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Sustainable development: the role of the international community in the prevention of the radiation threat in Central Asia

Letter dated 16 September 2013 from the Permanent Representative of Kyrgyzstan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

With reference to my letter dated 12 June 2013 ([A/68/143](#)), I have the honour to transmit hereby the revised versions of the explanatory note for the draft General Assembly resolution on the role of the international community in the prevention of the radiation threat in Central Asia (see annex I) and the draft resolution itself (see annex II).

The documents annexed to the present letter more accurately reflect the situation on the ground and recent developments with regard to the issue under consideration. Therefore, I would kindly request that the explanatory note and the draft resolution contained in document [A/68/143](#) be replaced by the revised versions attached hereto.

I would also be grateful if the present letter and its annexes could be circulated among the Member States of the General Assembly.

(Signed) Talaibek **Kydyrov**
Permanent Representative of the Kyrgyz Republic
to the United Nations



Annex I

Explanatory note

Draft General Assembly resolution on “The role of the international community in the prevention of the radiation threat in Central Asia”

From the 1940s to the 1970s, the Central Asian region was the centre of uranium ore extraction and processing in the former Soviet Union, a situation which generated a significant accumulation of uranium production waste. In the 1990s and at the beginning of the twenty-first century, preventive and emergency repair work at uranium production facilities was not done on a sufficient scale owing to a lack of funding; as a result, most of those facilities were exposed to weathering processes, and that has now become the cause of environmental problems in the region.

The uranium industry was under centralized State control. The flow of information on uranium production was strictly controlled from the top down by the relevant bodies of the Soviet Union’s Ministry of Medium Machine-Building Industry. Companies were secure facilities, extraction companies did not keep archival information on extraction and processing technologies and there was no horizontal data sharing among the different industrial plants.

All organizations in the sector applied identical regulatory standards (safety standards) to control irradiation and radioactive contamination at uranium ore extraction and processing sites, thereby reducing the administrative burden imposed. Radiation safety standards were comparable with similar standards in Europe and the United States of America in the 1960s and 1970s. However, a bonus system provided many incentives to enhance production indicators, while insufficient attention was paid to environmental safety and health issues.

In order to address the problems caused by the legacy of industrial uranium extraction and processing practices in the Central Asian States, the historical features of the uranium industry’s development in the region should be considered, as well as the prevailing conditions in the Central Asian republics since independence.

During the transition period, with its economic, political and social problems, the technical conditions for radioactive waste management deteriorated, which increased the risk of possible accidents. There was a real danger of pollution of the groundwater and rivers of the water basin throughout Central Asia, which would have major consequences not only for millions of people and the environment, but also for the whole sustainable development process in the countries of the region. It could take several decades and significant financial resources to mitigate the consequences of such accidents and disasters.

In this connection, the Kyrgyz Republic, in conjunction with other Central Asian States, is actively engaged in efforts at the international level to avert the radioactive threat posed by uranium tailings ponds. The joint appeal made by the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Secretariat of the Eurasian Economic Community and the United Nations Development Programme to Governments, international financial institutions, private sector representatives and other organizations, signed in the Kyrgyz Republic in September 2007, provided a

framework for the consolidation of efforts to reduce the risk posed by radioactive waste to people and the environment, the strengthening of sustainable development in the Central Asian countries, and the mobilization of donor assistance from international organizations and the private sector.

Subsequent to the above appeal, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Republic of Tajikistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan, in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme and other international organizations, organized a high-level international forum “Uranium tailings: local problems, regional consequences, global solution”, which was held in Geneva on 24 June 2009. The joint declaration, issued by the International Forum and adopted by the Central Asian States, the United Nations Development Programme, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the European Union, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the Eurasian Economic Community, noted the importance of regional cooperation in the following priority areas: improvement of the legislative framework, rehabilitation and elimination of tailings ponds, development and implementation of special programmes and projects to improve monitoring, and the implementation of health and humanitarian measures to enhance the quality and standards of living of the population living in the regions where the tailings ponds are located. The resolution adopted at the international conference on “Uranium Tailings in Central Asia: Joint Efforts to Reduce Risks”, held in Bishkek on 24 and 25 October 2012, confirmed the relevance of the conclusions and priorities jointly developed and agreed upon during the Geneva international high-level forum.

