

eco-education
eco-education

public participation
public participation

human rights
human rights

good governance
good governance

access to information
access to information

environmental management
environmental management



Armenian Aarhus Centers Network

September-October '10

We are introducing to your kind attention the 4th issue of the electronic bulletin being published by Armenian Aarhus Centers Network. In this issue we present activity of the Network in September and October. Hope you will find some interesting and useful information.



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ENVSEC Initiative



NEW CODE “ON SOIL” ADOPTING PROCESS CLOSED AND HASTY

CONSIDERING ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC ALLIANCE

The environmental public alliance expresses its deep anxiety with closeness and hastiness of new RA Code “On Soil” adopting process, and the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources worked out its bill with the financial support of the World Bank. The representatives of 19 NGOs and Aarhus Centers signed and addressed an appeal to PM Tigran Sargsyan.

The appeal says that the alliance considers it necessary to ensure successful public participation in adopting process of new RA Code “On Soil”, to display the bill on the website of the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, to make aware stakeholders, as well as to grant them an opportunity to present their proposals and opinions that must be included in the bill or substantiate in case of their refusal.

The copies of this appeal are also addressed to World Bank representation and Minister of Energy and Natural Resources Armen Movsisyan.

Varuzhan Hochtanyan, “Transparency International Anti-corruption Center
Karine Danielyan, «Association for Sustainable Human Development
Gohar Oganezova, "Armenian Botanical Society" NGO
Inga Zarafyan, EcoLur NGO
Hrant Sargsyan, "Tapan Eco-Club
Gevorg Petrosyan, “Biosofia” NGO, Gyumri Aarhus Center
Arthur Khazaryan, "Ecological Security and Democracy Development NGO
Mane Hakobyan, "The people are the master of our country» public association
Ararat Alikhanyan Dilijan Aarhus Center
Janna Galya, “Eco-tourism Association
Manya Melikjanyan, "Lore" Eco-Club, Stepanavan Aarhus Center
Hrayr Savzyan, Ekodar Environmental NGO
Greta Gabrielyan, "Ecological Academy" NGO
Lilit Baghdasaryan, "Sustainable Water Environment" NGO
Hasmik Aslanyan, “Shogher Union”
Edgar Yengibaryan Hrazdan Aarhus Center
Lianna Asoyan Gavar Aarhus Center
Silva Ayvazyan, Yerevan Aarhus Center

Armenia's implementation of the UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (the Aarhus convention) is of paramount importance in the process of securing environmental rights at the local level. On September 15-16, a seminar was held in Tsakhadzor aiming to discuss the progress of the Aarhus Convention implementation in the communities of Armenia under the theme "Ecological rights in the communities of Armenia".

ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS AND CO-OPERATION IN ARMENIA



The seminar was a follow-up of seminars on Armenia's international obligations in environmental management co-hosted in 2006, 2007 and 2008 by the Fridtjof Nansen Institute and the RA Ministry of Nature Protection. The project is financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kingdom of Norway.

During two-day seminar there were discussed environmental impact assessment in the sphere of environmental management, legislative progress's issues in the field of local self-government bodies, as well as roles and responsibilities in the municipal environmental management. Furthermore there were discussed challenges in municipal environmental governance and learnt from Armenian, Norwegian and international experiences in this regard. Public participation and accounting are the problems which are addressed to municipal level.

Civil servants from the municipal level alongside with a selected number of representatives of non-governmental organizations, the scientific sector and fourteen Aarhus centers in Armenia participated in the seminar.

Let's Preserve "Alpine Carpets"

Subalpine and alp landscapes are the main places of mowing and summer pastures of our republic and therefore has great importance, so keeping its vegetation cover is of special importance in the row of environmental protection measures. Currently the main reason of pasture degradation is its wasteful use, overgrazing, improper use of pesticides, as well as pasture burnings. In the second half of September month burning cases of natural pastures and vegetation cover are recorded in Aparan region and surrounding villages, nearby mountain slopes of Aragats and Tsakhkunyats.



