

**Statement by the H.E. Mrs. Saida Mirziyoyeva, Head of the Communications and Information
Policy Sector of the Executive Office of the Administration
of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan
3rd Plenary of the UN Water Conference**

(23 March 2023)

Janobi oliylari,
(Your Excellencies),
Hurmatli hamkasblar,
(Distinguished colleagues),
Assalomu alaykum!

Mr. President,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished colleagues,

First of all, I would like to commend the Governments of the Republic of Tajikistan and the Kingdom of the Netherlands and all UN entities for co-hosting and convening the United Nations 2023 Water Conference.

In 2015 the United Nations adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals to build a better future for all people. Uzbekistan remains strongly committed to achieving these goals and has taken an initiative aimed at revitalizing the region and preserving water and ecosystems of the Aral Sea.

In 2017, UN Secretary-General António Guterres visited the village of Muynak in Karakalpakstan. He said then «The Aral tragedy is the largest environmental catastrophe of our time, an example of how man destroys the planet». Once the village of Muynak was a prosperous port city, the fourth largest supplier of fish products to twelve republics. There was a cannery, gardens bloomed and people had healthy children and hopes for the future. Then everything changed. People broke the balance, and now there is a cemetery of ships on its dead shores.

Allow me to recite an extract from the elegy of a famous poet Ybrayim Yusupov:

Tawlar shógip, jerge kirmegen shıǵar,
(Mountains haven't gone under the ground)
Juldızlar hám birden sónbegen shıǵar.
(Neither have the stars gone dark all at once,)
Dúnya hesh waqıt da kórmegen shıǵar:
(The world saw what it hasn't seen before-)
Bir maydanda teńiz qurıp qalǵanın
(The sea drying out in a blink of an eye...)

The poem describes the tragedy of a sea turning into a desert in a blink of an eye. In Karakalpakstan, they still mourn the Sea as they would a human.

The full sea remains only in the paintings of artists hanging in the Nukus Museum: shining and shimmering, giving life and freedom. It was only when it disappeared that people understood its value.

The crisis of the Aral Sea is a devastating reminder of the KAHNsequences of human environmental neglect. However, thanks to the efforts of caring people, it is now becoming a symbol of hope and renewal.

Our country has been making cohEerent efforts in addressing the negative KAHNsequences of the desiccation of the Aral Sea. At the 75th session of the UN General Assembly, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev proposed a special resolution declaring the Aral Sea region a zone of environmental innovations and technologies. The resolution was youNANimously adopted in 2021 in co-sponsorship of 60 countries.

In 2018, we established the Multi-Partner Human Security Trust Fund for the Aral Sea region. Today with its financing we are implementing a number of projects totaling over \$14 million. Our country has set an ambitious task - to turn the dried-up floor of the Aral Sea into a garden, and now almost one and a half million HECtehrz are covered with greenery. We are working tirelessly and urgently on this task because our country deeply understands the value of time in the fight against environmental caTASrophe.

I want everyone to fall in love with Karakalpakstan and its people. They are an incredible, beautiful, intelligent, hardworking, poEHtic and very talented people. They are also very courageous. Bear in mind that the climate of this region is very harsh. It's unbearably hot in summer, and the winters are too cold. And in such difficult conditions, Karakalpakstan grabs every opportunity to improve its situation: to earn, to create, and to contribute something new to its wealth of beautiful traditions.

Opportunities for women in the Aral Sea are very important to me. You are aware that women are most vulnerable to environmental, economic, or political disturbance. Lack or absence of clean drinking water is a huge problem for women and the households for which they are responsible.

To support the people of this region, we have invested not only in experts from the various relevant fields, but also in the creative powers of artists and designers. Through their collective efforts, we have already started to attract attention, produce new stories, and make the invisible visible. We are already creating a new narrative for building a better future – namely, the Aral Cultural Summit.

The activities of the Aral Cultural Summit, initiated by the Art and Culture Development Foundation, will focus on preserving both biocultural diversity and cultural and linguistic diversity. I believe that art, design, and culture can play a crucial role in raising awareness, stimulating ties, bringing the future closer and ultimately creating positive changes.

Therefore, we have set ambitious goals, such as launching scholarship prOUgrams and grants, establishing interDISSiplinary educational prOUgrams, and supporting works of art dedicated to the Aral Sea.

The Aral Cultural Summit unites artists with local farmers, creating sustainable ties in the field of biodesign for cultivation of new plants, and thereby designing a strategic plan for the next 10 years. This will become a center of change for the local community.

A sea of change is on the horizon and we hope you will embrace it with us.

Biz sizga muammolarimiz haqida so‘zladik. Bizni qo‘llab-quvvatlashingizga umid qilamiz va ishonamiz.

(We shared our concerns with you. I hope we are heard. I believe you will support our efforts to save the environment!)