

**Astana Statement
by the Heads of State Founders of the
International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea**

On April 22, 2026, Astana hosted a regular meeting of the Council of Heads of State Founders of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS), chaired by the Republic of Kazakhstan. The event was attended by President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev of Kazakhstan, President Emomali Rahmon of Tajikistan, President Serdar Berdimuhamedov of Turkmenistan, and President Shavkat Mirziyoyev of Uzbekistan. President Sadyr Japarov of the Kyrgyz Republic also attended as a guest of the Kazakh President.

Engaging in substantive discussions defined by mutual understanding, trust, friendship, and constructive cooperation, the Heads of State Founders of IFAS (hereinafter referred to as the "Heads of State" or the "Parties") addressed a broad range of issues aimed at strengthening cooperation within the Aral Sea basin.

The Heads of State emphasized the pivotal role of IFAS as the primary regional institutional platform for addressing critical environmental, water, energy, and socio-economic challenges. In this regard, the Parties agreed to continue reforming the institutional and legal framework of IFAS to enhance its efficiency and elevate its international standing.

The Parties welcomed the progress made in modernizing the institutional and legal framework of IFAS, reaffirming their commitment to sustaining these efforts while fully respecting the interests of all Central Asian states.

The Heads of State underscored the critical importance of water resources and ecosystems in ensuring the environmental, food, and energy security of Central Asia. To this end, the Parties reaffirmed their commitment to further deepening regional water cooperation, viewing it as a vital component for achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals and fostering peace, stability, and prosperity across the region.

The Heads of State expressed deep concern over the deteriorating situation in the Aral Sea basin, driven by ecosystem degradation and global climate change. These factors have accelerated the melting of mountain glaciers and increased the frequency and intensity of natural disasters, leading to growing water scarcity and a negative impact on human health and regional ecosystems.

Consequently, the Parties advocated for stronger regional cooperation in climate change mitigation and adaptation; the restoration of water, forest, mountain, desert ecosystems, and wetlands; disaster risk reduction and emergency response; and the combat against desertification. They also emphasized the sustainable, integrated use of water resources, environmental protection, glacier preservation, and the promotion of projects aimed at nature restoration, reducing water-intensive production, and introducing resource-saving and "green" technologies. In this regard, they called upon UN agencies and international and regional organizations for active partnership in tackling these challenges.

The Heads of State reaffirmed the positive outcomes of large-scale afforestation efforts, ecosystem and wetland conservation, the partial restoration of the Aral Sea, and other measures taken to mitigate the Aral Sea crisis. They also expressed their support for the Parties' initiatives aimed at global greening.

The Heads of State recognized the importance of consolidating efforts for a comprehensive solution to the environmental and socio-economic challenges in the Aral Sea basin, particularly in areas highly vulnerable to ecological crisis and climate change impacts.

The Heads of State emphasized the importance of developing a sustainable, mutually beneficial cooperation mechanism to address environmental, water, energy, and food security issues in Central Asia, while respecting the interests of all countries in the region.

The Heads of State noted that ensuring universal and equitable access to safe and sustainable drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) is an inherent human right, critical for preventing water-borne diseases. Consequently, the Parties encouraged targeted investments in maintaining these services and expressed their readiness to strengthen cooperation aimed at enhancing the healthcare and health-security dimensions of these initiatives.

The Heads of State highlighted the importance of existing and under-construction hydropower facilities in addressing water and energy issues and achieving climate resilience in the river basins of Central Asia.

The Parties noted the importance of developing data repositories and sharing environmental and water information in accordance with national legislations. They also stressed the need to implement automated water accounting and monitoring systems across the Aral Sea basin countries to ensure efficient and rational water management.

The Parties underscored the necessity of taking effective measures to widely deploy innovative water-saving technologies for more efficient and rational use of Central Asia's water resources.

The Heads of State emphasized the importance of the Program of Actions to Assist the Countries of the Aral Sea Basin (ASBP-4) and the Regional Environmental Programme for Sustainable Development of Central Asia (REP4SD CA) in addressing shared environmental, water, and socio-economic issues, as well as in promoting green economy principles and climate adaptation. In this context, the Parties called for the continued effective implementation of joint projects and programs by leveraging external investment, including within the framework of these programs. They also acknowledged the coordination efforts between the Executive Committee of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea and international development partners in implementing ASBP-4 and REP4SD CA.

The Heads of State emphasized the importance of regional youth and volunteer movements dedicated to water conservation and environmental protection, aiming to ensure their active engagement in addressing today's challenges and threats.

