

## Dialogue of Declarations Forum: A path to interfaith peace and ensuring freedom of religion



From September 10 to 13, 2025, Tashkent and Samarkand will host the Second International Dialogue of Declarations Forum, organized by the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies (ISRS) under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan together with the American NGO Love Your Neighbor Community (LYNC), with the support of the Committee on Religious Affairs, the Center for Islamic Civilization in Uzbekistan, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, and the Samarkand Regional Hokimiyat.

UzA correspondent spoke with Shafolat Nurullayeva, ISRS Deputy Director, about the significance of the upcoming Forum.

– Shafolat Fayzullayevna, could you please tell us about the background of this Forum?

– To promote the ideas of enlightenment and a culture of tolerance, and to ensure religious freedoms, the international community has held several forums since 2016, including in Marrakesh, Makkah, Jakarta, Potomac, and Punta del Este. Conceptual documents – declarations of the same name – were adopted as a result of these events.

Uzbekistan also responded to this call and made its contribution by organizing, in May 2022, the first High-Level Dialogue of Declarations Forum. The events within its framework were held in Tashkent, Samarkand, and Bukhara over five days, bringing together leading scholars of religion, theologians, and legal experts from several countries, including the USA, the UK, Austria, Pakistan, and Indonesia, as well as national specialists from relevant government agencies, law enforcement bodies, and representatives of the clergy.

The composition of the first Forum also included several high-ranking representatives from the Muslim World League, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, the governments of the United Kingdom and Indonesia, as well as other prominent figures from religious and legal circles.

I would like to recall that following the first Forum, the Bukhara Declaration was adopted, later recognized as an official document of the 76th session of the UN General Assembly. In addition, the chambers of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan also adopted a joint statement in support of the principles and calls of the Bukhara Declaration. This, in turn, highlights the importance of parliament's role in monitoring the protection of human rights and safeguarding citizens' interests, as reflected in international documents and national legislation.

At the same time, I would particularly emphasize that the adoption of the Bukhara Declaration confirms the importance and international recognition of Uzbekistan's model for building a tolerant society, one that includes people of diverse nationalities, religions, and beliefs.

The upcoming Second International Dialogue of Declarations Forum also confirms that Uzbekistan not only shares the principles, ideas, and values enshrined in the aforementioned international declarations but also consistently implements them in practice.

- In your opinion, what is the significance of the upcoming Forum for the international community?

- First, its regularity and the wide international composition of participants testify to the high recognition of our state policy in ensuring freedom of religion and interfaith harmony.

Second, the current Forum is a confirmation of Uzbekistan's firm commitment to the principles of openness, the development of an atmosphere of religious tolerance and generosity, and to raising interfaith dialogue to a high moral level.

Third, the event serves as a unique platform for exchanging best practices in ensuring the peaceful coexistence of people and followers of different faiths.

- What are the expectations for the second Forum?

- We expect the participation of about 50 leading scholars of religion, theologians, experts, and several high-ranking officials from 15 countries, including the USA, the UK, China, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Indonesia, and the Central Asian states.

Among the distinguished guests are the announced participation of Yousef Muhammad Al-Dobeay, Assistant Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation for Political Affairs, Abdul Rahman Al-Zaid, Assistant Secretary-General of the Muslim World League, Robert Rehak, Chair of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance, and others.

In addition, video addresses will be delivered by Mohammad Al-Issa, Secretary-General of the MWL, and Sheikh Abdullah bin Bayyah, Chairman of the UAE Council for Fatwa.

Over the course of four days, plenary sessions will be held to discuss pressing issues facing countries in the sphere of ensuring freedom of religion, as well as the role and contribution of civil society institutions in strengthening interfaith harmony.

On the sidelines of the Forum, three certification seminars will take place, featuring the participation of religious figures and government officials from Uzbekistan, as well as a side event dedicated to women engaged in religious affairs. Presentations of best international practices in interfaith dialogue and the promotion of tolerance in society are also planned.

Furthermore, a study trip will be organized for foreign participants to Samarkand, a city of special sacred and cultural significance for representatives of different faiths.

- What tasks are to be addressed by the participants?
- Within the framework of the Forum, it is planned to address several essential tasks.

First, one of the primary tasks is to inform the international community about the large-scale reforms undertaken in Uzbekistan to strengthen interfaith tolerance and interethnic harmony.

As is known, in recent years our country has undergone significant transformations in the nation's religious life. In this context, I would like to emphasize two important aspects that have become the foundation for further ensuring freedom of religion.

The first is the adoption in 2021 of the new edition of the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations". In drafting it, the needs of our society, as well as international norms and standards, were carefully studied, which enabled us to improve legislation in line with modern requirements in the fields of human rights and freedom of religion.

The Law also incorporated recommendations from authoritative international organizations, such as the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

The second is the adoption of the renewed Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, which explicitly enshrines the principle of freedom of conscience and prohibits the imposition of any religious views in the conditions of a legal and secular state.

Based on this principle, in February 2025, the Concept for Ensuring Citizens' Freedom of Conscience and State Policy in the Religious Sphere was developed and adopted at the legislative level. It defines the goals, objectives, principles, and priority directions of state policy in the religious sphere, as well as provides for the implementation of constitutional provisions to guarantee citizens' right to freedom of conscience while maintaining the secular nature of state-society relations.

Second, an equally important task of the Forum is to disseminate our country's experience in ensuring interfaith and interethnic harmony, as well as strengthening tolerance in society.

We consider it an important task to inform the international community about the ongoing efforts to ensure a stable political and legal environment in multi-ethnic and multi-confessional Uzbekistan, to foster mutual harmony in society, and to create opportunities for realizing the interests of all citizens. The efforts undertaken by the country in this direction are based on the country's rich cultural and historical heritage and fully reflect the democratic principles of secularism, freedom, equality, social justice, and solidarity.

In this context, it should be particularly emphasized that the positive historical experience of our country, with its centuries-old tradition of peaceful coexistence of representatives of various ethnic groups and religions, consistently attracts the interest of foreign researchers, scholars of religion, and political figures.

It is also noteworthy that international experts are increasingly regarding the Uzbek model of religious tolerance in society as a demonstrative and practically valuable experience, worthy of study and application.

Third, within the framework of the event, active discussions are also expected on international experience in ensuring religious freedoms and interfaith dialogue in multiethnic societies.

Such discussions contribute to strengthening mutual understanding between countries and peoples, make it possible to identify effective practices and adapt them to national realities, and also form a platform for further cooperation in the humanitarian sphere.

- Shafot Fayzullayevna, you mentioned that following the first Forum, the Bukhara Declaration was adopted. What final document is expected to be adopted at the second event?

- We intend to adopt an Appeal of the Participants to the international community with calls to:
- protect the rights of religious minorities;
- eliminate discrimination based on religion;
- promote religious education as a means of countering violent extremism;
- affirm freedom of religion as a universal human right;
- encourage equality of all people regardless of their religious and cultural differences.

Overall, we expect the outcomes of the Second International Dialogue of Declarations Forum to make a significant contribution to strengthening religious tolerance, generosity, mutual respect, and the peaceful coexistence of peoples in a diverse world.