

RES 3.035 Aral Sea Basin as the hot spot for biodiversity conservation

RECOGNIZING the value of the Aral Sea Basin for the survival and sustainable development of the more than 50 million Central Asian people and nature;

NOTING that this sub-region suffers from many environmental problems and is the most degraded area of the former Soviet Union due to the dramatic changes that are continuously threatening the unique biodiversity of the area, especially around the Aral Sea and in the Amu Darya and Syr Darya deltas;

EMPHASIZING that development efforts during the last four decades of the 20th century (expansion of grain and cotton production beyond the traditional boundaries of the ancient irrigated oases, the creation of massive irrigation systems stretching for thousands of kilometres and accompanied by a vast network of hydroelectric stations and reservoirs, the large-scale development of oil, natural gas, iron and copper, and the rapid expansion of cities and industrial settlements) led to unsustainable redistribution of the basin's water resources for irrigation purposes and had serious negative impacts on the region's natural resources and landscape;

CONCERNED that even after realization of several environmental programmes and spending of about US\$ 30 million for implementing solutions, both people and natural ecosystems continue to suffer under severe pressure from these activities;

RECALLING that the changes that happened in the Aral Sea basin were recognized by the world community to be one of the greatest catastrophes of the 20th century;

MINDFUL of the efforts of Central Asian States to overcome the ecological crisis and to improve the socio-economic situation through the establishment of the International Fund for the Aral Sea and the development and approval of Plans of Action for the Period of 2003–2010 for the Improvement of Environmental, Social and Economic Situation in the Aral Sea Basin, in agreement with the governments of participating countries;

AWARE of the need to protect and manage the outstanding natural areas of this region at the ecosystem level, even if shared among several states; and

AFFIRMING the international importance of landscapes, biodiversity and natural ecosystems of the Aral Sea Basin, and its globally unique natural and cultural heritage that is severely threatened by human activity;

The World Conservation Congress at its 3rd Session in Bangkok, Thailand, 17–25 November 2004:

1. REQUESTS the IUCN Director General, members and Commissions to launch a campaign to save the biodiversity of this threatened region;

2. CALLS ON countries of the Central Asian region to incorporate into their Aral Sea Basin programmes elements that promote, as the priority objective, assistance for implementing projects to rehabilitate ecological stability and biological productivity of natural ecosystems and to increase aquatic ecosystem stability in the Aral Sea Basin, including restoration of wetland systems in the deltas of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers and conservation of wetland biodiversity;

3. URGES Central Asian States to conserve the biodiversity of the region by:

(a) limiting intensive agriculture and irrigation, which are especially harmful for the environment;

(b) preserving all remaining natural ecosystems along the two main Central Asian rivers – Amu Darya and Syr Darya;

(c) preparing independent environmental impact assessments of the economic and ecological consequences of irrigation processes; and

(d) initiating the continuation of programmes on biodiversity rehabilitation and restoration in the Aral Sea basin; and

4. URGES the IUCN Species Survival Commission to support the development and implementation of the Strategy for Biodiversity Conservation in the Aral Sea Basin.

State member Sweden abstained from voting on this motion for reasons given in the Swedish Government's general statement on the motions process (see page x).

The Department of State, United States, provided the following statement for the record:

State and agency members United States refrained from engaging in deliberations on this motion and took no national government position on the motion as adopted for reasons given in the US General Statement on the IUCN Resolution Process.