

ISAR's Caspian Program



**Initiative for Social Action and
Renewal in Eurasia**

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Contact Information

ISAR-DC

Attn: Kate Watters, Michelle
Kinman
1601 Connecticut Avenue, NW,
Suite 301
Washington, DC 20009
Tel: 202-387-3034
Fax: 202-667-3291
E-mail: kwatters@isar.org,
michelle@isar.org

ISAR-Almaty

Attn: Gulnara Jalmaganbetova
480012 Almaty, Kazakhstan
ul. Shagabutdinova d. 128, kv. 7
a/ya 24
Tel/Fax: 7-3272-92-86-20, 92-
71-88
E-mail: root@isar.almaty.kz

ISAR-Atyrau

Attn: Svetlana Krasnozhen
465050 Atyrau, Kazakhstan
13 Satpaeva, No. 10
Tel/Fax: 7-31222-3-10-29
E-mail: isar-svetlana@nursat.kz

ISAR-Baku

Attn: Enver Safar-zade
370010 Baku, Azerbaijan
24 Jafar Jabbarly St., Apt. 2
Tel: 994-12-95-30-37
Fax: 994-12-94-30-84
E-mail: enver@isar-az.org

ISAR-Moscow

Attn: Aleksey Knizhnikov
121019 Moscow, Russia
ul. Vtoraya Tverskaya
Yamskaya
d. 38, kv. 13
G-19, a/ya 210
Tel/Fax: 7-095-251-76-17
E-mail: clearh@online.ru

Horizonti

Attn: Giorgi Tsintsadze
380079 Tbilisi-8
P.O. Box 94
33 Gogebashvili St.
Tel/Fax: 995-32-29-29-55
E-mail: kuko@horizonti.org

Advisory Board Members

Kaisha Atakhanova, Kazakhstan

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ISAR's Mission Statement

ISAR's mission is to strengthen the ability of citizens and social change organizations in Eurasia and their colleagues in the US to influence decision-making, advance social justice and promote environmentally sound stewardship of the earth and its resources.

In order to achieve this mission, ISAR brings to bear the resources and experiences of the global community to:

- support citizen initiatives;
- acquire and disperse financial support for local grassroots projects;
- gather, publish and broadly disseminate information;
- provide consultation and technical assistance;
- offer training and educational programs, including organizational development and environmental education;
- initiate and support cooperation among nongovernmental organizations (NGOs);
- foster dialogue and constructive interaction among citizens, NGOs, business and government;
- research and analyze policies and issues relevant to NGOs;
- represent the interests of NGOs on the local, regional, national and international level.

About ISAR

Founded in 1983, the Initiative for Social Action and Renewal in Eurasia (ISAR) is a nongovernmental organization that operates as an international association of NGOs. Our nine members—located in Baku, Azerbaijan; Minsk, Belarus; Almaty and Atyrau, Kazakhstan; Moscow, Novosibirsk and Vladivostok, Russia; Kyiv Ukraine; and Washington, DC—work together to build civil society, protect the environment and support local NGOs. We share common values, including a belief in transparency, cooperation and mutual respect. These values guide ISAR members as we choose appropriate strategies to address the needs of the diverse communities we serve. ISAR is funded by public and private sources.

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

ISAR's Caspian Program has been working with NGOs in the Caspian region since October Among NGOs Working on Environmental Problems of the Caspian Basin," (Baku, Azerbaijan), which was attended by more than fifty environmental NGO representatives.

Objectives of ISAR's Caspian Program

To attain this goal, the following program priorities have been established:

- *Creating and developing systems of independent public environmental monitoring in the Caspian Basin.* The program supports efforts by local NGOs to conduct independent environmental monitoring through the entire Caspian basin. ISAR also supports the inclusion of NGOs in the monitoring efforts of state and international organizations.
- *Supporting NGO efforts to preserve, rehabilitate and rationally use the ecosystem of the Caspian Basin.* The program supports greater involvement of NGOs in evaluating the status of protected territories and biodiversity in the Caspian basin, as well as protecting and rehabilitating them.
- *Seeking and advancing alternative paths of economic development for the region.* The program supports the efforts of NGOs and other organizations to broaden the use of renewable natural resources in the region as economic alternatives to oil and gas extraction. These efforts may include: "clean" energy and programs for energy conservation; ecotourism and other forms of environmentally friendly recreation; the development of marine resources and aquaculture; and the development of sustainable agriculture.
- *Facilitating interaction among NGOs, Transnational Corporations (TNCs) and Government.* The program supports the development of open and transparent dialogue among NGOs, TNCs and government in order to ensure citizen participation in corporate decision-making.
- *Supporting open information exchange and environmental education.* Through Caspinfo, ISAR's on-line information service, and other means, including bulletins, conferences, and environmental education projects, ISAR provides quality, timely and ongoing information to NGOs and other interested parties.
- *Strengthening the public environmental movement to protect the Caspian.* In all its activities, the program supports the development of the environmental NGO movement. In particular, the program aims to bring new international funders into the region and support efforts to improve the regulatory and legal climate to encourage both local and international giving.

General Program Principles

Environmentally responsible development and effective environmental protection in the Caspian basin shall include the following democratic and civic principles:

- The development of civic initiatives on the local, regional and international level is critical to environmental protection in the region. The NGO community must be involved in the discussions and decision-making of all national and international activity that can impact the future of the Caspian.

