



**THE EMBASSY OF THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN
TO THE KINGDOM OF BELGIUM
MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN
TO THE EUROPEAN UNION
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PRESS-RELEASE

5 May, 2005

ARAL SEA CRISIS – GLOBAL TRAGEDY OF THE PRESENT

On the threshold of the XXI century mankind collided with grand ecological problems among which the Aral Sea crisis when in a generation's slight whole sea disappeared, the sea which was a source of vital people's activity for many centuries and provided mature-and-climate balance thought Central Asia.

The presentation entitled "Aral Sea Crisis – Global Tragedy of the Present" was held in the European Parliament on 20 April, 2005. The presentation was organized by the Mission of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the



European Union in cooperation with Dr.Charles Tannock, MEP from the United Kingdom and the Delegation of the European Parliament on relations with countries of Central Asia.

The presentation was attended by the Members of the European Parliament, representatives of the European Commission, members of the Diplomatic Corps, a number of Belgian and European NGO and humanitarian organizations.

Speaking on the subject of the presentation, Dr. Charles Tannock noted in his speech that the Aral Sea, once the fourth largest inland body of water in the world, in the past few years has gained global attention as one of the greatest man-made natural disasters in the world.

Because of shrinkage and drying up, Aral Sea has now in places retreated more than 100 km from its original boundaries. In the late 1980s the salinity reached 23%. To make matters worse shrinkage of the Aral Sea is resulting in growing concentrations of chemical pesticides and natural salts; these toxic substances are then blown from the increasingly exposed lake bed and contribute to desertification and water pollution in surrounding areas and far beyond.

The most significant factor of the Aral Sea crisis is the health of the people with significant rises in mortality and hospitalization rates.

Mr. Ch. Tannock said that the European Union is a significant committed donor to the Aral Sea Stabilization but still the long awaited major international effort is yet to get underway.

Dr. Ona Juknevičienė, MEP from Lithuania, Chairwoman of Central Asia Delegation, said that Aral Sea Crisis has negative impact on the quality of lives of tens of millions inhabitants of Aral Sea basin states. It is an enormous tragedy an extent of which is hard to comprehend.



Dr. Ona Juknevičienė said that Aral Sea crisis is as a complex multi-layer problem. First and foremost, it is an ecological tragedy. Misuse of water

resources resulted in disappearance of flora and fauna, lowered biodiversity, desertification and dust storms throughout the region. It led to increased contamination of Aral Sea from leached salts and agricultural chemicals. Furthermore, shrinking of the sea resulted in climate change, because a natural barrier making the temperature milder was gone. Moreover, clouds of salt and dust could change the climatic picture in a much wider part of the world.

Aral Sea crisis is intersectoral problem touching ecology, economics, energetics and agriculture; therefore a right balanced policy mix is needed. Above this, it is an international issue and has to be and is solved internationally. Multidimensional nature of the problem leads to searching broad partnerships for solutions.

It is clear that the vicious circle of ecological and health degradation can be broken only through international efforts. Need to save what is left of this internationally important water body and revitalize it has already brought together many international players.

The lack of funds and co-ordination among the Aral basin nations and the donors involved in the region are among the major barriers for moving ahead.

Dr. Ona Juknevičienė concluded her speech by saying that it is vital to increase financial and technical support from the European Union and other international donors in order to revitalize the Aral Sea basin.



Mrs. Farrida Abdurahimova, Senator of Oliy Majlis (Parliament) of the Republic of Uzbekistan and deputy mayor of Tashkent city, visiting Belgium, informed the participants of the event on activity of new two-chamber parliament of Uzbekistan on ecologic problems and called European colleagues to cooperation to tackle Aral Sea crisis by joint efforts.

H.E. Dr. Vladimir Norov, Ambassador of Uzbekistan to Belgium and Head of the Mission of Uzbekistan to the EU, said that the Republic of Uzbekistan and other countries of the region on the path of sustainable development are facing challenges and threats related to the problems ecology and the main ecological problem of the region is problem of drying up of Aral Sea.

He said that despite the difficulties of transition period the Government of Uzbekistan is undertaking the program of concrete measures on saving and rehabilitation of biological variety, protection of gene pool of the Aral Sea region, health and creation of worthy living conditions for people of Karakalpakstan, the northern part of Uzbekistan, which is situated in the epicenter of this ecological disaster.



Ambassador V. Norov noted that the problem of Aral Sea goes by its roots into remote past, but took threatening scales in last decades.

He also noted that it was also established on the basis of geographical, archeological and other studies, carried out during last years, that Aral Sea for the period of its existence was drying up several times and filled by water again—this process had a cyclic character and it is extremely difficult to establish causes of this phenomenon.

The Aral Sea crisis is the real illustration of the consequences that could arise in other parts of the world due to increasing lack of fresh water.

That is why we welcome the European Union Water Initiative, said Ambassador V. Norov, - which was launched at the World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002 and do hope that within the

realization of this initiative the serious attention will be paid to problems of Aral Sea.

Ambassador V.Norov draw attention of the audience to the fact that the opening of the European Commission Delegation in Uzbekistan will not only promote the realization of the EU projects aimed at sustainable development in the region but would also serve to spread the policy and experience of the European Union integration all over this strategically important region of the world.



The film, made by Charity Social Fund on Genofund protection of Aral region, on ecologic and social consequences of Aral Sea disaster was demonstrated to the participants of presentation.

The presentation was continued by performance of Ensemble from Karakalpakstan

entitled “Baqshi & Zhirau” where musicians and singers presenting the songs from dastans (epic ballades) and folklore Karakalpak folklore songs.

The Members of the European Parliament Mr. Struan Stevenson from the UK, Mr. Jozef Pinior from Poland, Dr. Cristina Gutierrez-Cortines from Spain, Armin Lashet from Germany, interviewed by Uzbek television, stressed on the importance



of the presentation, dedicated to Aral Sea crisis, which took place in the European Parliament and underlined that problem needs coordinated international efforts and revival of Aral requires increase of financing and technical support of the European Union and other international donors.

English composer and specialist in musical art Stephia Wishart attended the concert and commented on the performance and vocal skills of Bakhbergen Sirimbetov, who presented a solo vocal item, accompanying himself on a unique stringed instrument - kobyz.

"As a specialist in music I feel delighted, as this was the first time I saw kobyz, and even had the chance to try and play this instrument," said Vishart. "An instrument, such as kobyz, existed in Europe in the Middle Ages. However, both the instrument and the traditions of playing it have been lost. The performance of Karakalpaki artists was very memorable and cognitive for European music-lovers, and once again proved the importance of cultural exchange between the countries and nations," she added.