

Opening Remarks by U.S. Ambassador to Uzbekistan Richard Norland

International Seminar on “*Renewable Energy in Central Asia: Enhancing Food Security and Improving Social and Economic Conditions in Remote Locations.*”

Tashkent, November 11, 2008

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a pleasure to participate, along with my colleagues from the American Embassy in Tashkent, from USAID, and from the State Department’s environmental office, in this important gathering. I am delighted to have the opportunity to work once again with Mr. Juraev and the Foundation for Regional Policy, with whom we have cooperated on a number of useful conferences over the past year. It is also an honor to work on this project with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

U.S. participation in this seminar is yet another example of the gradual deepening of the U.S.-Uzbekistan relationship, which has seen steady, step-by-step improvement across the full range of security, political, humanitarian and economic issues over the past year. The opportunity to discuss renewable energy and food security issues allows us to further deepen our bilateral dialogue and focus it on increasingly concrete and tangible issues for the benefit of the people of Uzbekistan and Central Asia as a whole.

There is no more important or relevant subject in Central Asia today than the nexus of issues surrounding renewable energy, water supplies, climate change and economic development. Uzbekistan has drawn the attention of the international community to the plight created by the disappearing Aral Sea, and the desperate social impact this has had on the people residing in Karakalpakstan.

The United States remains deeply concerned about these issues. For example, even in the midst of a presidential transition, the U.S. will participate actively in the upcoming meeting of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change conference in Poland on December 1-12. The results of this seminar in Tashkent may well be relevant for that conference. For those who have studied President-Elect Obama’s platform, it will be obvious that the entire complex of issues relating to renewable energy, natural resources, climate change and economic development will have top priority on the agenda of the incoming Administration.

The most important thought I would leave you with today is that we see the states of Central Asia themselves as taking the lead role in addressing the issues of energy and water that are so pressing, particularly with the onset of winter and the possibility of a crisis in the region. The United States, and of course others in the international community, are prepared to help in any way we can, but we look to the leaders of Central Asia to signal how best to do this. We were encouraged by the successful summit meeting in Bishkek a few weeks ago at which Central Asian presidents reached agreement on interim measures to address energy and water issues this winter.

I am confident that this seminar will offer valuable insights into how the international community and the Central Asian states can further improve cooperation to address this extremely important set of issues. It is an honor to be part of this discussion. Thank you.