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Strategy of Implementation of the United
Nations Convention to Combat
Desertification in Those Countries
Experiencing Serious Drought and/or
Desertification, Particularly in Africa

CHAPTER 1

GENERAL

Land and soil, as its essential component, is the key national natural resource of Belarus; its efficient management and protection form the keystones of the social and economic well-being and environmental situation in the country.

The land is a unique natural asset due to its multi-functionality. Land performs environment-forming and nature-protection functions in the biosphere; it constitutes an integral part of natural systems; it is the universal and indispensable material pre-requisite for production; it serves as a spacial basis for business facilities, settlements and infrastructure; it is the main means of production in agriculture and forestry; it is the object of land relations. The soils comprising it possess the unique feature of fertility – the ability to produce biomass.

Land (and soil) preservation and efficient/sustainable management are a priority of the national policy of sustainable development and environmental security.

Edict of the President of the Republic of Belarus No. 575 of November 9, 2010 “On Approval of the Concept of National Security of the Republic of Belarus” (National Register of Legal Acts of the Republic of Belarus”, 2010, No. 276, 1/12080) recognizes degradation of land, forests and natural complexes, as well as radioactive, chemical and biological contamination of soils are key threats to the national security.

The relevance of the issues of land degradation is mentioned in the National Strategy of Sustainable Social and Economic Development of the Republic of Belarus until 2030, approved by the Presidium of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus on February 10, 2015.

Land degradation and droughts are pressing problems for all regions of the world. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa (hereinafter, the Convention) was signed in Paris on June 17, 1994 in an effort to take joint action of the international community to resolve these problems.

So far, 195 parties have acceded to the Convention – the absolute majority of the countries of the world.

The Republic of Belarus acceded to the Convention in accordance with Edict of the President of the Republic of Belarus No. 393 of July 17, 2001 “On Accession of the Republic of Belarus to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa (National Register of Legal Acts of the Republic of Belarus”, 2001, No. 68, 1/2855).

The Belarus natural conditions (the amount and distribution of precipitation, close-to-surface location of groundwater, considerable area of environment-stabilizing land types) at the present exclude development of desertification in its extreme form. However, a number of countries of the Central and Western European region (Annex 5 to the Convention), including the Republic of Belarus, are particularly sensitive to the processes of desertification.

The activity on implementation of the Convention in the Republic of Belarus is aimed at providing for a systematic land inventorying and monitoring, measures to prevent land (and soil) degradation and avoid losses in soil fertility and productivity.

In accordance with Articles 5 and 10 of the Convention, the affected countries undertake to develop relevant strategies and action plans, establish national priorities of prevention of land degradation.

According to Article 1 of the Convention, land degradation means reduction or loss, in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas, of the biological or economic productivity and complexity of cropland, pastures and forests resulting from land uses or from a process or combination of processes, including processes arising from human activities, such as:

erosion caused by wind and/or water;

deterioration of the physical, chemical and biological or economic properties of soil;

long-term loss of natural vegetation.

The 2008-2018 Strategic Plan and Framework to Enhance the Implementation of the Convention, approved by the Eighth Conference of the Parties (2007, Madrid) provides for development of national strategies and plans by the parties in implementation of the Convention.

The Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (2012, Rio de Janeiro) recognized the need for immediate measures for reversing land degradation trends and concerted efforts for eliminating this phenomenon within the framework of implementation of Target 15.3 of the Sustainable Development Goal 15, as defined by the above Conference (“by 2020, combat desertification, and restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land-degradation-neutral world.” Neutral (zero net land) degradation) was recognized as the determining factor of food security and access to energy and water resources.

This Strategy has been developed in fulfillment of the commitment of the Republic of Belarus under the Convention, and prevention of land and soil degradation.

This Strategy has been reconciled with a relevant integrated financial strategy; it is based on a synergetic approach to the implementation of the Convention and other international treaties of the Republic of Belarus.

CHAPTER 2

THE CURRENT CONDITION OF LAND (AND SOIL), AND PROBLEMS WITH PREVENTION OF DEGRADATION THEREOF

As of January 1, 2015, the Belarus land resources comprised 43.9 agricultural land, 45 per cent forest fund land, 1.5 per cent reserve land, 2.3 per cent water fund land, 5.1 per cent – nature protecting, health-improving, recreational, historical and cultural land.

