

ON THE ACTIVITIES OF RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS IN UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract

This article analyzes the legal foundations, stages of formation, and the role of religious organizations in the spiritual life of society in the Republic of Uzbekistan. The study highlights the development of relations between the state and religious organizations during the years of independence, the constitutional guarantee of freedom of conscience, and the content of state policy aimed at ensuring religious pluralism and interfaith harmony. In addition, the mechanisms for the registration and coordination of religious organizations and the powers of the Committee on Religious Affairs are scientifically substantiated. The article also examines existing religious denominations, religious educational institutions, and pilgrimage activities in Uzbekistan, revealing their role in strengthening religious tolerance and social stability.

Keywords

Uzbekistan, religious organizations, freedom of conscience, secular state, religious tolerance, interfaith harmony, religious pluralism, state–religion relations, Committee on Religious Affairs, religious education.

After the Republic of Uzbekistan gained independence, relations between the state and religion were formed on new legal foundations. Ensuring freedom of conscience, strengthening religious tolerance, and promoting interfaith harmony were identified as priority areas of state policy. Uzbekistan is a secular state in which religion is separated from the state; however, the necessary legal conditions have been created for the lawful activities of religious organizations.

The Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Law “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations” constitute the main legal framework regulating the activities of religious organizations. These legal acts guarantee every citizen’s right to profess or not to profess any religion and affirm the separation of religious organizations from the state and their equality before the law. While the state does not interfere in the internal affairs of religious organizations, it ensures that their activities are carried out within the framework of the law.

Within the framework of the Action Strategy for the Development of the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2017–2021, significant and systematic reforms were implemented to ensure religious tolerance, strengthen the right to freedom of conscience, and improve the activities of religious organizations. During this period, developing state–religion relations based on democratic principles and strengthening interfaith harmony were defined as key priorities of state policy.

One of the most important international outcomes of these reforms was the adoption on December 12, 2018, by the UN General Assembly of the resolution “Enlightenment and Religious Tolerance.” This document was initiated by Uzbekistan and unanimously supported by all UN member states. The resolution is significant for promoting ideas of combating extremism and radicalism through education

and enlightenment. This initiative clearly demonstrated Uzbekistan's international standing and its consistent policy in the field of religious tolerance.

As part of domestic reforms, in accordance with Presidential Resolution No. PQ-3668 dated April 16, 2018, the activities of the Council for Confessional Affairs under the Committee on Religious Affairs were improved. Expanding the council's membership from 9 to 17 members contributed to ensuring equal representation of religious denominations operating in Uzbekistan and promoting open dialogue, thereby strengthening cooperation among religious organizations.

In addition, Presidential Decree No. PF-5416, signed on April 16, 2018, was aimed at fundamentally improving the religious and educational sphere. Based on this decree, a continuous system of religious education was formed in Uzbekistan, covering primary, secondary, higher, and postgraduate levels. This system contributed to the training of religious personnel in the spirit of modern knowledge and enlightenment.

According to Presidential Resolution No. PQ-4436 dated September 4, 2019, new cooperation mechanisms were introduced to ensure freedom of conscience and stability of the religious and educational environment in society. Cooperation between the Committee on Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Youth Union, the Women's Committee, and mahalla institutions was strengthened. Special attention was paid to coordinating spiritual and educational activities among women, and special departments and advocacy groups were established.

Furthermore, the establishment of the International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan on the basis of the Uzbekistan Islamic Academy and Tashkent Islamic University marked an important stage in the development of religious education. The opening of regional professional development centers also contributed to increasing the effectiveness of religious organizations' activities at the local level. Overall, the measures implemented during 2017–2021 elevated the activities of religious organizations in Uzbekistan to a new legal, organizational, and spiritual level, serving as an important factor in ensuring religious tolerance, interfaith harmony, and social stability.

Religious organizations in the Republic of Uzbekistan are established at the initiative of at least one hundred permanently residing citizens who have reached the age of eighteen and acquire legal entity status after registration with the Ministry of Justice or its territorial bodies. Their activities are coordinated and supervised by the Committee on Religious Affairs under the Cabinet of Ministers. Today, thousands of religious organizations belonging to various denominations operate in Uzbekistan. Although the majority of the population professes Islam, Christianity, Judaism, the Bahá'í Faith, Buddhism, and other religious denominations also operate freely. This reflects the practical manifestation of religious pluralism and tolerance in Uzbek society.

Religious organizations are not limited to conducting worship and rituals; they also engage in spiritual and educational activities, promote moral values, and contribute to strengthening peace and harmony in society. Religious educational institutions operate in the republic, where both religious and secular subjects are taught. The activities of religious organizations in Uzbekistan are legally regulated and characterized by an open and stable system. Relations between the state and religion based on mutual respect serve as an important factor in ensuring peace, stability, and social cohesion in society.

Conclusion

Since gaining independence, relations between the state and religion in the Republic of Uzbekistan have been consistently developing based on democratic and legal principles. Ensuring freedom of conscience, religious tolerance, and interfaith harmony has become a key priority of state policy. The Constitution and the Law “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations” have created a solid legal foundation for the activities of religious organizations, guaranteeing their separation from the state and equality before the law.

The reforms implemented within the framework of the Action Strategy for 2017–2021 elevated the activities of religious organizations to a new legal, organizational, and spiritual level. In particular, improving the religious and educational sphere, modernizing the religious education system, expanding interfaith dialogue, and strengthening cooperation mechanisms between the state and religious organizations yielded significant results. The adoption of the UN resolution “Enlightenment and Religious Tolerance” at Uzbekistan’s initiative became international recognition of the country’s policy in this area.

Today, the free and lawful activities of various religious denominations, along with the formation of an environment of religious pluralism and tolerance, serve as an important factor in ensuring stability and harmony in society. Religious organizations actively participate not only in conducting worship and rituals but also in promoting moral values through spiritual and educational activities. Overall, relations between the state and religion in Uzbekistan, based on mutual respect and cooperation, play a vital role in ensuring social stability, civic harmony, and the country’s sustainable development.

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