

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to speak.

I represent the Executive Committee of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea, and I would like to focus on the problem of the Aral Sea and water use in Central Asia.

Undoubtedly, the Aral Sea crisis is the result of the use of water resources in the region without environmental consequences.

The process of drying out of the sea started since 60-ies of the last century as a result of thoughtless regulation of major transboundary rivers in the region - Syr Darya and Amu Darya rivers, by which in the past years the Aral Sea annually have received about 56 cubic km of water. Significant growth of population and urbanization, intensive land development, construction of large hydraulic and irrigation facilities on the tributaries of the sea in the past created the conditions for the drying of the Aral Sea.

Over the past 50 years the sea area has reduced by 8 times, the volume of water has decreased by more than 13 times. In some parts of the sea the level of salinity has increased dramatically and now exceeds the average level of salinity of the World Ocean by more than 10 times.

Today, sand and salt "Aralkum" desert with area of more than 5.5 million hectares was formed in place of the dried part of the sea. Annually more than 75 million tons of dust and toxic salts rise into the atmosphere and carry by the winds up to 400 km.

All these processes have detrimental impact on human health and cause intensive degradation of flora and fauna in the Aral Sea area.

As a result of the decline of fisheries, livestock, reduction of pastures and decreasing the productivity of lands, tens of thousands of people lost their traditional livelihoods.

Of course, the IFAS and the countries of the region are taking significant steps to improve the situation. At present Uzbekistan chairs the Fund and is making efforts to improve the environmental situation in the Aral Sea area.

In particular, planting the forests on the dried bottom of the sea and creating the local ponds in the delta of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers are carried out in order to fix the moving sands and reduce dust transfer.

Taking into account the urgency of these issues, in October last year in Urgench city in Uzbekistan the Government of Uzbekistan in cooperation with the Executive Committee of

the Fund organized an international conference on the environmental problems of the Aral Sea Basin.

On the basis of lessons learned from the crisis of the Aral Sea I would like to draw some conclusions related to water use in the region:

Firstly, the Central Asian countries during the use of water resources in the region must take into account the needs of the environment and not to reduce the volume of water flowing into the Aral Sea.

Secondly, it is necessary to develop further cooperation on use of transboundary watercourses. It should be take into account the interests of all countries of the basin, rational and reasonable use of water resources of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers.

In this context, it is proposed to strengthen the activities of existing regional body - the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination and its basin organizations on the Syr Darya and Amu Darya rivers.

Thirdly, for the countries of the region it is proposed to develop and widely apply the principles of the integrated water resources management in the region, which is the most important tool to achieve sustainable water use in the region.

In conclusion, taking this opportunity I would like to call all international organizations and donors, in particular the OSCE, to render assistance the countries of Central Asia and IFAS in the implementation of current projects aimed at reducing the negative impact of the drying out of the Aral Sea and improving the efficiency of water resources use.

Thank you for your attention.