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PERMANENT MISSION OF
THE REPUBLIC OF TAJIKISTAN
TO THE OSCE

**Opening Statement by the President of the Republic of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon
at the High-level International Conference on Water**

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Excellency Under-Secretary General,
Dear ladies and gentlemen,
Distinguished guests,

1. It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all in Dushanbe at the International High Level Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the International Decade for Action "Water for Life" 2005 - 2015.

Five years ago, the UN General Assembly started the International Decade for Action under the motto "Water for Life". Today we are in the middle of this very important international event which is in connection with a need to summarize the work that has been done and take concerted steps to further actions.

Today, it is still early to talk about substantial achievements in implementing the internationally agreed goals on water. There are many problems and challenges that require immediate solution: nearly 1 billion people worldwide lack access to the safe drinking water and 2.6 billion people - are deprived of basic sanitation, more than 80 countries are experiencing water shortage, 42,000 people die every week from diseases due to poor quality of drinking water and unsanitary conditions, over 90 percent of cases apply to children under the age of five, drought and desertification threaten the livelihoods of more than 1.2 billion people around the globe.

According to the UN estimations, two-thirds of the planet will face water shortage by year of 2025. Therefore, water issues have an utmost importance in all international documents on sustainable development.

The primary objective of the International Decade "Water for Life" is to promote efforts to execute international commitments related to sources by year of 2015, in order to prove the substance of the decade of action.

The past five years were difficult due to the global financial crisis and problems related to change of climate. In many countries, these global processes have a negative impact on the implementation of goals, objectives and projects for water supply and overall water sources.

2. Water Resources of Tajikistan and their status As you know, Tajikistan is one of the richest countries of the world on water resources. The country forms 64 billion cubic meters of water annually, representing more than 60% of river flow in the Aral Sea basin. However, only about 10% of river flow emerging in the country is used for domestic needs, and the rest of the water flows into the downstream countries, which is mainly used for land irrigation purposes.

Despite an abundance of water resources more than 40% of our population has no access to safe drinking water and in some rural areas providing drinking water remains an acute problem. Alongside with this, over the past decade Tajikistan is also facing the increasing power shortages, lack of financing in water sector and other factors, such as natural disasters which, despite the government's untiring efforts to prevent them, continue having a tremendous negative impact on the development of our country. In this context, resolution of water issues is an integral part of the National Development Strategy and Poverty Reduction Strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan. At the same time, Tajikistan has never created or imposed any problems for other nations and countries of the region and is not going to cause any troubles. At present, our country is ranked as last in Central Asia on specific indices of irrigated land and water use per capita.

Tajikistan is one of the pilot countries for implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. In connection with this, a needs assessment was conducted for the implementation of the MDGs, according to which to reduce by half the number of people who lack access to safe drinking water, the country will need about \$US 1 billion by year of 2015. With the view to improve water sector and achieving the Millennium Development Goals Tajik Government has also adopted the "Program on the Improvement of safe drinking water supply to the population of the Republic of Tajikistan for 2008-2020". As a result of the measures taken over the past five years in this field, about 1.2 million people have been provided with water of improved quality and more than 600,000 people gained access to safe drinking water. In order to solve water-related problems, more than 15 programs, as well as strategies and action plans had been implemented by the Government of Tajikistan over the past five years, in the margins of which dozens of projects are being implemented totaling to more than \$ 500 million.

Unfortunately, despite our every effort, the implementation of designated projects and programs are left far behind the timeline due to worldwide financial and economic downturn and annual natural disasters, which ultimately affect the country's budget.

3. The Aral Sea

Distinguished participants of the Conference are well aware of bitter experience of the region - desiccation of one of the largest lakes in the world - the Aral Sea. This tragedy

first of all is the consequence of large-scale development of new lands, the area of which from 4 million hectares in 1960 has increased to almost 9 million hectares at present. Moreover, more than 100 capacious reservoirs have been built in the downstream countries over the past years, and the volume of those reservoirs exceeds an aggregate water stock of the Aral Sea for one and half times.

The growth of the population, being one of the main reasons, has also contributed to the appearance of this tragedy. It should be mentioned that the population of Central Asia was 20 million in 1956, where to date it reached up to 63 million. These trends led to a drastic reduction of water flow into the sea, which resulted in its volume decreased by more than 10 times.

