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**CENTRAL ASIAN INITIATIVE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:
PROGRESS AND PROSPECTS**

submitted by

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in cooperation with the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia

through the Ad Hoc Working Group of Senior Officials



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CAPACITY-BUILDING

**PROGRESS AND PERSPECTIVES IN IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT
STRATEGY FOR COUNTRIES OF EASTERN EUROPE, CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL
ASIA, AND OF THE CENTRAL ASIA INITIATIVE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**CENTRAL ASIAN INITIATIVE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:
PROGRESS AND PROSPECTS¹**

I. BACKGROUND

1. The Central Asian Initiative on Sustainable Development (CAI) was put forward by the countries of Central Asia during preparation for the World Summit on Sustainable Development 2002 in Johannesburg, and was supported in the final document of the Summit². The initiative came up because of the lessons learned, and a conclusion made, by Central Asian countries throughout the first decade of independence.

2. The purpose of the Initiative is to establish, through cooperation with international development organisations and donor countries, multisectoral partnerships between governments, private sector, non-governmental and community based organizations, based on the best use of international experiences for adding sustainable development value to the

¹ The text in this document is submitted as received from the authors.

² <www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/sustainabledev/p2_partners_other_areas/central_asian.pdf>.

environmental agenda, and to the efforts addressing natural resource scarcity, poverty and imbalanced economic development in the countries of Central Asia.

3. On the initiative of the Central Asian countries, the 5th Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” in Kiev, 2003, has adopted the 1st Category document, "An Invitation to Partnership on Implementation of the Central Asian Initiative on Sustainable Development", which presented the Central Asian countries' consolidated commitment to cooperate in the field of environmental and water resources management, with the focus on sub-regional and intersectoral capacity building. In the meantime, the Invitation to the Partnership was a call to the donor community for support of it.

II. PROGRESS AFTER KIEV MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE 2003

4. Since the Kiev Conference, authorized Central Asian environment ministries and agencies, in receipt of donor assistance and active participation of non-governmental organisations organizations have held various sub-regional and national dialogues on CAI. Recommendations on CAI mainstreaming were taken into consideration and were reflected in national policies and development programmes of Central Asian countries. Sub-regional programmes on ecosystem management, education for sustainable development, public participation, harmonization of legislation and standards have also been supported by Central Asian countries. A number of capacity building and pilot projects have been implemented in the frames of the above programmes in the countries of Central Asia.

5. The European Commission, donor countries, UN agencies and other development agencies and banks have played key roles in funding these projects and in bringing expertise and best practices to promote and implement CAI and other relevant sub-regional environmental programs.

6. The Interstate Commission on Sustainable Development (ICSD) promotes in ensuring a necessary support of CAI. The Framework Convention on the Environment for Sustainable Development in Central Asia has been developed under ICSD, and presently some sub regional countries are on its adoption process. Various reports and pilot projects were developed under ICSD to implement the Regional Environmental Action Plan. ICSD's National Informational Centre under support of UNEP/ATP has developed and published “Integrated state value of Central Asian environment”, Evaluation reports on its basic priorities as well as Evaluation reports on arising ecological problems; sub regional strategy of sustainable development of Central Asia is under development. A decision on the establishment of the Central Asian Mountain Centre was also accepted by ICSD. Support of public initiatives and civil society participation in decision making are also part of ICSD's scope, via the setting up of a Public Council and Youth Ecological network.

7. Such regional programmes, as Central Asian Countries Initiative on Land Management (CACILM), Environment and Security for Central Asia, TASIC project on development of National Environmental Strategies for Sustainable Development in Central Asian countries, Chui-Talas IWRM project supported by UNECE, ADB, OSCE and other country based projects in water resources and environment management, significantly enabled the further development of CAI.

8. Under its mandate the Central Asian Regional Environmental Centre (CAREC) plays a supporting role in moving forward of CAI. After the Kiev Conference, CAREC contributed to the sub-regional dialogue between environment protection ministries and agencies, the water management authorities, ministries of education, NGO's, community based organizations as well as the private sector. CAREC has initiated and facilitated more than 150 seminars, round tables and conferences and arranged broad awareness campaigns through the use of TV, radio, papers and printed booklets and posters. CAREC has provided more than 100 CAI-focused grants to Central Asian NGOs through the use of facilities provided by the European Commission.

III. CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

9. Water scarcity and its quality, worsened by ecosystem degradation, and consequent loss of renewable resource productivity and environmentally induced health problems³ are challenges which may cause political and social instability in the entire Central Asia.

