

From Harvard to the Global Stage

A Personal Journey in Green Diplomacy



Ismail Belen

Forest Engineer · Public Management Specialist

Former Chair of the Bureau
United Nations Forum on Forests (2024–2026)

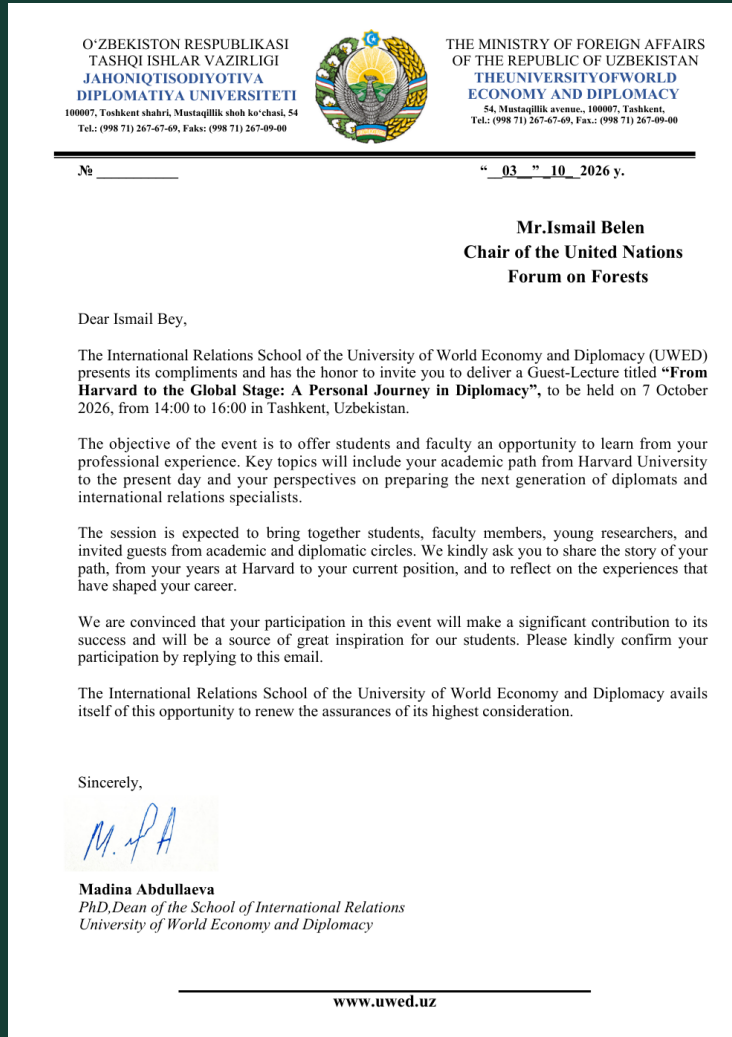
Harvard Kennedy School, 2013

School of International Relations

University of World Economy
and Diplomacy

Tashkent
Wednesday, 7 October 2026

Why am I here today?



An invitation from UWED

The School of International Relations invited me to share my journey and reflections with you.

“From Harvard to the Global Stage: A Personal Journey in Diplomacy”

My journey

How forestry and public service led me to international cooperation.

For the next generation

Lessons from experience for future diplomats and international relations specialists.

About me

İsmail Belen · Forest engineer and public management specialist

1986–1991

Forest Engineering, BSc

Karadeniz Technical University, Trabzon, Türkiye

1996–2002

Applied Science, MSc

Karadeniz Technical University

2006–2010

Public Management, MSc

Public Administration Institute for Turkey and the Middle East

2013

Harvard Kennedy School

Special Program for Senior Managers in Government

My professional foundation combines forests with public administration.

Public service in Türkiye

My career developed from field forestry to national administration.

1992–1999

Forest Subdistrict Chief

Various locations in Türkiye

1999–2001

Forest Engineer

Technical responsibilities in forestry

2002–2003

Division Director

Research, Planning and Coordination, Forestry

2003–2005

Head of Planning and Coordination

Afforestation and Erosion Control

2005–2007

Chief of Cabinet to the Minister

Ministry of Environment and Forests

2007–2011

Deputy Director General

General Directorate of Forestry

2011–2015

Deputy Director General

Combating Desertification and Erosion

2015–2022

Senior Agriculture and Forests Expert

Nature Protection and National Parks

Since 2022

Chief Inspector

General Directorate of Forestry

International responsibilities

European, Mediterranean and United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) roles

2010

Vice-Chair, Timber Committee

UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)

