

# **THE ESSENCE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CONCEPT OF ENSURING FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE OF CITIZENS AND STATE POLICY IN THE RELIGIOUS SPHERE IN THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN**

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## **Abstract**

This article analyzes the "Concept of Ensuring Freedom of Conscience of Citizens and State Policy in the Religious Sphere in the Republic of Uzbekistan," approved by Law No. ORQ-1037 of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated February 25, 2025. It examines the concept's goals, objectives, principles, and priority areas, as well as the fundamental notions defined within it (freedom of conscience, secularism, secular state). The article also discusses the mechanisms for implementing the concept and the expected outcomes and evaluates its significance in the reforms of Uzbekistan's religious and educational sphere.

**Keywords:** Freedom of conscience, state policy in the religious sphere, secularism, secular state, interfaith harmony, religious tolerance, countering religious radicalization.

## **Introduction**

Since gaining independence, the Republic of Uzbekistan has been consistently implementing reforms in all spheres of society, including the religious sphere. The "Concept of Ensuring Freedom of Conscience of Citizens and State Policy in the Religious Sphere in the Republic of Uzbekistan" (hereinafter referred to as the Concept), adopted on February 25, 2025, marks an important stage in this process. This Concept aims to realize the constitutional right of citizens to freedom of conscience, strengthen Uzbekistan's status as a secular state, and define the goals, objectives, principles, and priority areas of state policy in the religious sphere. The purpose of this article is to provide a scholarly analysis of the key aspects of the Concept and assess its significance.

The Concept, comprising 7 chapters and 41 articles, reflects the issues of ensuring stability in a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional society based on the rich national-historical experience and universal values of Uzbek statehood.

The **goal** of the state policy in the religious sphere is defined as creating equal conditions for the realization of citizens' right to freedom of conscience, promoting mutual understanding and

respect among religious organizations of various faiths, strengthening interfaith harmony, and ensuring religious tolerance and secularism in society.

To achieve this goal, the Concept outlines the following **main objectives** of the state policy in the religious sphere:

- Ensuring equality of citizens and preventing discrimination of their constitutional rights and freedoms, regardless of gender, race, nationality, language, religion, belief, social origin, and social status.
- Strengthening the unity and solidarity of the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional people of Uzbekistan, fostering respect for their traditions, and creating equal conditions for their development.
- Creating equal legal conditions for the active participation of citizens in social life.
- Creating conditions for citizens to exercise their constitutional right to freedom of conscience, regardless of their attitude towards religion, without allowing the forced imposition of religious views.
- Relying on secularism in the implementation of the state's internal and foreign policy in accordance with constitutional norms.
- Ensuring that state governance, civil service, the Armed Forces and law enforcement agencies, self-governing bodies of citizens, other institutions of civil society, and social relations are regulated based on secular principles, in accordance with constitutional norms.
- Implementing consistent measures to strengthen the active civic position of citizens in establishing religious tolerance and the rule of law in society.
- Preventing state employees from giving preference to any religion or belief or discriminating against any religion or belief in their professional activities and the performance of their functional duties.
- Developing the country's science and culture while benefiting from the advanced achievements of world science, culture, art, and literature.
- Combating radicalization, preventing the spread of extremist and terrorist ideas that threaten the rights, freedoms, and legitimate interests of citizens, the health of the population, social morality, public safety, and public order.

Separate chapters of the Concept describe the current state of ensuring freedom of conscience in Uzbekistan, the goals, objectives, and principles of state policy in the religious sphere, the priority areas of ensuring freedom of conscience of citizens and state policy in the religious sphere and the mechanisms for their implementation, the harmony of common interests and ensuring freedom of conscience in a secular state, and the priority areas and mechanisms for the development of a secular state (in the areas of state administration, economy, education, healthcare, culture, regulation of the marriage institution, the formation of norms of social morality and behavior).

