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**ECOLOGICAL PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF  
ENSURING WATER SECURITY**

At the High-Level Plenary Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals in September 2010, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov noted that in view of continued shrinking of the Aral Sea and humanitarian disaster around it, the most important objective to date is conservation of the environmental and biological fund in Priaralie, mitigation of harmful impact of the Aral Sea disaster on environment and, the most important, on lives of hundreds of thousands and millions of the people there. The Priaralie zone receives water from the two main rivers – Amudarya and Syrdarya; any reduction in inflow from these rivers disturbs critically the ecological balance, which is subtle as it is, in the whole vast region<sup>1</sup>.

Recent developments convince on topicality of the warning by the Leader of our country.

The Priaralie disaster is a consequence of the ill-considered policy of the former Soviet regime concerning the regulation of natural flow in the Central Asian rivers - Amudarya and Syrdarya - in connection with the construction of huge water-engineering systems in the upper reaches of transboundary rivers in the 1970-1980s.

Under the conditions of global climate change, the tendency of increasing frequency of natural disasters, which in combination with human activity cause anthropogenic disasters of ever unprecedented scale, has become an indisputable fact.

Given this, the intention of the countries located upstream the main rivers of the region to use transboundary water resources in violation of adopted international rules gives rise to great concerns.

The project of Roghun Hydropower Plant with a dam 340 meters high, which has no parallel worldwide, is such an example. Construction of this structure would aggravate the already difficult environmental situation in the Central Asian region and would result in many socio-ecological and humanitarian disasters.

It is appropriate to recall that in August 2009 the whole world community was shaken by the technogenic accident at the largest hydraulic structure in Russia - the Sayano-Shushensk Hydropower Plant, which anew placed the issue of the appropriateness of building such huge structures on large watercourses and the risks related to their operation on the agenda.

The accident showed once again that it is impossible to guarantee the security of such gigantic facilities and forecast their future behavior. Moreover, the technological backwardness of the projects worked out as early as during the Soviet times is doubtless. Environmental risks related to construction and operation of such structures force us to over and over raise the question of their reasonability, when alternative ways to solve the energy problems exist.

Taking into consideration these circumstances, the World Bank announced a tender for feasibility study and environmental impact assessment of the Rogun Hydropower Plant project. Eminent companies and firms took part in that tender.

We assume that this expert assessment will be objective, transparent, comply with international law norms, and involve all concerned parties.

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<sup>1</sup> Speech of President of the Republic of Uzbekistan I.A. Karimov at the High-Level Plenary Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals. Remarks and comments of the representatives of foreign social and political circles. – Tashkent. «Uzbekiston», 2010, p.102

At the same time, according to a Tajikistan's official, technical parameters of the Roghun Hydropower Plant will not be changed even after the completion of the expert assessment: in other words, the project will keep all parameters of the dam height that cause concerns. This means that the Tajikistan official in fact a priori rejects the conclusions of the international expert examination, thereby casting doubt on its competence and the interests of the neighboring countries and of international community, which have insisted on the performance of objective and comprehensive analysis of the hydropower plant project on transboundary watercourse.

It is necessary to emphasize that the matter is not the water resources in the region countries in general, but the use of transboundary rivers and watercourses, i.e. resources of the rivers that historically served the vital needs of the countries located in the river basins.

Indeed, these problems cannot be "solved single-handed". Only all countries in the Aral Sea must together decide what and where can be built. Currently, this implies the interests of the whole population of Central Asia. The rivers are not the property of a single state. Hence, all decisions on the use of these rivers' flows, including those related to building hydropower facilities, must consider these interests without fail.

Otherwise, this may still more aggravate the situation in water supply in the lower reaches of the Amudarya and Syrdarya rivers and the ecological disaster of the Aral Sea.

The recent catastrophe in Japan revealed vulnerability of population against natural and anthropogenic disasters even in such technologically advanced country. Huge destructions, when the whole human settlements that were in the zone of the strong earthquake and consequent tsunami have vanished from the face of the earth, demonstrated what tragic consequences the natural disasters can bring. The lessons of that tragedy should teach us take into consideration the risks of potential natural and anthropogenic disasters and take preventive measures to reduce these risks rather than create new threats for their occurrence.

The questions raised by us are of vital importance for population in Uzbekistan and the whole region. The actions related to recommencement of the Roghun Hydropower Plant have caused a well-grounded anxiety of the country's society which supports clear position of Uzbekistan on transboundary river use.

Given the above-stated, we adhere to well-defined principles, namely:

1. The use of water resources of transboundary rivers in Central Asia must necessarily take into account the interests of 50 million people living the region.
2. No action taken on these transboundary rivers must have negative consequences on stability of existing ecological and water balance in the region.
3. The effective international legal framework on water use and environment must be the basis for building efficient system of joint use of transboundary rivers.
4. The right of any of the parties for implementation of projects related to use of transboundary rivers, including construction of hydraulic structures, shall not be rejected given that it is subjected to thorough, independent technical, economic and environmental expert assessment on the basis of openness and full awareness of all parties concerned.
5. Projects must be implemented on the basis of constructive approach and trade-offs, when the interests of other concerned countries are not infringed upon and the following two indispensable conditions are assured: a) avoid reduction of flow in watercourse for downstream countries; b) avoid breach of the ecological balance and security in the region.

We are certain that only joint efforts will enable preventing the disruption of the ecological and water balance in Central Asia, contribute not only to guaranteed and sustainable water supply for population, but also to environmental safety in the region.