The Parties intend to continue jointly advancing initiatives that strengthen cooperation, promote the rational and efficient use of water resources, and draw the attention of the international community to these issues at key international platforms.

The Heads of State noted the significance of the outcomes of major international forums, including the Third High-Level International Conference on the International Decade for Action “Water for Sustainable Development 2018–2028” (June 10–13, 2024, Dushanbe); the One Water Summit (December 3, 2024, Riyadh, co-chaired by Kazakhstan, France, and Saudi Arabia); the Samarkand Climate Forum (April 4–5, 2025, Samarkand); the International Conference “Global Mountain Dialogue for Sustainable Development: Towards the Bishkek+25 Summit” (April 24–25, 2025, Bishkek); the High-Level International Conference on Glacier Preservation (May 29–31, 2025, Dushanbe), held within the framework of the International Year of Glacier Preservation; the Third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries (August 5–8, 2025, Avaza National Tourist Zone); and the International Water Forum – Tashkent Water Week 2026 (March 25–26, 2026, Tashkent). These events provided pivotal platforms for addressing the pressing climate challenges facing Central Asia and the wider world, while expanding regional and international cooperation toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Parties welcomed and supported upcoming events geared toward advancing the SDGs, including the Regional Environmental Summit in Astana (April 22–24, 2026); the Fourth High-Level International Conference on the International Decade for Action “Water for Sustainable Development 2018–2028” in Dushanbe (May 25–28, 2026); the World Forum on the Introduction of Water-Saving Technologies in Samarkand (October 2026); the Second Caspian Environmental Forum in Turkmenistan (2027); and the Second Global Mountain Summit “Bishkek+25” in the Kyrgyz Republic (2027). In this context, the Heads of State underscored the importance of consolidating regional efforts to ensure the successful delivery of these events.

The Heads of State took note of Turkmenistan’s initiative to develop a Special United Nations Programme for the Aral Sea Basin and emphasized the importance of the initiative to establish a Regional Centre for Combating Desertification, which would serve as a regional mechanism to coordinate national programs and actions across Central Asian states.

Taking into account the initiative of the Republic of Uzbekistan to declare 2026–2036 the “Decade of Practical Action for Rational Water Use in Central Asia,” the Parties underscored the importance of pooling efforts to promote water conservation and integrated water management throughout the region.

The Parties noted the importance of granting regional organization status to the Regional Centre for Waste Management in Central Asia, located in Dushanbe, and incorporating it into the structure of the Interstate Commission on Sustainable Development of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea.

The Parties took note of Kazakhstan's "Water Towers Partnership" initiative, as well as the vital role of existing centers and proposed initiatives to establish new global and regional centers on climate technologies, glaciology, and mountain resilience, geared toward building capacity across Central Asian states in the face of climate change.

The Parties expressed support for Tajikistan's initiative to establish a Coordinating Glaciological Centre in Dushanbe. This center will serve as a complementary regional mechanism designed to strengthen scientific capacity, enhance glacier monitoring and data exchange, foster research and training, and improve early warning systems to bolster climate resilience in Central Asia.

The Parties took note of Kazakhstan's initiative regarding the potential establishment of an International Water Organization within the United Nations system, emphasizing that further consideration of this matter should proceed on the basis of a broad international consensus within relevant UN frameworks.

The Parties expressed their appreciation to international development partners and donor countries for their steadfast support in addressing the challenges of the Aral Sea basin, and called for continued cooperation to assist regional states in achieving sustainable development.

The Heads of State underscored the relevance and importance of declaring March 26 as the International Day of the Aral Sea and the Amu Darya and Syr Darya Rivers, aiming to strengthen and expand cooperation among the countries of the region.

The Parties will continue close cooperation to improve the environmental and socio-economic situation in the Aral Sea basin.

The Heads of State highly commended Kazakhstan's chairmanship of IFAS and praised the successful organization of the Summit of the Heads of State Founders of the Fund.

The Parties emphasized that the constructive negotiations held in Astana, characterized by openness and mutual understanding, made a substantial contribution to further advancing traditionally good-neighborly relations and mutually beneficial cooperation among the IFAS founding states in tackling the challenges of the Aral Sea basin.

The Parties expressed their profound gratitude to President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev of the Republic of Kazakhstan for his warm hospitality and the high level of organization of the meeting of the Council of Heads of State Founders of IFAS.

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Astana, April 22, 2026