The share of plow land in the structure of agricultural land is 65.6 per cent, meadows take 32.9 per cent, permanent structures occupy 1.4 per cent.

Belarus is in the top 20 countries of the world by the per capita share of arable land, which is 0.60 ha. The per capita share of agricultural land in general is 0.91 ha.

The area of environment-stabilizing land types (natural meadows, forest land, woodlands and forest plantations, bogs and land of water bodies), forming the natural frame of the country, is 11,621,400 ha, or 56 per cent of the national territory.

The share of forests in the Republic of Belarus is 39.5 per cent.

The share of natural territories subject to special and/or designated protection is more than 4.7 mln ha, or over 22 per cent of the national territory.

The drained land area is 3,410,400 ha, or 16.4 per cent of the national territory, including 2,880,400 ha of agricultural land and 311,200 ha of forest land.

Drained agricultural land with peat soils includes 1,068,200 ha, or 36.7 per cent, including 122,200 ha of land transferred to agriculture after recultivation of peat lands with less than 50 cm layer of peat, which had been withdrawn from commercial use.

The key factors of prevention of land and soil degradation, affecting their ecological condition, are human activities: unbalanced intensive land use, incompliance with legal provisions on land protection and use.

The land and soil degradation trends are also aggravated by climate extremes (droughts, frosts, et cetera). Although the territory of the Republic of Belarus is in the zone of sufficient moistening, the problems of droughts and arid phenomena leading to losses in the yield of main crops, and sometimes to land and soil degradation and negative landscape changes, remain highly topical. During the last decades the probability of droughts and their duration increased both due to the global climate changes (warming) and human impact on the environment (land reclamation, disturbance of natural vegetation). This gives top priority to the issues of prompt drought monitoring.

More than 20 types and forms of land and soil degradations have been identified in Belarus; the most important are the following

water and wind erosion of land (and soils);

soil dehumification, consolidation, local salinization, land waterlogging as resulting from inefficient business practices;

organic-matter degradation of peat;

technogenic pollution of land (and soil), inter alia, with radionuclides;

fires on drained land with peat soils, fires on land of the forest fund;

land disturbance through extraction of minerals and construction.

Specific types and forms of land and soil degradation, such as waterlogging of land resulting from inefficient business practices, land

disturbance through extraction of minerals and construction, etc., are inventoried as part of the cadastral land inventory of the Republic of Belarus.

However, some types and forms of land degradation, including water and wind erosion of land, soil dehumification, land contamination with chemicals, are not registered in a systemic manner.

In 2011-2013, organizational and technological measures aimed to protect land from degradation and provide for its efficient use, protection and rehabilitation comprised development of land tenure plans in 43 regions, including 8 in the Brest Oblast, 10 in the Vitebsk Oblast, 8 in the Gomel Oblast, 4 in the Grodno Oblast, 7 in the Minsk Oblast, 6 in the Mogilev Oblast.

In 2011-2013, low productive and severely eroded land with an area of 15,500 ha was withdrawn from agricultural use; 800 ha of disturbed and unused land were recultivated; 100 ha of forest fund blown sands, slopes and ravines were stabilized.

37,200 ha of land were transferred to the forest fund. Forests were restored and planted on an area of 82,300. Forest fund was inventoried with the water-body buffer zone limits, and measures on prevention and restoration of water-protection forests were developed in an area of 614,900 ha.

Reclamation systems were rebuilt in an area of 162,100 ha; agricultural reclamation operations were carried out in an area of 106,900 ha.

By 2015, ecological rehabilitation/restoration of degraded or transformed marsh ecological systems was carried out in an area of about 51,000 ha.

Efforts are made to raise public awareness and level of education in the field of land protection.

However, despite the progress, the issues of prevention of land and soil degradation are still highly relevant.

