are also convinced that these approaches and constructive co-operation between the parties will serve as the basis for achieving success at the regional level as well.

Thank you for your attention.