



United States Mission to the OSCE

Economic and Environmental Dimension Implementation Meeting

Session 3: Environment and Security

As delivered by Kate Watters
Executive Director, Crude Accountability
Vienna, Austria, October 18, 2011

I'm Kate Watters, Executive Director of Crude Accountability. Crude Accountability is a Washington, DC based environmental justice organization, working with oil and gas impacted communities in the Caspian Sea region. We work with communities in Russia and in Kazakhstan—both in the areas of exploitation and in transport of hydrocarbon resources—and have seen first-hand the negative impacts from failure to take environmental and security concerns into account in the development of these resources. We also work on oil and gas related issues in Turkmenistan, and just last week published a report on the Law on Hydrocarbon Resource Use in Turkmenistan and the role of the State Agency for the Management and Use of Hydrocarbon Resources under the President.

Today I want to focus my comments on energy and security in the Caspian region, with a specific look toward access to information and transparency and the connection to communities in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, attempting to access environmental information that is critical to their health and safety. Often this discussion focuses on theoretical approaches, and today I'd like to focus on concrete examples.

The village of Berezovka in western Kazakhstan is located on the edge of the Karachaganak Oil and Gas Condensate Field, one of the largest in the world. The residents of Berezovka have sought relocation to a location free from environmental hazards since 2002, when the government of Kazakhstan first promised they would be moved because of their close proximity to the field. As the community worked for relocation, it repeatedly requested information from the government—first on the local level and then on the national level—about emissions levels from the field. Residents were told that this information was confidential, and only after repeated lawsuits, did they obtain even partial information about emissions levels that were impacting the community. In addition, the community has repeatedly attempted to obtain full information about the village's environmental health data from the Ministry of Health, only to be denied. The community was also excluded from participating in environmentally important decision-making, including the sizing of the sanitary protection zone around the Karachaganak Field. This violates the Aarhus Convention, to which Kazakhstan is a signatory, and also contradicts international standards on access to information, transparency in environmental decision-making, and the right to live in a clean and healthy environment. We hope that the community will soon have access to this information and be relocated to a clean and healthy location as it should be according to Kazakhstani law.

In Turkmenistan, the World Bank is considering financing the renovation of the Turkmenbashi Port, which is located on the Caspian Sea and is Turkmenistan's largest port facility. According to documents available on the World Bank's website and on the website

of the Turkmen Maritime Service, which is responsible for the port, a public hearing was held on the project in Turkmenbashi on July 26 of this year. And, in fact, the environmental impact assessment is available on the website in English. However, this key document is not available in Russian or Turkmen. How local residents are expected to comment on the environmental impact statement and provide their comments is unclear, since they don't have access to it in a language they can read. This is a violation of Articles 4 and 6 of the Aarhus Convention, to which Turkmenistan is a signatory.

Similarly, the Turkmen Law on Hydrocarbons states that petroleum operations shall be under the aegis of the State Agency for the Management and Use of Hydrocarbon Resources under the President. This law stipulates that contractors working in the hydrocarbon sector are required to conduct their own environmental monitoring and submit the results of that monitoring to the State Agency, where that information then becomes confidential. This means, effectively, that the Ministry of Environment is excluded from evaluating any environmental monitoring results, in petroleum operations where there is clearly an environmental impact. According to the Aarhus Convention and internationally accepted standards, such information should be available to the public.

When considering questions of environment and security, such information is critical to protecting the public, to creating stable and secure communities, and to protecting the natural resources on which we all depend. Public oversight of and access to information is a key element to environmental security. In the cases outlined above, the lack of oversight and access can be remedied by additional inclusion of civil society and by a respect for the rule of law.

Thank you very much for your attention.
Thank you, Mr. Moderator.