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Sustainable development

International cooperation and coordination for the human and ecological rehabilitation and economic development of the Semipalatinsk region of Kazakhstan

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted in compliance with the request made by the General Assembly in its resolution [72/213](#). It provides a status report on the human and ecological rehabilitation and economic development of the Semipalatinsk region of Kazakhstan.

* [A/75/150](#).



I. Introduction

1. In support of the efforts of Kazakhstan to recover from the devastating consequences of nuclear testing at the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site, the General Assembly adopted nine resolutions between 1997 and 2017 (resolutions [52/169](#) M, [53/1](#) H, [55/44](#), [57/101](#), [60/216](#), [63/279](#), [66/193](#), [69/209](#) and [72/213](#)), calling on donor States and international development organizations to support the efforts of the country in improving the social, economic and environmental situation in the Semipalatinsk region.
2. In its latest resolution, [72/213](#), the General Assembly urged the international community to assist Kazakhstan in formulating and implementing special programmes and projects for the treatment and care of the affected population and in its efforts to ensure economic growth and sustainable development in the Semipalatinsk region. It also requested the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its seventy-fifth session, under the item entitled “Sustainable development”, on progress made in the implementation of the resolution.
3. To that end, the present report summarizes the progress made from 2017 to 2019 in the implementation of resolution [72/213](#) in the Semipalatinsk region by the Government of Kazakhstan, the United Nations and the international community.
4. The purpose of the present report is to outline the actions taken and progress made by the Government of Kazakhstan, United Nations system agencies and the international community in addressing the social, economic and ecological challenges in the rehabilitation and development of the Semipalatinsk region.

II. Context

5. Between 1949 and 1989, the Soviet Union conducted 456 nuclear explosions at the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site, the primary testing ground of the Soviet nuclear arsenal. During the four decades of testing, the total energy released by the explosions was equivalent to approximately 2,500 Hiroshima atomic bombs.
6. Until 1963, the explosions were mainly carried out on the surface and in the atmosphere. After the signing of the Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and Under Water in 1963, testing was conducted underground.
7. In 1989, the first Soviet anti-nuclear public movement, known as Nevada-Semipalatinsk, contributed to the end of nuclear arms tests at the Semipalatinsk site along with other developments. The last nuclear test took place on 19 October 1989.
8. On 29 August 1991, two years after a moratorium on testing had gone into effect, the Semipalatinsk site was officially closed. A few months later, the Soviet Union was dissolved and newly independent Kazakhstan became the first country in history to voluntarily give up its nuclear arsenal, which at the time was the world’s fourth largest.
9. In the 30 years since, the Government and the people of Kazakhstan have been actively advocating for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, showing a strong commitment to a nuclear-weapon-free world.
10. In July 2017, most of the States Members of the United Nations supported the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, the first legally binding international document by which a universal and comprehensive ban on nuclear weapons was established.

11. Kazakhstan ratified the Treaty on 29 August 2018, a day that the General Assembly had declared the International Day against Nuclear Tests in its resolution 64/35. That resolution had been initiated by Kazakhstan together with a large number of sponsors and co-sponsors with a view to commemorating the closure of the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site on 29 August 1991.

12. On 29 August 2019, exactly 70 years after the first nuclear test at the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site, the Nazarbayev Prize for a Nuclear-Weapon-Free World and Global Security was awarded, posthumously, to Yukiya Amano, the former Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and to Lassina Zerbo, the Executive Secretary of the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization.

13. From 2017 to 2019, Kazakhstan continued to implement national strategies and programmes for the rehabilitation of the Semipalatinsk region and received international assistance for the implementation of specific national programmes in the region.

III. Policy framework and Government programmes of assistance to the Semipalatinsk region

14. The Government of Kazakhstan is committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. According to its 2019 voluntary national review on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, 79.9 per cent of the Sustainable Development Goals are reflected in the existing strategic documents and programmes. The Government has created a high-level institutional mechanism to oversee the implementation of the Goals.

15. Furthermore, the overarching objective of Kazakhstan is to become one of the 30 most developed countries in the world by 2050. Strategy Kazakhstan 2050 and subordinate programmes and development plans are aimed at modernizing the country's economy, institutions and society and include specific indicators of achievement for 2021, 2025 and 2050. The strategy is being implemented throughout the country, including in East Kazakhstan Province and the city of Semipalatinsk, now named Semey.

