

Uzbekistan's initiatives at the United Nations: a contribution to the development of regional cooperation in Central Asia



This year, the United Nations marks its 80th anniversary. Over the past decades, the UN has become an important platform where countries – despite differences in political systems and national interests – can seek compromise and develop a shared vision for the future of humanity.

Today, as the world faces new challenges, the role of the UN as a universal mechanism for global dialogue is more relevant than ever. A vivid reflection of this is the motto of the current session of the General Assembly: “Working Together: 80 Years for Peace, Development and Human Rights, and the Way Forward.”

Against this backdrop, the growing role of a number of countries in the work of the UN is of particular interest – countries that aim not only to observe global processes but to actively shape the international agenda.

Among such nations, Uzbekistan is becoming increasingly prominent. Its recent activity within the UN has demonstrated a new foreign policy philosophy – one that is proactive, pragmatic, and oriented toward the common good.

Since gaining independence in 1991, Uzbekistan has built sustainable and multifaceted cooperation with the United Nations. Today, 25 UN offices and agencies operate in the country, implementing more than 140 projects with a total value exceeding \$175 million.

These programs cover virtually all key areas of development: education, healthcare, environmental protection, poverty reduction, gender equality, and institutional reforms. However, for many years, Uzbekistan's role remained largely observational, and the country's participation in the UN was mostly limited to supporting already existing initiatives.

A turning point in Uzbekistan's foreign policy came in 2016, marking a shift toward active engagement in shaping the international agenda.

From that point on, the Republic began to consistently promote not only its national interests, but also a

broader regional approach, emphasizing the shared challenges faced by the countries of Central Asia.

What marked a fundamentally new perspective was the vision of Central Asia not as an arena of competition or a “buffer zone,” but as a space of opportunity – where stability and mutual development are possible only through dialogue, trust, and joint efforts.

Speaking at the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly in September 2017, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev declared that “Central Asia is the top priority of Uzbekistan’s foreign policy today, and this is a conscious choice.” According to him, “Uzbekistan is firmly committed to dialogue, constructive cooperation, and strengthening good-neighborly relations. We are ready for reasonable compromises with the countries of Central Asia on all issues – without exception”.

President Shavkat Mirziyoyev also announced the holding of a high-level international conference under the auspices of the UN, titled “Central Asia: Shared Past and Common Future, Cooperation for Sustainable Development and Mutual Prosperity”, which took place in Samarkand in November 2017. The event focused on key issues related to security and sustainable development in the region. It was organized with the active participation of all Central Asian states, and with the support of the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia and the Regional Office of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

For the first time in many years, the leaders of the Central Asian states came together to openly discuss the region’s challenges and prospects for continued dialogue. In essence, the Samarkand Conference launched a new phase of cooperation among the Central Asian countries, giving rise to what became known as the “Spirit of Samarkand” – a constructive foundation for building a fundamentally new format of regional cooperation.

As a result of the conference, a Joint Communiqué was adopted, in which all participants unanimously expressed their commitment to strengthening the emerging processes of dialogue and enhancing cooperation among the countries of Central Asia.

Based on this Communiqué, a draft resolution titled “Strengthening Regional and International Cooperation to Ensure Peace, Stability and Sustainable Development in the Central Asian Region” was developed and submitted on behalf of the Central Asian countries. This resolution was subsequently adopted by the UN General Assembly at a plenary session in June 2018.

This document became a landmark, as it was the first time the region was represented on the global stage not as a collection of fragmented states with divergent foreign policy orientations, but as a unified geopolitical space, bound together by a shared historical legacy, common contemporary challenges, and a collective aspiration for the future. It is particularly noteworthy that the initiative received unanimous support from the international community, serving as a clear signal of the region’s readiness to embrace a new format of engagement.

What is also remarkable is that this diplomatic initiative at the UN level evolved into a sustainable mechanism of interstate cooperation, laying the foundation for a new model of regional integration.

It was this resolution that provided the conceptual basis for launching the regular Consultative Meetings of the Heads of State of Central Asia, which, since 2018, have become a vital platform for aligning interests and developing a coordinated regional policy.

These efforts contributed to the continued proactive formation of Uzbekistan’s Central Asian agenda within the United Nations. Out of 13 General Assembly resolutions adopted at the initiative of Tashkent since 2016, six have been dedicated specifically to issues related to the development of regional cooperation in Central Asia.

A logical continuation of Tashkent’s efforts within the UN framework was the advancement of the concept

of sustainable tourism – as a key element of sustainable development and an instrument of cultural diplomacy for the countries of Central Asia.

The region possesses unique potential in this area. It is home to a rich historical and cultural heritage, numerous sites inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, and a wide array of natural landscapes – deserts, mountain ranges, and ecologically significant nature reserves. However, for decades, this potential remained largely underutilized, due in large part to underdeveloped infrastructure, limited international presence, and a lack of interstate coordination.

