



**Statement by the President of the Republic of Tajikistan
Emomali Rahmon at the International Conference
on Water Related Disaster Reduction
(Dushanbe, 27-29 June 2008)**

Dear participants of the Conference,
Dear guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to greet all participants and guests of the Conference arrived in sunny and hospitable Tajikistan to discuss and elaborate concrete decisions on the reduction of negative impacts of water related disasters.

The International Decade of Action "Water for Life", establishment of "the United Nations-water resources" global mechanism, functioning of the United Nations regional commissions, creation of Asian-Pacific Water Forum, regularly holding world water forums and other events on different levels are the evidence of world community and world leaders' great attention to irreplaceable nature of water from the one hand, and its disastrous and devastating aspects, from the other hand.

At the same time, we consider that, it is time to proceed to more concrete and practical steps, directed at the implementation of all what has been said and proclaimed during these events. Time demands urgent actions from us, as despite of all these efforts, water issues did not lose their specific relevance in a global scale, but on the contrary, received new impetus of escalation.

Water security, including protection from water related disasters beneficially affects the solution of urgent problems in the ecological, economic and social spheres. The attainment of sustainable development in all other equal conditions practically unachievable without concrete, clear attitude and adequate solution of problems of protecting dangerous geodynamic processes, related to water disasters. According to the International Centre for Disaster Researches more than 9000 anomalous natural disasters took place during the last 25 years in the world, caused death of almost 2 million people and brought damage in amount of 1 trillion US dollars.

The specialists calculated that more than 90% of disasters and more than two third of all victims and 75% of damages caused by the meteorological and hydrological reasons, i.e. they are directly related to water.

Tajikistan which 93% of its territory is occupied by the mountains is very much prone to water related disasters. Floods, drought, mud flows, avalanches, hail damages and landslides are annually causing damages to the country's economy and bring death of population.

During the last ten years, the number of disaster victims exceeded three hundred people during the floods.

During the last eight years, expenditures related to prevention and liquidation of disasters

consequences in Tajikistan made up totally more than 65 million US dollars, considerable part of which directed at the resettlement of suffered population, material relief actions, as well as shore protection.

The complexity of works lies in the fact that mountainous rivers, flowing in narrow valleys and gorges are very dangerous during the mud flows.

According to our specialists' estimation, from 50 to 250 tons of fertile soil is washing away from one hectare of land annually. Total amount of fertilizers washed out in the soil, consists of 20-25 million US dollars. Therewith the current year appears to be another dry year for the whole Central Asian region, which caused already shortage of some products and price increase.

Therefore, one of Tajikistan's tasks is to attract the attention of governments, international organisations, donors to the necessity of paying priority focus to the complex solution of water problems with dangerous water disasters which are an integral part of it, as well as global climate change.

Taking into consideration the growing impact of water related natural disasters, the Government of Tajikistan decided to convene the present Conference, being conducted in the framework of International Decade "Water for Life", United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015, which envisages the establishment of potential to counter disasters at the governmental and community level, adopted at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction which was held in Japan in 2005. I would like to specially stress, that we are not pursuing an objective to win political dividends, but it's a logic continuation of the efforts, consistently taken by Tajikistan on water issues.

The participants of this Conference have multi-faceted tasks, but all of them come to one goal – protection of the population, environment and economy from unfavourable impacts of water disasters. It is especially important for the countries, which possess minimal opportunities and potential for complex solution of water problems.

During the First Asia Pacific Water Summit in Japan on December last year, Tajikistan stated the urgency of establishing regional and international emergency funds within the United Nations to assist during the water related disasters and provide access to clean fresh water. In my vision, solution of these problems requires integrated approach in the improvement of water financing and the development of water management, taking into consideration the ecosystem.

Such approach fully coincides with the Asian Pacific Water Forum concept and its known priorities.

In this direction, in our view, support of poor and the poorest countries should be the main task of the second phase of the International Decade of Action "Water for Life". On the basis of aforesaid, the Republic of Tajikistan proposes to hold a special UN General Assembly session on water issues for the complex consideration and solution of water problems, as well as consolidation of efforts, taken on different levels.

The elaboration and adoption of an international Water Convention will be the most important step in combining efforts. It may also define the universal principles of water policy subject to the water interests of all consumers and protection from water related disasters.

Preventing water related disasters in the world and in Tajikistan, in particular, became an intersectoral activity. It includes creation of hydro meteorological stations, data processing

system, legislative level and planned control of relevant territories, disaster preparedness and rescue works in case of emergency.

