

ANALYSIS OF THE STATE POLICY ON ENSURING FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE AND RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS IN THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract

This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the legal, political, and educational foundations of the state policy on ensuring freedom of conscience and regulating religious affairs in the Republic of Uzbekistan. It examines the ongoing reforms based on the “Concept of State Policy on Ensuring Freedom of Conscience and Religious Affairs”, adopted on February 25, 2025. The article explores the relationship between the state and religion, the legal status of religious organizations, the development of the religious education system, and the measures taken to promote tolerance and interfaith harmony, all within the framework of scientific analysis.

Furthermore, it analyzes the conditions created by the state for religious communities, the current state of interethnic and interreligious tolerance, the system of training religious personnel, and the cooperation with international organizations. This scholarly assessment demonstrates that Uzbekistan is shaping a national model for ensuring freedom of conscience, which is not only based on legal documents but also represents a crucial component of the country’s moral and educational policy. The article is aimed at revealing the scientific foundations of the balanced relationship between religion, the state, and society, and serves as a valuable resource for legal scholars, political scientists, Islamic studies experts, and researchers in the field of religious education and policy.

Keywords: Freedom of conscience, religion and the state, religious organizations, legislation, human rights, state policy, reforms, interfaith harmony.

Introduction

Currently, systematic reforms are being implemented in Uzbekistan to ensure the protection of human rights and freedoms. In particular, significant progress has been made in guaranteeing citizens' freedom of conscience, clearly defining the foundations of state policy in the religious sphere, and strengthening religious tolerance and interfaith harmony. The “Concept of State Policy on Ensuring Freedom of Conscience and Religious Affairs,” adopted on February 25,

2025, has become a progressive legal document that plays a vital role in reinforcing democratic principles in the country.

The main objective of this Concept is to ensure freedom of conscience in Uzbekistan, to guarantee every individual's right to believe or not to believe in a religion, to establish clear legal foundations for the relationship between religion and the state, to regulate the activities of religious organizations within a legal framework, and to prevent religious extremism. The law serves to structure state–religion relations on the principles of neutrality and cooperation. In this way, while maintaining its secular nature, the state acknowledges the religious and spiritual values present in society and supports them for educational and enlightenment purposes.

Material and Methods

Article 35 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan guarantees citizens' freedom of conscience, stating that “Everyone shall have the right to profess any religion or not to profess any religion. The imposition of religious views by force is not permitted.” This legal norm serves as a fundamental basis for ensuring individual freedom of choice, freedom of thought, and belief. Freedom of conscience is considered not only as a religious freedom but also as a type of liberty encompassing broader moral and philosophical dimensions, and has become one of the key priorities of state policy.

Uzbekistan is a secular state; however, secularism does not mean marginalizing Islam or other religions. On the contrary, it implies engaging in educational cooperation with religious communities and recognizing religious values as an integral part of the nation’s moral and cultural identity. As stated in the Concept, religious values are among the key factors shaping the lifestyle, customs, ethics, and cultural heritage of the people, transmitted from generation to generation. Therefore, the state is implementing a number of practical measures that take into account the religious needs of its citizens.

As a result of the recently adopted reforms, significant progress has been made in the practical implementation of freedom of conscience. Transparency has been ensured in the registration process of religious organizations, and obstacles hindering the performance of religious rituals have been removed. Restoration and improvement efforts have intensified at pilgrimage sites and sacred places. Across the country, hundreds of mosques and churches have been renovated, and new houses of worship have been constructed. The quota for Umrah pilgrimages has been abolished, and the Hajj quota has been tripled. By 2025, nearly 800,000 citizens had traveled to Saudi Arabia to perform pilgrimage rites. At the same time, followers of other religions also freely celebrate their religious holidays and carry out pilgrimages.

Results

Based on Presidential Decree № PF-68 of April 21, 2025, titled “On Measures to Further Strengthen the Guarantees of Citizens’ Right to Freedom of Conscience and to Advance Reforms in the Religious and Educational Sphere to a New Stage,” the International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan has become one of the leading centers for training specialists by

integrating religious and secular knowledge. Furthermore, international research centers such as the Center for Islamic Civilization, and the scientific centers named after Imam Bukhari, Imam Maturidi, and Imam Termizi have been established, conducting scholarly research in the field of religious education and enlightenment.

