

A high-level briefing was held at the UN headquarters on the initiative of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan



On December 10 this year, a high-level briefing was held at the UN headquarters in New York on the activities of the Regional Expert Council on the rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees from armed conflict zones.

The event was held by the ISRS and the Permanent Mission of Uzbekistan to the UN with the assistance of the UN Counter-Terrorism Office and the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia.

Speakers at the briefing included UN Under-Secretary-General Vladimir Voronkov, Head of the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia Kaha Imnadze, UN Assistant Secretary-General Khaled Khiari, Director of the UN Counter-Terrorism Centre Mauro Miedico, former UN Special Rapporteur on Terrorism, Professor at the University of Minnesota (USA) Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, Laetitia Courtois, Permanent Observer of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to the UN, as well as heads of diplomatic missions of Central Asian countries.

The event attracted great interest from representatives of UN member states. In total, representatives from more than 50 countries in Asia, Africa, Europe, North and Latin America, as well as about 10 international organizations, participated in the briefing.

The Regional Expert Council on Rehabilitation and Reintegration was established in 2024 under the auspices of the UN Counter-Terrorism Office at the initiative of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The Council brought together experts and specialists from all Central Asian countries. Its platform accumulates knowledge, methods and programs that ensure the successful integration of reintegrated persons into a normal and fulfilling life.

As part of its international obligations, Uzbekistan was one of the first to repatriate its citizens from combat

zones. Since 2019, more than 530 Uzbek citizens, mostly women and children, have been returned to their homeland. They were provided with medical, social and psychological assistance. Professional training and employment programs have been developed.

During the discussions, UN Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East and Asia-Pacific Khaled Khiari expressed special gratitude to the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan for his contribution to ensuring regional security and commitment to this cause, including through the creation of the Regional Expert Council.

Speaking about the importance of the Council, the head of the UNOCT Vladimir Voronkov noted that “the Organization is proud that the UNOCT, together with the ISRS, acts as the secretariat of the Regional Expert Council.”

According to him, today's discussions confirm that the Regional Expert Council is capable of acting as a center for mobilizing international efforts, serving as an example of best practices and methods in the field of rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees.

As the head of the UNRCCA Kaha Imnadze noted, the experience of the Central Asian countries can serve as an example for other states. "The Regional Expert Council is a unique initiative that can be replicated in other parts of the world. I encourage our partners from Central Asia, the UN and regional organizations to continue to use this platform to find the best solutions," he added.

The Ambassadors of the Russian Federation and the United States to the UN also expressed full support for the Council's activities. It was noted that the Central Asian states have made significant efforts to return their citizens from conflict zones, which is an example of political will and commitment to the obligations assumed.

Participants commended the role of local communities (mahallas) in Uzbekistan's efforts to reintegrate returnees.

According to UN Assistant Secretary-General Khaled Khiari, the uniqueness of the Uzbek model is that all reintegration work is carried out "from the bottom up", taking into account the needs of the returnees themselves. At the same time, local communities have become a key link in the implementation of these measures.

Speakers also noted the human rights and child protection focus of the Uzbek repatriation model.

According to former UN Special Rapporteur Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, Uzbekistan took a position from the start that returned children would be treated as “children of the nation who would be protected and returned to society.” This, she said, was key to its success.

A similar point of view was expressed by UNICEF Child Protection Specialist for Children and Armed Conflict Katherine Cocco. According to the expert, the repatriation of children demonstrated Uzbekistan's commitment to children's rights.

Overall, all participants of the event unanimously stated that despite its short existence, the Regional Expert Council has become a key platform for discussing current challenges and developing solutions in the field of rehabilitation and reintegration.

It was noted that “a distinctive feature of the Uzbek repatriation program, as well as the key to its success, is the personal control of the President of Uzbekistan over all measures within the framework of this process.”

During the event, it was announced that the presidency of the Council next year will pass to Kazakhstan. In this regard, the head of the diplomatic mission of Kazakhstan to the UN Kairat Umarov noted that Astana, as the next chairman of the Regional Expert Council, will make every effort to further successfully

implement the initiative of the Head of Uzbekistan.

At the end of the discussions, the participants unanimously emphasized the need to continue the practice of familiarizing the world community with the activities of the Regional Expert Council, including by holding a separate side event on the sidelines of one of the key UN events - the High-Level Counter-Terrorism Week in New York, which is scheduled for June 2025.

