

Fundamental reforms aimed at strengthening the principles of democracy and justice are the priority for Uzbekistan



In recent years, Uzbekistan has been pursuing a systematic course toward creating a law-based, secular, democratic, and social State – the New Uzbekistan.

The proclamation of the human being as the supreme value and the protection of the rights, freedoms, and legitimate interests of the individual are an integral part of State policy. The adoption of Presidential Decree No. DP-6012 of 22 June 2020 on the National Human Rights Strategy proves that.

As President Shavkat Mirziyoyev noted in his address to the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly, Uzbekistan is confidently pursuing fundamental reforms aimed at strengthening the principles of democracy and justice, based on the idea of ‘For the sake of human honour and dignity’.

The following words of the Head of State reveal more precisely the essence of the reforms being carried out in the country in this direction: *‘The concept of honour and dignity of a person is not some abstract, high-minded notion for us. When we talk about it, we mean, first and foremost, ensuring the peaceful and safe life of every citizen, their most basic rights and freedoms’.*

In this context, it would be worthwhile to elaborate on the specific features of implementing policies based on human-centredness in the Republic of Uzbekistan.

First, the concept of ‘human dignity’, which has been consistently promoted in recent years, is closely linked to the ‘social state’ concept, which has been reflected in the renewed Constitution. It should be noted that a social state is, first of all, an opportunity for the full realization of human potential, creating the necessary conditions for a decent life, including reducing poverty and increasing the well-being of citizens.

The results of the national referendum held in 2023 on renewing the Constitution defined the priority areas of the country’s development. The renewed Basic Law reaffirmed Uzbekistan’s commitment to the

principles of human rights, freedom of speech and conscience, and the equality of all citizens, irrespective of ethnicity, language, or religion. The Constitution has been updated by 65 per cent, and the number of constitutional norms relating to human rights has increased threefold to more than 50 articles.

Additionally, article 20 of the renewed Constitution states that *'human rights and freedoms are directly applicable. Human rights and freedoms determine the essence and content of laws, the activities of State bodies, citizens' self-government bodies and their officials'*.

Second, the strategies, concepts and State programmes adopted by Uzbekistan emphasize further strengthening guarantees for protecting human rights and freedoms.

In particular, the universally recognized principles of human rights and the recommendations of international organizations in this area, which are directly reflected in the Action Strategy for the five priority areas of development of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2017-2021 and the Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan for 2022-2026, are the basis for reforms in this area.

These important documents outline new directions for national development aimed at ensuring that every member of society enjoys decent living conditions, supports their personal growth, and protects their rights through a range of economic, social, and political measures.

In turn, the Uzbekistan 2030 strategy was adopted in accordance with the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and aims to carry out comprehensive political, legal, and socio-economic reforms based on the United Nations principle of leaving no one behind.

Third, poverty alleviation and employment have been prioritized in the country's national policy. In this regard, new mechanisms have been created for entrepreneurship, social protection, vocational education, and work with the needy population.

On the initiative of the Head of state, the post of assistant hokim has been introduced in each district since 2022 to create conditions for the socio-economic development of the districts, provide gainful employment, and develop entrepreneurship, thereby reducing poverty and creating conditions for a whole life for the population. As a result, the poverty rate decreased from 17 per cent to 14.1 per cent in 2022 and 11 per cent in 2023.

In addition, introducing the 'Single Window' system has made it possible to increase the efficiency of providing employment services. It should be pointed out that Uzbekistan was one of the first countries in Central Asia to launch the 'Unified National Labour System' to maintain electronic labour records between employers and employees.

In 2016-2023, 2.6 million unemployed citizens received assistance in finding jobs for vacancies identified through this system. At the same time, a system was established to train unemployed citizens, especially youth and women, in professions, entrepreneurial skills, and foreign languages. Over the past 7 years, the coverage of vocational training for the unemployed population has increased 25 times.

The Public Services Agency was established to provide public services to the population quickly, efficiently, and widely. Today, the Agency pays special attention to further improving the system of providing public services, improving the quality of life of the population, the investment climate, labour conditions, and the development of small businesses and private entrepreneurship. Thus, about 300 different types of services are provided to the population and business entities through the State Services Centres.

Meanwhile, external labour migration has diversified, resulting in the expansion of the geography of countries. To date, intergovernmental agreements have been signed with 22 foreign countries to send workers who have indicated an interest in working abroad.

According to statistics, these reforms decreased the unemployment rate by 3.7 per cent in 2020 and reached 6.8 per cent in 2023.

Fourth, Uzbekistan is conducting extensive work to ensure freedom of speech and information and to develop the mass media's activities.

In particular, Internet sites have been recognised as mass media and have been entitled to tax exemptions, subsidies and grants with State support.

For them, income tax has been reduced by 50 per cent until July 2025, and registration through state service centres or the Unified Portal has been simplified, with the period of registration reduced to 10 days.

Today more than 2,200 media outlets are operating in Uzbekistan, which means a 49 per cent growth over the last eight years. 65 per cent of them are non-State media. In addition to the traditional media, Internet publications are actively developing. Their number has increased to 715, and their audience is constantly expanding.

The free dissemination and use of information are ensured in accordance with the renewed Constitution and the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan 'On Principles and Guarantees of Freedom of Information'.

Fifth, in accordance with international recommendations, work has been improved in granting citizenship and preventing its loss. Under the new Citizenship Act introduced in March 2020, tens of thousands of stateless persons have acquired Uzbek citizenship. Over the last 7 years, more than 80 thousand people have obtained citizenship of the Republic of Uzbekistan (*in 1992-2016 this figure was 482*).

The measures taken by the country in this area have been highly appreciated by international organisations and the general public, which has contributed to further strengthening the authority of Uzbekistan in the world arena.

A biometric passport valid for 10 years has also been introduced instead of the procedure for issuing a permit to travel abroad for 2 years, eliminating the difficulties faced by citizens in this matter.

Sixth, systematic measures have been taken to prevent torture and improve the conditions of detention.

Under Article 26, paragraph 2 of the Constitution, no one may be subjected to torture, violence, or other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.

At the same time, Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan № 530 of 14 March 2019 extended the powers of the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Oliy Majlis (the 'Ombudsman') to protect the rights of prisoners from inhuman or degrading conditions of detention. A procedure has been established for the Ombudsman's regular visits to places of deprivation of liberty.

In particular, in the first five months of 2024 alone, representatives of the Ombudsman visited penal institutions (47 remand centres and 60 colonies) 107 times. In addition, Presidential Decision No.DP-46 of 7 February 2023 approved the National Human Rights Education Programme, under which, starting from 1 March 2023, short-term training courses on combating torture are continuously offered to staff of agencies conducting initial enquiries, enquiries and pretrial investigations and penal institutions until the end of the investigation.

Notably, for the first time in the history of national statehood, Uzbekistan was elected as a member of the UN Human Rights Council for a three-year term (2021-2023). At the same time, Uzbekistan became the country with the most votes in the election – 169 member countries voted in favour of it.

According to the experts, Uzbekistan's membership in the UN Human Rights Council is of historical significance and is an excellent achievement in accordance with the ongoing work in the country and the goals set out in the adopted strategies.

Overall, today, as a result of large-scale reforms in the political, social and spiritual modernisation of society, the country is entering a new stage of development. Democratic transformations based on the idea 'in the name of human honour and dignity' have become irreversible in the country. Promoting and

protecting human dignity, interests, and rights have become one of the priorities of State policy.

Indeed, as President Shavkat Mirziyoyev stated, *'the people should feel all the changes and the practical implementation of the programmes in their daily lives'*.

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