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COMMUNICATION UNIVERSITY OF CHINA



Institute for a Community  
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## **President Kassym Tokayev Calls for Regional Cooperation at UN Conference**



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*Published on 13<sup>th</sup> August 2025*

Kazakhstan President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has reaffirmed Kazakhstan's commitment to fostering international partnerships, enhancing regional connectivity, and advancing inclusive development, calling on landlocked nations to turn geographic limitations into shared opportunities. On August 5, he was speaking at the Third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) in Awaza, Turkmenistan, where he emphasized that collaboration and innovation are essential to overcoming the geopolitical and economic hurdles facing these states.



President Tokayev began by thanking Turkmen President Serdar Berdimuhamedov for hosting the event and UN Secretary-General António Guterres for his dedication to addressing the specific needs of LLDCs and reminded the delegates that Kazakhstan has long been a champion of this agenda, having hosted the First UN Conference on LLDCs over two decades ago, which produced the landmark Almaty Program of Action, the first time LLDC issues were formally placed on the global development stage.

### **Challenges and Vulnerabilities of Landlocked Nations**

The President noted that the world's 32 LLDCs are home to over half a billion people, yet many remain at a disadvantage in accessing finance, technology, and global markets. Limited transport links not only inflate transit and trade costs but also leave these economies exposed to geopolitical turbulence. "Conflicts, sanctions, supply chain disruptions, and growing global mistrust compound these constraints," Tokayev warned. "They add to poverty, limit competitiveness, and slow our progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals."

Kazakhstan believes that LLDCs must be recognized as equal and promising partners in shaping solutions to global challenges. The Awaza Program of Action offers a roadmap for building a resilient, inclusive, and sustainable future. Achieving these goals requires political will from transit countries, active engagement of development institutions, and innovative financing to expand investments in transport, energy, and digital infrastructure.

### **Addressing Climate Change Together**

He identified climate change as an equally pressing challenge for LLDCs. From water scarcity and glacier loss to desertification and extreme weather events, many landlocked countries face environmental threats that demand collective responses. The coordinated regional responses are needed. Climate action must balance environmental imperatives with the development needs of nations and must be supported by international assistance. President has invited participants to the Regional Climate Summit in Astana in April 2026, to be held in partnership with the UN, as part of efforts to strengthen joint climate initiatives.

Highlighting Kazakhstan's own initiatives, the president detailed investments in regional connectivity, digital transformation, and sustainable growth. The country is prioritizing the North-South Transport Corridor and the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (Middle Corridor), while pursuing an integrated network of rail, road, air, and logistics hubs to reinforce its role as a Eurasian transit hub.



Kazakhstan now facilitates nearly 85% of all overland freight traffic between Asia and Europe. In parallel, digital infrastructure is being advanced through projects like the Alem. AI Artificial Intelligence Center in Astana and the launch of a new national supercomputer, both of which are open to international scientific cooperation.

### **UN Regional Center for SDGs**

Two days before the conference, on August 3, 2025, President Tokayev and United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres signed the Host Country Agreement for the UN Regional Center for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for Central Asia and Afghanistan, headquartered in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The initiative, first proposed by Tokayev in 2019, was endorsed by the UN General Assembly in March 2025. The center aims to coordinate efforts across the region, share best practices, provide technical assistance, and adapt global strategies to regional



realities. The new SDG Center will also serve as a platform to address Afghanistan's humanitarian and development needs, an issue as central to regional stability.

Central Asia's ecological vulnerabilities, from melting glaciers in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to the desertification affecting over 20% of its land, demand coordinated action. The center would be instrumental in addressing transboundary challenges such as the shrinking of the Caspian Sea, degradation of the Aral Sea basin, water scarcity, and environmental degradation so that all such issues of countries in the region can be solved together.



Kazakhstan has always remained committed not just to supporting the Afghan people through humanitarian aid, educational projects, trade development, and food security initiatives but also to raising its voice for stability in Afghanistan at all regional forums. Kazakhstan as a “symbol of peace and dialogue” and an example of bridge-building in global diplomacy, recalling the country’s historic decision to voluntarily renounce nuclear weapons.

The establishment of the SDG Center fits into Kazakhstan’s broader foreign policy, which emphasizes multilateralism, neutrality, and balanced engagement with all major powers such as Russia, China, the United States, and the European Union. The country has hosted major international summits, initiated the Astana Process for Syria peace talks, and facilitated dialogue between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Almaty already hosts 18 UN agencies, making it a natural home for the new center in terms of infrastructure, accessibility, and security. Kazakhstan's role in the center is as a tool for giving the region a stronger voice within the UN system, while ensuring that global development priorities reflect local realities. The key priority areas for regional cooperation include climate and environment, economy and infrastructure, education and human capital, and social development, such as promoting equality, empowering women, and protecting vulnerable populations, which remain vital for inclusive growth.

Kazakhstan’s business sector is also aligning with the SDGs, with initiatives like the Freedom Shapagat corporate fund channeling millions of dollars into education, environmental, and sports projects. Local companies are also participating in UN Global Compact programs, such as the SDG Ambition Accelerator, and there are moves to establish a Central Asian Local Network to unite businesses and governments in addressing regional challenges.





President Tokayev's message at the Awaza conference was clear: the future of LLDCs depends on a shift from isolation to integration, from vulnerability to resilience. With strategic investments in infrastructure, climate cooperation, and digital transformation supported by strong international partnerships, landlocked countries can transform their geographic limitations into engines of growth. The establishment of the UN Regional Center for SDGs in Almaty is a crucial step toward how the UN engages with regions facing complex, interconnected challenges. For Central Asia and Afghanistan, it is not just about achieving the 2030 Agenda but about shaping a shared future of stability, prosperity, and sustainable development.