Under such circumstances, regulation of water resources consumption at the interstate level, without doubt remains to be the key factor of water security in view of predicted decrease of river flows in Central Asia. The region is characterized by uneven distribution of water resources: the main flow of the Aral Sea Basin (over 80%) is formed on the territory of upstream countries, but more than 85% of than volume is used by downstream nations.

At the present time, due to the lack of economic mechanisms for water use, existing water allocation system does not meet a zone of runoff formation. Therefore, addressing this challenge requires long-term agreement between all states of Central Asia, which would provide mutually beneficial mechanisms for their implementation. At the same time, Tajikistan proposes that in the process of development of any national and regional approaches and strategies, particular importance should be given to the issues of the settlement of return waters and the mechanism of guaranteed transit of water into the Aral Sea.

Tajikistan has repeatedly stated that the only solution to address the Aral Sea crisis is to undertake substantial water saving measures through rehabilitation of irrigation systems and lands on the regional level, as well as the replacement of such water-absorbing agricultural crops as cotton and rice by the less water-retaining crops. Thereby it would also contribute to addressing food security challenges. Nowadays, according to expert estimates irretrievable loss of water in the Central Asian countries varies from 30 to 60%.

To this effect, Tajikistan has reduced its cotton plants to 30% and growing grains, vegetables and other less water-retaining agricultural crops on these lands, thus making a great contribution to water saving¹. Continuing this course, we hope that others in the region will follow this suit and take substantial steps for saving and improving of the environment.

Unfortunately, in addressing the Aral Sea challenges some individual nations are trying to distort a reality and divert attention from the root causes of this catastrophe - irrational and sometimes disastrous use of water resources.

In our view, such a biased interpretation of the facts is counterproductive. The effectiveness of efforts to save the Aral Sea, for which five countries have established the International Fund for the Saving the Aral Sea, primarily depends on the clear and proper understanding of reality and the implementation of concrete steps, especially in the rehabilitation of outdated and obsolete irrigation systems.

Repeated efforts made by countries in the region with support of the World Bank, European Union, UN and other international organizations to develop a water strategy in Central Asia have not been successful. In all these processes, Tajikistan has been always a supporter of these strategies and expressed its willingness to implement them duly.

However, some countries in the region ignored the adoption of these strategies, pursuing only their own selfish interests and benefits. Today Tajikistan is ready to closely cooperate with all countries of the region and international institutions to address water and energy problems and improve the ecological situation in the Aral Sea. Therefore and with the view to obtain a feasible picture of the current state of water and environmental problems in Central Asia, Tajikistan has appealed to the UN for an impartial and comprehensive review of existing water systems, irrigation infrastructure and environment sanitation in the region.

We are convinced that the establishment of a mutually acceptable and mutually beneficial mechanism of water and energy resources in the region, which would combine the interests of upstream countries who are rich in water resources and downstream countries with a large hydrocarbon reserves, would contribute to long-term mutually beneficial cooperation in the region and their sustainable development. Creating a water-energy consortium, which could play an effective role not only in addressing water and energy challenges, but also in the implementation of the MDGs, improving the socio-economic situation and the ecological rehabilitation of the region would be one of the most impactful steps in this direction.

4. Hydro energy

To date, about 1.6 billion people experience lack of access to electricity. Achieving the MDGs and other internationally agreed development goals needs significant expansion of access to energy in developing countries. It is estimated that if we succeed in strengthening the mechanisms of market expansion and financing, at least up to 1 billion people can be provided with access to energy supply from renewable sources. Hydropower is an important source of renewable energy, consisting 20% of world electricity supply. In Tajikistan, this figure reaches 98% and therefore the concept of "water" and the "energy" for our country are identical. The hydropower potential of Tajikistan is estimated at about 527 billion kWh per year.

The country is rated the first and second among the nations in the world on specific indices of hydropower potential per one square kilometer and per capita accordingly. However; only 3-4 per cent of this huge potential is currently developed in Tajikistan. At present, nearly one million people of the approximately 8 million in Tajikistan do not have access to adequate and constant energy services. Over the past 15 years, the country lives in conditions of severe energy deficit in winter, when electricity is supplied to the population not more than 4-6 hours a day.

Moreover, in some regions people are deprived of electricity supply for 2-3 months on end. This by first and foremost affects the scale of living and health of the people, especially that of children, women and the elderly population.