Naturally, proper attention should be given to all these elements and give full support in order to meet the increased requirements. It is a broad space for comprehensive cooperation and we hope to develop it in the durable perspective.

Dear friends,

In this Conference, we can't avoid some vital problems related to the whole population of Central Asia – Aral environmental catastrophe and potential threat that Sarez Lake, in the Pamirs, may someday sweep down and put homes and people at risk over a massive area. More than 50 million population of Central Asia faced with an environmental crisis in the Aral Sea basin, acknowledged also by the world community as an XX-th century global catastrophe.

The areas of irrigated lands of the region have been increased two times during the scaling land-reclamation of 1960-th and 1990-th (from 4.3 million hectare to 8.2 million hectare). Maximal area of irrigated lands belongs to Uzbekistan (4.3 million hectare), Turkmenistan (1.7 million hectare) and Kazakhstan (0, 8 million hectare). As a result, the diversion capacity for the irrigation of these lands was doubled. It has also caused water reduction, necessary for the preservation of the Aral Sea water balance.

Sea drying is also the result of short-sighted water policy of those periods. While calculating huge economic benefits from increase in cotton and rice production, the environmental nature of the region were ignored.

The Aral crises consequences negatively affected the living standards of the population of the region. The growing water deficit and its quality deterioration caused soil and planting degradation, catastrophic negative changes in flora and fauna, falling-off fish processing fields, as well as decline in irrigated cropping effectiveness.

Despite of the serious problems faced the countries of the region after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the heads of Central Asian states, recognizing the cooperation necessity, especially in the field of using the water resources and environmental protection, in March 26th, 1993 established the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS). The main objective of the Fund was to curb and alleviate the consequences of the Aral Sea crises, informing the world community about this crisis, attract funds from five countries of the basin, international organizations and donors to improve the environmental and socio-economic situation around the Aral Sea basin.

It is significant to note that rich with water resources Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, situated even far from the sea, have joined other neighbors in fight against this environmental crisis. It's laid down the first steps of mutual cooperation and joint actions against threats. Tajikistan as one of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea co-founders annually allocates 0,1% of budget revenues to Fund.

Our experts and specialists participated in the elaboration and implementation of many projects and programs, directed at improving the situation in the region.

The main flow of Aral Sea basin forms in the territory of Tajikistan (64 cubic km. or 55,4%) and Kyrgyzstan (29,3 cubic km. or 25,3%), but is used by Kazakhstan (15,29 cubic km. or 11,4%), Turkmenistan (27,07 cubic km. or 20,26%) and Uzbekistan (71,69 cubic km. or 53,64). It should

be mentioned, that despite of huge water resources, the population of Tajikistan is not completely provided with drinking water.

For the reason, that water resources of Amudarya and Sirdarya do not reach Aral Sea, huge areas of the sea bottom were exposed, million tons of salts transferred by air into the long distances facilitating glaciers melting in Tajikistan and other Central Asian countries. According to some estimations the glaciers areas in the region were reduced up to 30%-35% during the last decades. The Central Asian demographic outbreak, against the water resources deficit background, ongoing climate changes processes and insufficient regulated water flows, first of all Amudarya, pointing up the acuteness of water problems of this densely populated region.

Another direction of problem consists of necessity of wide application of water-saving technology in a production of agriculture. Despite of heavy water shortage in our region, there is conspicuous water consumption amounting up to 4040 cubic meters per capita in a year, whereas world average rate accounts 700 cubic meters.

There more than 90% of water in the Central Asia being used for irrigation, irrigation system's coefficient of efficiency scarcely reaches 50%, and the rest are non-productive outlays.

Therefore, application of innovative irrigation technology, modern methods of irrigation and elaboration of implementing new sorts of seed which allows to effectively use water - is a vital task both for state and public authorities and private sector, and for scientific-research teams.

It is very important, that the volume of water, stipulated by the layouts of complex utilization of water resources of Sirdarya and Amudarya as well as annually approving by Intergovernmental Coordinative Water-management Commission would have to be brought up to the level of the same sea.

On the assumption of this fact, we consider it very important to develop national plans of integrated water resources management and introduction of economic mechanisms of water consumption on the basis of Dublin principles.

Second Regional Program of Aral Sea Basin has been realizing which has relevant sections on a prevention of negative affect of water disasters. I repeatedly put forward an idea to Declare Aral Sea Basin as a priority pilot region for achieving Millennium Development Goals. We recognize, that we need efforts and time for integration of Aral Fund into the United Nations system.

We therefore, at first, concluded a Memorandum of Understanding with the UN Economic Commission for Europe and United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

As a subsequent step on this issue, we offer to impart the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea a statute of observer under the UN General Assembly. I am hopeful that these initiatives will find a support in the region, as well as be met with support by the Conference participants and will be stated in its resulting declaration.