16. In 2019, health-care authorities in Kazakhstan adopted a new approach to analysing the medical and radioecological impact of the former Semipalatinsk nuclear test site on the population of the surrounding areas. Under a new mechanism, children born of radiation-affected parents are included in the risk group that is entitled to State support and the duration and proportion of medical support is evaluated individually and is based on the amount and effect of radiation to which each person was exposed.

17. In addition, a list of possible health complications was produced as a point of reference for assessing the effects of radiation on second and third generations of people, with the aim of improving the provision of social services to the children and grandchildren of those who lived or live in the Semipalatinsk region.

18. In 2019, a centre for polytrauma and orthopaedic surgery was established in Semey. Since its opening, 89 endoprosthetic operations have been performed to replace large joints, as well as 66 arthroscopic operations.

19. In addition, a centre for eye microsurgery has been opened and a unique project to create a hybrid operating room has begun in which patients will be offered comprehensive emergency medical care involving cardiac and neurosurgery with innovative treatment methods.

20. At the end of 2019, the Government of Kazakhstan had examined 70 per cent of the former test site and found that land did not contain harmful traces of radiation. Under national law, the land may be made available for economic exploitation after the full completion of the ecological examination, expected in 2021.

21. In 2017, to reduce the shortage of teaching space, two new schools were built in the village of Bobrovka (600 places) and the Ushaktar microdistrict (1,200 places). During the period 2017–2019, the network of preschool institutions in Semey increased by 10 units (2,068 places) owing to the development of private preschool institutions.

IV. United Nations and international assistance to the Semipalatinsk region

United Nations joint programme

22. Between 2017 and 2019, 411 chief doctors and home-visiting nurses from all 25 primary health-care facilities, as well as staff of the medical colleges in the Semipalatinsk region, were trained by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on the universal progressive model of home-visiting of families with young children. In December 2019, the experience with preventing child abuse and improving child health and well-being based on an enhanced approach to home-visiting services was shared at a national meeting on the universal progressive model in which the Ministry of Interior, the National Centre for Public Health Care and representatives of all regions of Kazakhstan participated.

23. In 2017, UNICEF conducted an assessment of the mental health needs of adolescents in conflict with the law in East Kazakhstan Province, including the Semipalatinsk region. Approximately 60 to 70 per cent of adolescents in conflict with the law have a mental health disorder. A high level of comorbidity was found, with one fourth of the sample scoring above the caution cut-off for more than one psychological problem. High rates of exposure to adverse and traumatic experiences have been reported in adolescents involved with the juvenile justice system. The study's data are being used by mental-health and justice system specialists to identify high-risk profiles indicating high-priority groups for preventive interventions in the country.

24. In 2017, UNICEF conducted a review of family support services in East Kazakhstan Province, including those established with support from UNICEF, and presented its outcomes and recommendations. Altogether 39 organizations were identified that provided family support services to children and their families; 13 of those were non-governmental organizations and 26 were State service providers, including 22 children's homes, centres for the adaptation of minors, shelters, youth houses and other residential care facilities. The review identified promising family support practices in a range of settings in East Kazakhstan Province that were later shared with relevant stakeholders, along with lessons learned and recommendations for UNICEF and partners.

25. In 2017, UNICEF provided supplies for child-friendly rooms at juvenile courts in East Kazakhstan Province, including one in Semey. Moreover, judges in East Kazakhstan Province were trained on child-friendly justice practices. The UNICEF diversion programme was piloted in Oskemen, where the juvenile court and the police station were given support in the form of relevant materials and supplies. Moreover, a resource centre on justice for children was established at a local non-governmental organization, Phoenix.

26. In 2019, the International Agency for Research on Cancer, a specialized agency of the World Health Organization, jointly with the Research Institute for Radiation Medicine and Ecology of Kazakhstan, held an international scientific symposium in Semey entitled “Low-dose radiation and cancer: 70 years after the first test at the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site” to mark the seventieth anniversary of the first nuclear test and to advocate for urgent support for research relating to the former Semipalatinsk nuclear test site.

