Circular Information Letter

**8th Meeting of**

**the South and Central Asia MAB Network (SACAM)**

**on Biosphere Reserves and Sustainable Development**

**Dates: 24-25 October 2016**

**Almaty, Kazakhstan**

**Background**

Launched in 1971, UNESCO’s Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB) is an Intergovernmental Scientific Programme that aims to establish a scientific basis for the improvement of relationships between people and their environments. Its World Network of Biosphere Reserves currently consists of 669 biosphere reserves in 120 countries, including 16 transboundary sites. Building international, regional, sub-regional and ecosystem-specific networking is a key feature of the MAB programme. These networks play a key role in the exchange of information.

South and Central Asia MAB Network (SACAM) was set up during the Regional Meeting of Coordinators of National MAB Committees and Biosphere Reserves organized by UNESCO New Delhi in collaboration with the Indian National Committee for MAB and the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India in Dehradun from 22 to 25 February 2001. The first meeting of the Network was hosted by MAB – Sri Lanka on “Environmental Conservation, Management and Research" in Hikkaduwa from 15 to 18 October 2012. The meeting formally adopted the statutes of the "South and Central Asia MAB Network (SACAM)". The Islamic Republic of Iran hosted the 2nd SACAM meeting in Zibakenar on 25-28 September 2004, which focused on "Sustainable Eco-tourism in Biosphere Reserves and Similarly Managed Areas". The 3rd meeting of SACAM was held in Jodhpur, India from 12 to 15 November, 2007 in conjunction with the International Workshop on “Ensuring the Future of Drylands – Towards Implementing the MAB Agenda for a Sustainable Future of Drylands”. The 4th SACAM Meeting was organized in Qeshm Island, Iran from 14–17 November, 2011. The 5th SACAM meeting was held in Islamabad, Pakistan on the theme “Harmonizing Community Livelihood with Biodiversity Conservation” on November 26-27, 2013. The 6th SACAM meeting was also held in Islamabad-Pakistan on 3–5 December 2014 on the theme “Impact of Climate Change on Natural Ecosystems”. The 7th SACAM meeting was organized on 14-15 December 2015 in Dhaka, Bangladesh and focused mainly on strengthening MAB in the host country and preparation for Lima Congress.

A special SACAM workshop was organized during the World Congress of Biosphere Reserves held in Lima in March 2016 where strategies for cooperation within regional countries in line with the Lima Action Plan were discussed.

**8th SACAM Meeting**

The 8th SACAM Meeting will be organized in Almaty, Kazakhstan from 24 to 25 October 2016. The meeting will primarily focus on the Lima Action Plan (LAP) and the SACAM strategy for its implementation considering the regional concerns and realities and will come out with recommendations for national action plans. It is hoped that the meeting will not only help in future preparation of national action plans, but will also prevent ineffective solutions already tried in other countries of the region, suggesting successful alternatives.

Besides, most Central Asian countries (except Kazakhstan) are not yet active and full members of the network, so their presence at this meeting could stimulate their fruitful participation in the MAB program. Thus, Kazakhstan might serve as a mediator to facilitate the affiliation and participation of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan in the regional network.

**Goal of the meeting***:*

Elaborate recommendations to implement Lima Action Plan in the context of SACAM region.

**Objectives:**

* indicate priority directions of the Lima Action Plan;
* identify challenges, common for the region;
* discuss methods to overcome those challenges;
* find and discuss success stories.

**Participants:**

* countries of the SACAM region (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka,): 1-2 delegates from each country;
* countries not yet officially parties of SACAM, but interested in participation with further membership (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan): 1-2 delegates from each country;
* Kazakhstan: 1-2 representatives from each UNESCO biosphere reserve and potential candidates to be included in the UNESCO’s World Network of the Biosphere Reserves;
* organizers and other participants: representatives of Kazakhstan National Commission for UNESCO and ISESCO, Kazakhstan National MAB Committee, Committee of Forestry and Wildlife of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Kazakhstan, UNESCO Almaty Cluster Office, SACAM Secretariat, ECO Science Foundation, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Tethys Scientific Society, and other potential stakeholders.

Thus, it is planned to have over 20 international participants and about 30 participants from Kazakhstan.

**Tangible outcome***:*

A document “Recommendations for implementation of the Lima Action Plan in the countries of the SACAM region”.

**Dates and time of the meeting***:*

October 24 & 25, 2016, Almaty (23rd Arrival of the participants; 24-25th Working sessions; 26th Field visit to Ile-Alatau state national nature park + departure of the participants).

**Venue:**

Holiday Inn Hotel Almaty

Address: 2D Timiryazev Str., 050013, Almaty

Tel: +7 727 244 0255

**Logistics**

Local Organizers will provide accommodation to all the nominated international participants (max. 2 persons per country) for the period from 23 to 26 October 2016 (23rd day of check-in, 26th day of check-out). Participants, however, are required to make their travel arrangement through their respective MAB Committees or relevant agencies. Reference information on coverage of international travel expenses is provided below.

**Visa**

Participants are required to obtain necessary entry visa to Kazakhstan by themselves. Kazakhstan National Commission for UNESCO and ISESCO will assist in this process provided that the nominations are sent by 20 September 2016.

**Insurance**

Participants are suggested to cover their own travel and health insurance during their stay in Kazakhstan.

**Climate**

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The weather during October in Almaty is normally cold and dry. The day temperature is normally around 15°C while the nights are cooler at about 5°C.

**Working languages**

English and Russian

**Time Zone**

The local time in Kazakhstan is GMT + 6 hours.

**Currency and credit cards**

The exchange rate currently (22 August 2016) is: 1USD = 339 KZT.

Credit cards (Visa, Master card etc.) are widely used in Kazakhstan.

Most shops accept all major credit cards, but it is recommended that you carry some Kazakhstan Tenge in cash. Airports are the most convenient places for currency exchange.

**Airport pick-up service**

The local organizers will take care of the transportation of the participants from/to Almaty International Airport.

If for any reason you do not locate a representative of the local organizers on arrival, it is possible to travel to the hotel (Holiday Inn Hotel) by official taxi, book it in exit airport hall upon arrival, the cost is about 2000 KZT.

**Contact**

For further information regarding

* PROGRAM and LOCAL LOGISTICS:

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**Reference information on coverage of international travel expenses**

1.       Bangladesh- 2 participants (to be covered by UNESCO Jakarta office)

2.       Bhutan- 2 participants (to be covered by the Government after receipt of official invitation)

3.       India- 2 participants (already committed)

4.       Maldives- 2 participants (to be covered by the Government after receipt of official invitation)

5.       Nepal- 2 participants (to be covered by UNESCO Jakarta office)

6.       Sri Lanka-2 participants (to be covered by the Government after receipt of official invitation)

7. Afghanistan – at least 1 participant (to be covered by ECOSF)

8. Iran - at least 1 participant (to be covered by ECOSF)

9. Kyrgyz Republic - at least 1 participant (to be covered by ECOSF)

10. Pakistan - at least 1 participant (to be covered by ECOSF)

11. Tajikistan - at least 1 participant (to be covered by ECOSF)

12. Turkmenistan - at least 1 participant (to be covered by ECOSF)

13. Uzbekistan - at least 1 participant (to be covered by ECOSF)

14. Azerbaijan- 1 participant (to be covered by ECOSF)

15. Turkey - 1 participant (to be covered by ECOSF)