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Geneva

Opportunities for strengthening regional institutional and legal frameworks for the management of transboundary water resources in Central Asia are being discussed today in Almaty. The two-day meeting of the Working Group on Institutional and Legal Strengthening is convened by the Executive Committee of the International Fund for saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) and facilitated by the UNECE under the programme on Regional Dialogue and Cooperation on Water Resources Management in Central Asia, financed by the Government of Germany through GTZ in the framework of the Berlin Water Process.

The process provides support to the implementation of the decisions of the IFAS Summit (28 April 2009, Almaty), where the Heads of Central Asian States expressed their firm commitment to further improve the institutional structure and legal framework for regional water resources management and mandated the Executive Committee of IFAS to develop the new Aral Sea Basin Program for 2011-2015. The decisions of the Summit are an exceptionally important window of opportunity to start real, sustainable progress towards the solution of complex, often controversial issues related to water, energy and environment in Central Asia.

In this process, the UNECE offers an impartial umbrella, in-house expertise and a solid legal basis in the form of the UNECE environmental instruments, in particular the UNECE Water Convention, its institutions and advisory support. The UNECE efforts are part of the broader efforts by the donors' community and key regional and international organizations to provide support to improve the management of water and energy resources and protect the environment in Central Asia.

The Working Group is the first of a series of regional and national meetings designed to elaborate a set of proposals to improve the efficiency of regional cooperation. The proposals will be submitted for approval to the governments of States-members of the IFAS by the end of 2010.

Notes for Editors

The International Fund for saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) was established by five Central Asian states - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – to implement in a coordinated way the practical measures and programs to overcome the impacts of the Aral crises and to improve environmental and socio-economic conditions in Aral Sea basin.

Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH is an international cooperation enterprise for sustainable development with worldwide operations, which supports the German Government in achieving its development-policy objectives. It provides viable, forwardlooking solutions for political, economic, ecological and social development in a globalised world. Working under difficult conditions, GTZ promotes complex reforms and change processes. Its corporate objective is to improve people's living conditions on a sustainable basis.

Berlin Water Process was launched at the first "Water Unites" conference (Berlin, 1 April 2008) by German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier. The Process is an important part of the water and environment pillar of the European Union's Central Asia Strategy. The Transboundary Water

Management in Central Asia Program is implemented by GTZ under the Berlin Water Process to optimize cooperation in the Central Asian water sector and improve the lives of people in the region.

The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) of 1992 aims to strengthen national measures and transboundary cooperation for the protection and ecologically sound management of transboundary surface waters and groundwaters. 35 States and the European Community are Parties to the Water Convention. In Central Asia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are Parties to this instrument.

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