

RUBEN KHACHATRYAN

Candidate for IUCN Regional Councillor
Eastern Europe, North and Central Asia

“ My urge to protect nature, my very origins in conservation, were awakened in Armenia during the 1990s, a time when survival often came at the expense of nature. Forests were cut, protected areas were forgotten, and the environment was no one's priority. I later studied in Germany and saw firsthand what happens when nature is truly valued and protected. But I realized: knowledge isn't enough, people need to feel the connection.

I had started as a filmmaker and was making documentaries about Armenia's wildlife. I understood that nature needed a storyteller, someone to shape its message and make it resonate with people. That became my mission. Through conservation, education, and work with youth, I've tried to bridge the gap between people and the planet. Because when people hear nature's story, they begin to see themselves as a sustainable part of it, bridging the gap, healing the divide, and making the circle whole again. ”



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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKVqAyB8gs8>



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VISION & MISSION

1. STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY-LED AND CROSS-BORDER CONSERVATION EFFORTS

Expanding protected and conserved areas with equity

Issue - *Many protected areas are fragmented, poorly managed, and exclude local communities.*

Solution - Support countries in expanding well-managed and fairly governed protected areas—including Indigenous and community-led territories—to meet the 30x30 target and improve ecological connectivity.

Connecting habitats across borders

Issue - *Different species migrate across borders, but conservation efforts stop at national boundaries.*

Solution - Launch coordinated species recovery programs with shared monitoring, ecological corridors, and cross-border collaboration, building on models like the Caucasus Wildlife Refuge.

Using nature to rebuild peace

Issue - *Political conflicts often prevent environmental cooperation in transboundary regions.*

Solution - Position conservation as a tool for peacebuilding and dialogue in post-conflict areas. Facilitate regional cooperation through shared ecological goals.

Combating wildlife trafficking regionally

Issue - *Wildlife trafficking continues due to weak enforcement and a lack of coordination.*

Solution - Establish regional coalitions of NGOs, communities, and government agencies to monitor, prevent, and prosecute wildlife crime.

2. ADVANCING NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS THAT SUPPORT PUBLIC HEALTH AND LIVELIHOODS

Adapting to climate change through ecosystems

Issue - *Climate change is intensifying wildfires, floods, and droughts, threatening people and nature.*

Solution - Promote nature-based climate adaptation, such as reforestation, wetland restoration, and grassland management, to build resilience in vulnerable landscapes.

Integrating biodiversity into public health

Issue - *Nature loss increases disease risks and undermines access to clean air and water.*

Solution - Utilize the One Health approach to integrate ecosystem protection with disease prevention, food security, and public health, collaborating with the health and agriculture sectors.

Restoring wetlands and waterways

Issue - *Water shortages and pollution affect millions, especially in transboundary basins.*

Solution - Restore wetlands, peatlands, and riverbanks to secure clean water and reduce flood and drought risks. Promote collaborative river basin management.

Farming in harmony with nature

Issue - *Industrial agriculture damages soils, displaces rural communities, and harms biodiversity.*

Solution - Support regenerative, agroecological farming practices rooted in traditional knowledge that protect soil, seeds, and pollinators while enhancing food security.

Greening the energy transition

Issue - *Renewable energy and mining projects can harm ecosystems and communities if poorly planned.*

Solution - Ensure all energy and mineral projects meet biodiversity and equity standards. Promote inclusive, nature-positive energy planning across the region.

Bringing nature into cities

Issue - *Rapid urban growth often neglects biodiversity, making cities more vulnerable to heat and pollution.*

Solution - Help cities implement nature-based infrastructure, such as green roofs, urban forests, river restoration, to enhance well-being and climate resilience.

3. AMPLIFYING UNDERREPRESENTED REGIONS AND STRENGTHENING CROSS-COOPERATION

Elevating regional voices in global policy

Issue - *Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central and Northern Asia are underrepresented in global conservation discussions.*

Solution - Advocate for the region's priorities in global IUCN strategies, biodiversity frameworks, and international decision-making spaces.

Improving regional coordination and governance

Issue - *Conservation efforts are fragmented, with limited cooperation between countries and IUCN members.*

Solution - Strengthen governance and cooperation through more inclusive platforms, joint planning, and stronger engagement between IUCN Members and Commissions.

Mobilizing direct and diversified conservation funding

Issue - *Local conservation initiatives often lack access to stable and equitable funding.*

Solution - Champion innovative funding schemes, including biodiversity credits, nature-positive finance, and community-accessible grants to support grassroots efforts.

4. SUPPORTING THE NEXT GENERATION OF CONSERVATIONISTS THROUGH EDUCATION AND MENTORSHIP

Investing in youth and marginalized voices

Issue - *Young people, indigenous communities, and women remain sidelined in conservation leadership.*

Solution - Launch regional youth fellowships, mentorship programs, and leadership pathways to build inclusive, community-rooted conservation movements.

Scaling up environmental education

Issue - *Many communities lack access to practical conservation knowledge and opportunities.*

Solution - Promote nature-based education through schools, eco-clubs, and local centers, expanding models like the SunChild Network and Eco-Clubs to build early, lasting engagement.

Ruben Khachatryan - BIO

Ruben Khachatryan is a conservation leader with over 23 years of experience pioneering cross-sectoral solutions to biodiversity loss, species protection, and environmental education in the South Caucasus.

He is the founder and director of the Foundation for the Preservation of Wildlife and Cultural Assets (FPWC), one of Armenia's most influential conservation organizations. Under his leadership, FPWC has launched groundbreaking initiatives such as the SunChild International Environmental Festival, a pioneering platform that uses film, art, and community engagement to empower youth and raise awareness of environmental challenges.

In 2010, Ruben spearheaded the creation of the Caucasus Wildlife Refuge (CWR), a landmark private conservation area now protecting over 35,000 hectares of vital habitat and migratory corridors. The CWR bridges state-protected areas and supports cross-border protection of endangered species, including the Persian leopard and Bezoar goat, serving as a model for community-based and sustainable conservation across the region.



From 2011 to 2020, Ruben served as director of the Yerevan Zoo, where he led a complete transformation of the institution, aligning it with EAZA standards and turning it into a modern hub for conservation, education, and animal welfare.

He holds degrees in Global Environmental Management and Policy (Germany and Switzerland), as well as Fine Arts and Film Directing, a unique background that allows him to bridge science, storytelling, and community mobilization in powerful ways.

Ruben's work has received international recognition. In 2014, he was awarded the Golden Medal of Armenia's Ministry of Nature Protection, and in 2018, he received the Frankfurt Conservation Prize. His efforts to rescue and rehabilitate illegally held and abused wildlife, including bears kept in captivity, have been featured on Al Jazeera, further cementing his role as a committed advocate for animal rights and species protection.

With a deep commitment to collaborative and inclusive conservation, Ruben Khachatryan brings visionary leadership, grassroots experience, and a strong regional perspective to the IUCN mission.