

**Developing a National Pollutant and Release  
Transfer Register (PRTR) and Strengthening  
Community Right-to-Know in  
Azerbaijan and Belarus**

January 2008 to December 2009

**Project Proposal**

By the

United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)

and

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)



UNITAR



UNECE

## **1. Introduction**

This document outlines a proposal for a two-year capacity building project aimed at assisting two EECCA countries to design National Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTR). The project activities will help the selected governments to comply with the Aarhus Convention Protocol on PRTRs, the first legally binding international instrument on promoting community right-to-know schemes for pollutants.

Registers have proved to be an effective tool to collect and disseminate data on emissions and transfers of 86 pollutants. Such information is a necessary precondition for preparing and implementing effective environmental policies as well as well informing the citizens about potential environmental risks. Availability of such data can also serve government officials in making informed decisions to address environmental degradation, transboundary movement of hazardous materials and other issues which have potential to trigger transboundary and regional disputes and conflicts.

The partner countries have demonstrated their interest in developing the national Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers systems by submitting the letters of interest to UNITAR on 28 July 2005 and 12 July 2005 respectively (see Annex 1).

The project involves the PRTR design activities, in particular six-step framework to cover all important milestones for developing a register under the requirements of the PRTR Protocol, led by the governments in cooperation with public interest groups, industry, and academia as well as specific capacity-building activities led by public-interest groups.

The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) in cooperation with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) will provide technical and methodological assistance to the countries.

## **2. Project Summary**

This twenty-four-month capacity building project aims at assisting partner countries in developing a National Pollutant Release and Transfer Register (PRTR). The project outcomes are in line with the Aarhus Convention Protocol on PRTRs adopted in 2003. The PRTR Protocol is intended to guarantee public access to information on the release and transfer of certain pollutants through national registers that can be searched through the Internet.

The project will be implemented through a two-pronged approach. The first element involves the design of national PRTR system through a country driven multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approach, including, *inter alia*, assessment of the existing infrastructure, design of key features of a national PRTR system, and conducting a PRTR pilot reporting trial. The second element includes specific capacity-building activities implemented through direct collaboration with public-interest groups aimed at strengthening their capacities towards designing and implementing a national PRTR system. This will be achieved by organising an awareness-raising workshop, conducting a survey to determine the level of information required from the PRTR register, taking account the civil society's needs and requirements, and establishing a virtual discussion group within the PRTR Virtual Classroom to provide the civil society in partner countries, as well as other UNECE countries, with a forum to discuss PRTR-related issues.

The project will be driven by the Governments of partner countries in cooperation with public interest groups, industry, and academia and assisted by the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

### **3. The International Policy Context for PRTR Development**

Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration, as agreed by heads of state in 1992 at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), provides specific references to the establishment of national emission inventories and the right of the public to access this information. Chapter 19 of Agenda 21, for example, recommends that governments should "*consider adoption of community-right-to-know or other public information dissemination programmes as possible risk reduction tools*".

As an important follow-up to the Rio Summit, the *Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters* (Aarhus Convention) was signed on 25th June 1998 in the Danish city of Aarhus. The Convention is a major initiative to strengthen environmental democracy and it acknowledges that achieving sustainable development requires the involvement of all stakeholders. It has been lauded as a significant achievement on the area of environmental democracy by Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations.

*“Although regional in scope, the significance of the Aarhus Convention is global. It is by far the most impressive elaboration of Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration, which stresses the need for citizen's participation in environmental issues and for access to information on the environment held by public authorities. As such it is the most ambitious venture in the area of ‘environmental democracy’ so far undertaken under the auspices of the United Nations.”*

Paragraph 9 of Article 5 of the Convention provides that each party shall take steps to establish a coherent, nationwide system of pollution inventories or registers which is accessible to the public. Furthermore, in May 2003 thirty six States and the European Community adopted a protocol to the Aarhus Convention on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs). The PRTR Protocol is the first legally binding international instrument on pollutant release and transfer registers and community right to know.