Year 2000 soil surveys established that peat soils have lost their genetic properties and moved to the anthropogenically transformed category in an area of 258,800 ha, or 7.6 per cent of drained land, including 190,200 ha, or 5.6 per cent of drained land that has been moved into the category of degraded peat soils. Preliminary figures indicated that by now the area of degraded land with peat soils has increased by 12 per cent.

In 2015, the area of other degraded (disturbed and unused) was 416,700 ha.

Manifestation of the land degradation processes became possible due to existence of ecologically unstable land and soils in the country. 10.9 per cent of the total area of arable land is occupied by loose sand, and 4.8 per cent – by drained peat and bog soils. 16.3 per cent of arable land has low natural fertility.

Erosion causes major damage to soils. According to the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, more than 500,000 ha of land are exposed to water and/or wind erosion processes, amounting to over 5 per cent of the agricultural land area; soils of about 30 per cent of arable land are at risk of deflation. Annual losses per hectare of erosion-exposed arable land may amount to 16-18 tons of the solid matter, exceeding the permissible level (2 t/ha). The yield of crops on eroded land is then reduced by 5-60 per cent.

There is a sustainable humus content reduction in arable soils (2.28 per cent in 1996, 2.23 per cent in 2010).

According to the Land Resource Register of the Republic of Belarus, the area of land contaminated with radionuclides and withdrawn from agricultural use amounts to 246,700 ha (1.2 per cent). A major part of the above-mentioned land cannot be used for production of standard pure agricultural crops, wherefore it is advisable to consider reclassifying it as land of the forest fund.

29 regions throughout the country belong to the group of ecologically unfavorable land, 62 regions are considered as unfavorable for production of crops.

A number of organizational issues remain outstanding for a long time, such as:

- inadequate level of legal regulation in part of identification of land degradation types and forms of relevance for the Republic of Belarus, as well as criteria of their classification as such;

- inadequate information on land subjected to degradation, precluding their independent assessment, examination of the degradation trends and adoption of prompt measures to neutralize/mitigate negative impacts of the process;

- incompliance with requirements to balanced crop rotation and best agricultural technologies, causing development of erosive processes;

- unsatisfactory condition of some reclamation systems, primarily on the forest fund land, entailing disturbance of the condition of natural environmental systems and land degradation;

- inefficient use of a part of reclaimed land, causing reduction of the humus content in soil, as well organic matter in peat;

- absence of a package of measures on adaptation of agriculture and forestry to climate changes.

CHAPTER 3

GOVERNMENT POLICY IN THE FIELD OF PREVENTION OF LAND AND SOIL DEGRADATION

The public administration in the field of land protection and efficient management, including prevention of land and soil degradation is performed in accordance with the Code of the Republic of Belarus on Land, the Law of the Republic of Belarus of November 26, 1996 “On Environmental Protection” (Vedamastsi Vyarhounaha Saveta Respubliki Belarus, 1993, No.1, Art.1; National Register of Legal Acts of the Republic of Belarus, 2002, No. 85, 2/875), Law of the Republic of Belarus of July 23, 2008 “On Land Reclamation” (National Register of Legal Acts of the Republic of Belarus, 2008, No. 184, 2/1520).

The public policy on land protection and efficient management, including prevention of land and soil degradation, is enforced by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection, the State Property Committee, other national government authorities, local executive and administrative bodies, and other public organizations.

The following government programs are targeted at prevention of land and soil degradation:

The 2010–2015 State Program of Social and Economic Development and Integrated Use of the Natural Resources of the Pripyat Polesye, approved by Edict of the President of the Republic of Belarus” No. 161 of March 29, 2010 “On the State Program of Social and Economic Development and Integrated Use of the Natural Resources of the Pripyat Polesye in 2010–2015” (National Register of Legal Acts of the Republic of Belarus, 2010, No. 80, 1/11503), containing measures on improvement of the efficiency of use of reclaimed land, prevention of land degradation in agricultural landscapes of the Pripyat Polesye – a unique area, where the issues of preservation and efficient management of both natural systems with minor changes, and large drained areas are of high relevance;

