

## EWNC raises international concern about the environmental impact of Sochi 2014 Olympics

In early March 2011 experts of the United Nations Environment Programme, UNEP, visited Sochi to monitor environmental issues during the preparation for the Winter Olympic Games 2014. In an attempt to cover up the grave problems and the ongoing destruction of valuable natural sites the Sochi 2014 Organising Committee aimed to prevent community leaders from meeting the experts.



No independent civil society organisations from Sochi were invited to meet the UNEP experts. Nevertheless, the Environmental Watch on North Caucasus, EWNC, learned about the planned visit and contacted directly the UNEP representatives.

The leader of EWNC, Andrey Rudomakha, sent an official letter to the President of Sochi 2014 Committee Dmitry Chernyshenko with a request to “organise an advisory meeting with public organisations and extend an invitation to the advisory meeting to all public organisations, which participated in previous UNEP meetings.” The Organising Committee did not react to the official request, until EWNC issued a press release about the ongoing visit. After this the EWNC was invited by the Sochi 2014 organisers to meet the UNEP experts, yet the invitation did not include any representatives from other organisations or local communities.

At the end of March the Sochi 2014 Organising Committee boasted the signing of a new declaration on “restoring the ecosystem of Mzymta river basin” in the latest round of meetings with UNEP, presenting the new document as a breakthrough that will “turn green” games mired in environmental problems. Independent experts and environmental NGOs were not invited to this signing, which was attended by Russia’s deputy prime minister Dmitry Kozak, regional officials and leading investors involved in large-scale construction projects in the Mzymta river valley. The “Declaration of commitment for Mzymta Valley Restoration” includes a commitment from all sides to make the process fully transparent and available for all stakeholders, including local residents and NGOs.

EWNC is concerned that the Declaration to restore the Mzymta valley is yet another attempt to rescue the image of the Sochi 2014 Games, preparations for which have caused unprecedented environmental damage, and may be used as a pretext for additional public spending on Olympic projects in Sochi.