## **4. Problem being addressed**

### ***Azerbaijan***

Azerbaijan has an economy in transition in which the state continues to play a dominant role. It has energy resources (oil and natural gas reserves) and significant agronomic potential based on a wide variety of climatic zones. The most pressing environmental issues facing Azerbaijan are water and air pollution problems created by the Caspian petroleum and petrochemicals industries; and soil contamination by DDT and toxic defoliants used in cotton production during the Soviet era.

The west-central part of Azerbaijan suffers from water pollution originated in the neighbouring countries while large industrial facilities, such as Ganja, Mingachevir, Dashkesan generate pollution and cause contamination of soil and water. Furthermore, excessive application of pesticides and chemical fertilizers has caused extensive groundwater pollution, and Azerbaijani scientists have linked this to birth defects and illnesses.

Environmental agencies and non-governmental organizations do exist in Azerbaijan, but clean-up and prevention programmes have been hampered by lack of funds.

### ***Belarus***

In the last decade Belarus has carried out a number of economic, political and environmental reforms with the objective of building a democratic society with a market economy. Citizen's access to information may be considered as one of the basic rights of individuals in a democratic society, including environmental information, and this information allows citizens to actively participate in the democratic process.

Economic development in Belarus has led to the numerous environmental problems. Pollution from industrial sites involved in the production and consumption of chemicals causes atmospheric air pollution in large industrial cities, where the concentration of chemicals exceeds the maximum permissible levels under national law. Other environmental problems include an accumulation of toxic wastes, contamination of ground waters used for drinking water supply, soil contamination in industrial areas and obsolete pesticides disposals sites. Annually, incidents that result in the release of chemicals into the environment are recorded at industrial enterprises. There are cases of occupational diseases associated with the impact of chemicals as well as increase of the mortality rate as a result of accidental poisoning.

Some areas of the environmental concern are situated in the proximity with borders of Ukraine, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and Russia. In particular, significant discharges of wastewater in transboundary water basins of Pripjat currently take place in the southern Belarus, in the Polesye region, which is shared between Belarus, Ukraine and Poland. The economic activities of oil refineries, oil fields and gas processing plants add pressure on the environment in this area. Transboundary pollution also spread in the North-Western Belarus, especially in Daugava/Zapadnaya Dvina basin. Information on released pollutants in those areas can be used for the water management systems.

Public understanding of these environmental and public health concerns can be addressed through providing citizens with reliable information about environmental concerns and related risks to health.

One of the key steps in addressing these problems described above in the partner countries and preventing the adverse impacts of pollutants on public health is collecting, recording and analysing the data that will be registered in single publicly assessable national database. Availability of such system will raise public awareness about potentially toxic releases and increase the abilities of all stakeholders to participate in environmental decision-making. Such transparency will also generate pressure for industrial installations to improve their environmental performance, since the public will be aware of the performance of industrial sites in their locality and can lobby local government for tightened standards and/or enforcement.

### ***National Commitment to Citizen Access to Environmental Information and Development of a PRTR system***

**Azerbaijan** recognizes the importance of its citizens' access to environmental information and as a demonstration of national commitment the country acceded to the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters on 23 March 2001. Seeking to meet its obligations under the Convention Azerbaijan has expressed interest in developing a national PRTR system.

**Belarus** acceded to the Aarhus Convention on 9 March 2000. To comply with its obligations under the Convention Belarus has also expressed interest in developing a national PRTR system.

Belarus is one of four pilot countries involved in the UNITAR supported Pilot Project on Developing an Integrated National Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals and Waste with a focus on governance, stakeholder participation, and partnerships to support national Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) implementation. One of the project components will be the implementation of two partnership projects in the framework of SAICM. Some linkages between these projects activities could be established.

A key characteristic of a PRTR system is that it promotes community right-to-know by making collected information available to all interested parties. This requires the PRTR to be both comprehensive and easily understandable. Through active dissemination of the data, the awareness of workers and communities about potential chemical hazards can be raised and the risks can be evaluated. This can serve as an important basis for constructive dialogue between citizens, government and industry and may also catalyze the development of programmes to promote the reduction of risks associated with chemical hazards at the community level.

