



7th WORLD WATER FORUM

SPECIAL ISSUE SESSION R32AP

"DEVELOPMENT OF COOPERATION IN THE ARAL SEA BASIN TO MITIGATE CONSEQUENCES OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL CATASTROPHE"

FINAL DOCUMENT

The Executive Committee of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) in collaboration with the network of the Global Water Partnership in Central Asia and Caucasus (GWP CACENA) organized a special issue session "Development of Cooperation in the Aral Sea Basin to Mitigate Consequences of the Environmental Catastrophe" in the framework of the 7th World Water Forum on 14th of April 2015 in Gyeongju, the Republic of Korea.

Within the special issues session, participants:

- Agreed that current challenges observed globally, including climate change, unprecedented increase in the demand for water, increasing water scarcity, reduction and pollution of fresh water, increased frequency of water-related disasters, intensive glacier melting, degradation of water ecosystems, desertification, environmental degradation, disruption of the ecological balance are characteristic of the Central Asian Region and create significant problems related to its sustainable development;
- Recognized that as a result of the Aral Sea desiccation in the countries of the basin, especially in the Aral Sea Region, a complex of complicated environmental, socio-economic and demographic problems emerged that are global by origin and level of consequences;
- Stressed that the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea, established in 1993 by five Central Asian states, is the only regional body supported at the highest political level, which provides an unique platform for regional and international cooperation to address the problems of the Aral Sea Basin;
- Noted the urgency of implementing the Third Aral Sea Basin Program (ASBP-3) approved by the Governments of the Member States of IFAS and aimed at ensuring a more effective and integrated management of water resources, improving the environmental situation and socio-economic conditions, as well as strengthening cooperation in Central Asia;
- Recognized that situation in the Aral Sea basin in the field of water management, environmental and socio-economic conditions remains difficult despite the efforts of the Central Asian countries to address the problems of the Aral crisis and mitigate the consequences of the Aral Sea desiccation;
- Noted that the countries of the region with the assistance and support of international organizations, financial institutions and governments of donor-countries are taking steps to address the problems of the Aral Sea Basin and improve the environmental and socio-economic situation in general.

Following the discussions, for the effective and rational use of water resources, environment protection, socio-economic and sustainable development of the region, implementation of practical actions to mitigate the effects of the Aral Sea crisis, further strengthening of the regional cooperation to confront today's challenges and solve common problems in the Central Asian Region the participants of the special session proposed the following areas:

1. ***Strengthening of cooperation within IFAS*** – to ensure close interaction between the Member States of IFAS to address water, environmental and socio-economic problems of the Aral Sea Basin; strengthen the potential of the executive bodies of IFAS; and utilize the capacity and advantages of IFAS in addressing regional issues. The measures to promote and develop dialogue within the IFAS should be supported in order to achieve consensus between the countries.
2. ***Ensuring implementation of the ASBP-3*** - it is necessary to take urgent measures to implement the regional and national ASBP-3 programs and projects, and, in this regard the financial and technical assistance from international organizations, financial institutions and governments of donor-countries should be extensively involved; to ensure greater involvement of the executive bodies of IFAS for more effective implementation of ASBP-3 regional projects.
3. ***Solution of the Aral Sea problems*** - given the enormity of the Aral Sea crisis and the problems to be solved, it is necessary to consolidate the efforts of the international community to eliminate the negative consequences of the Aral Sea desiccation and reduce its damaging effects on the environment and livelihoods of millions of people living in the area of environmental disaster. In this case, important tasks are to create conditions for reproduction and preservation of the gene pool and public health, development of social infrastructure, raising the quality and the living standard of people, preservation and restoration of biodiversity of flora and fauna.
4. ***Enhancing international cooperation*** – to develop mechanisms for effective interaction and cooperation of the Executive Committee of IFAS, the executive bodies of the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination and the Interstate Commission on Sustainable Development with international organizations and financial institutions, as well as the donor community in order to attract their attention and efforts to address the problems of the Aral Sea Basin; to cooperate actively with the UN agencies, considering the UN General Assembly Resolution 63/133 dated December 11, 2008 on granting the observer status in the General Assembly to the IFAS.

Given the relevance of the above areas the special session participants call on international organizations and financial institutions, as well as donor community to support IFAS and Central Asian countries in the implementation of programs and projects in the Aral Sea Basin and the Aral Sea area.

In conclusion, the session participants expressed their gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Korea and the Forum Organizing Committee for the support and creation of conditions for the preparation and conducting of the session under the Regional Process of the 7th World Water Forum.