10. The challenges and constrains of environmental management in EECCA countries have been accurately presented in the EAP Task Force for EECCA Secretariat's Report "Progress in Environmental Management in EECCA countries"⁴. The majority of these findings are appropriate to Central Asian countries.

11. In addition to those challenges and constrains, it needs to underline that there is still a huge limitation for mainstreaming environmental sustainability and sustainable development in Central Asia, caused primarily by the sectoral approach to the environment and natural resources management, lack of civil society and private sector participation, limited national public funding and almost no private investment. It needs to be mentioned that the high poverty level which is forcing extensive use of raw resources, while an access to them, especially to water resources, were originally scarce is another serious limitation.

12. The key lessons learned after the Kiev Conference are the vitality of the extended multisectoral and multistakeholder partnership; clearly formulated CAI objectives; a clearly developed and logically built program base; increased ownership over CAI by Central Asian countries; a stronger capacity for ensuring sufficient critical mass to the mainstream sustainable development agenda in the sub-region; and the attraction if the donor community interest.

IV. CAI PRIORITIES AFTER BELGRADE

13. Based on the progress achieved and lessons learned after Kiev Conference, and taking into consideration the various environmental challenges and concerns, the need for institutional capacity building and for enabled environmental sustainability, and the renewed objectives for better programme focus areas of CAI, has been agreed on in multistakeholder consultations of Central Asian countries.

³ 'According to WHO estimates, more than 13,000 children under the age of 14 die every year in the pan-European region, most of them in EECCA countries, and the social benefits of having access to safe water supply and sanitation services exceed 13 times the cost of providing those services': -<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/6/19/38152403.pdf>, pg. 23.

⁴ <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/6/19/38152403.pdf>, pgs. 3-4.

14. While renewing the set of objectives and focal areas, it was very important to refer to the political framework established during the two international conferences which have taken place in Central Asia, such as the International UN Conference on Regional Cooperation in Transboundary River Basins (Dushanbe, 2005), and the Central Asian Ministerial Conference, “Enhancing Environmental Cooperation between the European Union and the Central Asian countries” in Almaty, Kazakhstan on April 5-6, 2006.⁵

15. In order to ensure an adequate follow-up to the decisions made at the Kiev Conference and the above conferences, in regard of CAI, and realizing the importance of its further development for Central Asia, the following areas are to be the ‘After Belgrade’ priority focuses of CAI:

16. **Environmental management strengthening.** Still existing a sectoral approach to environmental management, weak environmental management institutions, country development strategies and programs with no visible priority for environmental sustainability account for limited investments into environmental management system, as well as for the further application and dissemination of environmentally sustainable best practices. Therefore, CAI is to focus on:

- (a) The cross-sectoral mainstreaming of environmental sustainability into the national and local development strategies and plans;
- (b) The integration of environmental sustainability procedures and tools, such as Strategic Environmental Assessment, Environmental Impact Assessment and Environmental Audit, into the national legislations requiring their enforcement;
- (c) The harmonisation of national legislations with the countries’ obligations under international environmental conventions;
- (d) The capacity building of the environment management institutions and their personnel;
- (e) Support and facilitation of multisectoral policy dialogue regarding environmental sustainability at sub-regional and national levels.

17. **Increased Role of Civil Society.** The majority of the Central Asian countries joined the Aarhus Convention and undertook an obligation to ensure the access of civil society to environmental information, decision making and justice. Central Asian countries recognise that

⁵ The International UN Conference on Regional Cooperation in Transboundary River Basins (Dushanbe, 2005), where the Central Asian countries taking focus on CAI presented the joint report "Economic Integration – The Major Factor of Sustainable Water Consumption and Safety in Central Asia" and then in Conference Address to heads of the states and international organizations have initiated development of "Partnership Agreement in Central Asia for establishing favourable investment environment to achieve MDGs".

At the Central Asian Ministerial Conference “Enhancing Environmental Cooperation between the European Union and the Central Asian countries” in Almaty, Kazakhstan on April 5-6, 2006 the EU and Central Asian countries have identified following areas of environmental cooperation between them for the period 2007-2013:

- (a) regional aspects of the EU Water Initiative, transboundary waters and the Caspian Sea;
- (b) improved and sustainable management of forests and its resources and indicative actions for the Forest Law Enforcement and Ministerial Governance;
- (c) introduction and further implementation of the Kyoto Protocol mechanisms;
- (d) public awareness through cooperation with civil society and private sector.

