

**TASHKENT DECLARATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
“PROBLEMS OF ARAL: IMPACT ON THE GENE POOL OF THE POPULATION, FLORA, FAUNA
AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION FOR MITIGATING CONSEQUENCES”**

The participants of the International Conference adopted the following declaration on the environmental crisis in the Aral Sea coastal zone and international cooperation for mitigating its consequences:

1. The results of the held International Conference proved once again that inefficient water use during the last fifty years, which has led to changes in the runoff regime of the Amudarya and Syrdarya rivers, has caused one of the largest man-made disasters in the recent history - the desiccation of the Aral Sea. As a result, a complicated combination of environmental, socio-economic and demographic problems, which are of a global nature in the origin and extent of their consequences, have emerged in the Aral Sea coastal zone.

2. The danger of the worsening situation in the Aral crisis area can increase greatly and rapidly as the result of further reduction or variation of water inflow to the Aral Sea. Over the last 50 years, the glaciers of Pamir and Tien Shan mountain systems have lost 25% of their volume, and this process is progressing rapidly. Along with the problem of inefficient water use, it may expand the disaster area, extend saline lands unsuitable for agricultural use and habitation, deprive millions of people of employment and incomes, and lead to new losses of flora and fauna in the Aral Sea coastal zone. The prevention of the worsening situation in the Aral Sea coastal zone is an integral part of economic, social, environmental and other aspects of regional security not only for all Central Asian states, but also for neighboring countries.

3. In this context, the issues related to reasonable use of water resources in transboundary rivers in the region, the need for implementation of well grounded approach and solutions in the use of water resources, first of all, runoff of transboundary rivers in the interests of all countries and peoples living in the region are getting especially urgent. Within their own territory the states in the region should seek to use transboundary rivers in a fair and reasonable way, according to the key documents of international law, including the Conventions on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (1992) and Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses (1997) that constitute the fundamental principles for the use of transboundary rivers, and implement appropriate measures for preventing considerable damage to other riparian countries.

4. The efforts made by the governments of Central Asian republics and the international community during the past 15 years have given certain positive results, making it possible to mitigate to some extent the consequences of the Aral crisis for population, flora and fauna in the disaster zone. However, the scope and volume of this assistance have been significantly reduced in recent years. Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan being the countries facing this global disaster experience significant difficulties in overcoming its consequences.

5. The conference participants express their deep gratitude to the Uzbek Government as well as to JIPOOH, UNICEF, UNESCO, WHO, World Bank, Asian Bank, German Technical Center, other international organizations for new initiatives on research and development of efficient ways and mechanisms aimed at mitigating the consequences of the environmental crisis in the Aral Sea coastal zone in the interest of social and economic protection of population, conservation and restoration of biodiversity.

6. The conference participants drew the attention to the need in the region of a strict water conservation regime and improved water use efficiency for drinking as well as agricultural purposes, preventing unreasonable water losses in the supply to users. It is particularly important to implement projects aimed at the reconstruction of water-supply and irrigation networks, the reconstruction and construction of new collector-drainage networks, re-equipment of pumping facilities, general installation of equipment for metering used water.

7. Based on the issues discussed, the conference participants agreed on the following as the main tasks of the international community and Central Asian countries:

- provide assistance to regions of the environmental disaster zone in the Aral Sea coastal zone concerning protection of the gene pool of population, promotion of population health, improvement of their access to pure drinking water, upgrading of sanitation and hygiene, reduction of sickness rate, infant and maternal mortality, improvement of environmental protection;
- prevent artificial reduction in volumes and regime of runoff of transboundary rivers to the Aral Sea, which may lead to worsening of the environmental situation in the Aral Sea coastal zone, health and living conditions of millions of people inhabiting this region;
- provide assistance to the countries in the region, which use water resources of transboundary rivers for drinking and irrigation purposes, in their efficient use through the reduction of excessive losses, application of advanced irrigation technologies, integrated water resources management, which would meet requirements for achieving a balance between needs in conservation and restoration of functions of such a fragile ecosystem as the Aral Sea coastal zone and other needs including agricultural and industrial;
- implement measures for control of desertification and salinization through tree-planting and other agro-technical and special actions in the environmental disaster zone; and
- provide conditions for increasing employment and incomes of population in the environmental disaster zone by development of small-scale business, first of all, industrial and agricultural production and services using low quantities of water.

8. The participants of the Conference call upon international donors and sponsors to consider the list of projects attached to this Declaration and proposed to international organizations, financial institutions, other countries and donors for implementation in order to mitigate the consequences of climate change in the Aral Sea coastal zone.

Source: Conference Secretariat