The UN resolution “Sustainable Tourism and Sustainable Development in Central Asia”, adopted in 2019 at the initiative of Uzbekistan, introduced a qualitatively new model of cooperation. Rather than focusing solely on increasing tourist flows, the resolution emphasized the preservation of cultural and natural heritage and the creation of cross-border tourist routes.

It is worth noting that the implementation of this strategy is being carried out in close cooperation with international organizations, including the UNWTO, UNESCO, UNDP, the World Bank, and others.

This format not only facilitates investment attraction and exchange of best practices, but also helps to integrate the region into global tourism and investment flows.

A special focus in Uzbekistan’s international agenda is also placed on environmental issues. The large-scale consequences of the Aral Sea desiccation — including deteriorating public health, environmental degradation, rising poverty, and increased migration – have long since transcended the boundaries of a national crisis. In this context, Uzbekistan’s efforts to internationalize the issue have become both a logical and timely step.

In 2021, as a result of Uzbekistan’s active and systematic diplomatic efforts, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution entitled “On declaring the Aral Sea region a Zone of Environmental Innovations and Technologies”.

This step not only brought the issue onto the international agenda, but also recognized its importance in the context of global environmental security and climate justice.

Importantly, the resolution solidified a new approach – to view the Aral Sea region not merely as a zone of ecological disaster, but as a platform for implementing innovative solutions, technological partnerships, and sustainable development.

A significant practical outcome of this initiative was the establishment – at the proposal of Uzbekistan – of the UN Multi-Partner Human Security Trust Fund for the Aral Sea Region. This fund has become a key mechanism for coordinating the efforts of donor countries, international organizations, and the private sector committed to restoring the region’s ecosystems and improving the quality of life for its population.

Uzbekistan’s strategic course toward enhancing interregional connectivity between Central and South Asia has also received broad support from the international community. At the 76th session of the UN General Assembly, a resolution initiated by Uzbekistan – “On Strengthening Connectivity Between Central and South Asia” – was unanimously adopted, with 40 countries from various regions of the world acting as co-sponsors.

What makes this document unique is that it encompasses virtually all key areas of cooperation between the two macro-regions – including political, trade and economic, transport and logistics, as well as cultural and humanitarian spheres.

The resolution underscores the importance of enhancing cooperation for developing landlocked countries, and highlights the critical role of transport and transit corridors in accelerating economic growth and improving the effectiveness of trade and economic ties between Central and South Asia.

In other words, the adoption of this resolution lays a solid foundation for deeper engagement between the two regions and for enriching the interregional agenda with concrete projects aimed at unlocking the vast untapped potential of cooperation.

Against the backdrop of growing transnational threats, particularly in the field of security, Uzbekistan launched a significant initiative in 2024, leading to the adoption of a UN resolution aimed at combating drug trafficking in Central Asia. This step was not merely a response to a pressing regional issue, but also an important element of a broader strategy to establish a sustainable regional security mechanism.

In a context where drug trafficking remains one of the primary threats to the stability and development of Central Asian states, Uzbekistan's initiative demonstrates the country's capacity to actively coordinate efforts at the global level.

The resolution was supported by more than 30 countries, reflecting a high level of international solidarity in addressing this challenge. Such broad support underscores the relevance and urgency of the issue, encouraging not only joint action among Central Asian states, but also engagement from the wider international community.

It is noteworthy that nearly all of Uzbekistan's initiatives actively contribute to the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals – highlighting the depth and consistency of Tashkent's foreign policy strategy.

Through its actions, Uzbekistan demonstrates that its foreign policy is not confined to short-term interests, but is instead built upon long-term objectives aimed at promoting global security, stability, and prosperity.

The interconnectedness of global and regional processes clearly illustrates that sustainable development is impossible without regional stability, and such stability, in turn, cannot be achieved without active integration into global processes.

In this context, Uzbekistan's initiatives at the United Nations are setting the tone for the global agenda, offering solutions that are fully aligned with the interests of the international community. The unanimous adoption of resolutions, support from dozens of countries, and the involvement of major donors and international organizations all serve as evidence that Uzbekistan is perceived as a constructive and trustworthy partner.

At the same time, Central Asia remains a central pillar of Uzbekistan's diplomatic agenda within the UN framework. Tashkent's efforts are consistently aimed at transforming the region into a zone of lasting peace, mutual trust, and broad international cooperation. This, ultimately, reflects the deeper meaning and strategic importance of Uzbekistan's foreign policy course – one that is being implemented on the world's most prominent platform for international dialogue: the United Nations.

Without a doubt, the upcoming 80th session of the UN General Assembly will once again draw the world's attention to the positive transformations taking place in Central Asia, while also highlighting the region's growing role in the international system.

Azamat Sulimanov,
Head of Division at the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies
under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan

Shakhlo Khamrakhodjaeva,
Leading Research Fellow at the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the
President of the Republic of Uzbekistan