



Permanent Mission of the Republic of Azerbaijan to
the United Nations Office and other International
Organizations in Geneva



Concept Paper

Strengthening Environmental Governance and International Cooperation for the Protection of the Caspian Sea

High-Level Panel Discussions

30 January 2026, 15:00–16:30, Geneva, Palais des Nations

Background

The Caspian Sea is the world's largest enclosed inland water body and a shared natural heritage of global environmental significance. It hosts unique ecosystems and endemic species, supports economic development and livelihoods across the region, and plays a strategic role in energy, transport, and food security. In the meantime, the Sea is experiencing growing pressure from pollution, biodiversity loss, climate change, and the drastically declining sea level.

This high-level discussions, co-organized by the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva, Secretariat of the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea (Tehran Convention), International Dialogue for Environmental Action (IDEA) Campaign and the Caspian Integrated Science Network (CASPISNET), is aimed at promoting a dialogue on strengthening regional environmental governance of the Caspian Sea and enhancing international cooperation. The event will bring together policymakers, international organizations, scientific institutions, and civil society representatives from the Caspian region and beyond to explore pathways for coordinated action, science–policy integration, and innovative partnerships.

The discussions will be held in the context of increasing global attention to transboundary water governance and marine protection, and will highlight the role of local stakeholders, regional conventions, scientific networks, and international hubs in supporting sustainable and cooperative solutions.

H.E. Ms. Leyla Aliyeva, Vice-President of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, Founder and Head of the IDEA Campaign, will deliver a keynote address to highlight the importance of environmental awareness, policy recommendations and coordinated actions in the Caspian region.

Objectives

The Panel aims to:

1. Highlight the environmental challenges facing the Caspian Sea and the important role played by local stakeholders;

2. Present legal and environmental frameworks of regional cooperation under the Tehran Convention;
3. Showcase UNEP's support to the protection of the Caspian Sea and its broader Regional Seas Programme;
4. Strengthen the science–policy interface by engaging academic and research networks;
5. Explore the role of Geneva-based platforms in supporting international cooperation and water diplomacy related to the Caspian Sea;
6. Identify key messages and pathways for enhanced collaboration among regional and international stakeholders.

Participants

- Permanent Representatives and diplomats based in Geneva
- Senior officials from UN entities and international organizations
- Scientific and academic institutions, including CASPISNET / University of Geneva
- Geneva-based policy and water diplomacy platforms, including the Geneva Water Hub
- Civil society representatives
- Members of the international community with interest in marine and transboundary water governance

Format and Facilitation

The event will take the form of a moderated high-level panel combining keynote interventions, experts' inputs, and interactive Q&A. The discussions will be moderated by Mr. Mahir Aliyev, Coordinator of the Tehran Convention Secretariat, ensuring coherence across policy, science, and cooperation dimensions and guiding the dialogue toward clear takeaways and conclusions.

Annotated Agenda (15:00 – 16:30) Palais des Nations, Room XIV (Building A)

Time	Description
15:00– 15:15	<p>Opening Session: Setting the Political and Institutional Context</p> <p><u>Opening remarks</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - H.E. Ambassador Galib Israfilov Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations Office at Geneva <i>Highlighting Azerbaijan's commitment to environmental protection, regional cooperation, and multilateral engagement on Caspian Sea issues.</i> <p><u>Welcome remarks</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - H.E. Ms. Tatiana Valovaya Director-General, United Nations Office at Geneva <i>Positioning the discussion within Geneva's role as a global hub for environmental governance, diplomacy, and international cooperation.</i>
15:15– 15:30	<p>Setting the Stage: Vision and Mobilization of International Cooperation</p> <p><u>Keynote Address</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - H.E. Ms. Leyla Aliyeva Vice-President of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation / Founder and Head of the IDEA Campaign <i>Reflections on environmental stewardship, public awareness, youth engagement, and the importance of international cooperation for protecting the Caspian Sea.</i>
<p>Panel Discussion: Moderated by Mr. Mahir Aliyev, Coordinator, Tehran Convention Secretariat</p> <p><i>Participants will exchange views on key challenges and opportunities related to the environmental protection of the Caspian Sea, including scientific cooperation, the development of effective policy frameworks, and the integration of Caspian Sea priorities into global environmental governance</i></p>	

<p>processes, with a view to strengthening multilateral cooperation and ensuring the long-term preservation and sustainable management of the unique Caspian ecosystem.</p>	
15:30– 16:15	<p>I. Environmental Governance of the Caspian Sea</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr. Arnold Kreilhuber, Director, UNEP Europe Office <i>Reflections on UNEP's role in supporting the Tehran Convention, regional seas governance, and the integration of the Caspian Sea into global environmental agendas</i> <p>II. Science–Policy Interface and Knowledge Cooperation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dr. Elnur Safarov, CASPISNET Coordinator, Institute of Geography The Ministry of Science and Education of Azerbaijan Republic. <i>Overview of the scientific drivers of the Caspian Sea's environmental challenges, including climate impacts, hydrological change, and ecosystem pressures. Reflections on the role of interdisciplinary research, data sharing, and regional scientific cooperation in informing policy and decision-making.</i> - Dr. Alexandre Hedjazi, Chair, University of Geneva - UNECE Center of Excellence on Smart, Sustainable Cities <i>Caspian Foresight: Regional support system for regional socio-ecological governance</i> <p>III. International Cooperation and Water Diplomacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prof. Mark Zeitoun, Director, Geneva Water Hub, Professor of Water Diplomacy, University of Geneva (TBC) <i>The Caspian Sea in global water and environmental diplomacy. Insights on transboundary water cooperation, water diplomacy tools, and Geneva's role in supporting cooperative solutions</i> - Michael Fishbach, Co-founder and Executive Director of the Great Whale Conservancy (TBC) <i>Insights from a marine conservation perspective on major environmental pressures affecting coastal and freshwater ecosystems and the role of international cooperation in protecting aquatic biodiversity</i>
16:15– 16:25	<p>Interactive discussion facilitated by the Moderator.</p> <p><i>Guiding Questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the recommendations of local stakeholders on improving the environmental situation of the Caspian Sea? • What concrete actions can strengthen implementation of the Tehran Convention in the coming years? • How can enhanced monitoring and Earth-observation data support stronger regional cooperation and more effective implementation of the Tehran Convention? • How can scientific cooperation better inform regional decision-making? • What role can Geneva-based platforms play in sustaining international engagement on the Caspian Sea? • How can youth and civil society initiatives complement intergovernmental action?
16:25– 16:30	<p>Closing remarks: Key Messages and Way Forward</p> <p><i>Synthesizing key messages, cooperation opportunities, and possible next steps</i></p>