



NATIONS UNIES
COMMISSION ÉCONOMIQUE
POUR L'EUROPE

ОБЪЕДИНЕННЫЕ НАЦИИ
ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКАЯ КОМИССИЯ
ДЛЯ ЕВРОПЫ

UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC COMMISSION
FOR EUROPE

**Statement by Mr. Ján Kubiš
United Nations Under-Secretary-General
Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for
Europe**

Central Asia Water Resources Dialogue Meeting

Ashgabat, 20.07.2010

Let me express my sincere gratitude to UNRCCA and personally to Ambassador Jenča for organizing this very timely meeting. The visit of Secretary General Ban Ki-moon reconfirmed the readiness of the UN to provide further active support to the sustainable development, stability and security of Central Asia. It is important to take full advantage of the political momentum generated by the visit to further strengthen regional cooperation. The UNECE will continue its efforts to increase technical cooperation assistance to Central Asia, including in the framework of the UN Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia.

High-level discussions during the visit of the Secretary General have again highlighted the primary importance of finding mutually acceptable, cooperative solutions to the complex problems related to the water and energy nexus in Central Asia. Disputes over water have too long been a major stumbling block hindering regional cooperation. While the region – especially energy exporting countries – have registered impressive economic growth in the last decade, the recent conflict in Kyrgyzstan, the compound water, food and energy crisis in 2008 and emerging challenges, like the increasing irregularity of water supply caused by climate change remind us that the relative stability and security of the region cannot be taken for granted. Security threats – terrorism, religious extremism, drug trafficking, illegal migration – remain serious. The sustainability of economic growth depends to a large extent on the ability of Central Asian countries to preserve and strengthen the stability and security of the region through cooperation.

Having been directly involved in Central Asia for almost two decades, I am fully aware that there are no easy or rapid solutions to the disputes and problems hindering the effective management of shared water and energy resources. The

UNECE – offering a neutral UN umbrella, relevant international legal instruments and in-house expertise – has accomplished significant work in Central Asia, for example, the Strategy on the rational and efficient use of water and energy resources in 2004, or the more recent Chu and Talas, dam safety and CAREWIB projects. On the basis of this solid experience, the UNECE is giving priority to assistance that helps laying the foundation for the elaboration of long-term solutions to the complex problems of the water and energy nexus. Let me mention some examples of such assistance:

First, the UNECE is the custodian of several relevant international legal instruments. The UNECE Water Convention and other UNECE legal instruments, like the Espoo Convention, offer neutral frameworks for the elaboration of cooperative solutions to existing disputes. The related institutions and expert pool can provide the necessary support to countries in implementing these instruments and assist those wishing to start the process of accession thereto. Presently the UNECE is offering capacity building programmes which explain how countries can take full advantage of international law and UNECE legal instruments to settle their disputes in a cooperative manner with other countries sharing the same river basin. This very week the UNECE is holding a capacity building workshop in Dushanbe on the Espoo Convention and in September another workshop is planned there on the Water Convention. Similar events are also being offered to other Central Asian countries.

Between 2009 and 2011 the UNECE is implementing a 2-million US dollar programme entitled “Regional Dialogue and Cooperation on Water Resources Management” financed by the Government of Germany through GTZ in the framework of the Berlin Process. The Berlin Process in turn is part of the Water and Environmental Pillar of the Central Asia Strategy of the European Union. The Programme consists of four elements: capacity building on international water law; strengthening regional institutions; modernizing legal frameworks for water resources management; and improving water monitoring and data exchange. Implementation of the Programme started in April 2009 with the adoption of the Joint Statement of the Summit Meeting of the Heads of States Founders of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea. The Summit provided the Programme with a strong political mandate. Since then, impressive results have been achieved. Some 60 local experts with the assistance of two international consultants prepared a comprehensive analysis and a set of recommendations on institutional and legal strengthening. Two working groups – each with the participation of representatives of governments and regional institutions – discussed the study and favored an evolutionary, step by step approach to legal and institutional strengthening. Last April, agreement was reached on the setting up of a small drafting group – consisting of two representatives of each government – which will review all existing institutional agreements and elaborate recommendations for their modernization. I ask those governments, which have not yet done so, to appoint their representatives to this group.

Later today I hope to meet informally the representatives of IFAS member countries to share with them some ideas on the phased implementation of the proposed programme of legal and institutional strengthening. In my view the Third Aral Sea Basin Programme (2011-2015) offers a suitable framework and timelines for it.

You might argue that this Programme does not deal directly with such crucial and often controversial issues as long-term water release regimes, the building of new hydropower stations or the consequences of increased water use by Afghanistan from the Amudarya basin. Still, it is rendering much needed indirect assistance to problem-solving through strengthening IFAS and its legal basis. Well functioning regional organizations, supported by research institutes and expert pools, can provide a conducive framework for information exchange, analysis, discussion and ultimately the elaboration of concrete proposals to solve these issues. IFAS has a unique advantage when undertaking this work. It can take decisions and adopt documents at the level of the Presidents and it receives guidance from the regular meetings of deputy prime ministers. The involvement of high-level decision-makers is especially important, since integrated management of water resources requires inter-ministerial and inter-agency coordination. In addition, strong regional organizations based on modern legal agreements can provide reliable institutional and legal guarantees for the implementation of decisions agreed upon by their member countries.

A five-year programme with the resulting strengthened institutions and modern legal framework would help not only to solve present problems but also to empower the Governments of Central Asia to deal with the challenges of the next decades. Present institutions have so far succeeded in managing shared water resources and thus avoiding open conflict. But it is inconceivable that in ten, twenty or thirty years from now, the same institutions would be able to effectively address the growing challenges. The rapid shrinking of glaciers, the increasing strain on regional water resources caused by rapid economic development and demographics, the planned expansion of irrigated areas in Afghanistan resulting in increased water use, all call for regional solutions that are, often, more effective and efficient than national efforts.

Last but not least let me mention the National Policy Dialogues supported by the UNECE and OECD in several countries. The introduction of IWRM at the national, river-basin and regional level, requires harmonized, complementary efforts at all three levels. National Policy Dialogues on IWRM that involve all relevant ministries and agencies (water, energy, environment, health and sanitation) complement river-basin and regional programmes.

I am looking forward to the continuation of this interesting discussion on the implementation of the outcomes of the visits of the Secretary General. I hope this meeting can give much needed impetus to the ongoing work on the Third Aral Sea Basin Program and further strengthen coordination between the Executive Committee of IFAS, regional organizations and the donors community.