27. The symposium brought together international experts in dosimetry, radiation epidemiology, radiation biology and risk communication from France, Germany, Japan, Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation, as well as from the World Health Organization. Experts discussed scientific findings from long-term studies on various populations affected by protracted low-dose-rate exposure to ionizing radiation due to their residence in the radioactively contaminated territories and strongly supported long-term full-scale health research on the populations residing in the vicinity of the former Semipalatinsk nuclear test site.

28. In 2019, an international scientific and practical conference dedicated to the thirtieth anniversary of the Nevada-Semey international anti-nuclear movement was held in the capital of Kazakhstan under the auspices of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. The purpose of the conference was to analyse the current tense international situation in terms of the threat of nuclear war and to discuss the role of the anti-nuclear movement in Kazakhstan and the world at large.

International Atomic Energy Agency

29. In 2017, the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Government of Kazakhstan inaugurated the IAEA low enriched uranium bank in East Kazakhstan Province. The bank is owned and controlled by IAEA but is operated by the Government of Kazakhstan under national law and in accordance with IAEA safety standards and security guidance. In 2018, IAEA signed contracts to purchase low enriched uranium, paving the way for the launch of the bank’s operations in October 2019.

30. The bank stores a reserve of 90 metric tons of low enriched uranium and acts as a supplier of last resort for States members of IAEA in the event that the supply of low enriched uranium to a nuclear power plant is disrupted due to exceptional circumstances and the State in question is unable to secure low enriched uranium from the commercial market or by other means. The bank is located on the premises of the Ulba metallurgical plant. The plant is a licensed nuclear site with commercial-scale operations and the complete infrastructure to safely and securely store, transport and process low enriched uranium.

31. IAEA has received the following contributions on behalf of the bank: \$50 million from the Nuclear Threat Initiative, \$49 million from the United States of America and \$24.4 million from the European Union. The United Arab Emirates and Kuwait contributed \$10 million each; Norway provided \$5 million and \$400,000 came from Kazakhstan plus in-kind contributions, including its hosting of the bank.

32. IAEA has assisted Kazakhstan in the rehabilitation and remediation of the former Semipalatinsk nuclear test site through a project supporting the transfer of lands of the former test site for economic use that ran in two phases from 2012 to 2019. The project helped Kazakhstan to produce reliable datasets that will serve as a basis for decision makers to determine the territory that can be made available for economic use. Scientific and technical support for the transfer of land in the north, west and south-east of the Semipalatinsk site to economic use was studied and data were produced.

33. Within these projects, expert advice was provided to review, harmonize and ensure quality management of the data. IAEA transferred relevant technologies that included procurement of the required equipment and its on-site installation, commissioning and acceptance testing, and training. Seven scientists were awarded fellowships for training in Belarus, Czechia, Denmark, Germany and the Russian Federation and scientific visits were conducted.

International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

34. From 2017 to 2019, the Kazakhstan Red Crescent Society conducted several knowledge-disseminating activities free of charge for more than 23,000 people in East Kazakhstan Province on such crucial subjects as first aid, voluntary blood donation, restoring family links and the Society's main operations in the region. In addition, about 7,000 members of vulnerable groups in the province received substantial humanitarian assistance including clothing, food parcels and household goods.

35. In 2018, the Kazakhstan Red Crescent Society, in collaboration with local non-governmental organizations, assisted more than 1,200 people during extensive floods in East Kazakhstan Province. More than 2,200 people have been trained for future disaster risk reduction efforts.

Government of the United States of America

36. From 2017 to 2019, the Department of Energy of the United States of America supported Kazakhstan in its attempts to enhance radiological security and nuclear materials management. The Department collaborated with domestic and international partners to address the threat of illicit use of high-priority radiological materials in Kazakhstan. The programme recently increased the safety and security of more than 13,300 radioactive sources at the National Nuclear Centre and the Mangystau Atomic Energy Complex-Kazatomprom. Furthermore, the Department pursued an integrated approach to addressing the persistent threat posed by nuclear materials through a full cycle of materials management and minimization efforts, work that included the conversion of two reactors from highly enriched uranium to low enriched uranium.

37. During the reporting period, the United States Agency for International Development supported non-governmental organizations in East Kazakhstan Province in conducting extra HIV testing and in the production of locally informed media content prepared by citizen journalists.

European Union

38. In 2017, under the Erasmus plus programme of the European Union, a centre of competence and employability development was established at Shakarim State University in Semey to promote the employability of targeted population groups by developing their competencies in line with changes in the labour market.

