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**Statement by Mr. Andrey Vasilyev,
Deputy Executive Secretary of the UNECE**

High-level Doors' Meeting on the Third Aral Sea Basin Program

Almaty, December 15, 2010

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Chair of IFAS and personally Deputy Prime Minister Shukeev for inviting the UNECE to this important meeting. I would also like to congratulate to EC IFAS to the development of a well-structured ASBP-3 proposal. The launching of the Program is a significant milestone both in regional cooperation in Central Asia and in UNECE activities in support of it.

Thanks to the active involvement of the governments, academia and the civil society of IFAS member countries, intensive efforts by the Executive Committee of IFAS and close coordination and cooperation with the donors' community, ASBP-3 comprises a realistic number of carefully selected, professionally drafted projects. Its main objective is to alleviate the environmental, social and economic consequences of the Aral Sea tragedy and achieving rapid progress towards environmental sustainability in its Basin. The elaboration of ASBP-3 offered an opportunity for EC IFAS to assume a central role in donors' coordination in areas covered by the Program, in particular water resources management. EC IFAS is expected to provide continuing, stable, professional support to the implementation of ASBP-3 through facilitating information exchange, monitoring and evaluation as well as attracting additional funding.

The UNECE has noted with satisfaction that representatives of the donor community confirmed their full support to ASBP-3 during the December 9 conference by stating "Donors fully support the Program and are ready to work together with EC IFAS and the Governments of IFAS member states in its implementation". Though the UNECE is not a donor, therefore it has not formally joined this statement I would nevertheless like to stress the importance of the strong commitment of the donor community expressed in it. It is crucial to preserve the significant momentum that has been built up in coordination and cooperation between IFAS member countries and donors.

Donors are crucial partners in making ASBP—3 a full success, since they provide co-financing for and support to the implementation of projects. Their statement also mentions the significant gap between the tremendous needs and available resources within ASBP-3 – a gap that could best be narrowed by stable and professional donors' coordination that can improve the effectiveness of implementation, strengthen confidence between the donors' community and implementing partners and help attract additional resources. It is very important to preserve the very impressive level of donor support to ASBP-3 throughout the implementation period by reciprocating it with the same level of support from the side of IFAS member

States. As it was emphasized on 9 December, providing additional, national funding to projects would be highly appreciated by the donors' community.

The UNECE has been providing active support to EC IFAS in the implementation of the decisions by the Summit Meeting of Heads of States Founders of IFAS in April 2009 through the Program "Regional dialogue and cooperation on water resources management in Central Asia". The Program is funded through GTZ by the Government of Germany in the framework of the Berlin Process- which is part of the Water and Environmental Pillar of the Central Asia Strategy of the European Union.

This support included comprehensive assistance to the elaboration of ASBP-3. The UNECE Program supported the involvement of a large number of experts from IFAS member countries, the organization of two large working group meetings – each with some 40-50 participants representing the Governments of IFAS member states and regional organizations - a series of national consultations in capitals as well as meetings with the donors' community, including the donors' conference last week.

The main objective of the UNECE Program is to strengthen regional institutions and legal frameworks for water resources management, build capacity for the implementation of the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes and facilitate water monitoring and information exchange. We are encouraged by the inclusion of an impressive number of complementary projects under direction four of ASBP-3: "Improving institutional and legal instruments".

In the framework of the program the UNECE- together with UNRCCA – organized a regional seminar in April 2009 in Almaty on international water law, focusing on the UNECE Water Convention. Since then highly successful national capacity building seminars were held in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan on the Water Convention and in Tajikistan on the Espoo Convention. We hope to conduct similar events in Bishkek and Tashkent too in the near future.

The UNECE strongly hopes that work on institutional and legal strengthening will receive a new impetus by the adoption of ASBP-3. Progress under direction four of the Program "Improving institutional and legal instruments" is of particular importance for the overall success of ASBP-3: a strengthened IFAS and its institutions would guarantee more effective support to the implementation of the Program.

The UNECE would like to invite the governments of IFAS member States to actively participate in the elaboration of a package of proposals on institutional and legal strengthening. Next year a set of concrete ideas and recommendations will be submitted to the Governments of IFAS member states by the Expert Group. Strong institutions and modern institutional acts do not prejudice in any way concrete solutions to the problems related to regional water resources management. But they can serve as a useful framework for information exchange, research, consultations and decision-support as well as a guarantor of effective implementation of decisions taken by the Governments of their member States.

I wish every success to the Governments of IFAS member States, EC IFAS and the donors' community in the implementation of ASBP-3. The UNECE is ready to provide continued support to EC IFAS and cooperate with donors and partner organizations throughout the implementation period of ASBP-3.