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**STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF THE
REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN AT THE MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUCNIL**

29 July 2010

**In response to the statement by Mr. Sagit Ibatullin,
Chairman of the Executive Committee of the International Fund for
Saving the Aral Sea**

Mr. Chairperson,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The roots of the Aral Sea problem go back a long way, but this problem began to take on a threatening scale in the 1960s. An increasing population and the growing need for water, the intensified opening up of new lands, the further development of irrigated farming and repeated years with little rainfall created the conditions for one of the greatest global environmental disasters in recent history – the drying up of what was once one of the most beautiful bodies of water on our planet. The Aral Sea is dying before the eyes of all humanity. History has seen nothing like this before.

Over the last 50 years there has been a fourfold reduction in the area covered by the Aral Sea's waters, the volume of water has decreased by a factor of ten and its salinity level has increased tenfold.

We are all witnesses to how the Aral Sea region has been relentlessly engulfed by the growing desert. Not only the regions around the shrinking sea – the Kzyl-Orda oblast of Kazakhstan, the Dashkhovuz oblast of Turkmenistan, and the Republic of Karakalpakstan and the Khorezm, Navoiy and Bukhara oblasts of Uzbekistan – but also the entire Central Asian region is faced with a constant environmental risk threatening the quality of life, health and, most importantly, the gene pool of the children and the rest of the population living there.

A water supply deficit, a reduction in the quality of drinking water, soil degradation, a dramatic reduction in biodiversity, climatic changes as a result of an increasingly hazy atmosphere and the possibly associated reduction in the size of the Pamir and Tyan-Shan glaciers where a considerable portion of the region's river flows begin – this is just a short list of the results of the Aral Sea's demise.

Today it is perfectly clear that a difficult set of environmental, climatic, socio-economic and demographic problems of a global scale has emerged in the Aral Sea region.

In a situation that, according to the experts, has far-reaching dangerous consequences for the planet it is becoming ever clearer that it will be impossible to solve this problem without joint efforts co-ordinated with the international community and, first and foremost, the institutions of the United Nations.

It was not without reason that while visiting the Aral Sea during a trip to Uzbekistan in April of this year the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, referred to the dying sea as “one of the worst environmental disasters in the world”.

As you know, in March of this year the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) marked the 17th anniversary of its inception. If we are to sum up some of the results of its work, the Fund’s undisputed achievement is that it has been able to draw the attention of the global public, the governments of many countries and a host of international institutions to the Aral Sea problem.

With the active support and participation of the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Global Environment Facility and various international organizations and individual countries, quite a number of projects are currently being implemented with the aim of improving the unfavourable situation in the region that is threatening the gene pool of the population living there.

The fact that IFAS was accorded observer status in the United Nations General Assembly in 2008 opens up new possibilities for its work at a global level.

An international conference on the Aral Sea held in March 2008 in Tashkent at Uzbekistan’s initiative imparted a significant impulse to the broad-based consideration of this acute problem in an international format.

The forum resulted in the adoption of the Tashkent Declaration and Action Plan providing for the implementation of projects costing a total of around 1.5 billion United States dollars to mitigate the serious effects of the Aral disaster.

In the last ten years alone over one billion dollars have been spent in Uzbekistan on the implementation of the aforementioned projects and programmes, including foreign loans, technical assistance and grants amounting to 265 million dollars.

With respect to the need to draw up a new agreement on IFAS and its charter, something that you mentioned in your statement, it should be noted that Uzbekistan considers this to be advisable and is in favour of continuing work on the basis of existing documents with the possible inclusion of additions to help improve IFAS’s activities.

Thank you for your attention.