



UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

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Программа Организации Объединенных Наций по окружающей среде برنامج الأمم المتحدة للبيئة

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REPORT OF THE UNEP 2nd EXPERT MISSION

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I. INTRODUCTION

A UNEP expert team conducted a mission to Sochi from 28 to 30 January 2010. The objective of the mission was to review the construction of the combined road/railway from Adler to Krasnaya Polyana, in relation to the impacts on the environment.

The mission was in response to a number of protests from some non-governmental organizations and the invitation of the Government of the Russian Federation and the Sochi 2014 Organizing Committee. It was also in line with the UNEP-Sochi 2014 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and the broader MoU between UNEP and the Russian Federation which is currently being developed.

The mission involved visits to various sites that were considered sensitive along the construction path of the combined road/railway and other sensitive sites in the region (including the Biathlon venue and Olympic Village in the mountain cluster, Gasprom complex, Rosa Khuta). It also involved discussions with the Russian Railway Corporation, Olympstroy, the Sochi 2014 Organizing Committee, and the administrations of the City of Sochi, the Sochi National Park, the Biosphere Reserve, NGOs and local experts. The mission visited several installations (including the leopard breeding centre, tree nursery and zoo) presented as mitigation measures to the effects of various Olympic and tourism projects on the environment.

The mission also used the opportunity to organize a roundtable discussion for stakeholders (the Organizing Committee, Olympstroy, the Russian Railway Corporation, representatives of the Ministry of Natural Resources, NGOs and representatives of various communities around the various Olympic projects) with the view of bridging the communications gap between them.

The mission received overwhelming support from the various stakeholders. There were staff from all the relevant departments and corporations working on the Sochi 2014 project as well as representatives from NGOs who accompanied the mission for the site visits.

II. KEY FINDINGS

1. Several environmental assessments have been conducted by the Russian Railway Corporation on the combined road/railway project. The mission was presented with them and with separate assessments by NGOs highlighting negative impacts of this project on fauna and flora.

2. These assessments were conducted mostly on the available literature, some of which might not be current, and they covered specific fields of expertise. The mission observed that more efforts could be devoted to the collection of field data, particularly on key issues such as hydro-ecology and the values and functions of the ecosystems of the valley in general.

3. It was also noted that the assessments focused on the direct impacts of the projects to the immediate surrounding and did not take into account the cumulative and synergetic effects of the various projects on the ecosystems of the Sochi region and its population.

4. The mission found the Russian Railway, Olympstroy, the Sochi 2014 Organizing Committee and the Ministry of Natural Resources very opened to discussions and suggestions on improving this particular project as well as the other projects that are associated with the Olympics and tourism development of the region. The mission appreciated very much this positive approach of the local stakeholders who seem eager to address all environmental issues, with more interest and attention than in the past and pledged to integrate those issues in their workplans and priorities.

5. The mission observed that the implementation of decisions taken at the political level relating to the mitigation and compensation of impacts of Olympic and tourism projects are taking too long. Some of these projects include:

The enlargement of the Sochi national park;

The strengthening of the level of protection of the most sensitive areas, such as the upper Mzimta valley;

The setting up of new protected areas, in particular along the Black Sea coast, in order to protect important wetlands and migratory routes of birds, as well as key types of natural habitats for wildlife.

6. The mission noticed that there is a relative reluctance of the various stakeholders to engage each other. Some NGOs/stakeholders did not feel that their suggestions or inputs were being taken into account. On the other hand, those contracted to develop projects also feel that some NGOs were only interested in stalling the entire Olympic project and were not interested in constructive dialogue. In the view of the mission, the level of reluctance to engage with or even listen to each other calls for actions from **both sides** to improve cooperation.

III. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The above-mentioned findings lead the mission to make the following recommendations:

1. A **comprehensive assessment** of the overall impact of the Olympic and tourism projects on the ecosystem should be conducted, in all relevant fields of ecological expertise. If needed and required, UNEP could propose experts to undertake this assessment or help to coordinate the process. This assessment would contribute in building the necessary baseline without which it will not be possible to comprehensively monitor the impacts of the projects on the environment;

2. A strong “**monitoring programme**” that integrates all effects of Olympic and tourism development projects should be set up. This programme should be based on updated and field data and should monitor both the direct and indirect effects of all projects on ecological goods and services. **The process should involve a third party** and on a regular basis;

3. This monitoring programme should be developed through a holistic approach of biodiversity conservation and management in the Sochi region. This is an important condition for assessing the synergetic effects of all Olympic and tourism projects, structures and activities on the natural processes on the basis of which the ecological goods and services are provided to the local population;

4. Both, in response to short term necessity and as a compensatory measure, a «**Caucasus Eco-region Monitoring Centre**» should, if feasible, be set up at the eco-regional level, that could benefit from the **Biosphere Centre** recommended by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee (32COM 7B25).

This Centre could aim to significantly improve and update the knowledge on biodiversity in the region and benefit from local and national institutional capacities (academy of sciences, Sochi National Park, Caucasus Biosphere Reserve, Teberdinsky Strict Natural Reserve, local expertise) as well as international expertise;

5. The process of designing a global «landscape restoration plan» of the Mzimta Valley should start in order to restore the areas affected by provisional and/or definitive infrastructures (roads, bridges, settlements, etc.) and equipments.

In addition, a detailed «**landscape restoration programme**» of the river valley affected by the construction works of road and railways, should be implemented. This programme should aim at restoring the characteristic features of the original landscape, as much as possible.

Preparatory restoration field activities (such as tree plantations) should continue, as well as adapted and strengthened, in accordance to the priorities and guidance defined in this landscape restoration plan, as soon as it will be made available;

6. The mission was informed that a decision has recently been made to set up the «**Caucasus polygon**» at the Caucasus eco-region level. The mission feels that this is an important decision and considers this measure a precondition for the reintroduction of the Caucasus leopard and for obtaining a minimum viable population of this species, through the establishment of a functional

ecological corridor between the Western and Eastern Caucasus. With regards to this specific compensatory measure, the IUCN (SSC/Cat specialist group) could be approached for support;

7. The implementation of the decisions taken in order to prevent, reduce and compensate the negative effects of all Olympic and tourism projects on the ecosystem in general and biodiversity in particular, should be strengthened. It might be useful to have plans and follow-up mechanism on the implementation of these decisions;

8. The inputs of various stakeholders is necessary for the achievement of the greening objectives of the Sochi 2014 Games. The view of the mission is that **both sides** need to increase efforts to genuinely engage each other. Work on the above recommendations might help in rebuilding confidence on the commitment to make the Games green. Secondly, regular interactions between stakeholders, is encouraged. **UNEP could increase the frequency of its roundtables and other forms of interactions within the next 12 to 24 months to assist this process as necessary with the hope that interactions between relevant stakeholders will ultimately become a regular practice.**

IV. CONCLUSION

Sochi Games present both challenges and opportunities. Some of the above-mentioned recommendations are meant to help in addressing the challenges. Effective engagement of stakeholders and using experiences of international best practices could make Sochi 2014 a unique environmental showcase. Sochi 2014 also presents a major opportunity to raise environmental awareness and care for the environment particularly in the Sochi region. It is an important opportunity for best practices on waste management and sustainable transport to be implemented in Sochi.