

Dushanbe Statement of the Heads of Founding States of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea

On September 15, 2023, in Dushanbe, a meeting of the Council of Heads of Founding States of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) was held under the chairmanship of the Republic of Tajikistan. The meeting was attended by President of the Republic of Kazakhstan K.K. Tokayev, President of the Republic of Tajikistan E. Rahmon, President of Turkmenistan S.G. Berdimuhamedow, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh.M. Mirziyoyev, and First Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Kyrgyz Republic A.A. Kasymaliev as an observer.

Based on the results of a substantive discussion on a wide range of issues related to regional cooperation aimed at further improving the ecological, socio-economic, water, and energy situation in the Aral Sea basin, which took place in a traditional atmosphere of mutual understanding, trust, and friendship, the Heads of Founding States of IFAS (hereinafter referred to as the Heads of States or Parties) declare the following:

The Heads of States note that water resources play a key role in Central Asia's sustainable development, and transboundary water cooperation is an essential component of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, ensuring peace, stability and prosperity in the region. In this context, the Parties, expressing their readiness to prioritize water issues in national and regional strategies and development plans, reaffirm their commitment to further strengthening regional water cooperation.

The Parties recognize the important role of water resources in ensuring ecological, food and energy security, as well as achieving climate resilience and socio-economic development, taking into account an integrated and cross-sectoral approach to addressing these issues.

The Heads of States especially emphasize that IFAS is a key and unique regional institution for ensuring mutually beneficial cooperation between the countries of Central Asia in order to improve the ecological, socio-economic, water and energy situation in the Aral Sea basin. In this regard, every effort will be made to further improve the organizational structure and legal framework of IFAS, as well as strengthening its potential and enhancing its image on the international arena.

The parties note the progress in improving the organizational structure and legal framework of IFAS and advocate for the rapid completion of this process, taking into account the interests of all the founding states of the Fund.

The Heads of States express concern about the worsening Aral ecological disaster, which resulted in the formation of more than 5.5 million hectares of deserts, which have a significant negative impact on human health and the state of ecosystems throughout the region and beyond. The parties declare a firm commitment to jointly confront this

crisis and its negative consequences, including by taking specific measures to comprehensively solve problems related to improving the socio-economic and ecological situation in the Aral Sea basin, especially in areas prone to ecological crisis.

The Heads of States note the positive results of large-scale forest reclamation work, conservation of ecosystems and wetlands, restoration of part of the Aral Sea and other measures to reduce the negative impact of the Aral crisis on the environment.

The Heads of States express concern about the deteriorating situation due to the impact of climate change, which has led to the accelerated melting of glaciers and to a growing number and intensity of natural phenomena, leading to an increased shortage of water resources. In this context, the Parties emphasize that only concerted actions by the states of the region, especially within the framework of an improved IFAS, will make it possible to take measures aimed at achieving climate resilience.

The parties emphasize the importance of expanding interaction and coordination in the field of the climate agenda, caring for natural resources, in particular the preservation of glaciers and water resources in general, building a low-carbon economy, and introducing resource-saving and “green” technologies.

The Heads of States note that ensuring universal and equitable access to safe and sustainable drinking water, sanitation and hygiene services for all people is critical to preventing water-related diseases. In this regard, the Parties encourage targeted investments in maintaining such services and express their readiness to strengthen cooperation aimed at enhancing the health aspect of activities in these areas.

The parties recognize the important role of hydropower facilities on interstate watercourses to promote the integrated and rational use of water resources and resolve water and energy issues in Central Asia, taking into account the interests of all countries in the region.

The Heads of States emphasize the importance of developing a comprehensive and mutually beneficial mechanism for water and energy cooperation in ensuring water, energy and food security in Central Asia.

The Parties note the need to take coordinated measures aimed at the widespread introduction of advanced information and communication technologies for water resources management, as well as innovative water-saving technologies for more efficient and rational use of water resources at the national and regional levels.

The Heads of States advocate the development and implementation of joint projects and programs with the attraction of external investments within the framework of the Action Program to assist the countries of the Aral Sea basin (ASBP-4) and the Regional Environmental Programme for Sustainable Development in Central Asia (REP4SD-CA).

The Heads of States emphasize the importance of regional youth movements on protection of water resources and environment in order to ensure the participation of the younger generation in overcoming modern challenges and threats.

The parties note the need to develop information bases and exchange information in the field of water management and ecology, including the introduction of new technologies at the national and regional levels.

The Heads of States express satisfaction with the adoption of resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly on the Aral Sea basin and the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea and emphasize their commitment to further intensify interaction with the UN system.

The Heads of States note the importance of the adopted Joint Statement of the Central Asian States at the UN 2023 Water Conference, which confirms the readiness to work together to implement the commitments adopted within its framework.

The Parties express gratitude to international development partners and donor countries for their support in solving the problems of the Aral Sea basin and call on them for further interaction to assist the countries of the region in achieving sustainable development.

The Parties emphasize that the constructive negotiations held in Dushanbe in an atmosphere of openness and mutual understanding made a significant contribution to the further development of traditionally good neighborly relations and mutually beneficial cooperation of the IFAS founding states in solving the problems of the Aral Sea basin.

The Heads of States highly appreciated the chairmanship of the Republic of Tajikistan in IFAS and noted the successful holding of events dedicated to the 30th anniversary of the Fund, as well as the fruitful results of the UN 2023 Water Conference held under the co-chairmanship of the Republic of Tajikistan on 22-24 March 2023 in New York.

The Parties express gratitude to the President of the Republic of Tajikistan H.E. Emomali Rahmon for the hospitality and high level of organization of the meeting of the Council of the Heads of the Founding States of IFAS.

Dushanbe, 15 September 2023