

# \$3 Billion Raised for Disappearing Aral Sea

By [The Moscow Times](#)

October 30, 2014



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Global donors contributed \$2.9 billion to mitigate the disastrous consequences of the drying up of the Aral Sea in Central Asia, RIA Novosti said Thursday.

The fundraiser's results were announced by Uzbek Deputy Prime Minister Rustam Azimov at a conference on the Aral in Urgench, Uzbekistan.

Azimov did not name the donors or elaborate on the programs the money will go to.

Earlier reports said a total of \$8.5 billion of international donations had been allotted for the Aral Sea in 2011-15.

The inland sea on the border between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan has shrunk by 90 percent since the 1960s, to a large extent because the water has been used indiscriminately for irrigation projects in the local deserts.

The sea's disappearance brought about an environmental disaster for the arid region. It has also ruined the local agriculture and fishing industries and negatively impacted the health of the local population.

Dust from the dried-up seabed is also borne along to wide swathes of eastern Eurasia on trade winds blowing over Central Asia.

Experts say nothing short of rerouting the great Siberian rivers southward can salvage the Aral. But about 300 projects to mitigate the disaster remain ongoing in the region, focusing on such diverse fields as irrigation, health care and environmental protection.

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