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Sustainable development

International cooperation and coordination for the human and ecological rehabilitation and economic development of the Semipalatinsk region of Kazakhstan

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted in compliance with the request made by the General Assembly in its resolution 63/279. It provides a status report on the human and ecological rehabilitation, and economic development of the region surrounding Semey, Kazakhstan.

* A/66/150.

I. Introduction

1. This report outlines progress made towards accelerating the development of the Semipalatinsk area during the period 2008-2011, through programmes and actions of the Government of Kazakhstan and the international community, including United Nations agencies.
2. The year 2011 marks the twentieth anniversary of the closing of the Semipalatinsk nuclear testing site, an important and highly symbolic statement against nuclear weapons testing. The nuclear tests in the polygon were stopped by a Presidential decree signed in August 1991. President Nazarbayev and the people of Kazakhstan deserve great credit for closing the Semipalatinsk test site in 1991 and for dismantling and removing the nuclear weapons left on Kazakh soil. The establishment of the nuclear-weapons-free zone in Central Asia and the designation of 29 August as the International Day against Nuclear Tests are testimony to Kazakhstan's commitment to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.
3. The decades of testing at the Semipalatinsk site had severe humanitarian, social, economic and environmental effects. The Semipalatinsk polygon hosted almost a quarter of the more than 2,000 nuclear test explosions carried out since 1945. Only after the 1991 closure could the full effect of the tests be explored.
4. The General Assembly has identified the Semipalatinsk testing site as potentially having a detrimental effect on human lives, health and the environment in the region, and it adopted six resolutions between 1997 and 2009 calling on the international community to render assistance to rehabilitate the environmental, social, economic and humanitarian sectors in the region.
5. Development of the vast area surrounding the polygon has been hampered. There remain uncertainties today about the direct impact of the testing, but also a general fear about the ecology. There is a need for better communication about the development potential of the region, and a better coordinated programme of targeted support.
6. The Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan has made significant contributions to the rehabilitation of the Semey region through a special social protection law and a variety of programmes. The amount of national aid to Semey for the period 1999-2010 amounted to approximately KZT 68 billion. That was complemented by grant support from the international community totalling \$15.5 million.
7. The General Assembly, by its resolution 63/279, took note of the contributions provided by the organizations of the United Nations system, Member States and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as the role of the Government. In the same resolution, the General Assembly called upon the international community to continue to support Kazakhstan in the rehabilitation of the region. Such support would include facilitation of the Kazakhstan national programme on addressing the problems of the former Semipalatinsk nuclear testing ground in a comprehensive manner. The Assembly also requested the Secretary-General to report at its sixty-sixth session on progress made.
8. The present report accordingly summarizes the actions undertaken since 2009 by the Government of Kazakhstan, the United Nations system and the international community in the Semipalatinsk region.

II. Economic and social conditions

9. The Human Development Index of Kazakhstan is 0.714, which gives the country a rank of 66 out of 169 countries with comparable data. Kazakhstan is rated by the World Bank as an upper middle income country.¹ It enjoys macroeconomic stability achieved through oil and minerals exploitation and reforms in social, monetary and credit policy, land relations and private sector development. The economic and social institutions of Kazakhstan have been developing rapidly since independence. Kazakhstan has already achieved some of the Millennium Development Goals, including on poverty reduction, access to primary education and promotion of women's rights, and the Government has made further commitments under a Millennium Development Goal Plus agenda. These comprise expanded targets for Millennium Development Goals that have already been achieved in Kazakhstan.

10. Despite the achievements, the 2010 Millennium Development Goals report identified social and economic indicators that still require special attention from the Government. Although Kazakhstan has made some progress in the reduction of income poverty, for example, there is still a risk of poverty for a considerable proportion of the population who currently live near the poverty line.

11. East Kazakhstan, where the territories of the former Semipalatinsk test site are mainly located, is an economically diverse region with a strong potential for industrial and innovative growth. However, a higher than average portion of the population there has an income below the subsistence minimum (8.4 per cent compared to 6.5 per cent at the national level). According to the 2010 Millennium Development Goals report, the levels of rural poverty are almost twice as high as urban poverty levels in Kazakhstan, and 45 per cent of the East Kazakhstan population is rural.

12. In 2010, the East Kazakhstan region experienced the second highest level of infant mortality nationwide (22.72 deaths per 1,000 live births). As compared to the country-level data, the region had more infant deaths resulting from asphyxia and infections.

13. East Kazakhstan is a region with one of the lowest life expectancy levels in the country (67.2 years; 61.6 in men and 73.0 in women), low birth rates (16 per 100 people), and one of the highest crude mortality rates (11 per 1,000 population, in 2009).

