

Environment and Children's Health Protection at last terms in Armenia

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Any person wants to breathe clean air, drink clean water, eat ecologically clean food, and live in a safe environment. Especially it's necessary for the children's health. In the Constitution of republic of Armenia and the correctly the law of "About children's rights" /are accepted 29.05.1996/ in 7-th article are written: "Everyone the child has the right to protection and strengthening of health".

At present, all this is impossible in Armenia without cooperate with other countries, without solution other financial, economic, law and other problems, which are the causes of impossibility to realize these global problems. The republic has its share of environmental problems, including a nuclear power plant subject to contradicting assessments, polluted rivers, reservoirs on the verge of collapse, green zones victimized as a result of construction works.

A broad public discussion of environmental problems began in the mid-1980s, when the first "green" groups formed in opposition to Yerevan's intense industrial air pollution and to nuclear power generation in the wake of the 1986 reactor explosion at Chernobyl'. Environmental issues helped form the basis of the nationalist independence movement when environmental demonstrations subsequently merged with those for other political causes in the late 1980s.

In 1991 independence of Armenia was welcomed with great enthusiasm and elation, however, it caused very serious problems among which environmental problems hold significant place. Environmental conditions in Armenia have been worsened during the winters of 1991-92, 1992-93, and 1993-94 brought enormous hardship to a population lacking heat and electric power. (The large-scale felling of trees for fuel during the winters of the blockade has created another environmental crisis.) The results of the blockade and the failure of diplomatic efforts to lift it led the government to propose reconstruction of the Armenian Atomic Power Station at Metsamor, which was closed after the 1988 earthquake because of its location in an earthquake-prone area and which had the same safety problems as reactors listed as dangerous in Bulgaria, Russia, and Slovakia. After heated debates over startup continued through 1993, French and Russian nuclear consultants declared operating conditions basically safe. Newly independent Armenia needed the income from foreign sales of Nairit rubber and chemical products, many of which had been assigned exclusively to that plant under the Soviet system and were still unavailable elsewhere to the former Soviet republics in the early 1990s. Up-to-date environmental safety technology and adherence to international standards were promised at Nairit when the decision to resume production was announced.

Another environmental concern is a significant drop in Lake Sevan's water level because of drawdown for irrigation and the diversion of water to hydroelectric plants to compensate for the electric power lost through the inactivity of the nuclear plant at Metsamor. This crisis was addressed in 1992-93 by construction of a tunnel to divert water into the lake from the Arpa River. Engineers estimated that once the project is finished, the tunnel will allow 500 million cubic meters of water to be drawn from the lake annually, while maintaining a constant water level. The Ministry of the Environment reported that the lake's water level had dropped by fifty centimeters in 1993. Experts said that this drop brought the level to within twenty-seven centimeters of the critical point where flora and fauna would be endangered.

The Government of Armenia after independence with the international organization's, other countries has cooperated in the field of integration of economic, ecological, and social policies for sustainable development, as well as in creating legal and regulatory structures to stimulate the observance of laws¹, norms, and rules on environmental protection, assists in the implementation of the principles of Environmental Conventions, works with the Global Environment Facility (GEF) on the implementation of global mandates and national strategies, particularly the Lake Sevan Action Programme and the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (BSAP), supports Armenia's initiatives in developing the "third way" position of the countries with transition economies, within the framework of UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and Montreal Protocol. During the short period of its independence, the Republic of Armenia has already joined 14 international conventions in the sphere of environmental protection and signed related protocols, with the aim of integration into the broad European family. Has accepted many laws of about environment, ecology problems and now this process is continuing.

However, when you talk about environment you have to pay attention to another problem. Within recent years residents of Armenian had to fight for the most necessary and basic things such as food, clothes and other things. Even now in conditions of some definite positive improvements in the republic the average annual income of a resident is only \$600. All these problems primary for today's children's or tomorrow's society. Last years in Armenia, as the government, none-government and any levels, are attentively, and achieve the actions to solute environmental, and connected with it problems, because environmental problems in our world in permanent influent to the children's health. Now days, too: for example, the Ministry of Nature Protection of the Republic of Armenia has developed a number of environmental programs, including The National Action Plan on Environmental Protection and The Complex Program on Rehabilitation, Conservation, Reproduction and Use of Lake Sevan Ecosystems, which were approved by the Government of the republic. Today and tomorrow our children will carry the issues of today's problems of its sphere.

