



## Environment and Security Initiative ENVSEC

### **Summary of the Regional Meeting on Environment and Security in the upper Amu Darya River basin between Afghanistan and Tajikistan**

*20-21 November 2007, Kabul*

The regional meeting between Afghanistan and Tajikistan on Environment and Security issues in the upper Amu Darya River basin was held in Kabul on 20 and 21 November 2007.

The meeting was hosted by the National Environmental Protection Agency of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (NEPA) and organized in partnership with ENVSEC organizations (UNDP and UNEP attended and co-facilitated the meeting). The number of meeting participants exceeded 50 people representing governmental, academic, non-governmental and international organizations as well as chiefs of environmental authorities in the northern provinces of Afghanistan.

Please consult the final agenda and list of participants for more details.

The short outline of the meeting presentations and discussions is provided below:

#### **Meeting on the Environment and Security in the upper Amu Darya River Basin**

##### ***Day 1 (20 November 2007): Analysis and mapping of the Environment and Security issues***

The meeting opened with welcoming speeches from the National Environmental Protection Agency of Afghanistan, Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection of Tajikistan, Ministry of Energy and Water of Afghanistan and UNDP Country Office. All speeches expressed the need and support for transboundary cooperation on environmental matters.

Mr. Jafar Javan from UNDP Bratislava Regional Centre gave an overview of ENVSEC partnership and an outline of ENVSEC experiences in Central Asia in general and Ferghana Valley in particular.

Mr. Nickolai Denisov from UNEP/GRID-Arendal outlined the development of the Amu Darya Basin Program under ENVSEC, key issues in the on-going assessment, and noted good

progress in environmental cooperation between Tajikistan and Afghanistan in 2006-2007.

Mr. Zahid Ullah Hamdard from the National Environmental Protection Agency of Afghanistan mentioned that environmental changes in the Amu Darya river basin are dramatic both due to regional factors (water abstraction for irrigation, land use changes, reduction of forests) and global factors (climate change and shrinkage of glaciers, droughts). There is a need for cooperation on policy making, information exchange, and improved nature resource management practices.

Mr. Neimatullo Safarov from the National Biodiversity and Biosafety Center of Tajikistan highlighted the geographic and socio-economic importance of the upper Amu Darya region, particularly the mountains of Pamir and Hindukush as the “water towers” and repositories of rich biodiversity, where environmental changes could affect the whole basin. He underlined the main factors of environmental threats and presented a draft map of Tajikistan with areas under environmental stress and clusters of problems in the context of environment and security.

Following the presentations of national assessment papers from Afghanistan and Tajikistan the floor was opened for questions and answers. In particular, it was suggested by the participants to intensify dialogue and involve downstream countries (Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan); others indicated that upper basin countries (Tajikistan and Afghanistan) are at the beginning of cross-border cooperation in the Amu Darya and involvement of others will be feasible at a later stage. Eventually countries should try to capitalize on the available resources and agree on the rational use of water, considering that demographic and economic growth in the region will lead to more water use and energy consumption.

Mr. Viktor Novikov from UNEP/GRID-Arendal explained the purpose and arrangements of the ENVSEC mapping exercise and participants divided into three work groups, led by experienced local experts and facilitated by the ENVSEC team.

*Group 1: Water resources, energy and land use (leader: Mr. Qasim Naimi):*

Participants noted that the following issues in combination or alone could increase insecurity and in extreme cases lead to threats to stability and to development of society:

- Severe droughts and floods
- Water shortage and reduction of glaciers
- Deforestation
- Erosion (soil, river banks, etc)
- Lack of energy
- Under-developed institutional capacities and lack of funding to tackle the problems
- Poor river basin cooperation and lack of the legal base for it
- Lack of data and information exchange

*Group 2: Industrial pollution and military legacy (leader: Mr. Arif Rasuli):*

The group of experts has prioritized the following clusters of problems:

(i) Industrial activities:

- Pollution of water and the transport of pollution downstream
- Pollution of air and damage to the environment (Baglan cement factory, TadAZ, others)
- Pollution of land in agricultural use: grazing lands, forests, implications for food chain

(ii) Agricultural activities:

- Excessive use of pesticides, herbicides, insecticides and fertilizers leads to their wash out into the rivers and formation of toxic waste sites (Vakhsh site in Tajikistan, smaller sites in Afghanistan)

(iii) Mining without consideration of environmental measures could have many adverse impacts. Aynak Copper Mine, located 30 km south Kabul, will soon constitute the largest mining industry in Afghanistan and create some 12,000 jobs. Ministry of Mines and Industries and Ministry of Economy assured the authorities that production will be environmentally safe.

(iv) Communal water pollution and disease outbreaks. Kokcha River was mentioned as being seriously polluted by waste. In Afghanistan there is absence of sanitation and treatment facilities, even in Kabul. Natural disasters increase the risk of wash-out of waste into rivers, which increases the risk of pollution.