During this period, schools are closed and social security agencies and hospitals operate in a very limited mode. Lack of electricity has a severe impact the economy of our country: due to lack of electricity almost all national industry is halted. All this leads to increased unemployment, growing and social tensions.

In this regard, as well as by virtue of the fact that the country lacks the resources of hydrocarbons, hydropower development remains the most important area of public policy. The construction of hydropower projects in Tajikistan is of vital importance. At the same time, it is advantageous for other countries in the region to secure a guaranteed water supply to irrigated lands in view of increasing water scarcity. Hydropower, in addition to supplying safe and cheap electricity is also important from the standpoint of sustainable use of natural resources in the long run, when the oil and gas reserves that are used today in the region for electricity generation, will be exhausted. Today about 80% of electricity in the region is generated from hydrocarbon resources, resulting in hundreds of millions of tons of carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere.

The use of water resources in this context could significantly reduce these emissions and thereby contribute to improving the environmental situation. This approach is also fully consistent with current global trends to climate improvement and adaptation to the consequences of climate change, that it was once again clearly indicated at the World Summit on Climate Change in Copenhagen.

Tajikistan has repeatedly initiated an idea on joint development of the abundant hydropower resources and hopes for cooperation, understanding and support from neighboring countries and the international community in its implementation. We are confident that given the rapid demographic growth ' and a clear climate change, rational use of hydropower resources in the development and adoption of agreed mechanisms for long-term and unrestricted water and energy flows are the non-alternative measures to ensure sustainable development and to address challenges in poverty alleviation, education, health, job creation and other vital socio-economic issues.

While developing own hydropower resources, Tajikistan fully respects the interests of neighboring countries. Therefore, demonstrating good will and based on the need for transparency, openness and respect for common regional interests, we approached the World Bank with request to conduct a feasibility study and evaluation of social and environmental impacts of the construction of Rogun, which is now under implementation.

5. Sarez Lake

In connection with the intensive development of agriculture and population growth in the region the issue of safe drinking water supply to the people becomes more critical over the years. Prediction for population growth and its impact on water resources in the near future is unconsoling. To address this issue, Tajikistan has offered to build a water pipeline from Sarez Lake, which is located in the heart of the Pamir at an altitude of 3300 meters above sea level.

The water volume of safe freshwater lake is about 17 cubic kilometers and it could be used to supply drinking water to millions of people living in Central Asia. In the terms of increasing water shortages in the region, the sustainability and purposefulness of this project focused to address the vital issue of the region's population - drinking water supply, can become one of the successful projects to help those in need of safe drinking water.

6. Climate Change, Natural Disasters

Tajikistan is one of the most mountainous countries in the world, 93% of its territory is covered by mountains. Difficult geographical conditions and landscape make it one of the most vulnerable to natural disasters and climate change on the Eurasian continent. Every year, unpredictable natural disasters in Tajikistan, mainly water-related disasters, inflict tremendous economic damage, thousands of families remain homeless and those disasters often cause civilian casualties. Frequently, entire villages with existing socio-economic infrastructure are completely destroyed mudflows, floods or landslides. The death toll only in result of floods since the beginning of this year totaled 46 people and dozens of people are reported missing. More than 20 cities and districts of the country were hit by natural disasters, which resulted in the destruction of more than 4000 homes, thousands of people left homeless and damaged dozens of schools, hospitals, social facilities, as well as roads, bridges, power transmission lines and other vital infrastructure.

According to preliminary estimates, damage to the national economy caused by natural disasters since the beginning of this year has amounted to U.S. \$ 600 million. The Government of the Republic of Tajikistan annually allocates tremendous funds for the prevention and mitigation of consequences of natural disasters. An overwhelming part of those funds are spent on to the resettlement of the affected population, financial aid, as well as for restoration and shore protection works.

The amount of more than \$ 20 million has been spent over the past two years on shore protection works of the Amudarya River basin.

We are grateful to the Governments of friendly countries, international organizations and donors for their assistance to the population affected by these natural disasters. These disasters do not only cause unpredictable damage, but also undermine our efforts to achieve the MDGs, causing additional difficulties and imposing hardships in implementing programs and strategies to reduce poverty.

7. Glaciers

The issue of degradation of glaciers and snowfields in the area of main rivers runoff becomes a matter of deep concern for our region. In recent decades, the area of glaciers in Tajikistan has decreased by one third. More than a thousand of 14 000 glaciers are completely melted and one of the largest glaciers in the world on land - Fedchenko has lost more than 20% of its volume during the second half of the 20th century. This trend predicts substantial changes in the region's water resources, which are fundamental elements for the development of all sectors of the economy and, in general, in securing sustainable development.

