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U.S. Embassy Hands Over 10 Water Trucks to Turkmen Border Service

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The U.S. Embassy in Turkmenistan handed over 10 MAZ water trucks to the State Border Service (SBS) of Turkmenistan at a presentation ceremony held at an SBS military unit in Ashgabat on April 20, 2004. U.S. Ambassador to Turkmenistan Tracey Ann Jacobson and First Deputy Chief of Turkmenistan's State Border Service Colonel Rakhmangeldi Annasakhatov participated in the ceremony. The trucks were donated through the Export Control and Border Security Program (EXBS), implemented by the U.S. Department of State and U.S. Customs Service and administered by the Embassy in Ashgabat.

"The U.S. Government is committed to working together with Turkmenistan to fight illegal trafficking in narcotics, weapons, and persons," said Ambassador Jacobson during the ceremony. "Border Guards must often work in isolated locations along the border. Conditions can be difficult, and their work challenging. We are pleased to support their work with today's donation from the people of the United States of America." Colonel Annasakhatov expressed his appreciation to the U.S. Embassy "for participating in the mission of protecting the boundaries of our motherland." He also thanked the Embassy for previous donations of 40 UAZ jeeps, 40 night vision goggles, 140 binoculars, 7 interdiction tool kits, and 40 GPS devices. "I am assured that this equipment will be very useful and make the work of our border guards easier," noted the First Deputy Chief.

EXBS is an ongoing U.S. Government program supplying equipment and training to assist in the effectiveness of border security and designed particularly to deter the spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Its function is to stop the transit of WMD and related items by attempting to halt these items in countries as close to the source as possible. Countries participating in this program benefit by using the equipment and training provided to secure their own borders. Equipment and training to stop the transfer of WMD and related materials can also be used to prevent trafficking in narcotics and persons, and smuggling goods to avoid taxation.



Ambassador Jacobson and Colonel Annasakhatov view the new water trucks.

Ashgabat Celebrates Earth Month – April 2004

Throughout the month of April the U.S. Embassy has collaborated with Turkmen communities on behalf of environmental awareness. Activities have included a clean-up event in a suburb of Ashgabat, secondary school olympiads on environmental knowledge, an ecological film festival, a panel discussion on environmental protection and others.

Competition at a Girls' College

On April 6, "Gulruh" Girls' College conducted a competition among its



students for the best drawing and team competition on their knowledge of water related issues in Turkmenistan. Students gave speeches on the importance of water conservation and presented projects for teaching local residents how to respect the environment. The USAID-funded Central Asia Natural Resources Management Program (NRMP) assisted the faculty in preparation of this event by providing

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Ashgabat Celebrates Earth Month – April 2004

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educational materials that were used during the competition.

Film Festival

On April 15, 16, and 19, visitors to the American Center enjoyed viewing documentaries and feature films that taught them how to prevent deterioration of land and water resources and, more broadly, to respect nature. The movie “Twister” about tornadoes, shown at IREX on April 16, portrayed the dark side of nature and challenges of researching natural phenomena. After viewing the films, participants expressed willingness to be more proactive in solving environmental problems around them.

USAID Supports Workshop for Future Oil and Gas Specialists

On April 20, NRMP conducted a workshop on oil and gas issues for representatives of the Turkmen Polytechnic Institute (TPI) in Ashgabat. The main goal of the workshop was to familiarize the faculty members and students with issues such as petroleum contracts, oil-contaminated soil solidification methodology, and plugging and abandonment of oil and gas wells.

“I learned a lot about an environmentally safe technology to remediate oil-contaminated soil, which I was especially interested in,” underlined Maksat Halmamedov, President of the Student Chapter of Society of Petroleum Engineers (SPE) at TPI.

More than 15 students, including members of the SPE Student Chapter, took part in the workshop and were very interested in the issues covered. Open discussion and exchange of opinions between participants and trainers was a distinguishing feature of the workshop.

The workshop was a continuation of the long-term cooperation between the NRMP and TPI, established in 2000 to help the Institute advance its main mission – providing the country with skilled professional oil and gas specialists. TPI is the leading Turkmen educational institution for training oil and gas professionals.