One of the reasons for the success of PRTR systems is that they entail benefits and possible uses not only for the governments but also for the public-interest groups and reporting industries. For example, PRTRs provide government authorities with useful data for setting environmental management priorities; enhance knowledge within industry about inefficient and wasteful production processes; and inform the public about the risks from chemicals to

which they are exposed thus giving the public an opportunity to make informed choices and take appropriate actions. Public interest groups can use information on pollutants to reinforce their positions when participating in environmental decision-making processes.

## **5. Objectives of the Project**

The overall goal of the project is to provide, over a period of 24 months, technical and financial support to partner countries for the implementation of specific PRTR design tasks and the strengthening of community right-to-know within the framework of the Aarhus Convention. It will also contribute to the preparation process for partner countries' accession/ratification of the PRTR Protocol.

Specific objectives of the project include the following:

- to enhance the availability of environmental information provided by government to the public;
- to foster democratic dialogue between government, industry and the public;
- to strengthen the capacities of public-interest groups to participate meaningfully in the PRTR design process;
- to raise awareness of high-level decision-makers in the Government of partner countries with the goal of institutionalising a PRTR in partner countries;
- to formalize the process of PRTR design in partner countries including participation of concerned government sectors, as well as affected and interested parties; and
- to provide information and technical expertise to partner countries relevant for making informed PRTR decisions which take into account national needs and circumstance.

## **6. Key Activities**

The key activities under this project will be implemented through a two pronged approach, the first element (A) to be implemented in six sequential phases focusing on PRTR design activities, while element (B) involves specific capacity building activities for public interest groups that will run throughout the project implementation period.

### ***(A) PRTR Design Activities***

It is proposed to implement the project through a country-driven, multi-stakeholder approach in order to ensure that the design of the national PRTR system is consistent with national priorities and accommodates partner countries environment and development objectives. The project methodology will follow, as appropriate, a 6-stage framework, which has been developed and tested by UNITAR in collaboration with a number of countries and international organizations.

Each of six phases includes important milestones towards achieving the overall goal of the project. Details for implementing each project phase will be developed by UNITAR and National Coordinating Team, established under the project which will include representatives of government ministries, industry and public interest groups.

**Phase 1: Identifying the Goals of the National PRTR System (January – March 2007)**

After the initial commitment at the national level to pursue a PRTR programme, the National Coordinating Team will undertake consultations with the various concerned parties to identify the objectives of the national PRTR system. Taking into consideration the perspectives of the various sectors is important in order to design a national PRTR that is realistic, and that addresses the needs of various parties of interest.

Tasks and activities of Phase 1 include:

- Consultations with parties-of-interest to identify the objectives of a National PRTR system and raise awareness about the PRTR design project.
- Preparation of a National PRTR Briefing Document which includes information on international PRTR activities, potential benefits and objectives of a national PRTR, and an introduction to the PRTR design project.
- Formalization of agreed national objectives for the PRTR system in a document to serve as a reference throughout the design project.

**Phase 2: Assessing the Existing Infrastructure Relevant to a National PRTR (April - July 2007)**

The infrastructure assessment should identify available expertise and compile relevant national information into one coherent document to be used as a reference during the PRTR design project. The National PRTR Infrastructure Report is considered a key document to ensure that the PRTR system is linked to, and builds upon, ongoing programmes and initiatives.

- Development of an assessment of national legal, regulatory, institutional and administrative infrastructure, as well as assisting national databases on emission data or releases/transfers of chemicals to various environmental media, programmes and activities conducted by industry, research organizations and public/environmental interest groups relevant to a national PRTR.
- Preparation of a National PRTR Infrastructure Assessment Report based on the assessment from various sources.

Belarus may choose to base its infrastructure assessment upon the National Profile developed under the UNITAR supported 17 Countries Project on National Profile Preparation, Information Exchange and Priority Setting for the Sound Management of

Chemicals<sup>1</sup>. A National Profile provides a comprehensive overview and assessment of the existing national legal, institutional, administrative, and technical infrastructure related to the sound management of chemicals in the context of Chapter 19 of Agenda 21 which can be adapted to the PRTR context.