Then, parties of the Conference have agreed that the key focus of this enhanced EU environmental cooperation with Central Asia will be on water issues reflecting the importance of water in the Central Asia Initiative for Sustainable Development.

civil society can ensure needed social demand and commission for public and private investment into environmental sustainability. CAI makes a greater focus on:

- (a) Building Central Asian countries' capacity to implement the Aarhus Convention via encouraging development and strengthening national and sub-regional NGO and CBO networks, ensuring the legal and institutional base for their access to environmental decision making, information and justice, and supporting various training programs for them;
- (b) Improving access to ecological information via development of multisectoral information networks, the development of accessible data bases, practicing public monitoring and public awareness campaigns;
- (c) Contributing to civil society mobilisation via the setting up of special grants for NGO's focused on access to environmental information, decision making and justice;
- (d) Supporting civil society participation in existing and developing national, regional and sub-regional environmental and sustainable development programmes and projects;
- (e) Supporting the youth environmental and sustainable development movements at local, national and regional levels, through the extension of their knowledge and skill base.

18. **Promotion of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).** ESD is within the focus of CAI and it should significantly add to an increased environment and sustainable development conscience and knowledge base for the young generation. CAI will support integration of ESD into the system of formal and informal education in Central Asian countries via:

- (a) The support of the development of national ESD plans;
- (b) The development of ESD national standards;
- (c) ESD trainings for various target groups;
- (d) Supporting the development of ESD educational and training materials; and
- (e) Facilitation of ESD sub-regional dialogue and networking for joint activities and information, and best practices exchange.

19. **Coordinated approach in water management.** In order to contribute to the wellbeing of people in the region and to the environmental sustainability, Central Asian countries via CAI will generate the best and most adaptable international and Central Asian practices and will use existing cooperation and partnership platform in the region to consolidate well coordinated efforts for sustainable water management. CAI mainstreams Millennium Development Goals, implementation of European Water Initiatives into national and sub-regional policies, creating transparent and better understood environmental information for cooperation with the donor community. Key priorities of CAI are:

- (a) Improved water quality, water supply and sanitation;
- (b) Conservation and sustainable management of water and wetland ecosystems;
- (c) Integration of water quality standards and harmonization of appropriate national legislations;

- (d) Building of livelihood capacity for sustainable water use; and
- (e) Support of a sub-regional, multistakeholder water dialogue and partnership.

20. **Climate change.** Most Central Asian countries are parties of UNVCCC and its Kyoto Protocol in order to achieve sustainable energetic stability, CAI will focus on:

- (a) Facilitating sub-regional multi-sector sustainable dialogue and partnership towards environmental sustainability;
- (b) Renewable energy promotion and the development of the renewable energy sub-regional market;
- (c) Energy saving and efficiency;
- (d) The reduction of greenhouse gas emissions via the above two measures and reduced emissions of transport and bio-wastes;
- (e) The promotion of reduction, replacement and compensation mechanisms under the Kyoto Protocol; and
- (f) Legal and institutional support for the above activities.

21. **Enabling an environmentally sustainable livelihood.** To ensure local community and private sector interests and contribution to environmental sustainability, particularly in water and energy focus areas, as well as other applicable areas, CAI will promote the livelihood and market value of environmentally sustainable businesses and products via:

- (a) Piloting and showcasing marketable, environmentally sustainable best practices;
- (b) The introduction of fiscal incentives for environmentally sustainable businesses, technologies and products;
- (c) The integration of environmentally sustainable standards of production and services;
- (d) The integration of economically feasible relationships of pricing mechanisms for transboundary pollution of the environment, natural resource and utilities use (heat, electricity, etc.) to ensure environmentally sustainable and self-supporting base of its supply;
- (e) The promotion of payment for ecosystem services;
- (f) The promotion of ecotourism and complementary industries and services; and
- (g) The promotion in facilitation of private sector and community focused multisectoral dialogue in the sub- region, in favour of an environmentally sustainable livelihood and management.

V. CAI IMPLEMENTATION

22. Central Asian countries in favour of CAI coordination and its effective implementation have agreed to set up the CAI Partnership, for membership in which Central Asian governments, NGO's, the private sector and their associations, as well as donor countries and international organisations, are welcomed. The CAI Partnership Dialogue is to be established to discuss CAI prospects, to generate facilities for its programmes and projects, and to review their implementation.

23. The environment ministers of Central Asian countries and the ICSD are forming a policy and practice of the existing sub-regional environment coordination framework and ready to support and promote the CAI Partnership.
