

United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA)

Programme of Action for 2012-2014

Introduction

The United Nations Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA) was established in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, in 2007 upon the initiative of the five Central Asian states to identify and address existing and potential threats to stability and to strengthen cooperative security partnerships between the governments of Central Asia, as well as regional and international organizations. The Centre, which began operations in 2008, is an important example of political engagement and preventive efforts by the United Nations in support of Central Asian states. UNRCCA strives to promote dialogue and facilitate conditions conducive to finding mutually acceptable compromises through preventive diplomacy and consensus building approaches. The Centre's new Programme of Action for the period 2012-2014 is based on its mandate (UN documents S/2007/279 and S/2007/280) and consultations with the Central Asian governments. It builds on the previous three-year plan, taking into account current realities and lessons learned. The Programme of Action focuses on the impact of trans-boundary threats facing the region, implications of national developments on regional stability, and the management of common resources and environmental degradation.

Key Priorities for 2012-2014

The three main priority areas for UNRCCA during 2012 to 2014 are as follows:

1) The impact of trans-boundary threats facing the region

The countries of Central Asia are vulnerable to transnational threats including terrorism, extremism and organized crime, particularly drug trafficking.

In recent years terrorist attacks were carried out in a number of countries of the region. Border areas between Central Asian states and with Afghanistan are the most affected, but violence has occasionally spread to urban centers. The Governments in the region have stepped up border controls and are taking measures to thwart attempts at destabilization, including the propagation of extremist agendas. Drug trafficking is another major threat to security. Organized crime groups, generating profits through the drug trade and other illicit activities, have the ability to influence the economic and political life of the countries, fuel corruption, reduce the effectiveness of law enforcement, and undermine the rule of law. The security conditions in Afghanistan, including the production and export of illegal drugs, have an immediate impact on Central Asia as well. With the erosion of effective border controls in some cases, possibilities emerge for human trafficking and smuggling of weapons and other dangerous materials. This combination of issues calls for increased cooperation and

collaborative responses in terms of counter-narcotics and counter terrorism, including continued non-proliferation efforts, and effective border management.

2) Implications of national developments on regional stability

The outbreak of violence in Kyrgyzstan in the spring of 2010 posed serious threats to the integrity of the country, as well as security around the Fergana Valley and throughout the region. The crisis underlines the importance of having effective monitoring mechanisms in place in order to spot the warning signs and to undertake preventive diplomacy at an early stage.

Another lesson learned is the importance of developing a common understanding of the factors that make countries vulnerable to instability. Attention should be placed on assessing the impact of underdevelopment, social factors, ethnic tensions, organized crime and notably corruption, and political transition. This necessitates a more holistic analysis and response, not least among members of the UN system in Central Asia. Such a comprehensive and “one UN” approach – also involving development banks and international financial institutions – would strengthen the leverage of conflict prevention activities, and give added relevance to the work of UN agencies as well as regional organizations.

Tackling the problem at the source would address the underlying factors that could lead to conflict and diminish prospects of a spill-over to neighboring states. If a crisis does erupt, the relevant actors should be mobilized to prevent its spread, address its consequences, and identify measures for reestablishing peaceful conditions.

3) Management of common natural resources and environmental degradation

With the break-up of the Soviet Union the utilization of trans-boundary water resources has become a source of tensions between countries, given the competing priorities for hydro-electric power and irrigation. With no framework agreement in place, the region has relied on short-term *ad hoc* arrangements, which have neither ensured mutual benefits to the countries nor prevented tensions from rising. Competition for water resources among downstream countries will probably increase when Afghanistan develops its energy and agricultural sectors.

Regional structures such as the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) have an important role to play in building confidence among countries in this area. In 2010, the United Nations and the Executive Committee of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) signed a Memorandum of Understanding regarding priorities in addressing the socio-economic implications of the ecological disaster in the Aral Sea basin. The strengthening of this regional structure, which has the participation of all the Central Asian countries, would be vital contribution to improving early warning in relation to water disputes and to encourage bi- and multi-lateral solutions to water management.

The countries also face an array of environmental threats, including desertification, degraded waste storage sites, industrial pollution, and radioactive materials. All pose threats to environmental security and the health of the population. While there is a need for measures to mitigate the effects of decades of extractive industry and mono agriculture, which was detrimental for the environment and people of the region, there is an urgent need to look forward to ensuring sustainable practices. The Aral Sea tragedy, whose consequences extend beyond Central Asia, is testament to the need for durable water management policies. The impact of climate change, particularly the melting of glaciers and depletion of long-term water stores, could have serious long term effects on the region, including environment based conflicts and forced migration.