### **Phase 3: Designing Key Features of the PRTR System (August 2003 - December 2007)**

A complete national PRTR system consists of several components or elements that need to be designed according to the national goals and objectives for the system. The objectives of Phase 3 of the project are to make draft design decisions on key features and characteristics of the national PRTR system, in line with the established PRTR objectives. Relevant decisions that will need to be made include, *inter alia*, selection of chemicals and industrial sectors for reporting, agreeing on reporting thresholds, developing and testing of PRTR software, deciding on institutional PRTR implementation arrangements, and agreeing on legal reform measures and legal drafting,

Tasks and activities during Phase 3 of the project include, for example:

- Organization of a Phase 3 Planning Meeting
- Technical working meetings of Task Forces
- Preparation of reports of Task Forces

Throughout the deliberation of the Task Forces, UNITAR, working closely with its international partners, and other countries that may be able to provide technical expertise, will closely follow the work of the Task Forces and provide technical training and information upon demand. For example, should a Task Force working on criteria for selecting chemicals require information about how other countries have undertaken this task, UNITAR will make relevant contacts and get the Task Force in touch with external government experts or consultants. This may also include the organization of short term expert visits to facilitate in depth interaction and capacity building for a particular topic.

### **Phase 4: Conducting a PRTR Pilot Reporting Trial (January – June 2008)**

The purpose of the pilot reporting trial is to test the PRTR system and to gain necessary experience directly applicable to the design of the national PRTR. The pilot trial experience can be used to refine the various design elements of the national PRTR system, and to gain concrete insights into the human and financial resources needed for its operation on a national scale. The data collected in the reporting trial also might be used to test the potential uses, analyses and applications that authorities are planning for the national PRTR system. A number of specific planning and implementation issues needs to be addressed in relation to a PRTR pilot reporting trial. These include for example defining the scope of the pilot trial (e.g. by choosing the industry sample and region); ensuring that the necessary technical PRTR elements are in place for operating the trial; deciding what local authorities to involve; and establishing clear responsibilities for all operational tasks involved in the

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<sup>1</sup> For more information visit the website: <http://www.unitar.org/cwg/np/index.html>



trial. The feedback from the pilot reporting trial experience can be extremely valuable to the National Coordinating Team in refining and improving the design of the PRTR system.

Tasks and activities during this phase of the project include, for example:

- Organization of a Planning Meeting to develop a work-plan for the Pilot Trial
- Development of pilot software for PRTR reporting
- Training on data estimation
- Preparation of a report of lessons learned

#### **Phase 5: Preparing a National PRTR Design Proposal (July – October 2008)**

The objective of Phase 5 is to prepare and deliver a draft document which outlines the complete specifications of the national PRTR system which can be submitted for review and possible approval by national authorities. The proposal will also include an action plan for implementing the PRTR system on a national scale.

Tasks and activities during this Phase, include, for example:

- Drafting of the National PRTR Proposal
- Circulation and review of the National PRTR Proposal by key national authorities whose policy support is critical for final approval and implementation
- Organization of consultative meetings with stakeholders, as appropriate

#### **Phase 6 Organizing a National PRTR Review and Implementation Workshop (November – December 2008)**

Holding a National PRTR Implementation Workshop can be an effective way to finalize the PRTR design process and set the implementation phase into motion. This final workshop will serve to catalyse broad policy support for the national PRTR proposal and initiate follow up actions. The workshop may also provide an opportunity for affected and interested parties to provide a last round of comments on the PRTR design proposal. A well planned agenda and the active involvement of key leadership figures in the organization and facilitation of the workshop is instrumental to the success of the workshop.

Tasks and activities during this Phase include, for example

- Identification of key participants, speakers, and policy figures to be invited to the workshop
- Development of the workshop agenda
- Development of a media strategy and press conference

- Organization of the workshop
- Preparation of workshop report

UNITAR and its partners will be available to provide advice to the National Coordinating Team during all stages of planning and organizing the workshop. In addition, UNITAR as well as other external experts will participate in the event as resources person, as required by the partner country.

