

EF.DEL/9/07  
23 January 2007

ENGLISH  
Original: RUSSIAN

**STATEMENT BY KYRGYZSTAN AT PART I OF THE  
FIFTEENTH MEETING OF THE OSCE ECONOMIC AND  
ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM: “KEY CHALLENGES TO ENSURE  
ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY AND SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT IN THE OSCE AREA: LAND DEGRADATION, SOIL  
CONTAMINATION AND WATER MANAGEMENT”**

Vienna, 22 and 23 January 2007

**Session II — Environmental governance, in particular as it affects land  
degradation and soil contamination**

Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Distinguished participants in the Fifteenth OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum,

Permit me to welcome you on behalf of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic and the State Agency for Environmental Protection and Forestry to what is such an important meeting for all of us to discuss land degradation issues. I should also like to express my gratitude for the invitation to take part in this Forum.

I should like to take the opportunity to mention the role of the OSCE in the Environment and Security process. Our agency is engaged in active co-operation with OSCE experts. A number of projects aimed at eliminating environmental threats are being carried out in our country with the support of the OSCE.

Let me now turn to the main topic of my report and shed some light on land degradation problems in the Kyrgyz Republic.

Slide No. 1

The Kyrgyz Republic encompasses part of the Tien Shan and Pamir mountain ranges and much of its territory is comprised of mountain ecosystems, which cover some 90 per cent of the country's area. Approximately 14 per cent of the population lives in high-altitude regions (more than 1,500 metres above sea level) and mountains dominate all aspects of the country's life: economic, social, ecological and cultural. Some 90 per cent of Kyrgyzstan's agricultural land can be described as being vulnerable to desertification.

Land degradation processes are the product of both man-made and natural factors, and a combination of the two. The main land degradation processes that Kyrgyzstan is faced with include soil erosion, salinization and waterlogging, chemical pollution and loss of vegetation. The degradation of natural resources is the result of the specific geophysical and climatic

conditions in each zone, which are in turn aggravated by excessive and inappropriate exploitation of the fragile natural environment. The intensity of erosion is due, above all, to a washing away of the soil surface, the silting up of irrigation systems and destructive agricultural operations on steep slopes.

Aside from the man-made and natural factors that are putting pressure on the environment, processes such as land degradation are rooted in changes in the way the rural population makes a living that stem from Kyrgyzstan's socio-economic and political development over the past ten years. The transition from a centrally planned economy to an open market economy after 1990 drastically altered the structure of ownership of resources. This raised critical questions about the management of land resources and land-use practices in the region. The problems facing our country include over-use and improper land management, which contribute to further land degradation.

The high costs associated with reaching remote pasturelands have seriously increased pressure on grazing resources around settlements and villages, and sparse vegetation along river banks is endangered because pasturelands are taken out of rotation during the long winter months when they provide little in the way of grass for grazing. This also interferes with natural forest regeneration processes and reduces water collection capacity, and all these factors ultimately have had an adverse effect on agriculture as well.

The break-up of agricultural co-operatives forced a large proportion of the local population to go back to farming without the requisite agricultural know-how and without the capital needed for financing their operations. This led to the inappropriate and frequently destructive use of agricultural land. The inevitable decline in crop rotation, a lack of proper farming equipment, excessive irrigation and a reduction in the use of mineral fertilizers resulted in falling soil fertility and led to a loss of the land's productivity.

Land degradation is a serious and widespread problem in Kyrgyzstan today, with 88 per cent of all agricultural land classified as subject to land degradation and affected by desertification processes.

More than 40 per cent of agricultural land has already been degraded. A total of 1.36 million hectares are under cultivation, and of this figure 60 per cent has been affected by water and wind erosion. Almost 2,000 hectares of land has been contaminated by hazardous radioactive materials with a long half-life, while more than 200,000 hectares have residual chemicals present in the soil. The area of land potentially vulnerable to erosion represents 85 per cent of the country's territory, which is the result of its mountainous topography. In the majority of the country's regions the humus content has declined by 20–45 per cent in soils under cultivation compared to soils that have not been farmed. The area of salinated and waterlogged land in flat irrigation zones is increasing.

Slide No. 2 illustrates current trends in the principal types of land degradation and the condition of the country's land resources.

The main reason for the degradation of pasture ecosystems is unregulated overgrazing. The average productivity of pasturelands has now dropped to 40 per cent. The established procedure for the leasing of pastureland, in which remote pasturelands are under the control of provincial authorities, pasturelands being used intensively are under the control of district authorities, and only pasturelands near villages remain in the hands of the actual

livestock owners, is disrupting the practice of moving livestock to remote grazing areas and leading to the degradation of pastureland ecosystems.

According to land-use registry and monitoring data, vast areas of agricultural land are in a sub-standard condition today. There is progressive salinization and sodium contamination, waterlogging and swamping. Significant areas are subject to wind and water erosion and they are littered with rocks, which reduces their fertility. As a result, local government authorities at all levels have started to make frequent proposals calling for large tracts of high-value land to be reclassified as less valuable land.