The 2011-2015 Program of Social and Economic Development of the Republic of Belarus, approved by Edict of the President of the Republic of Belarus No. 136 of April 11, 2011 (National Register of Legal Acts of the Republic of Belarus, 2011, No. 43, 1/12462), that defines further greening of the agricultural sector through introduction of progressive soil treatment methods and technologies, land and soil cover protection from degradation, water and wind erosion as a key area of arrangement of efficient management and protection of land resources;

The 2011–2015 State Program of Sustainable Development of the Countryside, approved by Edict of the President of the Republic of Belarus” No. 342 of August 1, 2011 “On the 2011–2015 National Program of Sustainable Development of the Countryside” (National Register of Legal Acts of the Republic of Belarus, 2011, No. 88, 1/12739), providing for implementation of measures against soil degradation and chemical contamination, including development (based on examples from the European Union) of agricultural land use regulations to ensure preservation of soil fertility and prevention of erosion from water and wind;

The State “Peat” Program for 2008-2010 and until 2020, approved by Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus No. 94 of January 23, 2008 (National Register of Legal Acts of the Republic of Belarus, 2008, No. 29, 5/26698), providing for measures to raise the tolerance of agricultural landscapes and soils to degradation, development and introduction of a resource-saving framework of adapted agricultural use and prevention from degradation of peat soil;

The main objectives of the 2011-2015 State Program of Preservation and Use of Reclaimed Soils, approved by Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus No. 1262 of August 31, 2010 (National Register of Legal Acts of the Republic of Belarus, 2010, No. 214, 5/32430) in the field of soil and land protection are protection from erosion, flooding and waterlogging, pollution with livestock waste, restoration and increase of the previous capacity of drained land, increase of the productivity of reclaimed land and its tolerance to unfavorable environmental factors;

The State Program of Overcoming the Consequences of the Chernobyl Disaster for 2011-2015 and until 2020, approved by Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus No. 1922 of December 31, 2010 (National Register of Legal Acts of the Republic of Belarus, 2011, No. 10, 5/33118), providing for implementation of a package of protective measures in the agriculture to secure production of products meeting the domestic and international standards of radionuclide content, as well as measures in forestry on efficient management of forest resources in contaminated areas, protection of forests from fires;

The Program of Development of the Industrial Complex of the Republic of Belarus for the period until the year 2020, approved by Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus No. 622 of July 5, 2012 (National Legal Internet Portal of the Republic of Belarus, 25.07.2012, 5/35993), providing for improvement of the economic mechanism of incentives for introduction of soil contamination and agricultural land degradation preventing technologies by industrial organizations;

The 2013-2020 State Program of Measures on Mitigation of Climate Change Effects, approved by resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus No. 510 of June 21, 2013 (National Legal Internet Portal of the Republic of Belarus, 27.06.2013, 5/37447), that provides for development of a package of measures mitigating impact on climate, as well as effect of climate extremes (droughts, frost, et cetera) on the condition of reclaimed land.

The strategic issues of protection and efficient use of natural environmental systems, an integral component of which is land (and soils), are set forth in the following instruments:

The Strategy of Implementation of the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat, approved by Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus No. 177 of February 10, 2009 (National Register of Legal Acts of the Republic of Belarus, 2009, No. 44, 5/29297);

The 2011-2020 Strategy of Preservation and Sustainable Management of the Biological Diversity, approved by Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus No. 1707 of November 19, 2010 “On Issues of Preservation and Sustainable Management of Biological Diversity” (National Register of Legal Acts of the Republic of Belarus, 2010, No. 287, 5/32887);

The National Strategy of Development of a System of Specially Protected Natural Territories until January 1, 2030, approved by Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus No. 649 of July 2, 2014 “On Development of a System of Specially Protected Natural Territories” (National Legal Internet Portal of the Republic of Belarus, 11.07.2014, 5/39101).

CHAPTER 4

THE STRATEGY GOALS AND KEY AREAS OF IMPLEMENTATION; PRIORITIES IN THE FIELD OF PREVENTION OF LAND DEGRADATION

The targets of implementation of this Strategy are preservation and efficient/sustainable management, prevention of their degradation, and increase of the productivity of land (and soils), providing for the national security and improvement of the public lifestyle.