Earth Day Clean Up Event

On April 25, the U.S. Embassy in Turkmenistan in collaboration with the Nature Protection Society of Turkmenistan, NRMP, and Turkmenistan’s Ministry of Nature Protection organized an environmental educational activity “Water for Life: Act Local, Think Global.” Over 80 volunteers gathered in Gokdere, a resort area in the suburbs of Ashgabat for an Earth Day cleanup along Chulinka creek, tossing bottles and cans into jumbo-size plastic bags. The multinational and diverse group of volunteers included exchange program alumni, Ashgabat

students, environmental specialists, ecological NGO members, and representatives of the Polish, Kazakh, and Russian communities. They braved heavy rain and celebrated Earth Day by ridding the area of litter and garbage. As the environmental volunteers, clearly identifiable by their brightly colored t-shirts commemorating Earth Day, collected trash, they also stopped to speak with park visitors about the importance of being environmentally responsible tourists.

This was followed by a small picnic where a World Wildlife Fund representative presented a brief environmental lecture combined with an Earth Day Poster Exhibition, organized by the Embassy’s Public Affairs Section. NRMP representatives distributed brochures with a map of the major water reservoirs of Turkmenistan and an explanation on the importance of using water efficiently. To wrap up the event participants organized a small performance sharing their musical and story-telling talents with each other.

The clean-up action dedicated to Earth Day, marked on April 22 every year, has become an annual event gathering people of various ages and backgrounds, joined with the purpose of contributing their might to preserving the environment around them. This year’s cleanup action raised not only environmental awareness in youth, but also highlighted respect for diversity. Representatives from the different ethnic groups exchanged ideas and formed contacts.



Alumni participated in a clean up activity in Gokdere.

PSA Presentation by NRMP

Muskee alum, Shohrat Orazov, spoke to a group of fifteen secondary school students on April 27, 2004, about his work in creating environmental awareness throughout Central Asia and the Caucasus. Director of USAID’s Natural Resources Management Project, Orazov taught

locals about the value of Public Service Announcements (PSAs) in educating people about water conservation, the dangers of pollution and carbon dioxide emissions, and preservation of natural resources. PSAs are social advertisements utilizing commercial marketing techniques to promote a public good or social benefit. They have become part of the mass media culture in the West and are quickly developing in the Newly Independent States.

Orazov allowed students to critique PSAs he helped create for Ukraine and Uzbekistan, providing them the opportunity to develop their own thoughts on what messages would hit home with Turkmen audiences. This presentation led to a lively discussion about the efficient use of natural resources in the region and the ability of PSAs to increase awareness and change attitudes and behaviors.

Panel Discussion Explores U.S. and Business Initiatives

Finally, the Embassy hosted a panel discussion on April 29 as the last in a month-long series of events to celebrate "Earth Month 2004." Teacher's Excellence Awards (TEA) and IREX alumni funding co-sponsored the discussion, devoted to "Industry Efforts in Environmental Protection." Panelists included the U.S. Embassy's Deputy Chief of Mission and Political Officer, representatives of international energy firms "Dragon Oil" and "Emeral Ltd.,"

the environmental consulting group "Environmental Solutions, Ltd.," and the Natural Resources Management Project. Three of the presenters were also U.S. Government-funded exchange program alumni of Muskie, Contemporary Issues (CI) and Regional Scholars Exchange Programs. More than fifty members of Turkmen society attended the event, including a number of TEA alumni that direct an "Earth Charter" education effort, Turkmen Government officials, National Red Crescent Society volunteers, Turkmen State University students and professors, local secondary school teachers of biology and ecology, Turkmen nature research agencies, local ecological NGOs, and others.

Panelists presented topics such as the role of local communities in protecting the environment, U.S. environmental policy, U.S. Department of State programs and experience in nature protection, efforts by industries to protect the environment in Turkmenistan, and the role of NGOs and local citizens in the development of environmental protection legislation. The audience was very active in raising and debating such questions as the U.S. position on the Kyoto Protocol, the role of the international business community in protecting the Caspian Sea ecological balance, irrigation technologies in Turkmenistan, genetically modified food, and many related topics. After the presentation, participants interacted informally and explored the topics in further detail.

Visits

U.S. Government Official Learns About Alumni Activities in Turkmenistan

Special Advisor in the Office of the Coordinator of U.S. Assistance to Europe and Eurasia of the U.S. Department of State Samuel Eisen visited Ashgabat at the end of April to learn firsthand about U.S. Government-sponsored programs in Turkmenistan. In addition to consulting with Embassy staff and visiting offices of the American Councils for International Education (ACCELS) and the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), which administer U.S. Government programs in Turkmenistan, Mr. Eisen also held activities with alumni and residents of Turkmenistan.

