

## Declarations

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**(Light editing has been carried out for the purpose of publication in this report.)**

# URUMQI DECLARATION

### **Preamble**

The Council for Sustainable Development for Central Asia (CoDoCA) conducted its second conference in Urumqi, Xinjiang, China, from September 13-18, 1998. The conference was hosted by the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the Xinjiang Institute of Ecology and Geography and was attended by 170 participants from 24 countries, including 11 from Central Asia.

The Central Asian region is defined as the area covered by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tadjikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Mongolia, Western China, the East-Central part of the Russian Federation (Altai, Buryat, Khakas, and the Tuva Republics), the Himalayan states of Bhutan and Nepal, Northern India, North Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

### **Declaration**

Participants at the conference, after reviewing over 100 papers and considering the opinions presented by scientists, scholars, and experts and following discussion

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and exchange of views on issues such as environmental protection, sustainable development and the limited carrying capacity of Central Asia's arid plains and mountains, unanimously make the following declaration, hereby called the '**Urumqi Declaration for Central Asia**'.

**The Conference recognised the factors outlined below.**

- ▶ Central Asia is a distinct region of the world united by its special characteristics and is of high ecological, economic, and cultural significance, not only for the people of the region, but also for the people of the whole world.
- ▶ Central Asia is a global reservoir of: water, natural resources, biodiversity, and cultural heritage and include some of the last nomadic cultures that have sustained human civilisation without impinging on the carrying capacity of the land for thousands of years.
- ▶ The mountains of Central Asia are the most important source of water for the region.
- ▶ Central Asia is the home of the world's longest and highest chains of mountains, and for centuries these have provided spiritual and physical nourishment to humanity.
- ▶ Central Asia has vast indigenous human resources with a mostly untapped potential of knowledge of and experience with the sustainable use of natural resources.
- ▶ Central Asia has undergone changes, some of which have adversely affected the economies, environments, and livelihoods of the people; and these include loss of soil fertility and decrease in availability of water and have caused pollution and loss of biodiversity.
- ▶ Vast opportunities are available in Central Asia:
  - to develop the area in a sustainable way,
  - to mitigate the ill effects of the actions of the past,
  - to use in a sensible way the reservoir of knowledge and experience and physical resources available in the region for humanity, and
  - to develop economic and business activities in all fields including (eco) tourism.
- ▶ The Central Asian governments, communities, and peoples have generally increased their awareness of environment and development, and they have taken many practical steps and made substantial progress since the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (which resulted in declarations such as the Rio de Janeiro Declaration on Environment and Development, (Agenda 21) and others such as the declaration of the first CoDoCA Conference in Ulaan Baatar 1994).
- ▶ Many nations in the region have put forward their Agenda 21 and programme priorities that are being implemented.
- ▶ According to the UN Charter and principles of international law, and under the prerequisites of respecting the sovereign rights of every country, nations are to use their natural resources based upon their international obligations, national laws, and policies on environment and development.

**The Conference acknowledges the following points.**

The positive role CoDoCA has played during the past years along with the Ulaan Baatar Declaration, following the first Conference on Sustainable Development of Central Asia, and organization of the second conference in Urumqi.

The participants are of the opinion that Central Asian nations face common issues, therefore closer cooperation on regional and transboundary issues is vital to achieve sustainable development.

Mistaken actions during the accelerated social and economic development in the past have hastened the environmental degradation of Central Asia causing (i) natural disasters (such as deforestation resulting in erosion, flash floods, and landslides; reduced water resources; desertification by overexploitation of the scarce natural resources in, for example, the oases; over-irrigation leading to salinisation; overgrazing leading to degradation of natural pastures; loss of biodiversity causing extinction of rare species; and overexploitation of scarce water resources causing the drying of rivers and lakes and causing deterioration of water quality), (ii) industrial and agricultural pollution, and (iii) a negative impact on human health.

Sustainable development can only be attained with environmental security and through conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.

Sustainable development can be attained by using transparent and good governance and participatory and community-based development practices that respect the specific characteristics and requirements of the local communities. In order to bring about harmonious development of the environment and economies of Central Asia with the participation of all stakeholders, public awareness of the needs and benefits of sustainable development should be strengthened through, e.g., publicity through the media, extension, education, training networks, and exchange of information.

Sustainable development requires technically and socially acceptable, economically viable, and scientifically-based management of land, water, and other natural resources; prevention of desertification and land degradation; eco-tourism development; conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity; promotion of renewable sources and efficient use of energy; gender equality; protection of cultural resources; and human resource development.

Sustainable development requires sustainable funding — including access to micro-credit and long-term funding and the commitment of governments, donors, financial institutions, and the private sector.

Sustainable development requires that governments substantially increase budgets for environmental protection and provide the necessary funding for scientific and academic institutions, ecological education, and monitoring of the environment as well as legal enforcement.

Sustainable development requires cooperation between the nations who share the same resources and face issues of common concern.

Sustainable development requires that before any project is undertaken environmental and social impact assessments are carried out.

The government and non-government organizations in Central Asia should make and promote increased use of opportunities offered by international conventions and other multilateral agreements.

Sustainable development requires that developments in trade, industry, transport, agriculture, and tourism are facilitated in an environmentally friendly way.

The conference recommends that Central Asian governments take up the issue of sustainable development with increased political will and commitment.

The planning for sustainable development centres around people and local communities.

The donors and funding agencies who have played a positive role in sustainable development so far should continue their commitments.

CoDoCA should continue and expand its functions as a facilitator and a platform to ensure the continuation of dialogue on the above-mentioned issues and to improve facilities for exchange of information to create and maintain a network of governments, non-government organizations, the private sector, the donor community, scientific institutions, and individuals interested in the region and to form linkages with existing networks within and outside the region.

CoDoCA will identify and develop a programme of regional initiatives on sustainable development and take the necessary steps to implement these — including the organization of workshops, meetings, etc.

CoDoCA will establish a programme secretariat for developing and facilitating a Central Asian network for exchange of knowledge and experience.

CoDoCA will establish informal regional working groups on various subjects to initiate and augment cooperation between the countries.

Urumqi, 18 September, 1998