III. Institutional framework for assistance to the Semipalatinsk region

14. Since the last report to the General Assembly (A/63/659), the Government of Kazakhstan has set clearer priorities for the Semey region. It has enacted a plan for the social and economic development of the city of Semey for 2009-2012, and the development programmes of Eastern Kazakhstan and Semey for 2011-2015.

¹ Gross national income (GNI) per capita in 2010 constituted \$7,440; see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/kazakhstan>.

15. A joint initiative of the Government of Kazakhstan and United Nations agencies is under way. It builds on the strategic development plan of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2020 and other national programme documents, and has been integrated into the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for the Republic of Kazakhstan 2010-2015.

IV. Government programmes for the Semipalatinsk region

16. During the reporting period, the Government of Kazakhstan developed a number of ministerial programmes aimed at resolving the problems in the Semey region. A programme of the Ministry of Economy and Budget Planning for 2009-2010 put forth an ambitious range of activities, many of which were subsequently included in the governmental programme for 2010-2020, its implementation plan, and the development programme for 2011-2015.

17. Among the programmes continued is the Zhasyl Damu (Green development) programme, implemented by the Ministry of Environmental Protection. It incorporates the following activities:

(a) Optimization of public administration in the territories and facilities of the Semipalatinsk nuclear testing site;

(b) Ensuring radiation security, rehabilitation of the environment and transfer of territories for land-use activities;

(c) Rehabilitation of the region's population and development of social infrastructure;

(d) Creation of a museum on the Semipalatinsk testing site.

18. There have been a number of other governmental programmes that have indirectly addressed the problems of the Semipalatinsk testing site, including:

(a) The fresh water sector programme (2002-2010);

(b) The governmental programme for the development of rural territories (2004-2010);

(c) The concept of environmental security of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2004-2015);

(d) The national programme for surveying the remaining after-effects of nuclear tests and identifying ways of rehabilitating the affected population (2005-2007);

(e) The population employment programme (2005-2007);

(f) The rehabilitation programme for people with disabilities (2006-2008);

(g) The East Kazakhstan region development programme (2011-2015);

(h) The Kazakhstan strategic development plan (until 2020).

19. A new regional development programme for 2011-2015, "Raising competitiveness of the region through innovative approaches to regional planning and social services", jointly funded by the Government of Kazakhstan and the United Nations agencies (the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Volunteers (UNV)), was approved and launched in 2011. The programme has a total budget of \$11,651,365 (with a Government share of \$9,816,365). It builds on the success of a previous inter-agency programme in the same area, funded by the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security, and is aimed at accelerating the progress on human development indicators and supporting sustainable development of the East Kazakhstan region. The joint programme consists of five components covering social and economic development and health-related issues. The programme addresses in particular the needs of vulnerable people in the cities of Semey, Kurchatov and Ust-Kamenogorsk, as well as other affected areas of East Kazakhstan Oblast.

V. Donor assistance to the Semipalatinsk region

20. Consistent with the intent of the General Assembly resolutions, international assistance provided in the period 1999-2010 addressed a variety of the socio-economic, environmental and health-related problems of Semipalatinsk. Following is an account of the international assistance provided since 2008.

21. **Social and economic:** A United Nations project entitled "Enhancing human security in the former nuclear test site of Semipalatinsk" was implemented jointly (2008-2010) by UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNV, and the Semey city administration and funded by the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security. The project took a long-term development approach that complemented other urgent environmental and medical interventions. The project specifically addressed the root causes of the development challenges of the Semipalatinsk area through capacity development, improving public service delivery, promoting business initiatives, and undertaking community mobilization. The project budget amounted to \$1,978,698.

22. Key achievements of the programme included:

(a) The rate of haemorrhage (previously the main reason for maternal mortality) in the area decreased twofold and trauma in labour was reduced significantly;

(b) Better access to day-care facilities and family support services for children with special needs and their families;

(c) Better access to financial markets, information and training for over 1,000 rural entrepreneurs;

(d) An expanded microcredits portfolio, funded by the private sector, to promote entrepreneurial activities and employment generation in rural areas.

23. An Aid-for-Trade project funded by the Government of Finland (2009-2012; \$698,592) aims to foster economic growth in the region through trade promotion and enhancement of the country's competitiveness. The components of the project include conducting trainings for small and medium enterprises, expanding their access to financial services, developing a regional trade strategy, providing grants for inclusive projects and providing advisory support to local authorities.