On April 27 at the new IATP Internet access site in Turkmenabat, Samuel Eisen conducted an online chat with 18 residents of Turkmenistan, including 11 alumni of exchange programs from three regions of the country. Mr. Eisen was interested in learning about alumni projects, stating in his introductory remarks, "we sponsor programs such as the exchange programs and IATP in order to promote good relations between our nations and to assist you in your best efforts to promote international understanding and democratic and economic development at home. Your efforts are the key to these goals." The chat participants told Mr. Eisen about their activities in the community using IATP resources. Participants also asked several questions related to U.S. assistance programs.

On April 28, some twenty alumni of U.S. Government-funded exchange programs met with Samuel Eisen in

Ashgabat. Alumni shared successful stories of community projects that were developed and implemented by combining ideas and efforts of different exchange program participants into joint alumni projects, e.g. summer camps, formation of NGOs that work with disabled children, public awareness campaigns and conferences, etc. Alumni expressed their interest in State Department plans for continuation of FLEX and FSAU exchange programs. Mr. Eisen told the alumni that after only three days in Turkmenistan he felt he had a much better understanding of Turkmenistan and that he would take those experiences and impressions back to Washington, D.C. with him and tell others about what he'd seen and learned.



Samuel Eisen during a roundtable discussion with alumni at the American Center.

Turkmen CI Alumni Recognized for HIV/AIDS Work

On April 28, Contemporary Issues (CI) exchange program alumni Chary Atayev (CI 02) and Galina Karmanova (CI 01) were recognized by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), U.S. Department of State, for their contribution to the development of awareness, prevention and treatment programs for HIV/AIDS in Eurasia. A special awards luncheon was held in Washington, D.C. for five CI alumni, selected by IREX from the entire Eurasia region, for the challenging and effective work they carry out in fighting HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Atayev and Karmanova, along with three other Eurasian CI alumni colleagues, spent the week of April 26-30 in Washington, D.C. and New York City in meetings with specialists and policy makers in the fields of HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention. They met with specialists and toured institutions such as the Whitman Walker Clinic, the National Institute of Health, the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), and UNAIDS. They also met and spoke with policy makers at the Department of Health & Human Services, the Office of Global Health Affairs, the National Intelligence Council, and on Capitol Hill.

“Everything I learnt I'll use in my daily work and will share with my colleagues in Turkmenistan,” said Chary Atayev sharing his impressions of the visit with ECA officials and IREX staff.

Chary Atayev is a national project officer for the U.N. Office of Drug Control and Crime Prevention in Ashgabat. Galina Karmanova is currently based in Tashkent, Uzbekistan where she is the chief of party for the USAID funded Drug Demand Reduction Program in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and the Ferghana Valley of Kyrgyzstan.



Five CI alumni recognized for their efforts of fighting HIV/AIDS. Galina Karmanova and Chary Atayev are on the right.

Turkmen Ugrad Alumni Attend Regional Security Conference in Kazakhstan

Five Ugrad alumni from Turkmenistan attended the Undergraduate Alumni Conference in Almaty, Kazakhstan, April 10-12. The conference, hosted by American Councils for International Education, gathered alumni of the Undergraduate exchange program from across Central Asia for three days of discussion, presentations, and group activities on regional security in Central Asia and the roles that alumni can play to affect changes in their home

communities. Activities were based on themes such as ethnic issues in Central Asian, balance of power, and natural resources management.

The alumni delegation from Turkmenistan made a presentation titled “The Influence of Vast Oil and Gas Reserves on Regional Security”, which highlighted the role of Turkmenistan’s vast hydrocarbon resources in ensuring regional stability. Existing and potential oil and gas pipelines in the region and their importance in solving the region’s energy issues was a special focus of the Turkmen alumni’s presentation.

On the last day of the conference, alumni participated in an International Crisis Game, with alumni groups playing the roles of different states, international organizations, media and other groups. Teams articulated their interests in a manner credible to the practice of global politics. “We enjoyed playing different roles, and I believe we gained some valuable knowledge from it,” said Bibi Meredova, one of the Turkmen delegation members.

Turkmen alumni returned from the conference with wonderful impressions and new experiences, which they hope to apply for development of their country.



A group of Ugrad alumni from Turkmenistan.