- The public must have full and complete access to environmentally important information (including oil contracts and production-sharing agreements).
- The level of NGO involvement in the resolution of the legal status of the Caspian Sea must be increased.
- A moratorium on military exercises and activities in the Caspian should be announced, with the gradual conversion of the Caspian Basin into a demilitarized zone.

And the following environmental principles:

- Protecting the unique ecosystem of the Caspian Sea must be at the foundation of all political and socioeconomic decisions on the Caspian.
- The environmental situation in the Caspian should steadily improve over time, and no activity undertaken in the region should result in the decline of the overall environmental condition of the basin.
- The status of existing protected territories should improve and become stronger; and new protected territories should be created. Zapovednik status must be conferred on the North Caspian, which would forbid geological analysis, exploration and drilling for hydrocarbon resources, and would not tolerate changes resulting from carrying out international environmental assessments.
- Natural resource use in the Caspian basin must rely less on nonrenewable resources and, instead, be based upon the rational, environmentally safe use of renewable resources. In all situations, the highest environmental standards should be employed.
- A moratorium on hydrocarbon exploration, drilling and transportation in the shallow, northern Caspian should be announced until technology used in the region is guaranteed to protect the region's biodiversity.

Principles of Cooperation with NGOs

- The program works with all NGOs involved in the resolution of environmental problems in the Caspian basin, regardless of their orientation towards governments and businesses working in the region, except for those groups using illegal tactics.
- The program provides free and open access to information to all environmental NGOs working in the region and organizations working in other sectors.
- The Caspian program's organizational committee, comprised of the board of advisors (local environmental NGO experts) and staff from each participating ISAR member, serves as the primary decision-making body for the program.
- NGOs participating in the program will independently decide the conditions of their interaction with TNCs, including whether to accept TNC funding.

Principles of Interaction with International Organizations in the Caspian Basin

- ISAR is ready to openly exchange information and interact with all organizations and structures interested in protecting the Caspian ecosystem. However, ISAR's Caspian program will maintain its programmatic independence in all interactions.

Current Priorities of the Caspian Program

Independent Public Environmental Monitoring

ISAR's Caspian program supports independent public environmental monitoring through:

- cooperative grants to regional NGOs such as a cooperative grant between a Georgian and Azerbaijani NGO to monitor pollution along the Baku-Supsa pipeline;
- regional meetings, including a 2000 seminar on methodologies for independent environmental monitoring, led by Ecoline, a Moscow-based NGO focused on independent monitoring;
- the establishment of a region-wide independent environmental monitoring system, including NGOs from Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia and Turkmenistan.

Interaction Among NGOs, Transnational Corporations and Governments

ISAR's Caspian program promotes constructive interaction among NGOs, TNCs and governments through:

- Our NGO-TNC-Government Forum that brings together representatives from the three sectors to discuss improved access to information, monitoring TNC activities, and the role of government in guiding and governing TNC activities in the region. The forum consists of meetings and seminars on topics such as:
 1. "Public Interest, Corporate Responsibility and Good Governance: Environmental Protection in the Caspian"
 2. "Community Protection: Insurance and Compensation for Local Citizens in the Caspian Region"
 3. "Oil Spill and Other Emergency Response Systems in the Caspian Basin: The NGO Role"
- Grants to regional NGOs to monitor the activities of multinational oil and gas companies;
- Inclusion of NGOs in regional meetings involving decision-makers from the corporate and government communities.

Seeking and Advancing Alternative Paths of Economic Development for the Region

ISAR promotes projects to advance alternative paths of economic

development for the Caspian region including:

- the publication of “how-to” manuals on organic agriculture and renewable energy;
- convening a regional meeting for NGOs on alternative paths of development including renewable energy, tourism and recreation, fisheries and marine aquaculture, and sustainable agriculture.

Supporting Open Information Exchange

- ISAR supports open information exchange through our free, on-line information service, Caspinfo, a bi-weekly publication that provides timely information about environmental, NGO, academic, corporate and other events, research and news on the Caspian region. The service is currently disseminated to over 400 international and regional subscribers.
- ISAR-Atyrau’s bi-monthly publication, *Transcaspian Bulletin*, focuses on issues of importance to Caspian region residents and provides a forum for NGOs from around the Caspian to exchange experience, knowledge, and viewpoints on environmental issues.
- Since September 2001, ISAR has managed an environmental and NGO resource center at the Astrakhan regional library. The center provides books, magazines and other information to local citizens and organizations, as well as providing computers, e-mail and Internet access to the community. A joint project with the library, this resource center also enjoys the support of the Astrakhan oblast administration, which has called ISAR’s Caspinfo information service “the single source of information... to concretely inform [its staff] on the Caspian.”

Promoting Caspian Concerns on the International Level

ISAR’s Caspian program works to include the Caspian region in relevant international activities, discussions and actions, including:

- the International Right to Know Campaign;
- World Bank semiannual meetings;
- international conferences and seminars on the Caspian;
- information dissemination and publication of articles in the West on the NGO community in the Caspian basin;
- informing Western funders of the environmental work being done in the region through our NGO-Donor Conference in March 2002.