These targets can be achieved through integrated implementation of measures in the following key areas:

improvement legal regulation in the field of prevention of land and soil degradation, economic mechanisms in this area;

improvement of the system of inventorying land subjected to degradation, taking into account biophysical and socioeconomic indicators harmonized with the strategic objectives of the Convention as per the Annex; regular updating of information on the amount, condition and distribution of land subjected to degradation, land degradation and rehabilitation trends, operation of the land monitoring system;

preservation, improvement of the condition and efficient management of natural ecological system, rehabilitation of degraded and transformed ecological systems;

preservation and reinforcement of the natural capacity of soil resources: efficient operation of reclamation systems; improvement of the use of agricultural land; implementation of agricultural and forest reclamation, anti-erosion and other activities aimed at protection of land from degradation;

development and introduction of innovative agricultural technologies; development of a system of organic farming; adaptation of agricultural production on land contaminated with radionuclides;

reduction of the share of land subjected to degradation; recultivation of disturbed land; rehabilitation of territories subjected to chemical contamination;

improvement of the level of scientific and technical knowledge and awareness of general public about the issues of efficient management of land resources, and prevention of land and soil degradation; reinforcement of the human and institutional capacity in this area; conduct of international and regional cooperation, inter alia, by raising international technical assistance.

The priorities of the Republic of Belarus in the field of prevention of land and soil degradation are as follows:

achievement of neutral (zero net) degradation of land and soil;

restoration of degraded and transformed ecological systems;

compliance with agricultural technologies providing for preservation and improvement of the natural soil fertility, development and introduction of innovative agricultural technologies;

mitigation of organic-matter degradation of peat soils;

development of organic farming meeting the principles of green economy;

improvement of the academic capacity in the field of land (and soil) protection and efficient management.

The above goals, key areas and priorities are determining in development of national action plans on prevention of land and soil degradation for relevant five-year periods.

The implementation of this Strategy will facilitate achievement of the following operational objectives of the Convention:

to actively influence relevant international, national and local processes and actors inadequately addressing desertification/land degradation and drought-related issues.

to support the creation of enabling environments for promoting solutions to combat desertification/land degradation and mitigate the effects of drought.

to become a global authority on scientific and technical knowledge pertaining to desertification/land degradation and mitigation of the effects of drought.

to identify and address capacity building needs to prevent and reverse desertification/land degradation and mitigate the effects of drought.

to mobilize and improve the targeting and coordination of national, bilateral and multilateral financial and technological resources in order to increase their impact and effectiveness.

CHAPTER 5

EXPECTED OUTCOMES AND MECHANISM OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS STRATEGY

The following indicators will be achieved upon implementation of this Strategy:

area of land subjected to water and/or wind erosion: no more than 550,000 ha by 2020; no more than 550,000 by 2030;

area of degraded drained land with peat soils: no more than 200,000 ha by 2020; no more than 190,000 ha by 2030;

area of radioactively hazardous land: no more than 150,000 ha by 2020; no more than 100,000 ha by 2030;

number of settlements in radioactive contamination zones: no more than 2190 by 2020; no more than 1770 by 2030;

share of environment-stabilizing land types (natural meadows, forest land, woodlands and forest plantations, bogs and land of water bodies): at least 57 per cent of the national territory by 2020; at least 60 per cent of the national territory by 2030;

area of ecologically rehabilitated depleted peat fields and disturbed bogs: at least 55,000 ha by 2020; at least 60,000 ha by 2030;

average level of humus content in arable soils: at least 2.23 per cent by 2020; at least 2.23 per cent by 2030;

overall pesticide load on soils: no more than 2.7 kg of pesticides per hectare of arable land by 2020; no more than 2.5 kg of pesticides per hectare of arable land by 2030.

The accomplishment of these targets will help achieve zero net degradation of land and soils

Biophysical and socioeconomic indicators reconciled with the Convention strategic objectives, as per the annex to this Strategy, are used for the purposes of reporting on implementation of the Convention.

This Strategy will be implemented through activities corresponding to the five-year national action plans on prevention of land and soil degradation with the funds allocated for implementation of state programs in the field of natural protection and efficient management of natural resources, such as land (and soils), international technical assistance funds, as well as other legitimate sources.