In this regard, it is necessary to develop a comprehensive program to study and preserve these unique sources of fresh water in cooperation with international organizations. In this context, several glaciers of the Pamir, and particularly Fedchenko in Tajikistan could be the main objects of study and preservation.

8. International cooperation on water issues

Global change and the processes of the past decades have had increasing pressure on water resources. In this connection, water becomes a major component of international cooperation and peace.

Tajikistan is a supporter of the agenda of water resources management that should be observed by all parties by the spirit of cooperation, tolerance and mutual respect that will provide a safe way to achieve sustainable development.

Prudent water resources management in trans-boundary river basins should be set up with a glance of equitable and mutually beneficial use of not only water but also other natural resources of the basin. Only such attitude would ensure sustainable development of our countries and preserve the environment for future generations. In this regard, development of water diplomacy could be considered as the key element. Those having a variety of approaches to cooperation in water resource management in more than 263 trans-boundary river basins are the evidence that the water is the main source of both human welfare and regional security. These basins, representing the territory where about 40 percent of the world's population is living, occupy almost half of the Earth's surface and contain about 60 percent of freshwater. The waters that cross national boundaries are of great strategic importance not only at the interstate level, but also at local and national levels.

In this context, I believe that the declaration of the year 2012 the International Year of Water Diplomacy would have significant contribution to enhancing cooperation and dialogue, elaboration of new approaches to resolution of water relations among riparian countries, as well as would improve understanding between water consumers at all levels.

We have already announced this initiative at the Fifth World Water Forum in Istanbul in 2009. We hope that other UN Member States will accede to Tajikistan in the promotion and adoption of a resolution on this agenda in the upcoming 65th session of the UN General Assembly.

9. Human rights

It is necessary to develop more effective integrated approaches in order water to be efficiently used for the needs of all people, addressing their social and economic challenges, and improving the environment. Solely such approach could ensure the sustainable development of our countries and save the planet.

We therefore, deem that the time has become for a broad discussion of adaptation of international law on water management to modern requirements and challenges with the view to improve the international legal framework of water cooperation, taking into account the needs and interests of states and human security in particular. In accordance with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,

all nations can freely dispose their natural wealth and resources to achieve their objectives, without prejudice to any obligations arising out of international economic cooperation based on mutual benefit and international law. No nation, in no case can be deprived of its means of livelihood.

If water resources are the basis for the development of other sectors of the national economy, which affects not only people's lives, but also poverty reduction, health, education, energy and other sectors people protection, so in this case, the rights of individuals and countries on water use should be respected.

10. Proposals for the second half of the International Decade

There are a number of economic difficulties, which become a major barrier in solving the tasks in the water sector. In this vein, we must consider the special needs of least developed and land-locked countries. It is important to promote:

- free movement of goods, which play a strategic role in addressing problems of poverty, disaster management, health support, education and etc.;
- debt relief for Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative;
- debt write-off on official bilateral loans and performs more generous official development assistance for countries committed to poverty reduction.

Therefore, today, more than ever, we by our joint actions, have to be guided by our commitment to develop a global partnership that was stated by us in the Millennium Declaration.www

Global climate change and its associated trends happening in recent years, exacerbate the life difficulties of millions of people in water and food, but especially deteriorating living standard of the most vulnerable and poor population.

Thereupon, Tajikistan as the initiator of the International Decade for Action "Water for Life 2005-2015", suggests that the second half of the decade should be devoted to the implementation of specific measures at international and regional levels to ensure the most vulnerable and poorest segments of the population with safe drinking water and basic sanitation.

I am hopeful that World Summit on the Millennium Development Goals to be held in September 2010 will also be a historically important event to review progress in implementing the Millennium Development Goals over the past 5 years. Tajikistan intends together with other UN member states and its various institutions to submit the report on the outcomes of today's Conference and other international events on water and sanitation to the forthcoming September Summit.

In addition, we intend to continue to raise issues on water along with other pressing issues of modern world in the Conference on Sustainable Development Rio +20 and other high-level meetings to be held in 2012. In all this, we hope for the support of esteemed UN member states and international organizations.

I wish you a pleasant stay in our country and wish everyone fruitful deliberations!