

Inaugural meeting  
of the Interinstitutional Working Group on Tailings Safety and Prevention of Accidental Water Pollution  
2 December 2021, from 2pm to 5pm Dushanbe time,  
via videoconference

**Objective of the meeting:** to hold the 1st meeting of the Interinstitutional working group (IIWG) on tailings safety and prevention of accidental water pollution with presentation of the results of the UNECE project to strengthen the safety of mining operations, in particular tailings management facilities (TMFs) in Tajikistan, as well as the draft terms of reference for the IIWG with the participation of interested ministries and departments, operators of mining facilities.

**Opening of the meeting**

Moderator: *Mr. Ardasher Mirzozoda, Deputy Chairman of the Service of the State Supervision over the Safe Conduct of Work in Industry and Mining Supervision under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan*

Expressed gratitude to the UNECE Secretariat and the Swiss Government for their assistance in implementing projects in the countries of Central Asia to strengthen tailings safety, including the Republic of Tajikistan (hereinafter - RT).

The State Supervision Service for Industrial Safety and Mining Supervision (hereinafter referred to as the Service), as the competent state body for the safe conduct of work in the mining industry in the Government of the RT, in recent years, has been cooperating with the UNECE on the issues of the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents (hereinafter referred to as the Convention).

Representatives of the responsible state bodies of the RT took part in workshops held in 2019 in Kazakhstan. In 2021, within the framework of the UNECE project, training was conducted on the application of the checklist methodology at the Zerafshan LLC JV enterprise in Panjakent, Sughd region with the participation of interested ministries and departments of the RT, as well as other countries of Central Asia. Other operators in the mining industry in the RT may be interested in applying this methodology to assess the safety of tailings.

The activities of the interinstitutional working group (IIWG) on tailings safety and the prevention of accidental water pollution can become an effective mechanism for interinstitutional coordination to prevent accidents at tailings and reduce the risk of transboundary water pollution. In its turn, the Service is ready to cooperate with all responsible government agencies and stakeholders on these issues.

*Ms. Sharifa Khudobakhsh, Deputy Minister of Energy and Water Resources of the Republic of Tajikistan*

Noted that the presence of historical burial sites of radioactive industrial waste from the times of the Soviet Union is still a problem for Tajikistan. The RT adopted the National Concept of the RT for the rehabilitation of uranium waste tailings for 2014-2024.

At the same time, today, the mining industry is actively developing and there is a need for the safe operation of mining facilities and tailings, as well as the adoption of a special approach, especially taking into account the mountainous terrain of the country (93% of the territory).

Emphasized that the UNECE Tailings Safety Guidelines help to identify the hazards of tailings. In addition, within the framework of the Assistance and Cooperation Program of the Convention, Tajikistan was able to improve the level of safety of tailings and improve interinstitutional cooperation and coordination between the competent authorities responsible for industrial safety and water pollution.

Expressed hope that the project will achieve its goals in the RT and new tasks will be set in strengthening interinstitutional coordination on the safety of mining operations and tailings.

*Ms. Francesca Bernardini, Chief of the Transboundary Cooperation Section Chief of the Transboundary Cooperation Section, UNECE Environment Division*

Taking into account the importance of preparedness for possible accidents at mining facilities and tailings, it is necessary to note the importance of actions to prevent possible accidents, however, the successful implementation of these tasks is possible only if all interested parties are involved in their implementation.

Tajikistan, along with Kazakhstan, has declared to be the first in Central Asia to create national platforms for interinstitutional coordination on tailings safety, and Tajikistan, the first in the subregion, will inaugurate a meeting of an interinstitutional working group. The UNECE supported such initiative of the countries and is ready to assist in development of the activities of the IIWG by drawing on international experience in interinstitutional coordination and interaction.

In Tajikistan, since 2009, an interinstitutional coordination mechanism for integrated water resources management (IWRM) has been functioning in the form of a national water policy dialogue (NPD) in the field of IWRM, whose activities are coordinated by the Ministry of Energy and Water Resources. One of the important strategic results of the activities of the NPD IWRM is the approval of the water sector reform program for 2016-2025. Successful activities of the IIWG on tailings safety and accidental water pollution will also have a positive effect and give strategic results.

What was noted by Ms. Khudobakhsh regarding the relevance of efforts to manage historical burial sites and enhance the safety of mining operations of existing enterprises is very timely. It should be taken into account that climate change is a source of extreme weather conditions that increase the risk of natural disasters affecting mining facilities and tailings, the so-called Natech, which requires additional efforts to improve the safety of mining operations, in particular tailings. The IIWG can make a significant contribution to improving safety at both existing and new tailings facilities, as well as to the country's efforts to join the UNECE Industrial Accidents Convention.

### **Session 1. Ensure Safe Management of Tailings and Prevention of Accidental Water Pollution**

*Mr. Firdavs Sharipov, National Coordinator for the UNECE Industrial Accidents Convention, Service of the State Supervision over the Safe Conduct of Work in Industry and Mining Supervision under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan*

He presented the legislative, regulatory and institutional framework for the activities of the Service and regular activities to ensure industrial safety and safe management of tailings in Tajikistan.

Presented the experience of participation in the events under the UNECE project in the RT and, in particular, in the training seminar at the Zerafshan JV LLC enterprise with the participation of representatives of other interested ministries and departments of the RT using the checklist methodology. This event has become an example of institutional cooperation, which will continue to be used by the Service for interaction with interested ministries and departments of the RT.