The area of salinated soils has increased by almost 1 per cent compared to 1990 and has reached 1.2 million hectares. The occurrence of salinated soils in Kyrgyzstan is tied to the widespread presence of various salt-bearing sediments, as well as mineralized ground water at shallow depths.

The soil improvement status of land in the Republic requires the implementation of a range of measures aimed at the reclamation of salinated, sodium-affected and swamped land, employing methods that include management, agro-chemical, hydraulic engineering, reclamation and chemical treatment techniques.

In this connection, the country is faced with the following priority tasks (Slide No. 3):

- Construction and upgrading of collection and drainage systems with the aim of lowering the level of mineralized ground water;
- Widespread introduction of a range of desalination measures;
- Extensive field-levelling work using ploughing techniques or the planting of protective rows of crops, depending on the soil reclamation conditions;
- Introduction of sophisticated irrigation methods and equipment;
- Application of gypsum from local sources and industrial waste products on sodium-affected soils;
- Proper organization of the network of inter-farm water collection systems in order to avoid the discharge of mineralized drainage water onto the fields of lower-lying farms.

We should mention that Kyrgyzstan is classified as a region that is particularly threatened by erosion. Eroded land covers an area of 5.3 million hectares, which represents 50 per cent of the total land available for agriculture.

There are two main types of erosion in the country: wind erosion and water erosion.

The effects of water erosion are such that each year the country's agricultural output falls far short for what it could be and therefore, taking into account local conditions, each farm needs to tailor its own approach to employing the simplest and most common methods for combating soil erosion.

For all practical purposes, most of the country is subject to the effects of wind erosion. Soils become coarser and sandier as a result of wind erosion and organic matter and nutrients are lost.

In this connection, anti-erosion efforts should be an integral part of the management of agriculture, forestry, industry and other commercial operations. Improper planning and implementation of anti-erosion measures are responsible for thousands of hectares of land being taken out of production in the mountain valleys and high-elevation pastures of Kyrgyzstan.

Detrimental processes that are occurring need to be identified promptly in order to combat desertification and land degradation, which will require an increase in monitoring work. In this connection, all land should be subject to monitoring, regardless of its form of ownership, the controlling government authority, the purpose for which it is being used, its legal status and the nature and duration of its use.

We should mention that there is essentially no system in place in the country now for monitoring the status of land, and therefore the well-organized, systematic monitoring of the condition of land should be considered an essential requirement for the effective management of land resources.

State supervision is one of the components of effective land management. The main task of State supervision of land use and conservation should be to ensure the strict compliance by all land users, regardless of their form of ownership, with the requirements of the land laws in force and to see that land is used in accordance with methods and practices that maintain soil fertility and that prevent land degradation and desertification and unsustainable and ineffective land use.

State supervision (Slide No. 4) of land conservation should focus on:

- Sustainable use and conservation of all categories of land, regardless of its form of ownership and commercial status;
- Implementation of a package of measures aimed at the restoration and preservation of soil fertility; protection of land against pollution by hazardous materials, salinization and swamping; combating weeds and erosion, etc.;
- Timely and complete restoration of land productivity;
- Planting of forest belts to protect fields, as well as vegetation to safeguard against erosion, torrential mudslides and landslides, and to reinforce banks and gullies;
- Expansion and restoration of forested areas, particularly in water conservation zones.

As a representative of the national government agency that is responsible for environmental security and forestry management issues, I should like to mention the special role played by forests in preventing land degradation.

In spite of the fact that the Kyrgyz Republic is classified as a lightly forested region, with forests covering just 4.32 per cent of the country's total area, forests are of great

ecological importance in global processes involving the regulation of environmental conditions and the prevention of adverse climate change.

In accordance with the Forest Code of the Kyrgyz Republic, all of the forests in the country, which are so valuable, have been granted an exclusive conservation status, which is meant primarily to promote environmental safety, public health and hygiene and other goals related to soil conservation, the prevention of torrential mudslides, water conservation and so forth.

Recognizing that measures to improve the condition of land resources are vital and must be adopted, the Kyrgyz Republic endorsed the Central Asian Countries Initiative for Land Management (CACILM). This initiative is an innovative approach to international co-operation among donors that is meant to provide support for the development and implementation of a framework programme at the national level for the purpose of elaborating comprehensive and integrated approaches to combating desertification through sustainable management of land and water resources.

In November 2006 the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic adopted the Framework National Programme for the Sustainable Management of Land Resources, which is intended to prevent and reduce the scale of desertification and land degradation in the country. Implementation of this programme will require efforts both on the part of our State and the global community.

In conclusion, I should like to point out (Slide No. 5) that environmental security issues have been included among the priorities of our National Development Strategy up to 2010, in recognition of the fact that environmental security is one of the elements of the country's national security and sustainable development.

In addition (Slide No. 6), our agency has prepared a draft of a new version of the Conceptual Framework for Environmental Security, in which land degradation and water resource management issues are treated as priorities.

The implementation of measures outlined in the National Development Strategy and the Conceptual Framework for Environmental Security will not be possible without the participation of all of the interested parties, the private sector and the public, and without the necessary support from the international community.

Thank you for your attention.