***(B) Specific Capacity-building Activities for Public-Interest Groups (January 2007 – December 2008)***

To ensure that public-interest groups in partner countries are meaningfully engaged in the PRTR design process, UNITAR will collaborate directly with one or more partner countries public interest groups with the objective of strengthening civil society capacities towards designing and implementing a national PRTR system. A second objective will be to raise public awareness of environmental concerns in partner countries and highlight the benefits for the public of having the PRTR system.

Tasks and activities include, for example:

- Organizing an Awareness Raising Workshop to inform and strengthen civil society representatives' capacities to participate in the PRTR design process;
- Conducting a survey to determine the level of information required from the PRTR register, taking into account the civil society's needs and requirements;
- Launching an outreach campaign to raise awareness about the PRTR development process in partner countries, including benefits of the PRTR system to governments, industry and the public;
- Conducting a Discussion Group within the Virtual Classroom on PRTRs<sup>2</sup> aimed to provide public-interest groups with a virtual forum to discuss PRTR-related issues. Participation in the discussion group will be open to all interested NGOs and other stakeholders in UNECE countries. This activity will build upon experience gained from the discussion group on *Strengthening Public Capacities in the EECCA region to Participate in the PRTR Process and Access to Information* that took place from 14 March to 14 June 2005, and was moderated by the Environmental News Agency Greenwomen (NGO, Kazakhstan).

## **7. Outputs/Deliverable Products**

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<sup>2</sup> The Virtual Classroom is an innovative information management tool that has been launched in 2003 with the objective to facilitate and support information exchange and communication about the development of national PRTR systems, allow countries to access individuals and organizations with experience and knowledge on PRTRs; and create a virtual environment to support PRTR capacity development by using modern technology. It is administered by UNITAR and available in English and Russian. For more information visit the website: <http://prtrvc.unitar.org>.

The final deliverable of the project will be a National PRTR system developed through and endorsed by a multi-stakeholder process. The PRTR Design Proposal will serve as the core document for government decision-makers in partner countries responsible for formally institutionalising a PRTR system and accessing to the PRTR Protocol.

## **8. Results/Outcomes**

The project is expected to achieve a number of results in the long run that are of direct benefit to the government, stakeholders, citizens, and the natural environment in partner countries. The PRTR system expected to emerge from the project will provide partner countries with sound information about pollution sources and emissions, thus helping to identify hot spot areas and to set priorities for risk reduction. Public environmental groups, communities and citizens, will, for the first time, have information at hand that will allow them to initiate a dialogue with regulators and directly with companies concerning opportunities for environmental risk reduction. This will enhance the availability of environmental information to the public, promote community right-to know in partner countries and strengthen democratic dialogue between government, industry and the public.

## **9. Monitoring and Evaluation**

UNITAR will initiate a regular and systematic self-monitoring process to review whether activities are executed as planned. During the first 12 months (or at shorter intervals if project monitoring according to standard project management cycles indicates a need) UNITAR will review the progress made in implementing activities and adjust inputs for the following year as appropriate. At the end of the project, an evaluation will be conducted in order to determine the impact of the project in partner countries and to determine whether the aims of the project have been achieved. A more in-depth evaluation may be conducted to identify and consolidate lessons learned and experience gained relevant to the other countries in the UNECE region.

## **10. Innovation**

First, serving as a tool to provide citizens with environmental information, a publicly Internet-accessible and user friendly pollutant release and transfer register is a modern concept endorsed by an international legally binding agreement on PRTRs. Its distinctive feature is that it provides the public with opportunity to search through the Internet for specific information related to companies, geographical locations, etc. Such registers facilitate public participation in decision-making and contribute to the prevention and reduction of environmental pollution.

Second, UNITAR is offering an innovative methodology where the multiple stakeholders will develop step-by-step a national PRTR system that would integrate the national needs as suggested by representatives of government, industry and public-interest groups.

Finally, although separate efforts and initiatives related to access to environmental information have already taken place in partner countries, a full-fledged national PRTR system will be designed for the first time in partner countries and in the EECCA region.

