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PRESS RELEASE

**Armenia's Minister for Nature Protection participated at the 12th session of the
Commission on Sustainable Development**

From April 28-30, 2004, the delegation of the Republic of Armenia, headed by H.E. Vardan Ayvazyan, Minister for Nature Protection, participated at the High-Level Segment of the 12th session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. The High-Level discussion focused on the issue of sanitation and human settlements.

During the session Minister Ayvazyan made statements on water and sanitation, which are considered to be core elements for sustainable development. In his remarks he noted that the United Nations and its agencies and funds, as well as international financial institutions could play an important role in the implementation of national programs aimed at addressing water and sanitation challenges in the country. He urged to focus on rehabilitating dated sanitation systems and providing for new environmentally and ecologically sound technologies.

Speaking about water issues, the Minister noted that Armenia suffered some serious water problems, including water quality. Much of the water came from underground, and was of a good quality. By passing through obsolete water supply systems it loses its quality. Moreover, 50% of the water entering the system gets lost due to leakage. In 2002, the country had adopted a Water Code, with a focus on basin management, the first to be developed and implemented in the South Caucasus. It had helped to introduce integrated water resource management in the country.

Full texts of Minister Ayvazyan's statements:

*Statement by H.E. Vardan Ayvazyan
Minister of Nature Protection of the Republic of Armenia
at the High-Level Segment of the 12th session of the
Commission on Sustainable Development*

April 30, 2004

(Statements and interactive discussion focusing on "Water")

Dear Chairman,
Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

For the Republic of Armenia, a mountainous country situated in an arid region of the South Caucasus, the problems of the protection of water resources, water quality, and access of the population to clean and safe water are actual problems not only from ecological, but also from economic and social perspectives.

In this regard it is worth mentioning here that the sustainable management of the water resources remains one of the most important issues in Armenia. The absence of an integrated approach to the management and use of water resources in the period of economic crisis of the 1990s led to such negative consequences as decline in the access to water supply, deterioration of the water quality and gradual degradation of the corresponding infrastructure..

It should be mentioned that more than 90% of the drinking water used in the country is formed out of the underground water sources. This water is of quite a high quality, but as it passes through water supply systems, which are very dated and do not correspond to sanitary requirements, the quality of the water significantly deteriorates. Moreover, 50% of the water entering the system gets lost due to leakage.

In the water policy of our country great attention is paid to the question of financial assistance from international financial institutions for the implementation of national water programs. In this connection I would like to emphasize the activities of the UN Agencies, the World Bank, and other financial institutions, as well as the donor countries aimed at assisting in the implementation of environmental programmes, particularly in the field of water resource protection, such as the restoration of the ecological balance of the lake Sevan, which is one of the unique natural water reservoirs on the planet. According to expert estimates, this freshwater mountain lake, situated 2000 meters above the sea level, is the only perspective source for drinking water in the South Caucasus. Starting from the 1930s, the water resources of the lake were used for agricultural and energy purposes, which resulted in the drastic decrease of the water level for about 19,5 meters. Activities undertaken by the Government of Armenia during the last few years led to the increase of the water level for about 1 meter.

In 2002 the new Water Code of Armenia was adopted. One of the main ideas of the Water Code is the creation of basin management system that will contribute to the sustainable use and integrated water resource management. I would like to mention that Armenia is the first country in the South Caucasus to introduce the basin management system. In the same year the National Council on Water, headed by the Prime-Minister, became operational. Since then more than 100 normative and regulatory acts have been elaborated and adopted. The establishment of basin management bodies continues. The articles of the Water Code are being vigorously implemented. Financial assistance from our international partners in this phase could greatly contribute to the sustainable water resource management.

One of the priorities of the Armenian Government is the elaboration of the National Water Policy and the National Water Programme. In the National Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper special attention is paid to the advancement of the irrigation system, which aims to increase the effectiveness of the agricultural activities and mitigate the desertification processes.

The improvement of the financial mechanisms in the water sphere would aim at achieving a speedy resolution to the water problems in Armenia in the context of country's sustainable development. Armenia's joining the strategic partnership on water in Johannesburg was in compliance with that approach. I consider the EU's Water Initiative and its component for the Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and the Central Asia, in particular, a good basis for the

development of real mechanisms of cooperation aimed at the realization of both the decisions of World Summit on Sustainable Development and the regional and national action plans. This would be our contribution to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in the field of water resources.

In conclusion I would like to state that the Government of the Republic of Armenia recognizes that the effective and comprehensive management of the water resources could provide for the sustainable and environmentally justified economic development of the country.

*Statement by H.E. Vardan Ayvazyan
Minister of Nature Protection of the Republic of Armenia
at the High-Level Segment of the 12th session of the
Commission on Sustainable Development
April 30, 2004
(Statements and interactive discussion focusing on “Sanitation”)*

Dear Chairman,

Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As it was stated in Johannesburg, ensuring availability of safe water and adequate sanitary conditions is a core element for sustainable development. Creation of a healthy environment and prevention of adverse impact of unfavorable environmental factors on the health of the population are several of the main goals that were duly reflected in the national programmes and action plans adopted by the Government of Armenia in the recent years. Water-resource management, water supply and sanitation are considered to be determining factors. The implementation of these programmes implies intersectoral cooperation and integrated planning. Support from international organizations, and that of the UN agencies in particular, can be very instrumental and play a positive role in implementing these programmes.

It should be noted here that the economic mechanisms regulating the reduction of water pollution are not yet sufficient in Armenia. We are actively working towards the creation of appropriate legal and institutional systems, which could provide for the allocation of financial resources to the end of solving the acute problems in the water sector.

The 1990s were marked by economic crisis and decline of the industrial production by over 70% in Armenia, whereupon the untreated or poorly treated municipal and agricultural wastewater became the main source for the water pollution.

In most of the human settlements, the wastewater drains into water objects either bypassing the treatment plants or, if they go through treatment plants, gets an inadequate treatment. The problem is exacerbated by the mere fact that none of the existing 20 wastewater treatment plants in Armenia function in full capacity. Wastewater undergoes a partial mechanical treatment only.

All treatment plants were put into operation before 1990 and the technologies applied there do not correspond to the actual demands. In addition, these technologies were developed taking into account the low-cost of the energy consumption at the time, and their utilization presently is associated with colossal expenses.

It is also worth mentioning that with the projected economic growth and recommencement of industrial activities the water quality can deteriorate because of the absence of necessary infrastructure for wastewater treatment.

In this respect, I would like to draw your attention to a point which was rightfully brought up in paragraph 46 of the Document on Sanitation (*E/CN.17/2004/5*), stating that there is a necessity for shifting the evaluation of sanitation system from the monitoring of the existence or absence of appropriate infrastructure to the efficiency of its functioning. As far as Armenia is concerned, the problem is not the absence of such infrastructure, but rather its poor functioning and deterioration. Accordingly, for countries like Armenia, the rehabilitation and modernization of the wastewater treatment plants through the utilization of modern technologies, as well as the construction of new ones are a priority as far as the provision of safe water and quality of surface and ground water is concerned. The latter is an integral part of our national policy in the field of water resources. To solve these problems under current conditions great financial resources are needed, and the Armenian Government is creating stimulating economic mechanisms today to attract these resources.

The problems existing in Armenia related to the condition of water resources and sanitation can be solved gradually parallel to the economic development of the country, the possible increase of the state budget capacities, the creation and implementation of new mechanisms for a target-oriented financing and with adequate environmental administration, as well as significant financial assistance for the national programmes by international financial institutions.

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