2010–2011

Vice-Chair, European Forestry Commission

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

2010–2011

Vice-Chair, mountain watershed group

FAO European Forestry Commission

2011

General Coordinating Committee member

FOREST EUROPE, representing Türkiye

2011–2012

Bureau member, forest negotiations

Legally binding agreement on forests in Europe

2003

National Focal Point for Türkiye

UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)

2012–2017

Chair, Silva Mediterranea

FAO Committee on Mediterranean Forestry

2015

Roster of Independent Experts

Nominated by Türkiye to UNCCD

2022–2024

Vice-Chair, UNFF Bureau

Sessions 18–19; Rapporteur, 2023–2024

2024–2026

Chair, UNFF Bureau

Sessions 20–21; term ended 15 May 2026

Professional associations and civil society

Selected roles in professional cooperation and civic organisations

President, GÖNDER

Association of Those Who Care About the Future, since 11 October 2013

Adviser to the President for International Affairs

Chamber of Forest Engineers of Türkiye

Adviser for Public Relations

Medium Density Fibreboard and Chipboard Manufacturers Association (YOMSAD)

President, PLANFOR

International Platform for Nature and Forestry

Founding Member of the Board of Trustees

Turkish World Parliamentary Foundation, since 3 March 2016

Technical projects and cooperation

Selected assignments connecting policy, restoration and practical forestry

2024

Aral Sea ecosystem restoration guidelines

Field assessments and institutional consultations

Since 2025

RESILAND CA+, Uzbekistan

International forest nursery consultancy

2026–2027

Forests and food security policy brief

Senior Technical Expert, Europe and Central Asia

2024–2025

Regional forest cooperation and value chains

FAO networking and regional guidelines

2024–2026

Forest Stewardship Council risk assessment

Research, consultation and drafting for Türkiye

2013–2014

Mountain watershed management

FAO, Central Asia and the Caucasus

2014–2015

National desertification strategy

National Coordinator, alignment with UNCCD

2019–2022

Restoration and project formulation

FRIENDS, TULIP and FAO–Türkiye programmes

2023

Nature-based solutions for forestry

Team Coordinator, regional FAO guidelines

Selected publications

Technical guidelines, book chapters and articles

2026

COP31 and Forestry

Author, Yeşil Dünya magazine, Chamber of Forest Engineers of Türkiye

2025

Fire Management in the Mediterranean Region

Chapter coauthor, The Status of Mediterranean Forests 2025, FAO

2024

Aral Sea Ecosystem Restoration Guidelines

Primary author and Guidelines Designer

2023

Nature-Based Solutions for Forestry

Coauthor of FAO regional guidelines

2018

State of Mediterranean Forests

Coauthor of chapters on policy, the global agenda and forest threats

2016

National Forest Funds

Coauthor, Forêt Méditerranéenne





UN-FAO



UN-New
York



Forest Europe



Niger



Senegal



Niger



Syria



Family Discussion!



We are the world!



Sport!



Team!



My mother and father







From Forest to green diplomacy

How forests, water and land connect public service with international relations

Environmental problems bring countries to the same negotiating table.

Our next discussion moves from global commitments to Uzbekistan and the Aral Sea region.

What does green diplomacy involve?

Using international cooperation to protect natural resources and people

Negotiation	Agree on environmental commitments and fair responsibilities.
Cooperation	Share knowledge, technology and finance across borders.
Implementation	Connect agreements with institutions and work in the field.
Accountability	Use evidence to assess results and maintain public trust.

The Rio Conventions

Different negotiating processes address the same landscapes

UNFCCC

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
Climate mitigation and adaptation.

CBD

Convention on Biological Diversity
Biodiversity conservation and sustainable use.

UNCCD

United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
Land degradation, desertification and drought.

Forests, soils and water connect their implementation.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals

The United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda on 25 September 2015

1 No poverty

2 Zero hunger

3 Good health and well-being

4 Quality education

5 Gender equality

6 Clean water and sanitation

7 Affordable and clean energy

8 Decent work and economic growth

9 Industry, innovation and infrastructure

10 Reduced inequalities

11 Sustainable cities and communities

12 Responsible consumption and production

13 Climate action

14 Life below water

15 Life on land

16 Peace, justice and strong institutions

17 Partnerships for the goals

Forestry contributes to several goals

The value of a forest extends beyond timber

SDGs 2 and 8	Forest foods, rural livelihoods and decent employment.
SDGs 6 and 11	Watershed protection and healthier urban green spaces.
SDGs 13 and 15	Climate resilience, biodiversity and land restoration.
SDGs 16 and 17	Inclusive institutions and partnerships for implementation.