A danger of Sarez Lake bursting with a volume of 17 cubic km, located in Tajikistan threatens a life of 6 million people of Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. I had already offered for times and again on readiness (availability) to use cleanest fresh (soft) water of this mountainous lake for water supply of millions people in the Central Asia.

Moreover, the world development tendency shows that cost of water in the foreseeable future

will exceed a cost for oil and gas, that already today's water shortage (deficit) in the region and in the world proves how is priceless (invaluable) this natural resource. We, therefore, consider it necessary to create international consortium, which would concentrate the efforts on developing approaches for realization of this idea, as well as protection of population from its possible bursting. Support of this idea will comprehensively be used only for the benefit of the people.

Last year severe frost winter has obviously revealed that there are absolutely insufficient hydro-power capacities in the Central Asian region for unusual frost winters. Insufficient water inflow to Tajikistan hydro-power plants has mostly worsened energy situation in our country.

Conclusion is only the following: in a deficiency of huge stocks of oil and gas is necessary to rapidly develop richest hydro-energy potential of the region, which 90% of them belong to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

Particularly, today, about 15 prospective dam locations are in Tajikistan for building water-reservoirs and hydro-power plants, which will allow Vakhsh cascade to regulate flowing up to 67 cubic km per year that will amount 58% of average long-term yield of all Aral Sea basin rivers. And then, millions hectares of land, most of all the lands of down-stream countries will be protected from reverse of climate change – flood, shortage of water and drought.

I would like here to specially emphasize, that none of the project in the field of hydro-energy development of Tajikistan damages the interest of our neighboring countries in the region.

Assessment of water development process in the Central Asia during last 15 – 17 years suggests that the region is lack of relevant substantial and comprehensive framework document – original water doctrine, taking into account universal principles of water policy with a glance of reducing water related disaster risk, interests of all water consumers in a condition of population growth, global climate changes, environment protection necessity, poverty reduction and, in general, securing sustainable development.

I hope that abovementioned proposals and searching more optimal ways of their resolving will be deeply considered within the panel sessions of this Conference.

In general, sharing with a huge positive international experience in the field of complex approach to water resources management and water related disaster reduction is of utmost importance and presents a great interest.

In this regard, I suppose, that for Aral Sea basin and for Tajikistan as well it is necessary to extend the spheres of activity of United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific on adaptation of guidelines of strategic planning and water resources management, elaborated by this Commission for assistance developing countries in preparation of plans in complex management of water resources with the special emphasis on elimination of poverty and achieving goals within the framework of Johannesburg Plan on a necessity of reducing disaster risks.

International efficient monitoring on implementation of taken decision in the field of water issues is a very necessary attribute in strengthening cooperation and alignment of priority direction in the activity of all participants of global water process. In this respect, the role of United Nations and its «UN – water resources» mechanism is extremely important. International decade of actions «Water for Life» is in fourth year of its realization.

With the view of assessment the efficiency of taken measures within this decade, in the 60th

Session of UN General Assembly, I offered an idea to convene the International Conference dedicated to the 5-year results of this decade in 2010 in Tajikistan, as the country-initiator, with bringing results of this action to the international community.

I believe that the participants of the Conference will support this idea. Furthermore, it is necessary to take it into account, that for its implementation, today the Government of Tajikistan in cooperation with the UN mechanism «UN – water resources» should begin appropriate preparatory work by forming subjects for discussion of water problems, including the issue of water related disaster reduction. I hope we can make an exchange of opinions in this Conference on this issue as well.

In conclusion, taking this opportunity, I would like to express a gratitude to the United Nations Secretary General, heads of UN specialized agencies, OSCE, Swiss Cooperation Office, GTZ (German Fund for technical cooperation), other international organizations, as well as individual countries and non-governmental organizations, which made their contribution to organization of our Conference.

We are expecting interesting and fruitful work within the framework of this event, which is focused at pursuing joint decision for as much as possible effective practical activity towards water related disaster reduction. We realize that this is a difficult and labor-intensive, but most noble and feasible task directed at improving living standard of the people.

I thank you for your attention and wish you all successful Conference and achievement of concrete results.

Dushanbe Declaration on Water-Related Disaster Reduction

Water-related disasters account for the vast majority of all disasters triggered by natural events. The growing social and economic impacts of disasters are immense, with hundreds of thousands of lives lost and millions of people affected. It is the poorest countries and the poorest people who are disproportionately affected.

