

# **ETHIC ARGUES FOR TRANSBOUNDARY RIVERS PROTECTION**

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Dear friends and colleagues!

Being involved in the Aral Sea problem for more than 30 years, I and like-minded friends always search for new arguments to convince decision makers and ordinary people that we must save the sea. Because economic arguments are more comprehensible for the majority of the population, we try to prove that saving water for the refilling of the sea may lead into the economic stability in the region.

Indeed, as it was officially stated, at the moment 100% of the water in the Aral Sea basin is being used for the needs of the population, mainly for irrigation. Many things are stated about so called "water deficiency" in the region of Central Asia even at the highest level. However, if we follow simple logic, such kinds of discussion bring forward surprise, because the discharge of rivers change each year and it is ridiculous to think that next year we will get as much water as we did this year. It is more logical not to use all water of the rivers to protect agriculture against bankruptcy in case there is drought. There was a lot of hope related to the stream of water coming from beyond the boundaries of the Central Asia. Twenty years have already passed since all the plans with reference to the turning of the Siberian rivers were given up and hardly are they going to be reanimated; nevertheless, many people still wait for this water. It seems, we should have decreased the range of agricultural production long ago and turn to the development of industry, use water saving technologies, reduce sowing hardly fertile fields against the caprices of nature and ambitions of neighbors. It is high time that we decreased the use of water at least for 20% of annual discharge of the rivers in order to have space for maneuvers in case of lack of water and other incidents and direct these 20% to the Aral Sea. Even this amount of water could keep the sea at the particular level and prevent the absorption of Khorezm oasis by a new desert, "Aralkum". It would also decrease the influence of the dust picked up by wind from the former bottom of the Aral Sea not only on the climate of the region, but also on the global one. Nonetheless, despite logic, Central Asian republics insist on identifying themselves as agricultural countries. So, use of water in a barbarian way still goes on.

To enlarge the arsenal of means in the struggle for the sea, we think that it is necessary to use ethical aspects in the process of convincing people about the necessity of frugal use of water. Just imagine, 4-5 people drink water from one 5 liter pot in front of each other. Scarcely there is anyone who would spit into this pot or would throw anything into it. All people understand that this pot is a common property and that the water in this pot is for drinking and it should not be polluted. Let us mentally enlarge the pot and increase the number of people who drink from it. At a particular stage, when this pot could be called basin, suddenly it is revealed that somebody has already been gargling and spitting back into the pot, some others have been bathing, and the others even have been meeting their natural needs in the water. Such metamorphose will not surprise many people; the majority would say that it should be like this. Only when our children are poisoned by dirty water or when we come out of the water covered with dirt, we come to comprehend that we should not behave like this towards water. When then people who dirt the water lose their responsibility for other people? What should be the maximum size of the pot and the maximum number of people who drink from it in order to make them act as they do when the pot is small? Why each person individually respects the rights of another to drink clean water, but a group of people working for example together at the same factory, become ignorant with relevance to dirty discharge from this factory that flows into the rivers? Why the population living in the downstream tolerates this situation and does not struggle for their rights

for clean water and for its adequate amount? The answers to these questions are in the sphere of culture and ethics.

In the Internet you may find an interesting small article – “Success Depends on Attitude and Not Resources” – from which I want to quote a little.

“...On analyzing the behavior of the people in rich & developed countries, we find that the great majority follow the following principles in their lives:

1. Ethics, as a basic principle.
2. Integrity.
3. Responsibility.
4. Respect to the laws & rules.
5. Respect to the rights of other citizens.
6. Work loving.
7. Strive for saving & investment.
8. Will of super action.
9. Punctuality.

In poor countries, only a minority follow these basic principles in their daily life.

We are poor not because lack natural resources or because nature was cruel to us.

We are poor because we lack attitude. We lack the will to comply with and teach these functional principles of rich & developed societies...”

We can see that in the list above ethics is the first item. Its influence even on the economy of the developed countries becomes obvious. In the relationships between people and countries situated up and downstream, ethics should play the main role. This is mainly related to the population and the countries that are downstream which practically do not have any means of influence on the countries upstream. Pay attention that the existence of, for example, the Aral Sea, depends on the subjects that are situated upstream. Taking all the water from the upstream, they do not think that they incapacitate people downstream even to have a sea as a property. Consequently, the economy of the population of the Aral Sea is shattered, the environment is degraded, nation's health and genetic fund are disrupted. The population is forced to move to more wealthy regions. Meanwhile, it is obvious that any upstream person's answers to the questions – “Do the people living downstream have the same rights as the ones living upstream? Do the people living around the sea have the right to have the sea as a property?” - would be positive. However, there is stark contrast between the mentality of the society and every individual, especially in Central Asia. At the level of society any kind of weakness of a particular nation or a group of people is regarded as a defect, and vice versa, strength that is endorsed by any kind of means, even illegal ones, is seen as achievement. The main cause for such a condition is the tradition of unquestioned submission to the elders and to the ones who are higher in position. This is the result of the extremely long soldierly background of our nations. It is high time that we governed our society according to the new principal rules that respect the rights of an individual to have his own opinion, position and property. Only under such conditions we can expect practical changes in the use of water and in the relationship to the downstream people who suffer involuntarily.

In this respect we have something to learn from the West. It is true, a lot of useful cultural novelty comes from there, but in the Asian culture there was a time when the relation to water was different. For instance, it was forbidden to sweep towards the direction of water source. They used to deliver water to the most remote points from the source and only then the others could use the water. When he was a child my father witnessed an event when a man coming from a city to a village swam in a small ditch. The local mullah immediately called the villagers and they changed the course of the ditch passing by the place where the man swam. Water used to be holy! Unfortunately, such kind of attitude is not found anywhere anymore. Even

many developed western countries cannot boast about their humane attitude towards population downstream.

Those who live downstream do not have real influence on upstream ones although both of them have the same rights. Nevertheless, the upstream subjects are continuing to use rivers as a free of charge convenient and hidden transport to remove many kinds of waste, trash, drainage and sewage waters away from their own county, state or region. Nowadays, there is an incapability of the rivers to self-clean because of the giant amount of waste and persistent organic pollutants there. The pollutants temporarily buried in sludge are coming up due to some accidents like bombing of ice jam-up or during quest works on bottom. At that time the concentration norms of pollutants in the water are overreached multiply. The rights of downstream subjects for water with the same quality as it is at the source are destroyed. An invisibility of waste in the water and lack of control provoke some subjects to hide evidence of many kinds of violations in water. Such behavior that looks like a criminal one, or a child behavior thinking that anything could be hidden in water is unworthy of human being. It should be eliminated as racism, slavery and gender inequality. We face violation of human rights not by race or gender but by geography.

Recognizing water as something sacred should become a sign of high culture and respect for neighbors of any nation. It is necessary to implement legislation along transboundary rivers to increase the degree of charge if evidences were hidden in the water. Equality of rights of downstream and upstream people has to be realized in practice and become a norm of behavior.

This situation should encourage the United Nations to take into consideration that UN is not only a platform for negotiations but that it should also act as the conscience of humanity! It is time to end one of the last inequalities on the Earth! It is time for UN to come up with initiative to stop any disposal into any water which is a blood of human being which is temporarily out of our bodies!

**ARAL SEA MUST BE SAVED AND RESTORED!**