During the discussion, the question was raised regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the management of tailings in Tajikistan, for example, regarding the schedule and nature of inspections. The representatives of Tajikistan reported that the pandemic had a significant impact on the mining industry, however, only for a short time. All scheduled inspections/verifications were carried out without changes and in the normal mode.

*Mr. Jamshed Kamolov Head of the Main Directorate for the Protection of the Population of the Committee for Emergency Situations and Civil Defense under the Government for the Republic of Tajikistan*

Presented information on the state and monitoring of radiation tailings in the RT, on measures to warn the population about the dangers in the territories of former uranium enterprises and their tailings, and also mentioned the existing difficulties regarding the safety of tailings in Tajikistan and proposed next steps to level these difficulties.

Noted the importance of interinstitutional cooperation for coordinating issues related to the risks and dangers of historical uranium tailings. The experience of Kyrgyzstan on radioactive waste in the city of Mayli Suu, transferred to the balance of the Ministry of Emergency Situations of the Kyrgyz Republic, was noted.

He clarified that the Committee for Emergency Situations and Civil Defense has a chemical-radiometric laboratory, which is equipped with modern devices for conducting radiation-chemical and biological reconnaissance. He also noted that, with the support of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Tajikistan received a radiation monitoring system that will be installed next year on the territory of Tajikistan. This will allow daily monitoring and data collection, which will be stored in the Committee's laboratory, as well as timely informing the population about the radiation level.

During the session, the main responsibilities of the agencies involved in the work on industrial safety in Tajikistan were briefly presented.

## **Session 2. Best Practices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) on the Safe Management of Tailings and their Application in Tajikistan**

*Ms. Claudia Kamke, Project Manager, Environmental Affairs Officer, UNECE Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents*

Presented information on the UNECE Conventions on Industrial Accidents and Transboundary Waters, their Guidelines and Good Practices for the Operational Safety of Tailings and Online Toolkit and Training for strengthening mine tailings safety, including a three-component methodology for determining the risk index of tailings, a checklist and a catalog of measures for appropriate practices, from which you can choose the most appropriate set of measures for a particular object.

Highlighted the outcomes of the 11th Conference of the Parties to the Industrial Accidents Convention, held on December 11, 2020, including on the safety of tailings and measures to prevent the impact on tailings of natural hazards, which have become more frequent due to climate change.

*Ms Claudia Kamke,*

Presented the outcomes of UNECE projects to support the countries of Central Asia to strengthen the tailings safety and to strengthen the safety of mining operations, in particular TMFs, in Tajikistan and Central Asia on the application of UNECE tools, guidelines and best practices to prevent accidental water pollution from tailings in Tajikistan, including indexing the danger of tailings on the examples of Tajikistan and Kazakhstan.

Spoke about the creation of the IIWG on tailings safety and prevention of accidental water pollution in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, as well as the Syrdarya project (phase 1), implemented by the UNECE Water Convention and including the development of measures to prevent accidental pollution of water resources in the Syrdarya river basin.

*Ms. Oleksandra Lohunova, UNECE Consultant*

Conducted a live demonstration of an interactive map of tailings in Tajikistan, which was developed in the framework of the UNECE project on strengthening the safety of mining operations, in particular tailings, in Tajikistan and Central Asia.

In the process of discussing the presentations of this session:

(a) Ms. Claudia Kamke explained that the proposed methodologies for indexing, plotting objects and classifying them on the Google map, the checklist methodology can, as shown by the experience of other countries and sub-regions, contribute to interinstitutional cooperation and coordination of joint efforts. They are offered as a tool for the work of an IIWG, including the possibility of exchanging experience between operators on reducing the risk of industrial accidents and improving the safety of tailings.

(b) A proposal was received from representatives of Tajik enterprises on possible familiarization with foreign (European) experience in ensuring tailings safety and application of the presented methodology. UNECE representatives invited representatives of Tajik enterprises to take part in a sub-regional workshop on the safety of tailings, which will be held as part of an ongoing project with the participation of experts and representatives of enterprises from Europe, and informed that they would further study the possibility of organizing visits to sites in other countries in the future.

### **Session 3. Establishment of a Working Group on the Tailings Safety and Prevention of Accidental Water Pollution in Tajikistan and Discussion of Priority Actions**

Moderator: *Mr. Ardasher Mirzozoda*

Introduced the participants of the meeting the draft terms of reference for the IIWG developed by the UNECE with the rationale, goals, objectives and possible forms of creation and operation of the IIWG (draft TOR is attached).

The moderator informed that the draft terms of reference will be sent to the Government of the RT and must go through the established procedure for coordination and approval, including the form of creation, goals, objectives and regulations of the IIWG.

The moderator informed the participants of the meeting about the activities of the UNECE project for Tajikistan. He informed about the appointment of a national coordinator for the UNECE Convention on Industrial Accidents in the Republic of Tajikistan. He also informed about the actions in connection with the proposal received from the Ministry of Emergency Situations of Kazakhstan on the accession of the RT to the UNECE Convention on Industrial Accidents and sending an official request on this issue to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of the RT.

The moderator informed about the ongoing efforts to assess and harmonize the legislative and regulatory framework for industrial safety and the responsibility of the parties for ensuring industrial safety, including tailings.

At the end of the meeting, the Moderator noted the interest of the state bodies of the RT in cooperation with the UNECE on this project, including, if possible, the official creation of the IIWG and the strengthening of interinstitutional coordination to ensure industrial safety, including at tailings, and expressed the hope that the ToR of the IIWG will be supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the RT.

Representatives of the UNECE expressed hope for the effectiveness of interaction between state bodies in the Republic of Tajikistan on the safety of tailings, including through the activities of the IIWG in future.