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MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF  
UZBEKISTAN, AT THE SIXTEENTH MEETING OF THE  
OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

Helsinki, 5 December 2008

Mr. Chairman,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The sensible use of natural resources, particularly water and energy resources, is one of the most serious problems in the Central Asian region.

Diverse and ambiguous approaches to this problem impede development and lead to conflict situations and sometimes to environmental disasters. One typical example is the drying up of the Aral Sea, which has tragic consequences not only for the people of Central Asia but also for a huge subregion.

The chronic shortage of drinking water and water for irrigation, salt and dust storms forming on the bottom of the dried-up lake and a whole array of other environmental problems are undermining the very basis of life in the Aral Basin and causing severe social and humanitarian problems.

Central Asia is currently going through a period of extreme water shortage, with the water supply from the main rivers of Amu-Darya and Syr-Darya not exceeding 70 per cent of the long-term average amount. This situation makes it difficult to secure the necessary volumes of water for drinking and irrigation. Moreover, 65 per cent of the population of the region live in rural areas and depend on agricultural production.

The largest hydroelectric installations in the region — Toktogul in Kyrgyzstan and Nurek and Kayrakum in Tajikistan — which were originally intended for irrigation, have recently been converted to the production of electricity.

As a consequence, the increased volume of water discharged in the winter is causing flooding of useful land, the destruction of housing and other emergencies with attendant losses estimated at hundreds of millions of dollars.

Water accumulation in reservoirs in the summer is resulting in a shortage of water for agricultural production, a reduction in the amount of cultivated land and crop harvests and, as a consequence, a deterioration in the living conditions of the population and even conflict situations.

The plant and animal ecosystems in the river basins are suffering from the change in the natural water regime.

Unilateral violations of this kind of the principles of shared utilization of the water resources of transboundary rivers as set forth in inter-State agreements between the countries of Central Asia have extremely undesirable and far-reaching consequences in terms of water management and energy and for the socio-economic development and political stability of the countries of the region.

In the countries in the upper reaches of the transboundary rivers, i.e. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, major new projects for the construction of hydroelectric installations are being planned in the upper reaches of the Amu-Darya, Syr-Darya and Zarafshan, such as the Kambaratin hydropower plant in Kyrgyzstan and the Rogun and Yavansk plants in Tajikistan, without account being taken of the environmental impact and agreements with neighbours.

In keeping with the fundamental requirements of United Nations conventions, all decisions on the utilization of the watercourses of transboundary rivers, including their use for hydroelectric installations, should not in any way cause damage to the environment or encroach on the interests of the population of the countries bordering the rivers. It should be emphasized that reference is being made here to the utilization of resources and the watercourses of transboundary rivers and of safeguarding the vitally important needs of the countries and peoples living along these rivers for centuries to come.

All measures must be taken to remove or limit any damage caused and, if necessary, to consider the question of compensation.

In its decisions the United Nations points out that “watercourse States shall co-operate on the basis of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, mutual benefit and good faith”.

Of all the arguments presented by us regarding the need to conduct an objective independent international study of the plans for the construction of the Rogun hydropower plant and reservoir in Tajikistan, we should like to draw attention to one in particular.

It is well known that the site of the Rogun plant, which has a capacity of 3,600 megawatts and a dam height of 340 metres, has a seismicity, as demonstrated and confirmed by repeated earthquakes, of eight to nine on the Richter scale.

Imagine for a minute how it would be if just one out of 100 earthquakes had a force of eight to nine or more on the Richter scale.

With all the calamities that have already befallen this region, (Kyrgyzstan and the People’s Republic of China) who would take responsibility for the hundreds of thousands of deaths that would be caused along the Amu-Darya?

Mr. Chairman,

Every country has the right to carry out projects involving the utilization of the resources of transboundary rivers, including hydroelectric installations, but they should be

subject to an in-depth independent international study of the technical, economic and environmental aspects based on the principles of openness and the provision of complete information to the countries concerned.

In this regard I should like to stress the need for two vitally important conditions to be guaranteed: first, the level of the watercourse for the countries downstream should not be lowered; and second, the environmental security of the region, which is already fragile, should not be jeopardized.

We believe that compliance with these demands should be compulsory for the various hydroelectric installations in Central Asia planned by national and transnational companies, including the international financing agencies wishing to participate in projects of this nature.

Thank you for your attention.