From 2000 to 2013, with the direct participation and financial support of organizations such as the United Nations, the Eurasian Economic Community, Rosatom, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the European Union, the World Bank and the International Science and Technology Centre, and also the Governments of the Russian Federation, the Swiss Confederation, the Czech Republic and other countries, consultative analysis and rehabilitation work was done on the tailings ponds in the areas of Ming-Kush, Kajy-Say, Mayлуу-Suu, Ak-tüz, Shekaftar, Sumsar and Kan in the Kyrgyz Republic.

It is clear that the main problems relating to the legacy of uranium in the region can only be resolved with targeted and coordinated assistance from the international community. The Kyrgyz Republic hopes that the increased attention and interest of the international community in these issues will lead to successful management of the national and regional environmental risks and prevention of a humanitarian crisis, while ensuring sustainable development in the Central Asian States.

For that very reason, in order to address the problem of ensuring environmental safety and sustainable development in the region, the Kyrgyz Republic has prepared a draft General Assembly resolution on “The role of the international community in the prevention of the radiation threat in Central Asia”.

Annex II

Draft resolution

The role of the international community in the prevention of the radiation threat in Central Asia

The General Assembly,

Taking into account the outcome of the high-level international forum “Uranium tailings: local problems, regional consequences, global solution”, held in Geneva on 26 June 2009,

Taking into account also the outcome of the international conference on “Uranium Tailings in Central Asia: Joint Efforts to Reduce Risks”, held in Bishkek on 24 and 25 October 2012,

Attaching particular importance to the protection of human health and the guarantee of fundamental human rights through the prevention of potential natural and man-made disasters, for the current and future generations,

Noting that numerous burial sites for uranium waste and other extremely hazardous radioactive processing wastes are located in densely populated areas of the Central Asian countries,

Noting also that many tailings ponds are located in seismically active areas close to population centres and the banks of major rivers in the region, and are subject to the threat of land and mud slides,

Considering that, despite the efforts made by the States of Central Asia at the national level, and also the support of international programs and projects to recultivate former uranium mines and tailings ponds, a number of States continue to have serious social, economic and environmental problems,

Striving to contribute to strengthening the integrity and safety of radioactive materials,

Expressing gratitude to the Russian Federation, the Swiss Confederation and other countries, and also to international organizations and regional integration associations, including the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Eurasian Economic Community and the World Bank, which are providing assistance in addressing the problems of uranium tailings ponds in the Central Asian region,

Taking into account that the Governments and peoples of the Central Asian States are aware of the threat of possible natural or man-made disasters and their global consequences for the lives and health of a large number of people and the environment,

1. *Notes* the paramount importance of the recultivation of areas affected by uranium extraction plants;
2. *Recognizes* the need to devise and promote effective programmes and projects for the sustainable management of radioactive and toxic waste in Central Asia;

3. *Also recognizes* the role of the international community in the prevention of the radiation threat in Central Asia and emphasizes the importance of adopting preventive and other measures to resolve the problem of radioactive and toxic waste and completely rehabilitate the polluted areas in accordance with the highest safety standards and best global practice;

4. *Calls on* the international community to assist the States of Central Asia in resolving the problems of uranium tailings ponds and emphasizes the importance of regional cooperation in the following priority areas: improvement of the legislative framework, management and maintenance at safe levels of uranium waste and other radiation tailings ponds, recultivation and elimination of tailings ponds, development and implementation of special programmes and projects to improve the monitoring of their safety, raising public awareness, taking measures to prevent people from gaining access to polluted materials, implementing health and humanitarian measures to enhance the quality and standard of living of the population in the regions where the tailings ponds are located;

5. *Further calls* on the international community to continue active sharing of experience and knowledge so as effectively to resolve the problems of uranium, radiation and toxic tailings ponds;

6. *Expresses support* for the efforts made by the States of Central Asia in devising and implementing their country programmes, and also for the intention of States in the region to hold further bilateral and multilateral negotiations to prevent the radiation threat in Central Asia.