An opinion was spread in population that burning of vegetation, so called, the grass, in these areas contributes to plant's reproduction and efficient growth in the next year. Such thinking is wrong: any change of ecosystem component over time leads to change of other components, thus changing the whole system. As a result burning is destroying not only above-ground part of plant and seeds, but is also infringed its root system, which over time leads to the destruction of vegetation cover. In addition, as a result of burning a large number of valuable growing herbs (ex, perennial, alpine chamomile, lavender, balsam fir, etc.), food plants, bushes and berries (strawberry, sweet-brier) are also destroying in these areas. Destruction of plants and its root system becomes the reason of erosion of fauna and land, the top soil, humus-rich layer carried out by wind or water, rocks are baring. The fires cause atmosphere pollution. Aparan Aarhus Center with Aparan city council launched awareness raising measures with residents directed to protect the natural pastures and aiming to present determined fines of ecological offenses in that field.

Civic Action for Security and Environment

(CASE)



SAFE ENVIRONMENT: STORAGE OF CHEMICALS IN ALAVERDI.

Project objectives: to assess possible influence of toxic substances into environment from the storage of chemicals, to identify the concentration of arsenic (As) and mercury (Hg) in water and soil. All data collected accompanied with risks assessment will be presented to “Vallex” Group, municipality and government. The project also has an aim to raise public awareness on environment and security problems.

Project activity: By financial support of OSCE CASE Small Grants Program, in Alaverdi a program called “Safe Environment” started on February 25, 2010. The project has an aim to observe and study the environmental impact and human health risks assessment of the arsenic storage left as a heritage from former mountain metallurgy factory, now being in the balance of “Manes” color metal factory public corporation.

Samplings from water and soil have been taken by Ecological –Noosphere Study Center of NAS to identify arsenic and mercury concentrations, buildings’ state assessment has been done as well by the seismological group from the Ministry of Emergency Situations of RoA. For providing wide public awareness and participation lots of talk-shows, interviews, press conferences and press releases had been organized.

As a result of this observation there was found that the state of the storage is the worst. There is no water isolation; the concrete is depleted and the quality is very low. All these factors increase possibility of hazardous substances to be widely flowed into environment. In some places the measurements showed no exceeds of (As) and (Hg) but in ground soils of some places the limits were exceeded (As)-14.97 and (Hg)- 12.29 times. Also there is a big chance for emergency situation when the flow will be increased by a factor.

As one of outcomes of the project a movie has been filmed that tells about the state of the chemical storage and possible impacts that it can have on environment and health. In this context the film has to show the relation between environment and security and raise public awareness on this matter.

Full movie can be found in <http://www.aarhus.am> and on facebook.com Aarhus Centers in Armenia group sooner.

Research has shown that the inorganic arsenites (trivalent forms) in drinking water have a much higher acute toxicity than organic arsenates (pentavalent forms). The acute minimal lethal dose of arsenic in adults is estimated to be 70 to 200 mg or 1 mg/kg/day. Most reported arsenic poisonings are caused by one of arsenic's compounds, also found in drinking water, arsenic trioxide which is 500 times more toxic than pure arsenic. Arsenic is related to the first five leading causes of non-accidental death in the United States, bringing the total to 1,525,675 related mortalities. EPA efforts are underway to reduce drinking water exposure to zero. Leading causes of mortality in the world are all related to arsenic. These are heart disease (hypertension related cardiovascular), cancer, stroke (cerebrovascular diseases), chronic lower respiratory diseases, and diabetes. These diseases are all related to the alteration of voltage dependent potassium channels. Researchers, led by Ana Navas-Acien, MD, PhD, of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Health, studied 788 adults who had their urine tested for arsenic exposure in the 2003-2004 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. Participants with type 2 diabetes had a 26% higher level of total arsenic in their urine than those without the disease. Diabetes is also related to alteration of voltage dependent potassium channels due in part to the function of insulin and potassium in the cellular metabolism of glucose. Due to the regular appearance of arsenic in public drinking water supplies, it is likely that arsenic plays a part in about thirty percent of total all cause mortality in the United States. Arsenic prevalence in the water has been related to the occurrence of hypertension, erectile dysfunction and related conditions.

