

STATE POLICY IN THE FIELD OF RELIGION IN UZBEKISTAN

Ishbabayeva Shakhnoza

Master's student at Turon University

Abstract. This article analyzes the state policy pursued in the sphere of religion in Uzbekistan, the legal frameworks coordinating the activities of religious organizations, the conditions created for citizens, and the ongoing reforms in the field.

Keywords. Uzbekistan, Russian Orthodox Church, Roman Catholic Church, German Evangelical Lutheran Church, Armenian Apostolic Church, Jewish and Baha'i religious communities, Buddhist temple, Bible Society, independence, Mecca, Medina, mosque, madrasa.

Uzbekistan has long been valued as a tolerant land where representatives of various nations, ethnic groups, and confessions have lived together in peace and harmony, freely performing their religious rituals. The consistent policy pursued by our country in this direction is rightfully recognized by our people and the international community.

After gaining independence, the religious factor in Uzbekistan objectively strengthened. The number of mosques and madrasas, pilgrims performing Hajj and Umrah to Mecca and Medina, and freely distributed religious literature increased sharply. On June 14, 1991, for the first time in the legal history of Uzbekistan, the Law "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations" was adopted, defining the state's policy regarding freedom of conscience and religion. Its adoption played a significant role in the lives of religious practitioners and representatives of various faiths. Since the day the independence of the Republic of Uzbekistan was announced in the Parliament on August 31, 1991, the attention paid to the religious sphere in our country has changed fundamentally.

The state policy pursued in the religious sphere in Uzbekistan during the years of independence can be divided into three distinct periods:

The first period (1991–1998) is characterized by the situation of the transition phase, where political freedom allowed some religious organizations to operate without registration, and the state began adopting laws and normative-legal acts to regulate the religious sphere.

The second period (1999–2016) is marked by the strengthening of the idea of interreligious tolerance, the enhancement of cooperation with the international community in the religious field and the fight against terrorism, and the formation of international legal frameworks.

The third period (2017–2023) is explained by the reinforcement of the legal foundations regarding religious organizations, the elevation of their role in the

spiritual life of the local population, the provision of religious freedom for citizens of various faiths, and the support provided by state and public organizations for their social adaptation.

During the years of independence, the number of religious organizations in Uzbekistan has grown significantly. Specifically, while there were 119 religious organizations in our republic in 1990 (89 Islamic and 30 non-Islamic), this number reached 179 in 1991 (146 Islamic and 33 non-Islamic). By 2012, the total number reached 2,224 (2,049 Islamic and 175 non-Islamic). Among the non-Islamic religious organizations, one can list the Russian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the German Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church, Jewish and Baha'i religious communities, the Buddhist temple, and the Bible Society¹.

It should be noted that in the early years, the number of such institutions in the republic increased from year to year. However, due to the results of conducted certifications and other factors, while the number of registered mosques in the republic initially stood at 1,949 in 1998–1999, a complete list of 1,355 mosques was formed by April 1999, and the imams of these 1,355 mosques were deemed fit for their positions. Among them, those with higher religious education numbered 230. Those with secondary specialized religious education accounted for 485, while the remaining 640 held certificates from the Muslim Board based on their experience and activities in the religious field. In terms of age, 1,147 imams were under the age of 60, 152 were between 60–70 years old, and 56 were over the age of 70².

The changes that took place in the religious sphere during the years of independence can also be seen through specific examples. In particular, as of April 15, 2007, a total of 181 non-Islamic religious organizations were operating in the territory of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Among them, one can list 36 Russian Orthodox churches, 5 Roman Catholic churches, 23 Evangelical Christian-Baptist churches, 21 Full Gospel Christian churches, 10 Seventh-day Adventist Christian churches, 4 New Apostolic churches, 3 German Evangelical Lutheran churches, 2 Armenian Apostolic churches, 1 Jehovah's Witnesses church, 1 'Golos Bojiy' (Voice of God) church, 58 Korean Protestant churches, 8 Jewish religious communities, 6 Baha'i religious communities, 1 Buddhist temple, 1 Society for Krishna Consciousness, and 1 Bible Society³.

In 2015, Friday mosques within the system of the Kashkadarya regional representative office of the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan actively participated in

¹ O'zbekiston Respublikasi Din ishlari bo'yicha qo'mitasining joriy arxivi. 2012-yil yakuni bo'yicha hisobot materiallari.

² O'zbekiston Respublikasi Din ishlari bo'yicha qo'mitasining joriy arxivi. 1999-yil yakuni bo'yicha hisobot materiallari.

³ O'zbekiston Respublikasi din ishlari bo'yicha qo'mitasi joriy arxivi. Qo'mitaning 2007-yil yakuni bo'yicha hisobot materiallari.

spiritual-educational and topical seminars, meetings, and roundtables held across various locations, delivering a total of 2,126 lectures.

The breakdown of these activities is as follows: 252 sessions on the prevention of early marriage; 635 events dedicated to the 'Year of Honoring the Elderly'; 615 on the prevention of and fight against religious extremism; 202 on preventing missionary activities and proselytism; 82 on the prevention of delinquency and crime; 58 on suicide prevention; 97 on the fight against drug addiction and AIDS; 15 in penitentiary institutions; 64 on preventing labor migrants from falling under the influence of fanatical movements; 70 on protecting youth from the influence of 'mass culture' and fostering a healthy spiritual environment on the internet; and 36 participations in seminars organized within military units.

