**Information provided by the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan**

Environmental protection has always been a priority for the Government of Azerbaijan. A clear example of this is that after gaining independence, our country has joined more than twenty international multilateral environmental agreements and conventions. Moreover, vast number of strategic documents on environment protection has been endorsed. Recently, on February, By the order of the President of Azerbaijan Republic “National Priorities for Socio-Economic Development: Azerbaijan – 2030” has been approved. In accordance with the order, Clean environment and “green growth” is the one of the priorities out of total five for the next decade.

In the socio-economic reforms carried out by the country's leadership in 2020, special attention was paid to environmental issues, and a number of measures were taken to protect the environment and improve the environmental situation.

Relevant measures have been envisaged and implemented in the “the Development Concept “Azerbaijan 2020: a vision of the future”, the “National Strategy for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological Diversity in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2017-2020” , “The State Programme on Socio-Economic Development of the Regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2019-2023, National Strategy for the improvement of solid domestic waste management in the Republic of Azerbaijan 2018-2022”, “The Action Plan on reducing negative environmental impacts of plastic packaging waste in the Republic of Azerbaijan: 2019-2020”, “State program for the geological study of the subsoil and the efficient use of the mineral resource base for 2020-2024” “Roadmaps for the national economy and key sectors of the economy” “The action Plan For 2020-2022 To Ensure Efficient Use Of Water Resources” and other programs.

After the adoption of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, democratic and legal reforms were initiated in the country and institutional mechanisms were created to ensure effectiveness of human rights. Articles 27 and 31 of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan stipulate that everyone has right for life and right to live in safety and Articles 39 and 41 stipulate that everyone has the rights to live in a healthy environment, right for protection of health and other such rights. At the same time, the right to live in a healthy environment, as defined in the Constitution, establishes that everyone has the right to gain information about true ecological situation and to get compensation for damage done to his/her health and property because of violation of ecological requirements. A number of proposals have been made to address environmental problems, including the provision of the population's demand for environmentally friendly drinking water over the past period by the Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan that was adopted on 28 December 2001 in order to restore the human rights and freedoms enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan and in the international treaties to which the Republic of Azerbaijan is a party and violated by governmental and municipal bodies and officials of the Republic of Azerbaijan, as well as to prevent violation of human rights in cases envisaged by the given Constitutional Law.

Prospects for solving the problem of drinking water of the population, preventing pollution of water basins, seas and rivers with industrial waste, creating mechanisms to regulate sanitary protection zones and to protect the right of people to live in a healthy environment and other proposals are of this nature. In the National Action Program to strengthen the protection of human rights and liberty in the Republic of Azerbaijan, approved by Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on December 27, 2011, among other issues the right of the population to live in a healthy environment and implementation of measures for improvement of the environmental situation to prevent environmental pollution was set as a goal. It should be noted that the Ombudsman was recommended to lead the work of the Working Group on coordination of the implementation of the National Action Program(NAP). In this regard, the implementation of measures envisaged by the Program each year is summarized by Ombudsman and published in book form and sent to official bodies, and the electronic version is posted on the official website of the Ombudsman Institute. Every year, public hearings are held with the participation of all groups of the population and Ombudsman that covers each city and district of the country in order to study the issues of implementation, promotion and application of NAPs, during which complaints of citizens are heard in the relevant fields, awareness-raising conversations are held on protection and promotion of their rights.

Harmful effects on the environment and human health are monitored and investigated by the bodies of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources carrying out environmental protection monitoring and state control. The appropriate measures in accordance with law are taken in case of irregularities and negative effect facts of human rights. Back in the Soviet Union, the process of onshore oil and gas production involved intensive contamination of land with oil and petroleum products in mining areas. The process of phased cleaning of contaminated lands at the level of modern requirements is underway. If the activities and production processes meet the requirements of the environmental protection legislation, appropriate measures in accordance with law are taken in case of negative effect facts and violations of human rights. Both the soil and the air have been polluted for many years as a result of the activities of the chemical industry enterprises in Sumgait during the Soviet era. During the period of independence, the activities of chemical industry enterprises that do not meet modern environmental requirements have been suspended and modern enterprises have been built. The requirements in the direction of the environment protection from pollution and the efficient use of natural resources have been established in the environmental protection legislation. The import of hazardous waste and persistent organic pollutants into the Republic of Azerbaijan, as well as carrying out export from the Republic territory are carried out in accordance with the legislation. Therefore, the Republic of Azerbaijan acceded to the United Nations Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes in 2001 and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants in 2003.

The forest inventory works have been continued in order to clarify the forested areas. Within the framework of the “Assessment and monitoring of forest resources to strengthen the knowledge framework in the field of forestry in Azerbaijan” project implemented with the support of FAO and GEF. the country inventory work has been carried out on the basis of international methodology and modern technologies, the multifunctional sustainable forest management practices have been applied. The greenery also have been laid on new areas on forest and non- forest fund lands, trees of different species have been planted. Due to gasification of the regions and public awareness raising campaigns, the number of illegal scraps has decreased.

