

Central Asian NGOs' Statement on Climate Change Issues

The republics of Central Asia find themselves in the group of countries most vulnerable to climate change. The Aral Sea disaster has become a prime example of the unsustainable development of our region. At the same time, climate change is increasingly affecting the lives of tens of millions of people, especially in rural areas. Further degradation of ecosystems, growing scarcity of water resources, increasingly frequent droughts and other natural hazards call for the most urgent action.

However, our governments continue to guide themselves with short-term interests or are influenced by those of private corporations. They do not take into account the demands of the public and instead continue to imitate climate change prevention efforts, while the allocated funds are used in an inefficient manner.

Central Asian NGOs address the Governments of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, the UN, the EU, and the international and business communities with an urgent appeal to revise and significantly strengthen national and regional climate commitments.

To prevent the climate crisis and its adverse effects in Central Asia, emissions must be reduced by at least 30 percent by 2030 and reach zero by 2050. However, the pledges given by the Central Asian countries are not sufficient. The excuses about the difficulties of achieving carbon neutrality, when examined in detail, turn out to be not so significant, but at the same time the social and economic benefits of climate mitigation and adaptation measures for human health, employment and national economies are obvious.

We call on the Governments of the Central Asian republics to:

- revise and adopt more ambitious targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and take a more proactive stance in promoting the region's role in international climate commitments and processes;
- introduce climate criteria into public planning, budgeting and procurement systems;
- ensure the participation of NGOs and the openness of the development and implementation of climate policies with the involvement of all stakeholders, especially women and youth;
- ensure transparency and public accountability of financial resources allocated to addressing climate change challenges;
- significantly strengthen climate change adaptation measures, primarily in the water and food sectors that require joint transboundary programs and regional cooperation;
- create a network of extension centres for climate change adaptation at the regional, national and local levels, making use of — among other available resources — the capacity of local NGOs. Already today direct support should be provided to the most vulnerable: smallholder farmers, female and young entrepreneurs, rural and remotely located population as well as residents in climate risk areas;
- strengthen work on climate education in our countries, introduce independent disciplines on environmental and climate issues in schools and universities, consider the establishment of Green Schools with 'green' infrastructure that would include buildings, energy and water supply, and practical applications from other spheres as well as possibilities to demonstrate and disseminate various sustainability technologies;

- create non-declarative favourable legislative conditions for the mass development of renewable energy and energy efficiency — not only for large-scale business and international financial institutions, as it is the case today, but also for the general population: farmers and households, which would also address the problems of fuel poverty;
- the Government of Uzbekistan and the Government of Kazakhstan should reconsider plans for the construction of nuclear power plants! Nuclear power is not a climate solution, but quite the opposite this will greatly increase the risks to climate and water security in the region;
- discontinue fossil fuel subsidies as well as renounce plans for the further use of coal-fired power plants and the development of unsustainable mining industries that prioritize short-term business interests over the benefit of people and nature;
- abandon attempts to replace real emission reduction measures with virtual calculations of sequestration by forests as well as stop replacing programs to support natural reforestation with mass tree-planting campaigns;
- significantly strengthen measures for water use efficiency, restoration and conservation of soil fertility and natural — mountain, forest, steppe and water — ecosystems. Natural ecosystems are the foundation for the future development of the Central Asian countries and their adaptation to climate change.

To empower the public and expand its opportunities for participation, we call for:

- simplifying access for civil society organisations (CSOs) to international and other funding mechanisms by removing excessively bureaucratized procedures, control and mediation from the side of state authorities as well as providing support for the accreditation of CSOs in the Green Climate Fund and other funds;
- establish national climate funds, which could include the introduction of climate taxes and taxes on excess profits of private companies that operate in the Central Asian region and are directly involved in fuelling the climate crisis, but remain detached from international efforts;

We call on the governments of the Central Asian countries and all international partners to — critically and in cooperation with NGOs and all other stakeholders — revise existing policies and shape a new model for the development of our region taking into account climate change and other global challenges.

Adopted at the Regional Meeting of NGOs of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan on 10 October, 2022