

AZOH; if you remember, last year we ran a similar campaign. Although it can be considered successful – thousands of letters were sent out and three articles were published as a result – but nothing has changed on the ground. The lake Urmia is still being dried up by Iranian government policies, and it is not a domestic or internal problem of Iran anymore, it has turned into a major regional and international environmental catastrophe in the making. Let's raise awareness about this issue and help stop this – otherwise people not only in Iran, but in Iraq, Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan, and possibly others, will be suffering from this. It takes just a few seconds to make your voice heard. Thank you for your activism!

USAN and USTN Boards

Dear member of Congress and media,

A major international environmental disaster is in the making, and requires immediate action to prevent a humanitarian, ecological, and food crisis. Lake Urmia, which is located in the West Azerbaijan region of Iran, is the third largest salt-water lake in the world, the largest lake in the Middle East and one of the environmental wonders of the world. It is registered as a Biosphere Reserve by the UNESCO and listed as a wetland of international importance under the 1971 Ramsar Convention, to which the Government of Iran included lake Urmia on June 23, 1975 (<http://www.ramsar.org/pdf/sitelist.pdf>). Lake Urmia's coordinates are 37°30'N 045°30'E.

Over the last several years, due to reckless and irresponsible irrigation and infrastructure projects (bridges, hydro-electric stations, dams), that disregard environmental impact assessments, lake Urmia, which was listed at 483,000 hectares at the time of the Ramsar Convention, has shrunk by up to 70% in area size and its depth has fallen by seven meters. This is clearly visible from Google Maps, where huge salt-covered areas are now dry, serving as a reminder of the lake's former size and splendor. According to experts, if the lake completely dries up, then up to 10 billion metric tones of salt will be released into the atmosphere resulting in an ecological catastrophe not only in Azerbaijani cities of Iran, and as far away as the capital city of Tehran, but also to neighboring countries such as Iraq, Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Millions of people could be displaced, resulting in refugees and additional burden on neighboring countries.

U.S. allies, U.S. soldiers, and U.S. interests will also be affected from this massive environmental degradation, as many people will become refugees, water and food shortages will increase, and wars

would be more likely, putting a strain on our budget and on our military. Authoritative reports on such scenarios were published by Washington DC-based think tanks CNAS: <http://www.cnas.org/node/4374> and CNA:

<http://www.cna.org/research/2010/climate-change-potential-effects-demands-us>

Such environmental disasters are not new – the second-largest salt-water lake in the world, Aral Sea in Central Asia, has similarly dried up to just 10% of its original size, creating all kinds of problems for the people on the ground. Lake Urmia should avoid the fate of the Aral Sea – if we all help and take action.

For well over a year now, tens of thousands of local ethnic Azerbaijani Turks, especially those living in the city of Urmia, which is the capital of the WestAzerbaijan province of Iran, are protesting government policies that result in environmental disaster and degradation. Unfortunately, domestic pressure did not bear any results, escalating this environmental problem further, and requiring international attention and action. After all, Iran is not a democracy, and does not care about internal pressure – unless it's coupled with international pressure.

The U.S. Azeris Network (USAN) and the U.S. Turkic Network (USTN) calls upon the U.S. Government and Congress to use its influence and position in the United Nations and its agencies, as well as calls on all environmental NGOs to put additional pressure on the government of Iran to take immediate actions to fulfill their commitments to preserve lake Urmia. The Iranian government should expedite the conserving and water transferring plans, and adjust its own \$1.7 billion lake restoration plan, which despite a generous dollar sum, envisions unscientific, unproven and ineffective solutions that are doomed to fail. A revised action plan, reworked with the assistance and guidance from the international community, should be launched and implemented immediately to be effective in protecting the Lake's flora and fauna. This environmental catastrophe must be stopped before it is too late. A detailed action plan on how to save the lake is available from USAN and USTN.

Sincerely,

USAN and USTN member

TAKE ACTION

Click the link below to log in and send your message:

<http://ADVOCACY.usazeris.org/link/target/azeri/BiqQbg7N.aspx>