



Central Asia Civil Society and Youth' Statement for the 28th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change

We, representatives of civil society from the five Central Asian countries — Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, take a unified position in the interest of the 75 million residents of our region.

Loss and Damage

Central Asia, situated far from any ocean, is a highly arid region where desert areas cover more than 70 percent of the territory. In the face of climate change, the growing deficit of water resources becomes a chief challenge to our region's future development. A serious threat looms over glaciers, the primary source of water for the region's major rivers. Since the mid-20th century, Central Asia has lost up to 50 percent of its glaciers in certain river basins. On average, glacier loss amounts to one percent annually. According to projections, by the end of the 21st century, our glaciers will have shrunk by 90 percent. This irreversible loss will result in significant economic losses and damages to livelihoods in Central Asia.

For many years, Central Asian countries have been attempting to overcome the consequences of the Aral Sea disaster associated with the nearly complete disappearance of a lake that once stretched over an area of 54 thousand square kilometres. A tree planting campaign is being carried out to cover the Aralkum, the former bed of the Aral Sea and one of the newest deserts on our planet, with saxaul and, thus, to mitigate the negative impacts on the economies and human health. Measures are also being taken to restore and preserve the river streams feeding the remaining parts of the Aral Sea.

Climate change, by increasing the region's aridity, leads to the degradation and shrinkage of other major natural water bodies in our region, such as Lake Balkhash and the Caspian Sea. Dust storms have become a growing problem for Central Asia — over the past 30 years, their frequency has increased more than tenfold in some places: from two or three to 35 sand and dust storms annually. The damage caused by dust storms to agriculture and human health is enormous, especially considering that they often contain pollutants: toxic chemicals and pesticides from the dried bed of the Aral Sea. Dust storms, along with heatwaves that exacerbate the degradation of arable land and pastures, pose threats to the food security of the region.

Local Communities

The intensification of aridity, the loss of glaciers, and the reduction of habitats and agricultural lands result in losses and damages that jeopardise the well-being of the population in the Central Asian republics.

The burdens of these losses and damages fall heavily on the most vulnerable communities, particularly rural ones and especially women in them, as well as children and youth whose shares have been steadily increasing in the overall population of the region.

Therefore, Central Asia needs to be recognized as a highly vulnerable region and be afforded the opportunity to attract international funds in order to compensate for the damages suffered by communities due to climate change.

Central Asian countries are striving to improve their capacity and knowledge regarding climate change adaptation technologies by introducing new educational programs and even establishing specialised universities. However, there is still a high demand for knowledge, especially among youth, women, and rural communities. To enhance climate change adaptation in Central Asia, our countries rely on the support of international organisations and other countries capable of providing such knowledge and resources.

The needs for technical and financial assistance for the most vulnerable groups — women, youth, farmers, and rural residents,

especially in mountainous areas — should be taken into account. Access to financial resources should be facilitated at the level of local communities by making it possible to assess and compensate for the losses and damages experienced by the most vulnerable groups.

We call on the global community, international organisations, and financial institutions to assist in implementing initiatives put forth by the Central Asian countries and endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly resolutions: declaring the Aral Sea Region a Zone of Ecological Innovations and Technologies (May 2021),¹ proclaiming sustainable mountain development and declaring 2023–2027 as Five Years of Action for the Development of Mountain Regions (December 2022),² and declaring 2025 as the International Year of Glaciers' Preservation (December 2022).³

Conservation of Natural Ecosystems

We view the conservation of natural ecosystems as the most important and effective means for adapting to the changing climate and for maintaining the resilience of the global and regional climate systems. We call on the global community and the region's governments not to replace the preservation of natural ecosystems with the creation of artificial forests, and to avoid the introduction of alien tree species. Nature-based solutions should be developed through a scientific approach, and only projects with high socio-ecological value should be considered for emission reduction units. It is essential to ensure the possibility of attracting financial resources for the conservation of natural ecosystems!

Fair and Efficient Energy Transition

We urge the Central Asian governments to pursue a more ambitious climate policy. The gap between actual actions, NDC commitments, national development plans, and the goals of the Paris Agreement should be closed. Efforts to slow down the temperature rise should be intensified; this requires a rapid and efficient reduction of the use of fossil fuels. At the same time, we call on our governments not to resort to nuclear energy for

¹ <https://press.un.org/en/2021/ga12324.doc.htm>

² <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/756/81/PDF/N2275681.pdf?OpenElement>

³ <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3998543?ln=en>

the energy transition, because it does not represent a climate solution, rather it hinders the development of renewables and creates significant challenges for future generations.

Civil Society

Recognising the decisive role of civil society in advancing solutions to prevent and mitigate the impacts of the climate crisis, we appeal to governments of the region and international institutions to condemn the persecution of civil society organisations and restriction of their activities, the disturbing signs of which have been emerging in Central Asian countries in recent years. It is necessary to improve the access of civil society organisations to resources and decision-making. Civil society should become a mandatory and active participant in the processes of developing mitigation and adaptation plans, as well as in reporting on the implementation of commitments determined on the national level. Special attention should be paid to the youth as one of the largest and most vulnerable groups and a change driver in Central Asia.

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