Conference on World Earth Charter in Kazakhstan

Anna Grekhova (CI 03), founding director of the Professional Organization of English Teachers (POET) was a key member of the development and presentation of "The Earth Charter and Enriching Central Asian Environmental Education" Conference in Almaty, Kazakhstan on April 22-23. The conference was supported by POET and the Central Asian Regional



TEA alumna from Turkmenistan Larisa Ahmetova (right) talking to her Almaty colleagues at the Earth Charter Exhibition.

Environmental Center (CAREC) based in Almaty and hosted by KIMEP. Nearly 20 secondary school English and science teachers from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan attended the forum.

Educators were introduced to the Earth Charter, a declaration of fundamental principles for building a just, sustainable and peaceful society in the 21st century, officially launched at the Peace Palace in The Hague on June 29, 2000. The mission of the Earth Charter Initiative is to establish a sound ethical foundation for the emerging global society and to help build a sustainable world based on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace.

Conference participants were presented with ideas for including the Earth Charter in classroom activities and received handbooks with Earth Charter lesson plans created by POET's English teachers. Copies of the handbook will be posted on the CAREC website.

Ms. Grekhova's travel to the conference was supported by a grant she won from the U.S. Embassy in Turkmenistan. She was accompanied by two POET colleagues and alumni of the TEA program, Larisa Ahmetova and Raisa Amirdjanyans.

Peace Corps

Peace Corps Volunteer Presents US Education in Dashoguz

On April 7, the IATP access site in Dashoguz hosted a seminar on the U.S. educational system, conducted by Peace Corps volunteer Robert Morrison. Before starting the interactive seminar, Robert conducted a survey, asking attendants why they were interested in the topic. The participants mentioned the high quality of education in the United States, flexible study options, and a system of transferable credit hours. Among biggest challenges they might face in the United States, the participants listed language, adaptation to American lifestyle, and making ends meet financially.

Robert then gave an overview of the educational system in the United States, explained the steps in the process of college admission and matriculation, and described the standardized tests used by colleges, including the Test of English as a Foreign Languages (TOEFL), required of most international applicants. He explained that state universities are usually less expensive than private institutions, but that financial aid programs often narrow or eliminate the gap, and described how the financial aid process works.

At the conclusion of the seminar, participants had the opportunity to use the Internet to get practice in finding colleges online, visiting the homepages of several universities whose programs interested them.



Robert Morrison describes the U.S. educational system before an Internet search session.

USAID/EDP Turkmenistan hosts Ronald Ashkin, EDP Chief of Party

On April 10-16, the Enterprise Development Project (EDP)/Turkmenistan office hosted its first project meeting with Ronald Ashkin, Chief of Party for project EDP. The purpose of the visit was to get updates on current EDP/Turkmenistan initiatives, gain further insight as to the complexities of operating within Turkmenistan, and define the possibilities for improvement and growth of the regional initiative in the future.

USAID and EDP continue to support the development of associations that will serve as avenues for communication, advocacy, lobbying and training within local professional and business communities. To this end, EDP has worked with the newly registered Association of Accountants of Turkmenistan to develop a strategy and sustainability for future operations. While visiting the EDP Ashgabat office, Mr. Ashkin met with the Association to officially congratulate them on achievements to date, as well as discuss an upcoming conference on their future development.

Mr. Ashkin's visit with EDP/Turkmenistan also included visits to a newly registered farmers' cooperative specializing in growing and processing various agricultural products in Geok-Depe. The Deputy Director detailed the history of the cooperative, specifics of its members' products, related sales and services, and tentative vision for the near to medium-term future.

Overall, EDP's Chief of Party was quite impressed with the work being accomplished by EDP/Turkmenistan. In fact, Mr. Ashkin is now keen on introducing the new Strategic Action Plan (SAP) product line to the projected portfolio mix. During a meeting with USAID and the U.S. Ambassador, the EDP Chief of Party outlined the new services associated with this region-wide initiative. The Ambassador, and USAID, were very receptive to this new initiative, and pledged their full support and assistance in moving this work ahead.



Ronald Ashkin (center) and EDP/Turkmenistan staff members.

CHAP and Partners Distribute Aid Throughout the Country

In March-April 2004, Counterpart International's Community and Humanitarian Assistance Program (CHAP) delivered three large containers of humanitarian aid worth USD 135,000, which will be distributed throughout Turkmenistan. The U.S. Department of State-sponsored



Three large containers of wheat arrived through CHAP for distribution among constituents of the National Red Crescent Society, Turkmen Blind and Deaf Society and the Association of the Disabled.

aid in the form of wheat grain was received by CHAP's local distribution partners - the National Red Crescent Society of Turkmenistan (NRCS), the Turkmen Blind and Deaf Society and the Association of the Disabled of Turkmenistan. These organizations will process the wheat into flour and distribute it among subordinate branches and end recipients.