During the year 2020, the works on the development of specially protected natural areas and the protection of biological diversity have been continued. Hence, in the direction of protection, reintroduction and restoration of historical habitats of gazelles in the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan, in November 2020, the relocation of 20 more gazelles to the Acinohur and Qakh State Protected areas took place. 5 European bisons have been brought to Azerbaijan as part of a project implemented by the IDEA Public Union, Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources and the WWF Azerbaijan Office to reintroduce European bisons to our country and will be released into the wild after being kept in a cage in the Shahdag National Park.

**Information provided by the Food Security Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan**

1. In a globalizing world, chemical contaminants cause serious problem for all countries of the world. Contamination of drinking water and foodstuffs through high-levels of radiation, as well as heavy metals, pesticides, biological drugs, agrochemicals, chemical compounds and other waste materials can be an example of exposure to high-risk toxic substances and unhealthy pollution levels that adversely affect human rights in terms of food safety. Pesticides have a special place among environmental contaminants. Unlike other contaminants, pesticides are deliberately released into the environment. Because modern day pesticides are mainly synthetic organic substances, their widespread use in agriculture confronts all the countries with the problem of elimination of pesticide residues.

Obsolote and banned pesticide stocks pose a serious threat to human health and the environment. At present, the Republic of Azerbaijan has a large amount of obsolote pesticides. The widespread use of pesticides in the USSR led to the creation of excessive reserves in supply bases. As a result of the collapse of the USSR, most of the toxic chemicals were left without owners. Uncontrolled storage of pesticides in unsuitable warehouses or open areas has led to violations of packaging integrity and labelling.

Nowadays, the elimination of technical waste is paramount importance. The world community is particularly concerned about persistent organic pollutants (POPs), that has the ability to spread cross-border and accumulate in living organisms and has a negative impact on human health and food as a whole. Along with developing countries, the main problem for Azerbaijan is the elimination of unusable and banned pesticides.

1. A preliminary assessment and risk analysis of the current situation in areas contaminated with residues of banned pesticides and other toxic chemicals are conducted out by Azerbaijan Food Safety Institute under the Food Safety Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2019.

As a result of the nationwide monitoring conducted by the inventory commission organized by the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2012, areas with useless and banned pesticide residues were identified in the country. Researches were conducted at 14 facilities operating in 11 districts (Agstafa, Shamkir, Samukh, Yevlakh, Ujar, Mususlu village of Ujar district, Siyazan, Khachmaz, Salyan, Dayikand village of Salyan district, Imishli, Jafarli village of Imishli district, Beylagan, Fuzuli district).

In addition, the Jangi pesticide landfill which is used as a warehouse for obsolote and banned pesticides poses a high risk to the country.

Regular meetings with local and international experts are organized to eliminate this problem in the country. Issues such as the export of waste from contaminated areas to countries with experience in this field will require large sums of money as it will not be an economically sustainable solution, as well as, whether the country has the necessary capacity to find a solution at the national level, providing large financial resources for the creation of new enterprises based on international experience are discussed at the meetings.

1. During control measures such as ventilation system, toxicological control of water flow, waste management conducted by the Agency, compliance of enterprises with the requirements of technical normative legal acts (norms and regulations of sanitation and hygiene) on food safety is checked. In public catering establishments The Agency has undertaken the following obligations in accordance with the “Regulations on the Food Safety Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan” approved by the Decree No. 1681 of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated November 13, 2017.

* To control the production, storage, sale, application, import and export of pesticides, biologicals, agrochemicals and other plant protection products, as well as the amount of residues in all types of plant products, feeds, feed additives and soil;
* To conduct state testing, registration of pesticides, agrochemicals, biological and other drugs and prepare a list of drugs allowed for use;
* To take appropriate measures on isolation of materials by timely detection of pests in phytosanitary controlled quarantine facilities and plant quarantine controlled materials, removal, storage, disposal, recycling or elimination of plants, plant products, pesticides, biologicals, agrochemicals and other plant protection products that has been proven to be dangerous as a result of product research.