24. The programme has had the following results to date:

(a) An increased number of trained entrepreneurs able to start a business;

(b) Better access for small and medium enterprises to financial resources through microcredits;

(c) Better access to financial markets, information and training for over 1,500 entrepreneurs;

(d) An expanded microcredits portfolio, ensuring entrepreneurial activities and employment generation in rural areas.

25. In 2010, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) completed the project “Supporting assessment of the territory of the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site for further economic use” (\$50,000). The project conducted analysis of a study undertaken by the National Nuclear Centre on radiation safety in the northern part of the site to determine future economic use. There are plans for further joint work with the Government on these issues in 2012-2015.

26. The Embassy of Switzerland implemented six projects of direct humanitarian assistance to health-care institutions and organizations providing specialized social services to children (preschools, centres for elderly and handicapped people, boarding schools, etc.) totalling \$59,142.

27. A joint programme of UNDP and UNV, “Promoting economic and social integration of *Oralmans*”, enhanced the social inclusion and access of ethnic Kazakh repatriates (*oralmans*) to social services in the Semey region. The programme established a centre for adaptation and social integration, and promoted community mobilization through volunteer action. The project budget amounted to \$650,000.

28. In 2009, the Japanese Embassy in Kazakhstan implemented two projects with a total budget of \$121,216 providing repairs to a school and acquiring wheelchairs and other equipment for the disabled in Semey.

29. The European Commission implemented a project (2009-2011) supporting volunteer centres in Semey specifically providing assistance to disabled children and their parents. The total budget was €48,447.

30. The United States Agency for International Development implemented two projects (2010-2011) focusing on the protection of the rights of women and children and the publication of a youth magazine informing young people about social issues of concern to them. The total budget was \$29,330.

31. **Environment:** The Department of Energy and Climate Change of the Government of the United Kingdom started a number of projects in 2009 that will continue through 2012. These include accreditation of the Radio-Chemical Analysis Laboratory, the creation of an individual dosimeter centre and the establishment of a training centre for radiation safety specialists. These projects contribute to the ecological health of the region and create jobs for the former employees of the nuclear sector. GBP 334,292 has been allocated for these projects.

32. The World Bank, in partnership with the Forestry and Hunting Committee of the Ministry of Agriculture, has implemented a project focusing on the development of cost-effective and sustainable environmental rehabilitation, management of forest lands and the development of forestry regulations. Equipment has been procured, and nine fire watchtowers and a fire chemical station have been constructed. The project’s budget is approximately \$34.1 million and the implementation period is from 2007 until 2012.

33. Under the Global Environment Facility UNDP small grants programme (2007-2009) a number of initiatives were undertaken on pasture management aimed at improving the economic well-being of rural communities living near the testing site.

34. **Health care:** The Korea International Cooperation Agency implemented, in partnership with the Semey Regional Oncology Dispensary, a project for improvements in the services of oncology medicine for the residents of the Semey region (2009-2010). The project (\$2 million) procured specialized medical equipment and trained 20 Kazakhstani medical staff in the Republic of Korea.

35. The Department of Energy and Climate Change of the United Kingdom completed a project in 2010 on the establishment of an equipment calibration centre for beam therapy at the Institute of Radiation Safety and Ecology, with a budget of GBP 87,937.

36. The Government of Italy implemented a project, jointly with UNICEF, on the promotion of health and protection for children with special needs (\$26,000). It increased children's access to preschool education in the Semey region, including children with disabilities, and provided support in childcare and development to parents of vulnerable children, including children with disabilities. It also improved the conditions of day-care centres, and built the capacity of local health, education and social protection specialists to support families with children with special needs.

37. Switzerland implemented four health projects in the Semey region in 2009. This included the procurement of a foetal monitor for the perinatal centre of the Maternity Hospital, disinfection equipment for a delivery room, special lift equipment for bathing handicapped people at the State Centre for Elderly and Handicapped People, a drying machine for the kindergarten for children with tuberculosis, and disinfection equipment for a delivery room of the Hospital of the Clinical Training Centre of the National Medical Academy. A total of CHF 40,367 was allocated to provide this assistance to the local community.

38. The international assistance provided covers all priority areas identified in the previous reports of the Secretary-General and in the report of the Tokyo International Conference on Semipalatinsk. Sixty-five per cent of the total support was allocated to health care, while the share of international assistance going to economic rehabilitation, environment and ecology and humanitarian assistance was 20 per cent, 11 per cent and 4 per cent, respectively.

VI. Priorities for future action

39. Today, due to the coordinated efforts of the Government and the international community, numerous projects and policy initiatives have addressed the problems around the Semipalatinsk test site. There has been research on radiology and ecology, improvements to the health-care infrastructure, dedicated social support, a growing business community, and a growth of civil society organizations.