Yeghvard joined to 10/10/10

International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction



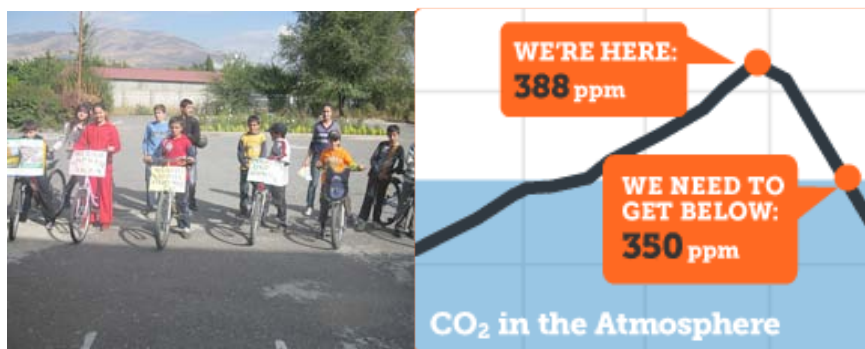
On October 10, Yeghvard Aarhus Center and “Yeghvard” youth environmental NGO organized a bicycle race. School age boys and girls walked through the town streets calling public attention with appeals “let’s prevent climate global warming”, “Let’s preserve our health”, and “Let’s protect of our environment”. The goal of the event was to focus public attention on issues of environmental protection and especially on climate change. Participants also called adults to join them and to run bicycle instead of cars which having negative impact upon climate.

The event was organized within the framework of the project CASE “Nairi Information Network”. It was also settled in the website www.350.org

On October 11, a course of study was held for students of higher classes of Aparan schools dedicated to the International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction at Aparan Aarhus Center, which aimed to inform participants the importance of the problem of the natural disaster risk reduction and clarify a number of natural, ecological and anthropogenic causes of disasters, the available resources, which prevents the hazards turning into disasters, to present disasters typical for the region, to introduce safety regulations During the natural disasters.



Coordinator informed that each year more than 250 thousand people are dying due to disasters around the world and its caused damage estimated at 50-100 billion dollars. According to forecasts, along with increase of urbanization rates and due to the planet climate change the number of victims will be increased. Lives of millions of people can be saved if will be added awareness raising and warning activities of the all sections and age groups of community’s population. During the course the explanations were accompanied by showing a presentation. An agreement was reached to meet again, aiming at printing information leaflets in connection with the topic and distributing those in the establishments of the city.



The First Meeting of "Aspare" Public Alliance of Gegharkunik

"Aspare" public alliance of Gegharkunik was established in 2009. The Alliance creation aims to promote formation of civil society in the Republic of Armenia, particularly in Gegharkunik region, to ensure steady and progressive development of the region. On September 23, the first official meeting of the alliance was held in Gavar Aarhus Center. The session was conducted by alliance coordinator, head of Gegharkunik branch of "A.D. Sakharov human rights protection center". The meeting was attended by representatives of NGOs and individual residents. There was

presented drafted regulations of "Aspare public alliance of Gegharkunik. The latter was approved by the panelists. The coordinator presented NGOs and individuals' processed applications of membership to the alliance. Deadline for presentation the alliance membership applications was determined until the 1st of November. There was presented also the alliance's new e-mail address: aspar.dashing@gmail.com, aimed at creating easier communication between the Alliance members and coordinators. It was proposed to include in the agenda of the next two sessions discussion of GAH alliance membership application and issues raised in the field of water supply in Gavar city and issues of legal relationship between residents-subscribers. Until December 31, 2011 the Alliance activities will be coordinated by representatives of two initiative NGOs: head of "A.D. Sakharov human rights protection center", Gegharkunik branch and Coordinator of Gavar Aarhus Centre.

Discussion over Environmental Issues of Syunik



A meeting was held in "Women development resource centre" with Zaruhi Postanjyan, deputy of National Assembly and head of "Greens Union" NGO. Coordinator of Goris Aarhus Centre also participated in the meeting. The part of the meeting was dedicated to the environmental issues of Syunik particularly to exploitation of Kapan uranium ore. The head of "Greens Union" NGO presented the issues related to exploitation of uranium ore and its impact upon the region. Participants actively participated in debate and as a result decided to organize signature collection in the city against exploration of the uranium ore in cooperation with coordinator of the Aarhus Centre. It was also mentioned that visits and cooperation will be continued constantly.