The efforts undertaken by the state to ensure interethnic and interfaith harmony and promote cultural diversity are also based on the principles outlined in the Concept. Over 130 nationalities and ethnic groups reside in the country, with more than 2,300 religious organizations representing 16 different confessions. There are opportunities to study in seven languages in educational institutions, 12 languages in television and radio programs, and 14 languages in printed media. These indicators confirm the effectiveness of the Uzbekistan model in ensuring interethnic harmony and interfaith tolerance. At the same time, there are a number of threats and challenges related to freedom of conscience. These include movements that deny social and legal norms under the guise of religious ideas, the threats of extremism and radicalism, and, in some cases, the spread of views encouraging citizens to refuse to fulfill their civic duties. Baseless calls spread through social media, global migration processes, and the flow of information may negatively impact the peace and religious harmony in the country.

To prevent such threats, the Concept emphasizes the importance of integrating legal, educational, and scientific approaches. Key tasks include enhancing the professional qualifications of personnel in the religious sphere, increasing legal literacy, promoting ideas of tolerance and harmony, working with youth, and strengthening an approach based on national and universal values in education and upbringing.

Discussion

As a secular state, Uzbekistan recognizes religious diversity in society and designates the protection of citizens' freedom of belief and conscience as a key priority of its state policy. This approach aligns with the country's international obligations. Specifically, it is in harmony with the key human rights documents adopted within the framework of the United Nations and other international organizations, and practical measures are being implemented accordingly. The Concept aims to systematize the policy in this regard, unifying legislation and practical activities. Ensuring freedom of conscience and formulating state policy in the religious sphere serves as a significant factor in ensuring stability, harmony, tolerance, and social justice in our country. It is not only a legal document but also an expression of a state policy with broad educational and spiritual significance. The systematic efforts of state bodies and civil society institutions to create equal opportunities for the realization of the right to freedom of conscience for representatives of different religious confessions are steadily contributing to the effective development of a model that ensures religious tolerance and interethnic harmony in our country.

Acknowledgement

As a result of implementing the tasks outlined in the Concept, conditions will be created for the realization of citizens' guaranteed constitutional right to freely choose a religion or to not

follow any religion. The rule of law in society will be strengthened, and the effectiveness of protecting citizens' constitutional rights and freedoms will increase. An environment of harmony, social solidarity, and unity will be consolidated, and the possibility of early prevention and resolution of potential conflicts will be ensured. Legislation ensuring secularism will be further improved, and existing legal gaps and contradictions will be addressed. Conditions for ensuring freedom of conscience in a secular state will be established. The organizational and legal foundations for developing a model of relations based on religious tolerance and interfaith harmony between the state and confessions in Uzbekistan will be enhanced. The system of training personnel in the religious sector, aimed at improving the qualifications of specialists in religious and Islamic studies, will be developed. Mechanisms for cooperation among state bodies, civil society institutions, and media representatives will be created to ensure systematic coverage of state policy in the religious sphere. A system for implementing scientific research and expert-analytical projects on religious issues will be established. Measures in line with the directions of the Concept will be implemented through periodically adopted programs.

In the Republic of Uzbekistan, the implementation of a unified state policy to ensure citizens' freedom of conscience and its results guarantee citizens' equality of rights. Additionally, it serves to prevent the misinterpretation and violation of secularism. The Concept aims to further elevate the spirituality of the country's population, especially the youth, ensure the unity and equality of the multiethnic people of Uzbekistan, and strengthen the legal foundations of statehood.

Conclusion

In Uzbekistan, freedom of conscience is not only a legal principle but also a central factor in spiritual and cultural processes. The guarantees enshrined in the Constitution create the opportunity for citizens to freely express their beliefs. At the same time, the place of religious values in society requires their recognition not through prohibition, but rather as an educational and cultural asset within the boundaries of legal frameworks. The Concept has initiated an entirely new stage in state-religion relations. It recognizes freedom of conscience as a democratic principle and stipulates that religious freedoms must be guaranteed by the state. It envisions that the activities of religious organizations will be subject to oversight based on transparent and clear criteria, and the principles of neutrality and cooperation between the state and religious organizations will be strengthened. The “Concept of Freedom of Conscience and State Policy in the Religious Sphere” aligns with Uzbekistan’s international obligations in the field of religion and freedom of conscience. This concept serves as an important legal foundation for protecting citizens rights and freedoms and creating an environment of tolerance and harmony in society. At the same time, it requires addressing issues in the religious sphere through legal, educational, and scholarly approaches.

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