



## **Dear participants of the World Summit COP15 on Biodiversity Montreal (Canada), 7-19 December 2022**

This week the World is focused on the World Summit COP15 on biodiversity.

In this regard, the “SOS Taldykol” Initiative Group and Ecological Society “Green Salvation” addresses participants of the Summit and international non-governmental organisations, UN Member States, including government of Kazakhstan, Mass Media with the following calls to improve situation with biodiversity in Kazakhstan.

We express our serious support to actions and initiatives on international level to support conservation of biodiversity. This Summit is timely as ever. Without biodiversity human beings as species **won't** be able to survive! Especially for Kazakhstan this problem is extremely important with the account of extreme continental climate in the country, that doubles the effect of the climate change.

Kazakhstan is a participant of key international legal instruments on climate change as well as on biodiversity (such as Ramsar, Bonn conventions, Sustainable development Declarations etc). It also committed itself to a launched by UNEP the Decade of Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030).

Unfortunately, our government's statements and commitments on high international level are not matching its actions on a national and local levels.

Our organisations conduct a significant work on saving biodiversity in Kazakhstan. One can get acquainted with our activities on our social network pages and website (<https://www.instagram.com/sos.taldykol/>; <http://esgrs.org/>).

The problem that we would like to attract your attention to is this unique natural system of wetlands Small Taldykol lakes in Astana (capital of Kazakhstan), which are under threat of extinction.

According existing data, the Taldykol lakes system was formed **13 000 years ago** and is an integral part of natural landscape and local climate.

On Small Taldykol lakes and adjacent areas sustainable climate was developed. The lakes are a habitat area for rare birds. Here there were registered 12 species of birds that were included into the Red List of Threatened Species the International Union for Conservation of Nature.



Moreover, on the shores of the Small Taldykol Lakes historical settlements and burial sites were identified.

Active construction of the adjacent areas, road construction, infrastructure building have already seriously fragmented habitat, destroyed most of the Lakes and brought to almost total destruction of the ecosystem.

This environmental catastrophe was “created” by the Astana City Hall under Mr. Altai Kulginov management as a mayor. Starting with 2020 the Lakes have been methodically destroyed and seven provisory parts of the Lake were filled with dirt and construction wastes and had or have been having construction works on top of it.

These action by the city hall, as well as by construction companies with support of city administration, are absolutely illegal both within national and international laws. Please see a list of violated legislation below.

We’ve been raising the alarm since July 2020 with the aim of saving this unique nature object in the capital. Residents of the city constantly were protesting, submitting requests, complaints to all relevant state bodies, there was a public petition signed by 12000 people addressed to Mr. Tokayev, in August 2022 there was a demonstration. We sent requests to local embassies and representation of international organisations.

Residents of the of city documented following illegal actions:

- Filling the Lakes with soil and construction waste (!);
- Works on illegal pumping out of ground water and dewatering, illegal pumping out of water in the lakes;
- Illegal ground water discarding by construction companies, piling and accumulation of construction and household waste on the shores of the lakes, active illegal construction works.

When conducting the, so called, dewatering works during construction that ground water was simply discarded into the city sewerage system. This is such an audacious action to a very precious resource as water.

Unfortunately, authorities absolutely ignore opinions of people of the country. In fact, the Small Taldykol Lakes could be considered as destroyed and filled in.



There was not a single public hearing conducted, authorities constantly mislead people by bringing false arguments and openly disinform people.

Courts of first and second instances have supported actions by the city hall.

Ministry of Environment, Geology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan keeps aloof and is not willing to solve the problem. As the territory of the Small Talдыkol Lakes allegedly under responsibility of the Astana City Hall.

Thus, city hall tried to exert full rights on controlling the fate of the Lakes, and moved them from the category of inventory from water fund to a category of land of residential area. However, as it was officially explained by the Committee on Water Resources of the Ministry, even when water reservoir was transferred from one category into a land category it doesn't stop to be a water object, and city administration has to install water body buffer zones and areas. And this job still hasn't been done.

It is obvious that destruction of natural lakes with an existing ecosystem aimed at restrained urban construction is against national, international law and against common sense. At the same time global trends in urban construction urban planning is directed to conservation and integration of natural objects into urban environment in the best interests of residents and their health. Period of quarantines and movement restrictions within the frameworks of combating COVID-19 pandemic made even more acute lack of natural-park spaces problem for recreation and rehabilitation.