Lectures were delivered on such pressing topics as: 'Peace is the Ultimate Blessing,' 'Our Peace is Our Invaluable Wealth,' 'Gratitude for the Blessings of Independence,' 'Puberty is Not Maturity,' 'Be Vigilant Against the ISIS Fitna!', 'ISIS – The Enemy of Islam,' 'Preventing Religious Fanaticism Among Youth,' 'Drug Addiction – The Plague of the Century,' 'Negative Consequences of AIDS,' 'Human Trafficking – A Global Problem,' 'Do Not Be Deceived by the False Claims of Missionaries,' 'Suicide is Not Martyrdom, but Perversity,' 'The Elderly are Always Honored,' and 'Blessing is with the Elderly.' Additionally, 811 individual counseling sessions were conducted with members of religious extremist organizations (REOs), practitioners of pseudo-Sufi movements, missionaries, and female religious teachers (otinoyis) ⁴.

"Reforms in this direction reached a new stage starting from 2016. In his speech at the solemn ceremony dedicated to the 24th anniversary of the Constitution, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Sh.M. Mirziyoyev, emphasized: 'It is well known to all of us that we cannot imagine human interests in isolation from the peace of the country, or the atmosphere of mutual respect, kindness, and solidarity in our society. All of these are our invaluable assets, and it is the sacred duty of each of us to protect them like the apple of our eye'⁵. For this reason, the 'Action Strategy' on the five priority areas of development of the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2017–2021 gave special prominence to ensuring interethnic harmony and religious tolerance, developing an environment of security, stability, and good-neighborliness in our surroundings, and strengthening the international prestige of our country⁶.

"Conditions have been created for Hajj and Umrah pilgrims in Uzbekistan. 'While only 130 people from Uzbekistan performed the Hajj pilgrimage during the seventy years of the communist regime, today more than five thousand Uzbek citizens

⁴ O'zbekiston Musulmonlari idorasining Qashqadaryo viloyati vakilligining joriy arxivi. Vakillikning 2015-yil hisobot materiallari.

⁵ "Xalq so'zi", 2016-yil 10-dekabr.

⁶ O'zbekiston Respublikasi Qonun hujjatlari to'plami. 2017-yil 13-fevral, 6-son (766). – B. 25-28.

fulfill their noble dreams and Islamic duties every year⁷". During the years of independence, 308,000 Muslims traveled to Saudi Arabia for pilgrimage, of whom 130,000 performed the Hajj and 178,000 performed the Umrah. Additionally, 2,500 Christians and Jews visited their respective holy religious sites. In 2016, more than 11,000 people traveled to Saudi Arabia, including over 6,000 for the Umrah and 5,200 for the Hajj. Starting from 2018, the quota for the Umrah trip was increased from 6,000 to 10,000. Since 2019, the Umrah pilgrimage quota for citizens of Uzbekistan has been abolished. By 2020, the number of citizens performing the Umrah reached 30,000, while the Hajj quota increased from 5,000 to 7,200. In the last seven years, more than 60,000 Muslims from our country have performed the Hajj. In 2024, a total of 15,000 pilgrims from Uzbekistan visited the two holy cities – Mecca and Medina – to realize their noble dreams⁸.

"By 2020, a total of 2,243 religious organizations were operating in our country, including 2,069 Islamic organizations, 33 Russian Orthodox churches, 4 Roman Catholic churches, 55 Full Gospel Christian churches, 22 Evangelical Christian-Baptist churches, 9 Seventh-day Adventist churches, 3 New Apostolic churches, 2 Evangelical Lutheran churches, 1 'Golos Bozhiy' (Voice of God) Christian church, 1 Jehovah's Witnesses church, 26 Korean Protestant churches, 2 Armenian Apostolic churches, 8 Jewish religious communities, 6 Baha'i religious communities, 1 Society for Krishna Consciousness, 1 Buddhist temple, and 1 Bible Society of Uzbekistan. Among the Islamic organizations, the Imam Bukhari International Center, the Imam Termizi International Scientific Research Center, the Center of Islamic Civilization in Uzbekistan, the Tashkent Islamic Institute named after Imam Bukhari, the Mir-i Arab Higher Madrasah, 10 secondary specialized Islamic educational institutions, as well as Orthodox and Protestant seminaries, are in operation⁹.

In conclusion, thanks to the religious policy implemented in our country during the years of independence, our religion and national values have been restored. Uzbekistan has gained unique experience and established a legal framework for properly managing relations between religious confessions. This process was guided by the principle of not only fostering national identity and pride, preserving the languages, cultures, religions, and traditions of various ethnicities, and restoring the thousand-year-old Islamic heritage and sacred monuments—such as mosques and madrasas—but also achieving overall solidarity among all nationalities and confessions within the country"

⁷ O'zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidenti vazifasini bajaruvchi Shavkat Mirziyoyevning Islom hamkorlik tashkiloti Tashqi ishlar vazirlari kengashi 43-sessiyasining ochilish marosimidagi nutqi. <https://president.uz/uz/lists/view/34>.

⁸ O'zbekiston Prezidenti Shavkat Mirziyoyevning O'zbekiston xalqiga Qurbon hayiti tabrigi. 15.06.2024.// <https://president.uz/uz/lists/view/7325>.

⁹ O'zbekiston Respublikasi Din ishlari bo'yicha qo'mitasining 2020-yil yakuni bo'yicha hisobot materiallari. ¹⁸ O'zbekiston Respublikasi Din ishlari bo'yicha qo'mitasining joriy arxivi. Din ishlari bo'yicha qo'mitaning 2020-yil hisoboti.

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