Environmental Training for Teachers in Lake Sevan Basin

Environmental awareness and education are the prerequisites for sustainable development of Armenia. In this regard, educating school children is crucial in raising public awareness and participation in environmental problem solving. Considering the existing environmental problems and management issues pertaining to Lake Sevan, an Environmental Training was organized on September 27, 2010 at Gavar Public Environmental Information Centre (Aarhus Centre) for secondary school teachers in Lake Sevan basin. The event was organized with assistance from Gegharkunik Marzpetaran and sponsored by the US Embassy through the US Alumni Association of Armenia (USAAA). Ms. Lusine Taslakyian, who is a member of USAAA and serves as Public Participation and Capacity Building Expert for the EU funded Transboundary River Management Project delivered the training and facilitated the discussion on various environmental issues. 37 teachers of Biology, Geography, Ecology and Nature Protection from schools of Gegharkunik Region (including representatives of towns Sevan, Gavar, Martuni and adjacent villages Chkalovka, Noraduz, Lichk, Tsovagyugh, Varsar, Lchashen etc.) acquired knowledge on existing environmental issues in Armenia, legal and institutional aspects of natural resources management and protection. They were introduced to water resources management system in Armenia, transboundary river management activities, waste and pollution, mining and health issues, biodiversity and protected areas. The training topics also covered Armenia's participation in international environmental conventions and Aarhus Convention in particular to help the participants to better understand own environmental rights and public participation mechanisms. Various environmental video films were demonstrated during the training and copies will be provided to the teachers for their further use in their daily teaching activities.

Young People Can be Active to Promote Establishment of Democratic Values

On October 2, as a result of joint Initiative Goris Aarhus Centre and "Davitbekyan Covenants" Youth NGO organized an event under the theme "Public issues and possible ways to solve those in the region". Coordinator of Goris Regional Council presented the objectives of the organization's creation, future plans, and issues concerning young people, highlighted their active participation in various issues and activation of cooperation scopes. He particularly stressed importance to the cooperation not only with the Aarhus Centre in Goris, but also with other



Aarhus Centers operating in different cities of the RoA aiming at solving environmental problems, as well as establishing, maintaining and developing democratic values. Aarhus Centre presented global, regional, Goris town's environmental problems and highlighted the cooperation as with "Davitbekyan Covenants" youth organization, as well as with other interested organizations, media, business, government and various non-governmental organizations for the sake of clean environment, human health and human rights, environmental preservation related issues. During the joint event there was decided to organize conference under the theme "Ecologically clean environment for all of us". The event was attended by representatives of NGOs, higher educational institutions, universities, Goris s local authorities

On October 2, public debate took place at the Aarhus Center refer to the forest sector situation of the republic. The initiative is implemented under the slogan of "Struggle against illegal deforestation - apply to the law, to protect you and your forest", within the framework of the ENPI FLEG Program "Improving Forest Law Enforcement and Governance in the European Neighborhood Policy East Countries and Russia" (supports governments, civil society, and the private sector in participating countries in the development of sound and sustainable forest management practices, including reducing the incidence of illegal forestry activities). The discussion was conducted by chairman of "EcoLur" Informational NGO and Director of "Forests of Armenia" NGO. Because illegal loggings are still continuing in Armenia, the forests of Dilijan also considers as a target environment. Therefore it's required to represent the current situation, forest management and legal issues to community residents. There were invited residents, representatives of local municipalities, NGOs, media, students, teachers, and the forester of "Dilijan" NP, members of Centre's board of experts. The forester of Dilijan NP noted that the NP is consistent, and runs according to the management plan, which is in accordance with the approved annual logging volume. Speakers once again called to launch active social



movement against this phenomenon and don't tolerate forest logging cases, otherwise generations will not be able to live in a healthy and safe environment. Parallel to the discussion chairman of "Khazer" Ecological NGO, the specialist

on environmental education conducted a course for students of high school of the city, aiming at increasing the education level of growing generation and involving for the purpose of forest preservation and the risks reducing existing in surrounding environment. The project is financed by the EU and implemented by the World Bank, World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the International Union for for the Protection of Nature (IUCN).