Water-related disasters are serious impediments to sustainable development, since they quickly destroy the gains of development. Still, there is a continued need for strengthening of cooperation at regional and international levels, involving actors from the water, disaster risk reduction, climate change and other important socio-economic and environmental sectors.

We, the participants of the International Conference on Water Related Disasters Reduction, Dushanbe, Tajikistan, 27-29 June 2008, which was held within the framework of the International Decade for Action «Water for Life», 2005-2015, representing governments, international and regional organizations, academia, the private sector and civil society at large would like to:

- express our deep concern about the increase of water-related disasters, such as floods, droughts, landslides and cyclones, which continue to cause heavy losses, taking human lives, and destroying livelihoods, and express our deepest sympathy to the people and communities who suffered from natural disasters;
- recognize the urgency of reducing the risks of water-related disasters since they threaten the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.
- further recognize that the risks of water-related disasters increase as a result of climate variability and change.
- reiterate our commitment to the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action and the recommendations contained in the 1st Asia-Pacific Water Summit;
- recognize the important role of United Nations agencies and mechanisms relevant to water-related disaster risk reduction and management and promoting international cooperation for disaster risk reduction;
- stress the importance of strengthening regional cooperation among Central Asian countries on water-related disaster reduction;
- welcome the continued assistance from development partners for mitigating the impacts of ecological disasters in the Aral Sea Basin.
- declare our willingness and being firmly resolved to work together towards meeting the challenges that water-related disasters present to sustainable development and global eco-safety.

We recommend to:

- devote the second half of the International Decade for Action "Water for life" to the enhancement of assistance to developing countries for water-related disaster reduction.
- create regional and international special funds under the United Nations to tackle the barriers

and constraints hampering access to safe drinking water for all and to render assistance to developing countries for water-related disaster risk reduction;

- include water-related disaster risk reduction into national development agendas and budgeting frameworks, including the development and adoption of risk reduction and adaptation related policies, legislation, programs and action plans, as called for in the Hyogo Framework for Action.

- accord highest priority to the development and implementation of national, regional and international strategies and action plans for water-related disaster risks reduction and management;

- increase public and private investments in water-related disaster reduction, with a focus on infrastructure and human resources development;

- strengthen the capacities in disaster prevention, preparedness and mitigation in the countries affected and vulnerable to water-related disasters;

- improve monitoring and assessment on water-related disasters in affected countries and regions based on reliable observing systems and updated data bases and drawing upon scientific evidence;

- strengthen development assistance in disaster relief, with particular focus on the victims of water-related disasters;

- give particular attention to solutions of the water problems in Central Asia countries, caused by drying of the Aral Sea, regional and global change, including climate and the increase of water-related disasters;

- construct hydro-energy complexes based on expert assessments, with water reservoir that prevent floods and mud flows, reduce the impacts of droughts and produce energy, which contributes to the improvement of the social and economic living standards of the population.

- disseminate and utilize international experience, knowledge and technology on water-related disasters risk reduction and management;

- strengthen cooperation and partnership on water-related disaster risk reduction between affected countries, development partners and including international organizations; increase research on the impacts of climate variability and change on water-related disasters, especially in Central Asia region in particular with the aim to develop adaptation strategies and mitigation measures;

- engage the public in water-related risk reduction through public awareness-raising and people-centered early warning systems;

- consider the possibility of establishing a Central Asian Centre on disasters risk reduction in Dushanbe.

We welcome the initiatives of the Republic of Tajikistan, in close cooperation with Central Asian countries, to:

- propose a high-level special event to be held during the UN General Assembly, devoted to

discussions on the water-related issues at global level, and on concrete steps to resolve existing water problems, in particular water-related disasters;

- initiate the establishment of an international consortium on the prevention of the possible break of the mountainous Lake Sarez, which would have impacts on the livelihoods and safety of 6 million people in Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan and enable the use of its freshwater resources for water supply of millions of people in Central Asia;

- develop Central Asian Water Doctrine, taking into account universal principles of water policy with regard to water related disaster risk reduction, interests of all water consumers and water users, taking into account population growth, global climate change, environmental protection, poverty reduction and sustainable development;

- organize an international conference to review the outcomes of the first half of the International Decade for Action "Water for Life" in Dushanbe, in 2010.

We agree that the Dushanbe Declaration will be submitted to the the Davos ICDR 2008 and 5th World Water Forum. We also agree to bring the declaration to the attention of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and promote the declaration at national and international gatherings.

We express our sincere gratitude to the government and people of the Republic of Tajikistan for organizing this Conference its hospitality.

28 June 2008

Dushanbe, Republic of Tajikistan