The United Nations forest agenda

United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests, 2017–2030

6 **Global Forest Goals**

26 **associated targets**

One target: increase global forest area by 3% by 2030.

Uzbekistan: national action and diplomacy

Yashil Makon connects local greening with international cooperation

National action

The government reported over 200 million tree and shrub saplings planted under Yashil Makon in 2025.

Local capacity

Nursery production, professional training and public participation support implementation.

Global engagement

Uzbekistan and the Republic of the Congo jointly promoted the new UN afforestation and reforestation decade.

Yashil Makon: survival and long-term care

Priorities presented to President Shavkat Mirziyoyev on 21 September 2026

1, 3 and 5 years	Assess planting effectiveness through seedling survival.
Local suitability	Match species with climate, soil and available water.
At least 3 years	Plan irrigation and seedling care from the outset.
Mahalla participation	Support local training, public green maps and monitoring.

The Aral Sea: a shared environmental history

NASA satellite images show the consequences of changing water flows



2000



2014

Diversion of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya for irrigation reduced inflows.

The impacts reach health, soils and local livelihoods.

Aral restoration needs a landscape approach

Planting decisions must respond to salinity, water availability and local livelihoods

Site assessment	Identify soil conditions, wind exposure and realistic water supply.
Adapted vegetation	Use suitable native or locally adapted trees and shrubs.
Human security	Connect restoration with health, livelihoods and community needs.
Long-term monitoring	Assess survival, vegetation cover and ecosystem functions.

The Aral Sea on the UN agenda

Uzbekistan turned a regional environmental challenge into international cooperation

2018

Launch of the Multi-Partner Human Security Trust Fund for the Aral Sea Region in Uzbekistan.

18 May 2021

The General Assembly adopted A/RES/75/278 without a vote.

The resolution

Declared the Aral Sea region a zone of ecological innovations and technologies.

Research, water-saving technology and regional cooperation provide practical avenues for implementation.

UN decisions link development with restoration

Selected General Assembly resolutions

2015 A/RES/70/1	The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
2017 A/RES/71/285	United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests, 2017–2030.
2024 A/RES/78/320	Sustainable forest management on degraded lands, including drylands.
2025 A/RES/79/283	UN Decade for Afforestation and Reforestation in line with Sustainable Forest Management.

Degraded lands and drylands

General Assembly resolution A/RES/78/320, adopted on 13 August 2024

**Sustainable forest management,
including afforestation and reforestation,
can address environmental challenges
on degraded lands and drylands.**

Relevance for Central Asia: restoration planning must account for dryland ecology and the limits of available water.

UN Decade for Afforestation and Reforestation

In line with Sustainable Forest Management

2027–2036

The General Assembly proclaimed a decade to advance afforestation and reforestation.

FAO and the United Nations Forum on Forests secretariat facilitate its observance. Activities rely on voluntary contributions.

Two UN decades, complementary mandates

Their dates and scope differ

2021–2030

Ecosystem Restoration

Restoration across ecosystems, including forests, wetlands, farmlands and urban areas.

UNEP and FAO lead the Decade.

2027–2036

Afforestation and Reforestation

Afforestation and reforestation in line with Sustainable Forest Management.

FAO and the UNFF secretariat facilitate its observance.

What the new Decade can mean for Uzbekistan

Possible priorities for discussion, building on existing national programmes

Nursery systems	Strengthen planting material quality and local technical skills.
Protective belts	Assess road, canal and agricultural shelterbelts with water budgets.
Aral Sea region	Test adapted restoration methods and share monitored results.
Evidence and learning	Compare survival, ecosystem benefits and maintenance costs.



United Nations
Convention to Combat
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CRIC21, Samarkand, Uzbekistan, 2023

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Address by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev at the Samarkand climate forum

04.04.2025



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Address by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev at the Regional Ecological Summit

22.04.2026





Özbekistan-Kongo ortak etkinliđi, BM Orman Forumu

For future diplomats

Environmental cooperation depends on technical understanding and trust

How would you turn a national greening programme into an international partnership?

Which partners would you involve?

What evidence would you need?

How would you demonstrate benefits for people and nature?

