



Uzbekistan Strengthens Its Role in International Environmental Policy

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Abstract

This paper examines Uzbekistan's environmental governance, biodiversity conservation, and climate change initiatives within the framework of regional and international cooperation. As one of only two doubly landlocked countries in the world, Uzbekistan possesses diverse ecosystems, including deserts, mountains, wetlands, and river valleys, which require comprehensive environmental management. Since joining the Global Environment Facility (GEF) in 1995, the country has implemented numerous projects aimed at biodiversity conservation, ecosystem restoration, sustainable land management, low-carbon transportation, and the elimination of ozone-depleting substances. Financial support from the GEF has strengthened Uzbekistan's capacity to fulfill its international environmental commitments and promote sustainable development. The paper also highlights Uzbekistan's growing leadership in regional environmental diplomacy through its active participation in the Regional Environmental Summit (RES 2026), the Central Asian Conference on Climate Change (CACC-2026), and the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS). Furthermore, it discusses Uzbekistan's role as the host of the Eighth Global Environment Facility Assembly in Samarkand, which serves as a global platform for addressing climate change, biodiversity conservation, water resource management, land degradation, and the transition to a green economy. Overall, the study demonstrates that Uzbekistan has become an influential regional actor in advancing environmental sustainability, fostering international partnerships, and promoting coordinated actions to address transboundary environmental and climate challenges in Central Asia.

Key words: Uzbekistan, Global Environment Facility (GEF), environmental sustainability, biodiversity conservation, climate change, regional environmental cooperation, Central Asia.

Uzbekistan is one of only two doubly landlocked countries in the world, meaning it is not only landlocked itself but is also surrounded by countries that similarly lack direct access to an ocean or sea. The country is distinguished by remarkable natural diversity: Uzbekistan's landscape includes sandy deserts, mountainous areas along its borders with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, and, in the west, territories adjacent to the dried-up Aral Sea. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) has drawn attention to the state of the environment, Uzbekistan's natural resources, and the environmental protection initiatives being implemented across the country.

Since joining the Global Environment Facility in 1995, Uzbekistan has achieved significant results through a series of national and regional grants. These funds have been directed toward conserving unique landscapes, phasing out the use of ozone-depleting substances, developing low-carbon transport systems by introducing bus rapid

transit corridors, and strengthening national capacity to address environmental issues. In particular, cross-border biodiversity conservation projects in Central Asia, as well as initiatives related to the Aral Sea basin, have contributed to strengthening transboundary environmental management and enhancing resilience to climate change.

With the support of the Global Environment Facility, Uzbekistan is fulfilling its international obligations and participating in programs aimed at developing sustainable food systems, improving land use, and restoring ecosystems. Overall, grants totaling 98.8 million, along with 773.8 million in co-financing, have facilitated the advancement of the country's environmental policy and strengthened its leading role on the international stage.

The VIII Assembly of the Global Environment Facility will be held in Samarkand from May 31 to June 6, 2026. The event will be attended by representatives of over 180 countries, international organizations, financial institutions, academia, and civil society. Participants will discuss pressing issues such as climate change, biodiversity conservation, combating land degradation, the sustainable use of water resources, and the transition to a green economy. The Global Environment Facility highlighted that Uzbekistan is becoming an important platform for developing solutions to environmental challenges.

The Global Environment Facility describes Samarkand as one of the oldest cities in Central Asia, with continuous human habitation dating back thousands of years. Thanks to its location on the Great Silk Road, Samarkand became a major hub connecting China, Iran, and Europe, and during certain periods, it was one of the largest cities in the region. Samarkand is currently conventionally divided into an old and a new part: the old part preserves its historical monuments and traditional way of life, while the new part is characterized by modern infrastructure and institutions.

The natural environment of Uzbekistan is highly diverse and includes deserts, mountains, steppes, swamps and river valleys. Most of the central territory of the country is occupied by the Kyzylkum desert, and in the east and south are the Tien Shan and Pamir-Alai mountain systems. "The country is home to more than 27,000 species of plants and animals. Among them are such rare species as snow leopard, Bukhara deer, saiga antelope and markhor. Of particular importance are the wetlands of the Amu Darya delta and the Aral Sea region as habitats for migratory birds. More than 30 protected areas have been created to preserve this rich natural heritage. As part of the Yashil Makon initiative, more than 200 million trees are planted annually, and reforestation work is also underway on the dry bottom of the Aral Sea. These measures play an important role in combating desertification, conserving biodiversity and adapting to climate change.

It should also be noted that the Regional Environmental Summit 2026 (RES 2026) was held in the capital of Kazakhstan, Astana, which brought together state leaders, international organizations, financial institutions and the expert community. The forum has become the largest platform for discussing joint solutions to environmental and climate challenges in Central Asia. Shavkat Mirziyoyev put forward important initiatives on current environmental issues. As part of the Regional Environmental Summit in Astana, a high-level session was held dedicated to the launch of the Central Asian initiative to strengthen synergy and joint actions in the field of biodiversity conservation - "Harmony with nature for regional sustainability". The event brought together environmental agencies of the countries of the region, international organizations and partners, becoming an important platform for developing coordinated approaches to protecting the unique natural heritage of Central Asia.

A high-level session was held on the topic "Environmental partnership between the SCO and UNEP: joint actions for a sustainable future of the region." The event became an important platform for discussing ways to deepen interaction between member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the UN Environment Program. The President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev took part in the regular meeting of the Council of Heads of Founding States of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea, where he was elected president of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea.

As part of the Regional Environmental Summit in Astana, a high-level session "Access of mountain areas to international financing" was held, dedicated to the role of mountain ecosystems in ensuring the environmental stability of the region and developing coordinated approaches to adaptation to climate change. Participants discussed the key challenges facing the mountainous areas of Central Asia, as well as mechanisms for strengthening international cooperation and expanding access to climate finance. The past regional environmental summit in Astana (RES) hosted the 8th Central Asian Conference on Climate Change (CACC-2026), which became a key platform for discussing the climate agenda of the region and coordinating joint actions of Central Asian countries.

Thus, within the framework of the Regional Environmental Summit (RES 2026), held in Astana, the delegation of the National Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Ecology and Climate Change, led by Advisor to the President of Uzbekistan on environmental issues - Chairman of the Committee Aziz Abdukhakimov, took an active part in key plenary and thematic sessions, confirming the country's commitment to promoting a large-scale environmental agenda, developing international partnerships and strengthening regional solidarity in matters of sustainable development.

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