Mandate and Activities

Activity 1

To liaise with the Governments of the region and, with their concurrence, with other parties concerned on issues relevant to preventive diplomacy.

- Encourage dialogue and contacts among countries of the region in order to identify issues that could lead to tensions, and to take steps to build confidence and cooperation.
- Carry out good offices functions in countries of the region on behalf of the UN Secretary-General.
- Conduct regular travels to the capitals and seats of regional organizations in order to encourage preventive diplomacy.
- Support initiatives designed to prevent conflict and strengthen regional cooperation, particularly in relation to transnational threats, water management, and promoting border security without affecting economic cooperation.
- Encourage countries sharing common borders to carry out joint needs assessments in order to develop common strategies for promoting trade, border control, tourism, and the management of natural resources.
- Strengthen contacts and cooperation between countries of Central Asia and adjacent areas, including Afghanistan.
- Work with inter-governmental organizations and other relevant structures that promote regional cooperation.
- Carry out training to enhance mediation and conflict prevention skills among diplomats and other relevant practitioners in the region, including Afghanistan.

Activity 2

To monitor and analyze the situation on the ground and to provide the UN Secretary-General with up-to-date information related to conflict prevention efforts.

- Liaise with national governments and relevant international and regional organizations in order to enable effective information exchange to provide early warning.
- Develop an early warning system in relation to water management in Central Asia taking into account the interests of all Central Asian states.
- Cooperate closely with the OHCHR and other relevant parties to monitor potential inter-ethnic tensions.
- Contribute to an annual Central Asia Risk Assessment conducted by UNDP and other relevant partners.
- Monitor developments pertaining to terrorist acts and extremist movements that could destabilize the situation in Central Asia.
- Provide regular reporting to the UN Secretary-General of the United Nations with special emphasis on regional threats and opportunities for cooperation.
- Reinforce information and analysis exchange within the region, for example in relation to drug control in the context of the Paris Pact and the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre (CARICC).
- Support efforts to strengthen research and analysis, particularly among academic institutions.

Activity 3

Maintain contacts with relevant regional organizations, encourage their peacemaking efforts and initiatives, and facilitate coordination and information exchange with due regard to their specific mandates.

- Conduct regular meetings and promote streamlined approaches with and among organizations dealing with issues of peace and security in Central Asia, including CIS, CSTO, CICA, ECO, OIC, OSCE and SCO.
- Work closely with the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) to promote early warning and cooperation in relation to preventing trans-boundary water disputes.
- Support efforts by UNODC and other stakeholders, to promote regional counter-narcotics cooperation.

- Facilitate cooperation with the two UN regional commissions with activities in Central Asia (UNECE, ESCAP) to ensure effective streamlining of conflict prevention initiatives.

Activity 4

To provide a political framework and leadership for the preventive activities of the United Nations country teams in the region; and to support the efforts of the Resident Coordinators and those of the United Nations system, including the Bretton Woods institutions, in promoting an integrated approach to preventive development and humanitarian assistance.

- Use the convening power of the Centre to hold regular consultations with UN agencies based in Central Asia in order to assess risks and work together to reduce tensions.
- Draw attention to the impact of under development on instability, and encourage development agencies and programmes to include a conflict prevention perspective in their work, for example in the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF).
- Encourage country teams, Resident Coordinators and other parts of the UN system present in Central Asia to share information that involves early warning indicators.
- Promote tension-reducing projects that can spur development and, as a result, reduce vulnerability to instability (like drugs, crime and extremism).
- Work with the UN system in Kyrgyzstan in support of peace building activities, including those under the UN Peace Building Fund (PBF), to prevent a relapse into violent conflict in Kyrgyzstan.
- Work with development agencies, banks, international financial institutions, bilateral donors and the private sector to promote regional economic cooperation, including between Central Asia and Afghanistan.
- Encourage efforts to promote greater cooperation on anti-corruption and financial intelligence in order to strengthen integrity and to fight money laundering and terrorist financing.

Activity 5

To maintain close contact with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to ensure a comprehensive and integrated analysis of the situation in the region.

- Conduct regular visits to Kabul to exchange information with UNAMA and other stakeholders on political, economic and social developments in the wider Central Asian region.

- Keep regular working level contacts with UNAMA on issues related to security and stability in the region, particularly fight against drug trafficking, terrorism and other forms of organized crime.
- Invite Afghan officials and UNAMA representatives to UNRCCA events aimed at exchanging views and recommendations on the role of Central Asian states regarding peace building efforts in Afghanistan.