Our NGO recognize that children are entitled to grow and live in healthy environments. We are well aware that protecting children's health and environment is crucial to the sustainable development of countries, and Armenia, too. So all these years we, as our action, strives to create work places for needy families, women and refugees through economic activities, which increase production and by means of educational, social, health and charity projects to assist parentless, needy children's mental and physical development and life improvement. The organization implemented some projects on Environmental education where 2015 children were participated in them. The aim of the project was to raise and teach the children to love the nature, to clean the environment and nature. Within the framework of the project actions were organized on cleaning rivers and forests. In 2000 the organization actively participated in Food security action. Our organization is a coalition member of "Green areas" and actively participates in all the works of the coalition. We agree, commend and join the efforts of the European Commission (EC) to ensure a healthier environment for children through the development of an Action Plan 2004–2010, as a means of ensuring implementation of the EC Communication on the Environment and Health Strategy. Effective action for protecting children's health should therefore emphasize: programmes and plans aimed at improving the state of the physical environment (air, water, soil, noise), in particular through the integration of children's needs into housing, transport, infrastructure and planning; equity, i.e. giving priority to protection of children at highest risk, and particularly of children who are neglected, abandoned, disabled, institutionalized or exploited, or who are suffering the consequences of armed conflict and forced migration, by improving access to preventive health

¹ Laws of "About examination of influence on the environment" /accepted 12.12.1995/, "The water code" /accepted 04.06.2002/ etc.

and social protection services; poverty reduction, i.e. policies addressing the multidimensional aspects of poverty among children; health promotion, i.e. actions aimed at preventing and reducing exposures to environmental health hazards by adopting healthy lifestyles, achieving sustainable consumption patterns and helping to create healthy and enabling human settlements². A major WHO event - the 4-th Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health - was held in Budapest, 23 - 25 June, 2004. An Armenian delegation comprised of health and environment authorities attended the conference (along with 52 other countries from the WHO European Region) and the Minister of Health co-chaired one of the sessions. Armenian specialists were actively involved in preparation for the conference and the development of Children Environmental Health Action Plan for Europe (CEHAPE). WHO will now support the implementation of CEHAPE in Armenia and its integration into the Armenian National Environmental Health Action Plan and other relevant national policies and strategies.

The causes of influence of children's health are: children are at the top of the food chain (because their food is human breast milk), they take in more food and water, and therefore toxins, relative to their body weight, their skin is more permeable to pollutants, they are liable to ingest between 27-70 times the maximum doses of toxins (Levels are set for adults)³. So we want to attentive the problems, which are connected with **ecologically clean food**, although our government is trying to answer of these problems, and our Parliament are accepting the changes in the proper laws⁴, especially still there are many opens in this sphere of economy, law and other sphere of Armenia. This problem is necessary for many countries of the world. Our food must be ecologically clean today, which are the most important problem in for protect children's health.

We count, that, the following questions should be attributed (related) to a category priority: Safety and quality of foodstuff and maintenance of their sufficient quantity(amount). With reference to this question we call for, that:

- The moratorium on use of genetically modified organisms (?? ?) has been entered.
- The quantity (amount) of the chemical substances used in agriculture and by manufacture and ????????????? of food stuffs has been reduced.
- The Governments have developed the quality standards of foodstuff and standards of a feed (meal) and have provided regular monitoring their observance.
- Adequately financed systems of maintenance of a healthy feed (meal) for schoolboys have been created, is especial for children from needy families.
- to the Firms making foodstuff, was in a duty to print on packing of their production the information on quantity(amount) of the preservatives contained in these products, and on their possible(probable) influence on health of people.

About those steps, especially in first and last in Armenia the level of law /in Parliament/ or in economy are accepted the proper means /about it has written on the previous page/. Currently, dairy products for example are inaccessible to the majority of the population because of their high cost. That is why especially in rural regions vegetables are economically preferable. However, a diet of only vegetables lacks important vitamins such as B12 and D and can only offer very low levels of specific proteins. Furthermore, most vegetables have low levels of essential amino acids (lysine, methionine and so on). Insufficient nutrition has a negative effect on the human immune system, and particularly on developing children's immune systems. This negative effect is further enhanced for

² Fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, Budapest, Hungary, 23–25 June 2004 Children's Environment and Health Action Plan for Europe

³ Making the Environment Work for Our Children's Health Report of the NGO Strategy Conference, December 15-16, 2003 *Organizers: European Public Health Alliance* and European ECO-Forum***

⁴ now in Armenian Parliament are discussing the new changes projects about the raising of requirements in law "About food", which aim to proper the EU legislation and assure the difference "ecologically clean food" with other, for example "genetic changes of food"

Armenians who live in the chemically polluted areas near for example the Yerevan Chloroprene plant (Nairit). This leads to increasing levels of disease-rates among children and birth and growth disorders. Especially children and pregnant women need to have access to sufficient amounts of proteins and essential amino acids. Connected with these, in Armenia must develop the organic economy, which purpose will have to be the production ecological clean food, which else are necessary the children's health of Armenia. Especially in our republic are important the development organic agriculture, because agriculture, as the sphere of economy, are developed as the soviet, as the independent times, which processes started in 2002 with helping the USDA MAP projects. There is a tremendous opportunity to develop organic agriculture in Armenia. Despite strong interest in organics, there is currently little or no coordination of resources or activities, presenting an opportunity to create networks that will propel existing efforts forward. Organic and sustainable agriculture can become the leading organizing principle in efforts to revitalize the Armenian economy. Prospects for organic agriculture are very good. And can be the insurance Armenian of protecting the children's health. But we have much work to do in this area not alone, as with helps of international organizations, other countries and in internal country's efforts /economic, legislative, social, with NGO levels and etc/.