Taking into account climate changes that doubles the effect on countries with extreme-continental climate. Thus, temperature increase in Kazakhstan is almost twice higher than on average globally and draughts in Western Kazakhstan, dust storms and hot summers in Astana, are all servings as evidence to it.

Against this background extinguishing a natural object and its biodiversity is an outrageous fact of improvident mismanagement of natural resources and environmental crime. Natural resources that positively affects residents of fast developing city.

In the 21 Century such barbaric methods of nature management by humans cannot be tolerated.



Urban construction should be driven by progressive methods based on principles of sustainable development, where rule of creation and careful coexistence between nature and human beings prevails.

Grand construction of the capital of Kazakhstan in the centre of vast Steppe has been conducted without regard to principles of sustainable development and oriented only on economic welfare of construction companies.

**Therefore,**

**We call for** saving this fragile heritage of natural steppe lakes, which has been existing for thousands of years until nowadays.

**We stand out for** saving this unique natural object and for full realisation of its cultural, socio-economic, recreational and environmental potential, which were proved in existing research on Small Taldykol lakes in financial terms.

It makes more sense to create on Small Taldykol lakes and their adjacent areas city natural park. This park above all would serve as conservation and protection tool for animals and their habitat, with at the same time recreation and eco-educational function for capital residents.

**We demand Kazakh authorities to fulfil following measures:**

1. To reverse decision of the city hall on transferring lands of the Small Taldykol lakes group from category of water reservoir lands to residential lands.
2. To give the Small Taldykol lakes a status of water reservoir (with preservation of 2020 year's borders), to establish water body zones and areas according to the relevant project dated 2019 on all seven areas of the lakes group and include them into State Water Cadastral Registry of the Republic of Kazakhstan.
3. To imply moratorium on any kind of construction works and preparation work on Small Taldykol Lakes and their adjacent areas before decisions on their conservation will be taken.
4. To recall permits from construction companies that received land parcels on the territory of the Small Taldykol lakes. To conduct auditing on legality of construction works and introduce demolition of illegally build buildings (construction without permits and supervision).



5. To include all Small Taldykol lakes group and its adjacent areas into a natural park, which is planned.
6. To conduct remediation works on the territory of the Small Taldykol Lakes.

**We also call upon participant of the COP15 Summit to draw their attention to the problem of biodiversity preservation on a local level.**

**We further call upon the United Nations to participate more actively in the assistance of biodiversity locally. Listen to civil society opinion.**

**We insist on necessity of participation of the civil society in the process of decision making on important issues, projects which affect local biodiversity.**

**We also insist on the voice of civil society to be heard at such high-level conferences. There should be channels of communication that would allow civil society's requests to reach to the participants of high-level meetings. Without civil society participation implementation of decisions would not be high.**

**Further call upon the UN Member States to fulfil fully their international obligations adopted in the area of biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.**

**«SOS Taldykol» Initiative Group  
Environmental society “Green Salvation”**



*Clarification:* In order to avoid various readings, we state that current address touches only Small Taladykol Lakes group and does not include greater Taladykol lake, which also part of a larger Taladykol lakes system. Historically Taladykol lake (or Big Taladykol Lake) was used as waste pond, and earlier there was a decision made to creat natural park in that disctrict.

*List of national and international legal instruments that were breached by Kazakh authorities with regard to Smal Taladykol Lakes:*

1. Current General Development Plan of Astana before 2030.
2. Water Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan.
3. Land Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan
4. Environmental Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan.
5. Law on Architecture, Urbanisation and Construction of the Republic of Kazakhstan.
6. State of the Nation “Kazakhstan in new reality: Time to Act” by Mr. Kassym-Zhomart Tokayev dated 1 September 2020.
7. Statement by Mr. Kassym-Zhomart Tokayev on the World Environment Day (5 June 2021), where intention of Kazakhstan to participate in the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and that forthcoming decade would be marked with great achievement in promoting green agenda.
8. Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.
9. Commitments to preserve birds and their habitat to the International Union for the Protection of Nature.
10. Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters.
11. UN Climate Change Framework Convention.
12. UN Convention on Biodiversity.
13. UN Convention to Combat Desertification.
14. Bonn Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals.
15. Sustainable Development Goals Declaration.