1. The following legislative acts were adopted by the Republic of Azerbaijan to control over the circulation and proper application of chemicals used to increase the productivity of agricultural crops and protect them from various pests, including to prevent of threats to the environment, human and animal health:

* The Law “On Pesticides and agrochemicals” (the year 1994) on determining the legal basis for tests, registration, use of pesticides and agrochemicals and organization of agrochemical services to agriculture;
* The Law “On Phytosanitary control” (the year 2006) for control over the circulation of pesticides, biological substances and agrochemicals, production, sale, application, import and export of toxic chemicals;
* In 2007, the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan adopted Resolution No. 10 on “Rules for state testing, registration and inclusion of pesticides, biological substances and agrochemicals in the list of permitted drugs”, “Rules for neutralization or elimination of unusable and prohibited pesticides, biological substances, their compounds and containers by withdrawal from the owner”, “List of highly toxic and environmentally hazardous drugs and rules of application”, “Rules for import and application of unregistered pesticides and biological drugs”, “Rules for transportation and storage of toxic chemicals within the country”. Our country ratified the Basel Convention in 2001 and the Stockholm Convention in 2004 to protect human health and the environment from the effects of POPs. At the 11th HCH (Hexachlorocyclohexane) and Pesticides Forum held in Azerbaijan in 2011, Azerbaijan made a public commitment to be a regional leader in the field of cleaning of POPs and managing waste in an environmentally safe way.

**6.** Periodic chemical analysis of water used in enterprises should be carried out. Thus, the results of chemical analysis of water are checked during the control measures. In addition, certain food products imported into the country are analyzed for toxic elements and if found, it is destroyed in accordance with the requirements of the legislation. In accordance with the “Rules for taking, transportation, storage, neutralization or elimination of goods (products) from individuals and legal entities by inspection bodies within the framework of inspection and other control measures” approved by the Resolution No. 542 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated December 6, 2017 neutralization and elimination of goods are carried out in accordance with the laws of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On industrial and household waste" and "On protection of atmospheric air".

Non-compliance with safety rules for handling pesticides during storage, transportation, application and storage operations leads to the formation of a local source of environmental pollution and poses a real threat to the release of toxic substances into the atmosphere, water bodies and soil. Obsolote pesticides have a negative impact on human health and the environment through pollution of the atmosphere, surface and groundwater, and soil.

For initial assessment and risk analysis of the current situation in the areas contaminated with residues of pesticides and other toxic chemicals banned in the territory of the Republic, pesticide, soil, plant and water samples were taken by AFSI in 13 out of 14 facilities operating in the regions.

It was determined that POPs was detected in 100% on 7 objects, 87.5% on 2 objects, 75.0% on one object in pesticide samples, 100% on 11 (eleven) objects, 50% for one object in soil samples, 87.5% on 3 objects, 66,7; 75,0 və 77,8% on according to 3 objects in plant samples.

Mathematical calculations were performed to assess environmental risks based on the FAO methodology. As a result, 6 out of 15 facilities were included in the “critical” category, one facility in the “problematic (pesticide)” category, 7 facilities in the “problematic environment” category, and one facility in the “low priority” category. In this regard, the work is ongoing to prevent the accumulation of obsolote and banned pesticide stocks in the country due to the improvement of the mechanism for controlling the circulation of pesticides.

The application of pesticides in agriculture, prohibited by international conventions and organizations, can cause serious problems in the field of human and animal health, environmental pollution, ecological imbalance, excessive levels of toxic chemicals in products and a serious reduction in the export potential of our country. According to the current legislation in the country, the production, sale and application of toxic chemicals that do not meet the requirements of state standards of the Republic of Azerbaijan or internationally recognized international standards in the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan, as well as, that have not passed state testing, registered and prohibited for use, are not allowed. Considering this, the Agency has banned the use of 191 active substances.

**7.** As a result of research, it was determined that the most critical situation in the country is the Yevlakh region. There was a 60 m long pesticide storage in the district. The remains of the warehouse are currently available. Due to the dispersal of stored pesticides, a strong pesticide odor was observed in hot and windy weather, and smoke and flammability of pesticides were observed at high temperatures. For this reason, residents often experience allergic reactions and poisoning. Taking into account that these areas are among the most critical objects in the country, the Agency considered it expedient to raise the issue of relocation of 11 reffugee families living in buildings in the contaminated area. Currently, the work is ongoing in this direction.

**8.** The Food Safety Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan continues its active participation in the project "Lifecycle Management of Pesticides and Disposal of POPs Pesticides in Central Asian countries and Turkey". The project, which aims to reduce POPs releases from obsolete pesticide stockpiles and contaminated sites and strengthen the capacity for the sound management of pesticides, was launched in May 2019 and is expected to run until October 2022. It is planned to implement relevant measures on the following components within the project:

* safely destroy POPs and obsolete pesticides and remediate a pesticide-contaminated site (Component 1);
* strengthen the institutional and regulatory framework for managing pesticides through their life cycle (Component 2);
* and increase the successful uptake of alternatives to chemical pesticides on key crops (Component 3);
* These three components are supported by a horizontal project management, Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) and communication component (Component 4).

**9.** According to Article 3 of the Law “On Sanitary and Epidemiological Safety” and Article 5 of the Law “On Foodstuffs” the entities must take preventive measures in this field. Thus, protection of the environment from harmful substances and wastes will be ensured by bringing production conditions in line with hygiene standards and sanitary rules.