"This humanitarian aid will certainly be of great assistance and support to different vulnerable social groups, such as large families, orphans, the elderly, the disabled and many others, who undoubtedly will save their family budget for their other needs," said Murad Elliev, CHAP Country Director in Turkmenistan.

NRCS will distribute the flour among its so called "charity houses", which feed poor people dinner every day. The Turkmen Blind and Deaf Society will disperse the aid through its representatives in the welayats to its members and employees, while the Association of the Disabled will pass the processed flour on to its disabled constituents and their families.

Since 1998, NRCS and local volunteer organizations have received over USD 9 million worth of assistance through CHAP and distributed it throughout the country.

Information Technology Leaders Discuss IT Development in Ashgabat

On April 17 and 18, the Internet Access and Training Program (IATP) brought together 42 leaders in the field of information technology (IT) for a conference on IT development in Turkmenistan. Representatives of the U.S. Embassy, United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the European Union (EU), the Embassy of Great Britain, alumni of U.S. Government-funded exchange programs and local Web developers discussed the challenges and obstacles to IT development in Turkmenistan and ways to surmount them. Among the issues discussed were infrastructure, government regulation, promotion of Turkmen-language Web sites, content development, and gender equity in Internet access. Participants also noted successes over the last year, including a tripling of the number of websites in the country as a result of IATP's Web design training activities, and the launch of the NATO-sponsored Silk Highway project, which now provides Internet to several local academic institutions.

Key players in development of information technologies in Turkmenistan had a rare opportunity to exchange notes on best practices and coordinate future activities. The conference also provided a forum for people from different walks of life to discuss their ideas. Two future projects developed at the conference will be to provide Internet training and information to clients of Ashgabat's HIV/AIDS

clinic while they are waiting, and to translate Russian and English psychological profile tests into Turkmen and make them available on the Internet.

The conference was held as part of the IATP Development Academy, intensive computer training courses and other activities for specified groups of people, tailored to their specific needs and goals. Major target groups for the Development Academy trainings are those involved in education, media, healthcare, environment and law.

New Turmenabat IATP Center Conducts First Internet Basics Course

On April 7, six students completed IATP's course on Internet basics at the recently opened IATP access site in Turkmenabat. Since opening of the site at the beginning of March, residents of Turkmenabat have new opportunities for access to the Internet and learning how to browse the web more efficiently. Merdan Allakuliev, one of IATP's new graduates, sent and received his first e-mail messages, when he contacted a cousin from neighboring Uzbekistan, with whom he had not communicated in over three years. The students are the first to graduate from the Internet e-mail basics course at the IATP access site and are now in an advantageous position relative to their peers in finding a job after graduation.

ACE Awards Support Alumni's Professional Development

Fourteen alumni of U.S. Government-sponsored programs were presented with certificates from George Mason University's Office of Continuing Professional Education on April 14 for successfully completing an IREX-organized training on "Effective Leadership". In February, these alumni completed the 10-hour seminar, which was third in a series of trainings as part of the Alumni Continuing Education (ACE) program for alumni's professional development. Presenting the alumni with their certificates at the IREX office, U.S. Embassy Public Affairs Officer Shannon E. Runyon highlighted the benefits of alumni continuing education programs for all types of professions. Previous ACE trainings were on "The Art of Presentation" and "Conflict Resolution". IREX also plans to organize a session on "How to Start Your Own Business" in the near future.

Ashgabat IRC Introduces Youth to U.S. Election System

On April 22, a group of alumni and other visitors to the American Center gathered for a presentation "Understanding U.S. Presidential Elections 2004". The presentation highlighted key moments during the pre-nomination process, party conventions, general election and Electoral College voting. An episode on candidates and campaigns from the "Framework for Democracy" film series, shown at the end of the presentation, illustrated elections as the key element of democracy in the U.S. and the intensity and complexity of the U.S. election system and recent reform efforts. This presentation was the first in a series of lectures, debates and activities in the run-up to the November 2004 U.S. Presidential elections aimed at giving participants a different perspective on democracy and election systems.