

High-Level International Conference on Water Cooperation, Dushanbe, 20-21 August 2013

Special Focused Event 'Scenario thinking to enhance water cooperation in the Aral Sea basin', 21 August 2013, 09:00 – 10:30

Opening remarks by Mr Tony Alonzi, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Deputy Regional Representative of the Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia

Convener: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Co-convener: UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy (Contact: Mr Fedor Klimtchouk, Deputy Head)

Dear Participants,

It is a real pleasure for me to welcome you today on behalf of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations to this Special Focused Event 'Scenario thinking to enhance water cooperation in the Aral Sea basin'. As per recommendations of the FAO Regional Conferences for Europe and Central Asia, enhanced regional cooperation for the sustainable management of water resources is a key area for FAO work in the region.

As we all know, the management of the shared regional water resources in the Aral Sea basin is a highly complex process that involves numerous stakeholders across sectors. While discussions on joint water resources management regimes in Central Asia are ongoing, parties have very different views about the principles that govern water allocation. The absence of a shared vision leads to fragmented national and regional policies, with risks of increasing competition over water resources while worsening their degradation. The delayed progress towards development of the regional water resources potential is negatively affecting the performance of critical economic sectors such as agriculture and energy in Central Asia.

In 2012, with the financial support of the Turkish Government through the FAO-Turkish Partnership Programme and contribution of the United States Department, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the

Executive Committee of the International Fund for saving the Aral Sea (EC-IFAS)¹ and the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy in Central Asia (UNRCCA) have jointly implemented the project “Mutually Acceptable Mechanisms on Integrated Use of Water Resources in Central Asia through the Application of the Scenario Approach” (phase 1) to advance water cooperation in the Aral Sea basin.

In this scenario development process, FAO has been providing a neutral forum where government representatives of all Central Asian states and Afghanistan can hold open and fair discussions and prepare for the future. Active participation was also ensured from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs to strengthen the relevance of the scenario set for decision-making purposes.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The project introduced the innovative scenario thinking approach to analyze the highly complex structure of the water-agriculture-energy nexus in Central Asia. ‘Scenario thinking’ helps to see the bigger picture, and provides a framework to engage in dialogue with all stakeholders. This forward-thinking and highly participatory consultation process has proved to have the potential to encourage a systematic thinking and foster mutual understanding.

At the end of the first phase of the project, in collaboration with all partners, a plausible and relevant set of scenario logics was developed for the Aral Sea basin and has been adopted by all participating member-countries. But what is even more important than the development of this scenario set are the ‘process gains’. New insights were gained, ‘common ground’ was expanded and views were aligned among the participants who had opportunities to hear not only the perspectives of the other countries but also the perspectives of the other sectors.

At the end of the last scenario workshop, participants requested the three main organizations (UNRCCA, FAO and EC-IFAS) to continue supporting the policy dialogue on integrated use of water resources in the Aral Sea Basin and

¹ *This project was directly supporting the implementation of the Aral Sea Basin Program for the period of 2011-2015 (ASBP-3) which was endorsed by the Heads of States of Central Asia in their Joint Statement at the IFAS summit in of April 28 2009.*

share recommendations /ideas for the development of the next phase of the project. The organization of the Special Focused Event is a positive response to this request.

In scenario thinking, the test of a good scenario is not whether it is right or wrong but whether it leads to better decision. Therefore, this process cannot be completed without a second phase aiming at applying the scenario set for improved decision-making and we invite you all to join us for strengthening the policy dialogue and regional cooperation among the riparian countries.

Let me wish a very fruitful event today, supported in this process by the excellent team of experts who have already been facilitating the first phase of the project.