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PRESS RELEASE**OSCE Office helps plant trees in Tajikistan's rural areas to prevent land degradation**

DUSHANBE, 12 March 2009 - An awareness-raising campaign on environmental protection, biodiversity and the effects of deforestation was launched today in Sayod village in the Dangara district as part of an OSCE Office-organized action aimed at preventing the erosion of rural lands.

As part of the project, some 20,000 trees will be planted in 14 villages to help prevent land degradation, erosion, and subsequent mudslides, landslides and floods.

"Unfortunately, not many people in the rural areas realize that cutting down trees and bushes on the mountain slopes is the prime cause of avalanches and mudslides," said Ambassador Vladimir Pryakhin, the Head of the OSCE Office in Tajikistan. "It is important to show the local population that land degradation can be prevented by planting trees, especially in areas most affected by erosion."

Khursandkul Zikirov, Chairman of the Tajik government's Environmental Protection Committee, praised the continuous support of the OSCE Office in Tajikistan in environmental protection: "These newly planted trees will serve as living legacies and symbols of the OSCE helping people to care for nature."

Every year Tajikistan loses 50,000 hectares of productive land due to erosion. This represents a serious threat to the economy of the country, which has little arable land as 93 per cent of its territory is covered by mountains, and to the local population, which is increasingly affected by natural disasters.

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