The Concept also defines the main mechanisms for implementing state policy in the direction of studying the scientific and cultural heritage of religions, developing religious studies and scientific research in the religious sphere, which include: supporting fundamental and applied research on the culture of religions formed in various historical periods of the Uzbek people

and the religious and philosophical heritage, historical works, architecture, poetry, and manuscripts in the social and natural sciences of great thinkers and scientists recognized as bright achievements of Islamic civilization; training, retraining, and professional development of qualified specialists in religious studies in state higher education institutions; systematically organizing scientific and educational events to study topical issues in the religious sphere with the participation of foreign and local scholars and qualified experts on religious confessions; supporting the implementation of international, regional, and national scientific research projects by research institutions to combat radicalization, extremism, and terrorism; and ensuring the conduct of scientific research and sociological surveys to study the attitude of the population to religious and social processes.

The main mechanisms for implementing state policy in the direction of countering factors that threaten the freedom of conscience of citizens, public safety, and public order in the religious sphere include: preventing religious radicalization; countering the ideas of radical religious movements, extremist and terrorist organizations and preventing the spread of their ideology, for which purpose to establish effective cooperation between state bodies and civil society institutions with religious organizations; implementing measures aimed at the social adaptation of individuals, especially young people, who have fallen under the influence of the ideas of radical religious movements, extremist and terrorist organizations, and ensuring their integration into the atmosphere of peace and harmony prevailing in society; creating an effective system of cooperation between state, civil society institutions, and media representatives aimed at implementing modern strategies to reveal the humanistic essence of religion and its important role in the life of society and the state; identifying cases of illegal and political use of religion in the information space and taking measures prescribed by law against them; ensuring that materials on religious issues in the information space are covered in accordance with the requirements of national legislation; promptly responding to violations of legislation in the field of ensuring freedom of conscience and applying fair legal impact measures, developing and implementing modern, effective methods of legal and preventive influence; restricting the use of information resources, including those distributed on the Internet, if they contain materials that incite national, racial, ethnic, or religious hatred, including those that promote the superiority of one religion or intolerance towards other religions, in accordance with the procedure established by law; and taking measures to prevent and suppress crimes of extremism and terrorism committed on the basis of religious fanaticism. As a result of the implementation of the tasks envisaged by the Concept, the following outcomes are expected: creating conditions for the exercise of the guaranteed constitutional right of citizens to profess any religion or not to profess any religion; strengthening the rule of law in society, increasing the effectiveness of protecting the constitutional rights and freedoms of citizens; strengthening the atmosphere of harmony, social cohesion, and solidarity in society, creating the possibility of early prevention and prophylaxis of potential conflicts; further improvement of legislation on ensuring secularism, elimination of existing legal gaps and contradictions; minimization of factors hindering the implementation of the principle of a secular state; creating conditions for ensuring religious freedoms in a secular state; improving

the organizational and legal framework for the development of a model of relations between the state and confessions in the Republic of Uzbekistan based on religious tolerance and interfaith harmony; improvement of the system of training personnel in the religious sphere, which provides for improving the qualifications of specialists in religious and theological educational fields; creating mechanisms for cooperation between the state, civil society institutions, and media representatives to ensure systematic coverage of state policy in the religious sphere in the information space; and establishing a system for the implementation of scientific research and expert-analytical projects to study religious issues.

The organization of the implementation of the goals and objectives set forth in the Concept is entrusted to the heads of the government, all levels of state bodies, organizations, and institutions, as well as local state authorities, including civil servants.

Cooperation in the implementation of the Concept will be carried out with the general public, non-governmental non-profit organizations, religious organizations, and other institutions of civil society, self-governing bodies of citizens, mass media, research institutions, and citizens. The state policy in the religious sphere in the Republic of Uzbekistan is based on fundamental principles such as legality, freedom of conscience, the separation of religion from the state, equality, free choice, interfaith dialogue, and mutual understanding.

It is planned to establish a commission of the Oliy Majlis (parliamentary commission) by a resolution of the chambers of the Oliy Majlis to exercise parliamentary control over the implementation of the main tasks defined in the Concept.

In conclusion, it can be said that the Concept serves to further enhance the spirituality of the country's population, especially the youth, ensure the harmony and equality of the multi-ethnic people of Uzbekistan, and strengthen the legal foundations of statehood.

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