

RUSSIAN FEDERATION

ASSOCIATION OF SHOR PEOPLE
NGO OF THE KEMEROVO REGION



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Point 4(b) Agenda for Environmental Issues

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Dear Chairman:

I, Yegor Bekrenev, am a member of the Shor delegation, and I have come from Siberia as Vice-President of the Association of Shor People and a member of the Council of Elders.

The Shor people are one of the indigenous peoples of Southern Siberia in the Russian Federation, and we are particularly known for our work as blacksmiths. Today, according to the 2003 census, there are 10,500 Shor people living in the Kemerovo Region. Since 1989, the population of Shor people has decreased by 2,000.

Today I would like to focus on environmental issues. I am very concerned that so little attention is paid in the Russian Federation to the environment. Nothing is being done to improve the situation. Because there are no negative administrative or judicial repercussions for breaking environmental laws, the industries involved in the destruction of natural resources operate knowing that they will not be held accountable for their transgressions.

The very richness of the mountainous Shor region is the cause of many of its troubles. As it happens, many major natural resources—iron ore, gold, coal, talcum, marble, granite—are located *under* the land where the Shor people have long lived and

farmed. This means that in the coming decades, and even centuries, the economy of the Kuzbass region will depend on the extraction of mineral wealth from the land of our peoples.

Industrial activity has had a devastating effect on the mountainous Shor region and on all of the Kuzbass region. The Kuzbass region, the homeland of indigenous peoples such as the Shor and the Teleut, has become an ecological disaster zone. Air, water and land are all polluted. Let's take the example of my home village of Chuvashka. There are three major coal operations (Sibergonsky, Krasnogorsky and Mezhdurechensky) in the area, all of which employ strip mining, including such explosives as granitotol and granmonite. Each detonation uses 50–100 tons of explosives, releasing a huge amount of dust and gas into the atmosphere—carbon monoxide, nitrous oxide and other chemicals. According to the experts, even a minimal detonation of 50 tons reaches 200–300 meters high. The concentration of harmful chemicals in the atmosphere exceeds the maximum levels allowed by law in a 3,000 meter radius, and the zone affected by pollution is 12–15 kilometers in diameter. In addition, the use of boilerhouses, huge trucks and excavators, bulldozers and other heavy machinery contributes significantly to pollution. They release loads of dust and harmful chemicals into the atmosphere.

Rivers, reservoirs and underground waters are polluted by the direct dumping of industrial waste, as well as by run-off from acid rain and thawed snow, which carry with them pollutants from the air and ground.

As a result of ongoing pollution and destruction of the landscape by explosives, the soil has become severely depleted and its biological fertility destroyed, which has also caused extensive erosion of the topsoil.

Additionally, mass deforestation, especially for the purpose of coal mining, has devastated the general fertility of the forest, and the pine forests in particular are nearly completely destroyed. Industry has also had negative effects in the areas of fishing, animal husbandry, and the hunting of sable, mink, fox and other wild animals.

Furthermore, pollution has severely affected the health of the local population. The situation is catastrophic: the life expectancy for men in Kuzbass is 55 and for women is 60–65. The destruction of their native environment has damaged their gene pool, and the extensive industrial development of their native lands has proceeded without any significant financial compensation. This is the current situation in Kuzbass.

Kuzbass is known as one of the most dynamically developing regions of Russia. The goal is to make the mining industry profitable. This means that old shafts will be modernized and new ones built. The plan in Kuzbass for 2003–2005 is to build 10 more shafts and to start 8 new strip mining operations with a projected total output of 16 million tons per year. If these plans are fulfilled, the total annual coal extraction will reach 150 million tons.

As you can see, the strategic issues of the mining industry are being resolved. What is not being resolved are the environmental issues: no one is incorporating environmentally-friendly technologies or looking at the implications for the health of the population of the Kemerovo Region. The ecological disaster in Kuzbass is not a local problem and should be taken to the federal level. To ignore it is a crime.

In order to protect the environment, we have to insist on the following:

- hydrotechnology and other effective methods;
- thorough processing of coal in order to extract not only the coal itself, but nontraditional by-products such as smokeless fuel, residential fuel, coke, resin and other coal by-products;
- implementing a system of incentives for *mining* companies that choose to switch to economically friendly technologies and for those that invest in environmental protection.

Today there are many environmentally-friendly technologies, but there will be no incentive to use them until the interests of local and indigenous populations are placed above the race to mine ever greater volumes of coal.

In conclusion, I would like to note that in the Russian Federation there do exist environmental protection laws, but they are frequently broken in the name of economic and developmental expediency.

On behalf of the Shor people, I call on you to unite the efforts of all indigenous peoples of the world in the struggle for improvement of ecological conditions throughout the world.

Thank you for your attention.