

**Sixth Ministerial Conference
Belgrade, Serbia, 10-12 October 2007**

Item 4. Biodiversity (Roundtable / 4:30-6:30)

Keynote address by Mr. Hussein Baghirov¹

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Azerbaijan unlike the many countries has unbelievably rich and unique biodiversity. At the same time like other countries we have faced with the biodiversity loss problem. Taking into account my six years experience in this field I can tell that only 20-30% of the reasons are conditioned by current circumstances. The sources of the remaining problems are conditioned by long-term historical factors for example such as overgrazing or the factors forming outside of the country as pollution of the transboundary water sources.

Some years ago Mr. Achim Steiner has addressed to me the question "will we be able stop the degradation of biodiversity for 2010". At that time my response was; Yes, we can, if will work hard. And at that stage it sound real. However now I can not give the single-valued answer to that question. I think for this we need to do nearly impossible thing to change human values. And this should be done not only in the developing countries because sometimes even the so called universal human values will not take us to environmental safety. Unfortunately the majorities of the humans have passion and love to the nature which reminds me the love of the gourmand to the good food. This is the love to obtain. I am not sure will it be possible to start giving back what were taking from nature, but may be possible to base our treatment to the nature by oriented not to take so much.

In the first years of independence we were realizing a number of projects based on technical assistance. At that time we were not ready to receive such kind of support and that projects have been only kept on the paper. Nowadays we are ready to get technical assistance and feel the sharp necessity to the application of the European countries' experience. We have learned to set tasks and are more able to finance them however often we have to know which of the way to use.

With understanding of this reality in recent years a tremendous work has been carried out on the expansion of old and creation of new specially protected nature areas in Azerbaijan.

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I am sure, if we take into account the speed of development of specially protected nature areas in Azerbaijan it is likely to rank very high. Within quite a short period, the overall area of strictly protected sites in Azerbaijan was enlarged almost twice.

Currently 10% of national territory has a status of protected nature areas.

(Presently, there are 13 state nature reserves and 21 state nature sanctuaries which encompass all major ecosystems. The overall area of the newly established 6 National Parks is more than 117 thousand hectares.)

The forthcoming establishment of the Shah Dag National Park to protect the ecosystem of the Greater Caucasus mountain range, Samur-Yalama National Park encompassing part of the Caspian Sea to the north of the country as well as Goygol National Park will expand this area up to 12% of the national area.

Of course, we face certain problems, the majority of which we have already solved within the country. But there are problems that we cannot solve without using experiences of others.

One of the real threats to biodiversity is coming from desertification triggered by the extensive development of cattle breeding in the country. These problems in Azerbaijan are one of the alarming issues but how encourage farmers to shift from traditional methods of cattle breeding on extensive grounds to one that is based on a self-confined farmland. It does not look as serious as oil pollution and accepted by society as income creating sector of development.

I have to say, that the intention of the country to protect nature is strong enough to take international loans to save biodiversity of Azerbaijan. Recently, we launched one of the largest sturgeon hatcheries in the Caspian region at a credit of 5 million US dollars provided by the World Bank. Another, large project on establishing a Shah Dag National Park will be launched soon and part of resources is provided as a loan of the World Bank.

Once more I have to stress, that it is hardly possible to solve all the problems linked to biodiversity conservation by efforts of the government only. It is important that all layers of the society take part in this process. One of the priorities in the involvement of public is to raise their awareness and help develop personal attitude to the issue of nature conservation. Therefore, we mainly focus on the development of ecotourism in national parks to raise public awareness about environmental problems by demonstrating rare and unique specimens of landscapes, flora and fauna.

I believe our input into the establishment of six national parks and into the expansion of the existing specially protected areas and creation of new ones over the timeframe between the Kiyev Conference and the present Belgrade Conference is a clear demonstration of our adherence to Kiyev commitments on biodiversity.

Thank you for your attention.