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Statement by Mr. Bo Libert, UNECE Regional Adviser on Environment

at the Donor conference on ASBP-3, 9 December 2010, Almaty

The immediate establishment of a framework for water cooperation in Central Asia after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the beginning of the 1990s was an extremely important decision. The cooperation within IFAS and the ICWC has been a crucial component in the development of the sovereign Central Asian states.

It is natural that with time the national interests of the five countries develop and they are presently diverging in terms of how to use available water. Unfortunately the cooperation framework for water has not developed in pace with these developments. Today the structure for regional cooperation is not effective for dealing with the conflicting positions in the region.

This was recognised by the heads of states in the Presidential declaration from April 2009. The declaration includes a reference to the further improvement of the organizational structures and legislative base of IFAS.

It is clear that IFAS needs to develop in order to remain relevant. So component 4 – Improvement of institutional and legal instruments - is a key component of ASBP-3.

The institutional structure for transboundary water cooperation is an issue dealt with by UNECE in the framework of the UNECE Water Convention. The Water Convention is, as you know, a framework convention that obliges its Parties to conclude basin-wide or other agreements and establish joint bodies on transboundary cooperation. It is natural for us to engage specifically in this area, also in Central Asia. UNECE is already active in several sectors related to transboundary water cooperation – this includes support to the Chu-Talas commission, regional cooperation on dam safety, water quality and information management.

It should be stressed that we are working closely with Parties as well as non-Parties of the Water Convention. As late as this week a seminar was held in Ashgabat in cooperation with Turkmen authorities on the UNECE Water Convention as well as other conventions and

development of IWRM. This meeting was the start of the National Policy Dialogue in Turkmenistan, thus part of the ASBP-3.

In an on-going project funded by the German Government and implemented in cooperation with GTZ, EC IFAS and its member countries, an analysis was made on the challenges in the development of regional water cooperation. (A project report can be found on the EC-IFAS and UNECE websites.) It was concluded that there is a need for:

- Clarification and delineation of responsibilities of the central bodies of IFAS and of the regional commissions - ICWC and ICSD;
- Clarification of mandates and competencies for each regional body and the regional commissions;
- Strengthening the coordinating role of the central authorities of IFAS – the Board and the Executive Committee - and establishing procedures for reporting and interaction between them and the regional commissions;
- Development of cooperation between ICWC and ICSD;
- Improved distribution of locations of regional bodies and their structural units among member-countries; etc.

The continuation of this work will take place in the framework the component 4 of ASBP-3. An expert group representing the IFAS member countries is presently reviewing the options for the development of cooperation. At the start of this work there are diverging views among the countries on the ambition of the changes that need to be considered, but we will know early summer 2011 what would be the realistic options.

An important profile of the ASBP-3 also in this area is the increased understanding of and facilitation of adaptation to climate change.

The component 4 project areas include options for development of cooperation outside the areas of diverging interests: dam safety, capacity building as well as policy development with regard to IWRM, development of broadly available water information. In a situation where some areas for cooperation is characterised by conflicting views, it is important to fuel cooperation where there is a common platform for a constructive dialogue.

We have taken part in the development of ASBP-3, and we commend the programme that is has been developed by EC IFAS truly in dialogue with donors and international organizations. UNECE is ready to continue working with IFAS organizations in the improvement of the water cooperation under component 4, and to contribute with its expertise accumulated under the UNECE Water Convention.