Sources and further reading

United Nations frameworks and resolutions

2030 Agenda and the 17 goals

<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests

<https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/71/285>

Aral Sea ecological innovations and technologies

<https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/75/278>

Sustainable forest management in drylands

<https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/78/320>

Afforestation and Reforestation Decade

<https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/79/283>

Sources and further reading

Uzbekistan, the Aral Sea and environmental cooperation

Yashil Makon: tree care and survival

<https://president.uz/en/lists/view/9645>

Uzbekistan's initiative with the Republic of the Congo

<https://gov.uz/en/eco/news/view/52846>

Aral Sea UN Human Security Trust Fund

<https://mptf.undp.org/fund/ar100>

NASA: World of Change, Shrinking Aral Sea

<https://science.nasa.gov/earth/earth-observatory/world-of-change/aral-sea/>

Rio Conventions

<https://unfccc.int/ru/node/624830>

Confidence begins with human dignity

Believe in your capacity to learn, contribute and serve

Your voice matters. Approach others with confidence, while remaining willing to listen and learn.

“Odami ersang demagil odami,
Onikim yo‘q xalq g‘amidin g‘ami.”

Alisher Navoiy reminds us that humanity involves caring about the concerns of others. This is a foundation for diplomacy.

Love, gratitude and responsibility

A sense of belonging can deepen our concern for others

**Love yourself, your family and your country.
Extend that care to the world we share.**

Be grateful to the Creator for life and its opportunities.
Let gratitude guide how you treat people and nature,
with respect for the beliefs and dignity of others.

Your greatest capital is yourself

Preparation turns confidence into the ability to contribute

**Invest in your knowledge, skills and health.
Prepare carefully, keep learning and protect your integrity.**

“Kem âletle kemâlât olmaz.”

A Turkish saying: good work requires adequate tools.
For a diplomat, those tools include expertise, clear language,
sound judgement and an understanding of people.

We grow through the people around us

Friends, colleagues, teams and schools help shape our direction

The people and institutions around us can widen our horizons or limit our development.

Seek relationships that encourage honesty and learning.

Listen to colleagues, share credit and support their growth.

A good team strengthens both the individual
and the work we accomplish together.

Trust needs continuity in communication

Be clear, reliable and approachable

**Stay in contact. Keep people informed.
Be reachable when your contribution is needed.**

Avoid long silences followed by sudden reappearances.
Explain progress, difficulties and realistic next steps.
Be transparent about your responsibilities and limitations,
while respecting legitimate confidentiality.

Lasting success brings life into balance

Health, family and professional achievement support one another

Build a life in which professional achievement can coexist with health, close relationships and peace of mind.

Care for your health and make time for your family.
Pursue meaningful work at a pace you can sustain.
Consider success over a lifetime, including its contribution to your happiness and the well-being of those around you.

At the centre of diplomacy is the human being

Our perspectives differ, but many of our hopes and concerns are shared

**Across borders, people care about their families,
their dignity, their security and their future.**

Aziz do'stlar, hurmatli ustozlar va yoshlar!

E'tiboringiz va samimiy mehmondo'stligingiz uchun katta rahmat.

O'zbekistonga tinchlik, farovonlik va ravnaq tilayman.

Aziz yoshlar, sizlarga o'qishda, ishda va hayotda katta muvaffaqiyatlar tilayman.

O'z kuchingizga ishoning. Ilm o'rganing. Orzularingiz sari dadil qadam tashlang.
Kelajagingiz yorug' bo'lsin!

Turkiya va O'zbekiston do'stligi doimo mustahkam bo'lsin!

Barchangizga chin qalbimdan rahmat!



İsmail Belen

Chief Inspector | Chair, GONDER | Chair, UNFF 2024-2026 | Chair, Silva Mediterranea 2012-2017

Ankara, Türkiye · [İletişim bilgileri](#)

3.298 takipçi · 500+ bağlantı



General Directorate of Forestry



Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government



Kapak Fotoğrafını Düzenle

Bir düşünceni paylaş...



İsmail Belen

5,7 B takipçi • 885 takip
OGM-Başmüfettiş
GONDER YK Başkanı
UNFF Başkanı (2022-2026)
Silva Mediterranea Başkanı (2012-2017)

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BAŞKANIN ÖZ GEÇMİŞİ



İsmail BELEN
Yönetim Kurulu - BAŞKAN

f x

Orman Mühendisi (Yüksek Lisans) – Kamu Yönetimi Uzmanı (Yüksek Lisans)



Prof. Dr. BEDİA DİNÇ

f x

Başkan Yardımcısı



Doç. Dr. SERVET
BİRGİN İRİTAŞ

f x



Dr. Özlem İritiş

f x in

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Ana Sayfa

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"iyi bir gelecek."

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