*Group 3: Climate warming, biodiversity loss, desertification (leader: Wali Modaqiq):*

Priority issues in Afghanistan:

- Glacier melting due to climate change;
- Loss of biodiversity (reduction of Marco Polo sheep, snow leopard, endangered birds) due to habitat alteration and uncontrolled hunting;
- Loss of rangelands due to drought;
- Desertification and landslides
- Deforestation due to illegal logging and war

Priority issues in Tajikistan:

- Glacier melting due to climate change;
- Loss of forests due to energy needs in winter time, weakening control and pest attacks
- Land degradation due to improper management, water logging and salinisation
- Pasture degradation due to overgrazing and drought

The Wakhan corridor was mentioned as a globally significant biodiversity area, where conservation will be especially effective when the countries bordering the area cooperate.

In the final session, Mr. Saidahmad Dustov from Tajikistan and Mr. Dad Mohammad Baheer from Afghanistan presented an overview of the national environmental policies, including basic legislation, progress in implementation of international conventions, and policy tools.

***Day 2 (21 November 2007):***

Mr. Anvar Homidov from the Agency on Hydrometeorology of Tajikistan introduced the national environmental monitoring network and highlighted the prospects for cross-border cooperation:

The initial basis for regional cooperation includes:

- Conclusions of the Tajikistan-Afghanistan high level meeting on environmental cooperation (14 July 2006, Dushanbe)
- Protocol on cooperation on water resources between the Ministry of Energy and Water of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and Ministry of Land Melioration and Water Economy of the Republic of Tajikistan (3 August 2007, Dushanbe)

Project opportunities in the field of water resources include:

- water resource management, including joint group of hydrology experts and institutions, hydrometric observations, pollution monitoring and mapping and information exchange
- scientific collaboration on identification of the immediate and long-term risks in the river basin

Mr. Neimatullo Safarov, member of the Interstate Commission on Sustainable Development (ICSD) of Central Asia, presented the ICSD's structure, activities and prospects of cooperation with the relevant institutions of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

Other participants indicated on-going/planned project activities for building synergies:

The EU-sponsored Kunduz River Program (and prospective Kokcha-Panj River Program) supports transition from administrative to river basin water management approach, strengthens good practices in water use, promotes afforestation and combats soil erosion in the upper catchments involving local communities into decision making. There are no river gauging stations in the Afghan part of the Amu Darya; remote sensing is utilized to estimate snow cover and to forecast river flow. Thus, it would be important to study Tajikistan's experience in hydrological forecasting and to establish a system for data exchange. Available hydrological data in Afghanistan date back to 1950-1980s, and, probably, the water situation has changed since then. Hence, it would be very interesting to compare trends and changes.

The USAID-sponsored Afghanistan Biodiversity Support Programme works with NEPA on institutional strengthening and field projects on biodiversity conservation. The transfrontier nature parks in the Pamir-Hindukush mountains could be further supported.

During the roundtable session participants discussed, formulated and agreed upon the priorities for possible cross-border activities and projects and reflected those priorities in the conclusions and recommendations. Country-specific working groups will aim on further developing the work plan for 2008.

Closing the meeting, Mr. Abduvohid Karimov warmly thanked Afghanistan for the great hospitality and wished a prosperous future to its people. H.E. Mostapha Zaher thanked the Tajikistani delegation, as well as UNDP, UNEP and other agencies for their active participation and support and expressed an opinion that such environmental cooperation contributes to peace, sustainable development and confidence-building between the two countries. Mr. Jafar Javan on behalf of ENVSEC ensured the countries of the Initiative's willingness to support them.

## **Meetings with donors and agencies on 18-20 November 2007**

### 1) Meeting with the Delegation of the European Commission (EC) to Afghanistan.

The EU is supporting the Kunduz River Programme in the Amu Darya basin in partnership with the Ministry of Energy and Water of Afghanistan. There may be opportunities for knowledge sharing with Tajikistan and aligning of EC activities with ENVSEC. As Afghanistan is not part of the EU support strategy for Central Asia, the EC office is interested in finding synergies.

### 2) Meeting with the Head of Belgian Diplomatic Representative to Afghanistan.

Annual Belgian assistance to Afghanistan in grants and other forms exceeds ten million Euros. There are no projects on environmental restoration or conservation so far, but projects having concrete impact on people's livelihoods (including environmental dimensions) could be supported.

### 3) Meeting with UNDP Country Office in Afghanistan and UNEP PCAB Kabul office.

UNDP is aligning its assistance with Afghanistan National Development Strategy ANDS (under preparation, will be finalised by mid-2008). Implementation of development projects, including MDGs, is complicated due to capacity constraints at the leading ministries. Regional cooperation within Amu Darya basin falls under cross-cutting themes. Concerning ENVSEC activities, UNDP country office has provided most of the organisational and logistical support for the Kabul meeting and is interested in substantial involvement in supporting further work. UNEP's Kabul Office is building NEPA's capacities on several pillars. It was noted that use should be made of the expertise and potential of the UNEP Kabul Office in ENVSEC work, especially in the context of UNEP's increasing focus on post-conflict reconstruction and conflict prevention.

4) NATO ISAF CIMIC is coordinating non-military activities related to the presence of NATO in Afghanistan and security of operations, including the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). NATO's presence is interested in helping to establish the necessary links for environmental work that may be supported by NATO's Science for Peace Programme and in supporting assessment work of ENVSEC, including cartographic materials.