On September 18, a measure under the theme "Vulnerability and Increase of Adaptability of Mountain Forest zone Ecosystems with regard to Consequences of Climate Change" took place in Goris. The event was organized within the frameworks of the project CASE / GEF / 00051202 "Increase of adaptability of the Armenian Mountain Forest ecosystems with regard to the consequences of climate change". There was briefly introduced the project purpose at the event, as well as presented the vulnerability of forest vegetation, adaptability, issues of Syunik forest pests and its outbreaks in the case of climate change, forest fire management in Syunik region, increasing public awareness and agitation within the framework of forests adaptability raising. The event was attended by representatives from more than 20 Armenian mass media, the RoA Ministry of Nature Protection, from the Rescue Service of the RoA Ministry of Emergency Situations, the forestry of Syunik province, Syunik regional administration, as well as representatives from various public areas. Goris Aarhus Center also actively participated in the event. During the event the expert on public awareness issues of the program stressed importance to the cooperation of the OSCE Office in Yerevan and Goris Aarhus Center. Goris Aarhus Center reached an agreement on further cooperation with media representatives directed to the environmental protection related issues to increase the level of public awareness, which will promote public active participation in decision-making process.

World Food Industry Day

In conjunction with the world Food Industry Day on 18 October, training was conducted under the theme "Genetically modified organisms" in Aparan Aarhus Centre". The goal of the measure was to give participants information on GMO and achievements of genetic engineering and its using in the fields of agriculture and food industry. Coordinator of the Centre informed that scientists have started



intervene in the affairs of nature and change genes of living organisms yet since 1970s and today they cherish great hopes with thinking that wide use of GMO will solve food problem of rapidly growing population of the Earth. However, the impact of genetically modified organisms upon human and environment is not completely explored and disclosed yet; there are no precise evidences of human gene possible changes and negative impacts because of genetically modified food. Scientists avoid making sharp deductions, but express opinions. One of which is because of that genetically modified food is arising decline of immunity, allergic and other phenomena. In order to regulate growing of Genetically Changed exposed organisms, its application in the industry, export, import, and maintenance, Bio-Resources Management Agency of the Ministry of Nature Protection has developed draft law on "using genetically modified organisms", which should be discussed by the government. The draft law also anticipates various amendments in the other laws as well as creation of research centers, which will control genetically modified organisms, local food production with its content, export and import.

The theme of this year's World Food Day will be 'International Alliance Against Hunger,' emphasizing the need for global mobilization to create the political will to eradicate hunger, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) announced recently.

"How is it possible in this day and age that so many of our fellow human beings remain hungry?" said FAO director-general Jacques Diouf when announcing the theme of the day, held each year on 16 October to commemorate the agency's founding in 1945 in Quebec City, and observed in more than 150 countries. "Nations must turn verbal commitments to fight hunger into practical programmes," he said.

TeleFood, a public-awareness and fund-raising campaign including television shows and other special events organised by FAO, will coincide with World Food Day to heighten attention about global hunger and to focus attention on achieving food security for all.



Public Debate in Goris Aarhus Centre

On October 19, public debate under the theme “Ecological issues of Goris and a standpoint from the frontal part” was held in Goris Aarhus Centre. Discussion was organized with jointly efforts and cooperation of the branch of Environmental Centre of Caucasus Region and Goris Aarhus Centre. The coordinator and experts of the Armenian branch of Environmental Centre of Caucasus Region presented missions, implemented works as well as results of that works of their organization and answered on participants’ questions. Afterwards were presented main environmental issues of Goris region and adjacent territories concerning the residents ; natural disasters, scavenging, land degradation, unfavorable state of resting places, Goris River issue, low level of awareness on ecological issues, central garbage dumping and other issues by Goris Aarhus Centre and panelists. Statement of questions, debates and collection of opinions were occurred, questionnaire was filled up under the theme “A standpoint from a frontal part”.

As a result was acquired an agreement of close cooperation, the coordinator of the branch of Environmental Centre of Caucasus Region marked that they are ready to support to any suggestion which aimed at furthering solutions of environmental issues and human welfare. Representatives of various sectors of society took part in the measure. Participants were satisfied with the results of the event.



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Office in Yerevan

OFFICE IN YEREVAN



For questions please call:

tel./fax: +374 223 26570

mobile: +374 93 431347

info_hrazdan@aarhus.am

edgaryeng@yahoo.com