39. As a part of the project entitled "Civil society support for freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association", funded by the European Union, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights held four public thematic consultations with civil society actors and State authorities. The consultations were focused on good practices and lessons learned regarding the implementation of international standards on the freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association. The regional consultations were held in Semey in October 2019 and provided State authorities and civil society with an opportunity to exchange views on a range of issues and challenges, including freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, legislative frameworks and lessons learned in other contexts.

Government of Switzerland

40. From 2017 to 2019 the Embassy of Switzerland to Kazakhstan funded seven projects in East Kazakhstan Province for a total amount of \$46,000. In 2016, a five-year joint programme of the Government of Kazakhstan and four United Nations system agencies – the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children’s Fund, the United Nations Population Fund and United Nations Volunteers – was concluded with noteworthy results benefiting the development of East Kazakhstan Province and the well-being of vulnerable populations in the regions affected by nuclear testing at the Semipalatinsk site. The programme, entitled “Raising competitiveness of the region through innovative approaches to regional planning and social services”, had a total budget of \$11,651,365, to which the Government had contributed \$9,816,365.

V. Priorities for future action

41. The Government of Kazakhstan, in collaboration with civil society and international actors, remained strongly committed to rehabilitating the enduring consequences of nuclear testing at the Semipalatinsk site. These joint efforts have yielded tangible results and laid the foundation for meeting some of the most pressing challenges in the Semipalatinsk region.

42. At the same time, promoting the long-term development of the affected region will require stronger efforts of the Government and the international community. In accordance with the Government’s action plan to rehabilitate the territory of the former Semipalatinsk nuclear test site and other relevant State programmes, and in line with the outcomes of the consultations between sectoral ministries and the Akimat of East Kazakhstan Province in preparation of the present report, the following priorities will require additional focus and coordinated action from the Government and the international community in the upcoming period:

- (a) Improving the primary health-care system with a focus on reproductive health, child protection and equal access, especially for vulnerable groups and those living in rural areas;
- (b) Enhancing education policies, with an emphasis on the efficient use of resources and infrastructure, equal access to services and readiness to function in crisis conditions;
- (c) Eliminating all forms of domestic and gender-based violence and other harmful social norms and practices that may contribute to various types of inequality (gender, income, discrimination against rural people);
- (d) Revising approaches to social assistance and guarantees by transitioning to measuring multidimensional poverty and creating incentives to reduce informality in the economy;
- (e) Reforming the system of public governance with a focus on strengthening the role of local government and increasing transparency and accountability to the public;
- (f) Finalizing an integrated ecological examination to pave the way for the further institutionalization of lands of the former Semipalatinsk nuclear test site;
- (g) Continuously monitoring the overall safety and resilience of East Kazakhstan Province with a view to leaving no one behind and building back greener;
- (h) Enhancing the engagement of civil society and the development community with the local authorities and the central Government towards the

achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, building on the results achieved through previous programmes in the Semipalatinsk region.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

43. The Semipalatinsk nuclear test site remains a symbol of nuclear disarmament and hope for a world free of nuclear weapons. In the reporting period, the Government of Kazakhstan continued to advocate for a nuclear-weapon-free world, spreading further the hope born in Semipalatinsk.

44. Simultaneously, the Government, with support from civil society, the United Nations and the international community at large, remained committed to perfecting national development strategies and programmes in the Semipalatinsk region. Such efforts, accompanied by targeted regional projects, have continued to improve the ecological, social and economic conditions of people affected by the test site. The Secretary-General calls on the international community to further support the joint work of the Government and the United Nations by:

(a) Providing the technical and financial assistance needed for the implementation of national development programmes for the rehabilitation and development of the Semipalatinsk region while promoting international awareness of the humanitarian and environmental devastation caused by the nuclear tests held in the region;

(b) Strengthening coordination and information-sharing among various actors in the region to plan, implement and monitor inclusive regional socioeconomic programmes and services aimed at addressing the ongoing challenges faced by the people affected by the test site.

45. In support of efforts by the Government of Kazakhstan to make the assistance given to alleviate the tragic consequences of nuclear testing more effective, the Secretary-General acknowledges the existing positive developments in the region and takes this opportunity to encourage the international community to intensify its contributions towards the rehabilitation of the Semipalatinsk region.