## **11. Sustainability of the Initiative/Project**

The project is expected to be driven by country needs through consultations with all concerned parties. The decision about institutionalising a multi-media PRTR with a right-to-know component will ultimately be in the hands of political decision-makers in partner countries and is beyond the responsibility of UNITAR, the executing agency. The project will ensure, however, that all necessary information, skills and technical assistance is provided to enable partner countries to move forward towards establishing a PRTR. In this regard, effective participation of non-governmental environmental groups in the PRTR design process is considered particularly important and is expected to generate the necessary momentum and popular support for a national PRTR system in partner countries. The tremendous impact of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster on partner countries, remembered through the recent 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the catastrophe, has created a relatively high public awareness of environmental issues in partner countries, and generated a citizenry that is likely to be receptive to an information tool such as the PRTR.

## **12. Gender considerations**

The project is designed in a way to engage a wide range of stakeholders, including public-interest groups, in the process of developing a PRTR system and strengthening community right-to-know. Public-interest organizations may include consumer, environmental, human rights or other community-based organisations (e.g. women's groups), and associations that share a concern about democratic and environmental matters in partner countries. As some pollutants particularly affect the most vulnerable groups of society, such as women and children (e. g. during pregnancy and breastfeeding specific chemicals such as persistent organic pollutants are passed on to the next generation) UNITAR will encourage women's groups to get involved in the project.

## **13. Marginalized or Vulnerable Groups**

The project is designed to address the specific needs of marginalized and vulnerable groups for an increased access to environmental information and a strengthened capacity for targeting government and influencing environmental decision-making. In particular a number of activities intend to develop capacities of public-interest groups in partner countries. This includes an awareness-raising workshop to inform and strengthen civil society representatives' capacities to participate in the PRTR design process, and a survey to determine the level of information required from the PRTR register, taking into account the ability of civil society to interpret such information as well as civil society's information needs.

## **14. Other Donors/Sponsors**

UNITAR will be able to provide an in-kind contribution to the project. This includes, for example, preparation of *Guidance Documentation*, and in-kind contributions from the UNITAR programme in chemicals and waste management, in particular technical support for the chemicals management aspects of the project.

## Annex I

FROM : NCCC

PHONE NO. :

JUL. 28 2005 03:21PM P1

**AZƏRBAYCAN RESPUBLİKASI  
EKOLOGİYA VƏ TƏBİİ SƏRVƏTLƏR  
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*"28" 08 2005*

**Mr. Marcel Boisard  
Executive Director  
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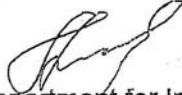
Dear Mr. Boisard,

As you know the system of PRTR can become the important tool in the general nature protection policy of each country, giving the information on state of pollution and promoting sustainable development. Existence of National PRTR can serve as the basic force for pollution reduction in many spheres of economy.

Azerbaijan is very interested in creation of National PRTR system. It is important to mention that Republic of Azerbaijan highly estimates experience of UNITAR on PRTR capacity-building activities.

We look forward to establish good qualitative cooperation relations between Azerbaijan and UNITAR on PRTR capacity-building activities.

Sincerely yours,

Isa Aliyev   
Head of Department for International Cooperation

МИНИСТЕРСТВО  
ПРИРОДНЫХ РЕСУРСОВ И ОХРАНЫ  
ОКРУЖАЮЩЕЙ СРЕДЫ  
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12.04. 2005 № 03-03/ 1438

Mr. Marcel Boisard,  
Executive Director  
UNITAR  
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CH-1211 Geneva 10  
Suisse

Dear Mr. Marcel Boisard!

Ms. Tatyana Terekhova has kindly informed us on development of the Program of national PRTRs preparation. We are very glad to inform you that Belarus has started active work on preparation for signing of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers to the Aarhus Convention. In 2004, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection financed two scientific researches, aiming at identification of the country's capacities to fulfill obligations under the PRTR Protocol and of main environmental pollutants that are to be included into the National PRTR.

We would like to express our hope on inclusion of the Republic of Belarus into the UNITAR list of countries, planned for PRTR capacity building.

Using this opportunity we would like to confirm our great considerations and look forward to further fruitful cooperation,

Alexandr Apatsky

Deputy Minister of Natural Resources  
and Environmental Protection  
of the Republic of Belarus