40. Henceforth, the investments made in human development need to be upscaled and sustained in the upcoming years, in order to put the region on a stable pattern of development and growth. To achieve this objective, a strong partnership between the Government, the United Nations and all development partners needs to be maintained. The priorities for international support are part of the five-year

development plan of the region, and the governmental and international efforts should be integrated and coordinated within one framework.

41. The decision of the Government of Kazakhstan to co-finance a joint five-year programme with the United Nations, supporting the development of the Semipalatinsk region until 2015, establishes a strong framework for coordination. It is both an impressive sign of commitment on the side of the Government to addressing the needs of the region, and a new level of cooperation of the country with the United Nations.

42. Partners in this programme will jointly apply innovative approaches to strengthen local governance, health care, social protection of vulnerable groups (children, women, elderly, disabled and repatriates) and economic development. The programme will cover the cities of Semey, Kurchatov and Ust-Kamenogorsk and 17 districts in East Kazakhstan Oblast most affected by the polygon testing.

43. The priority areas of work are as follows:

(a) Improving efficiency in planning and the use of state resources in socio-economic programmes at the local level, for better protection of vulnerable people;

(b) Capacity development to scale up the well-being of the population and to further develop local governance;

(c) Enhancing access to quality social and economic services for vulnerable groups of the population, including women and children.

VII. Conclusions and recommendations

44. The General Assembly adopted six resolutions between 1997 and 2009, urging the international community to assist the Government and people of Kazakhstan in their efforts to rehabilitate the Semipalatinsk nuclear testing site and the surrounding affected areas. The date of 29 August was declared the International Day against Nuclear Tests by the General Assembly in its resolution 64/35.

45. The sixth resolution of the General Assembly on Semipalatinsk (resolution 63/279), adopted in April 2009, invited the international community and the Government of Kazakhstan to improve the social, economic and environmental situation through a more comprehensive development-oriented approach that addresses the medium- and long-term problems of the Semipalatinsk region.

46. An international conference dedicated to the International Day against Nuclear Tests ("Semipalatinsk: from recovery to development") was organized on 26 August 2010 in Astana at the initiative of the Government of Kazakhstan, with support from the United Nations agencies in Kazakhstan, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization and IAEA. The conference reviewed the agreements stemming from the 1999 Tokyo Conference, aimed at accelerating support to the region, and discussed the support that had been provided in the period 1999-2010. The Astana conference also set the following future priorities:

Social and economic

- (a) Strengthening data collection, analysis and monitoring of the socio-economic situation in the areas of the former Semipalatinsk test site, with a special focus on the most vulnerable groups;
- (b) Improving governance practices of community planning, implementation and monitoring of socio-economic programmes and financial management at the local level;
- (c) Developing local capacities to employ the potential of the region and increase its investment attractiveness through inclusive business projects;
- (d) Supporting employment generation through training and small and medium enterprises development;
- (e) Strengthening social inclusion of vulnerable groups and securing their access to education, health care and social services;

Environment

- (f) Ensuring a gradual decrease of technogenic influence on the population and the environment;
- (g) Increasing knowledge and public awareness of the possibilities for conversion of territories for productive land-use;
- (h) Strengthening professional monitoring on the levels of radiation in the surrounding environment, water and food;
- (i) Developing modern livestock practices in the area around the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site;
- (j) Prioritizing programmes aimed at providing access to safe drinking water, in both urban and rural areas;

Health care

- (k) Developing a long-term plan for improvement of mother and child health, with a special focus on the most vulnerable groups (women in rural areas, children with special needs and their families, youth and adolescents);
- (l) Ensuring improvement of quality control systems in health services and implementation of evidence-based health-care techniques;
- (m) Improving knowledge of existing causes of disabilities among the population of the region;
- (n) Developing programmes aimed at reducing childhood disabilities, including the introduction of modern techniques of early identification and intervention and the provision of professional family-oriented rehabilitation methods.

47. In 2010 I visited the Semipalatinsk test site, which became a symbol of nuclear disarmament and hope for a nuclear-free world. This is where the agreement on the creation of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia was signed. There is every reason to believe that the hope in Semipalatinsk for deliverance and elimination of nuclear weapons may become a reality. While standing on the land of the former

nuclear testing site, I encouraged all the nuclear powers to follow the example of Kazakhstan.

48. I therefore call on the international community to support the coordination mechanisms established through the joint Government of Kazakhstan/United Nations Country Team programme “Raising competitiveness of the region through innovative approaches to regional planning and social services”, with a view to upscaling and increasing the effectiveness of assistance to the affected region and to enhancing the overall positive impact on people’s lives.
