

## A high-level event was held in Geneva



On November 11, 2024, high-level event on “Effective rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees from North-Eastern Syria – Uzbekistan’s experience – from global to local” was held at the United Nations Headquarters in Geneva. The conference was organized by the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan (ISRS) and the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Foundation (GCERF).

The purpose of the event was to present Uzbekistan's experience in the rehabilitation and reintegration of persons returning from combat zones, as well as the activities of the Regional Expert Council recently established on the initiative of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev.

The event was addressed by UN Under-Secretary General Vladimir Voronkov, head of UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate Natalia Gherman, Director of the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund Khalid Koser, Director of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy Thomas Greminger, as well as Permanent Representatives of Central Asian countries and the EU to the UN in Geneva.



During the event, it was emphasized that since 2019, the states of the region have returned about 2,200 citizens, mainly women and children, from combat zones in Syria and Iraq. Special rehabilitation and reintegration programs allowed them to return to peaceful life and restore ties with families and local communities.

Speaking at the event with a welcoming speech, the director of ISRS Eldor Aripov announced new strategic approaches of the Republic of Uzbekistan in the fight against terrorism and extremism.

It was noted that the main emphasis is placed on the issues of education, the fight against ignorance. The International Islamic Academy, the international research centers of Imam Bukhari, Termizi, Maturudi, as well as the International Center for Islamic Civilization operate in the country, which popularize true knowledge about the humanistic and peaceful essence of Islam and its role in the development of the civilization of Central Asia.

Religious policy is based on the principles of tolerance and inclusiveness. An effective barrier to the spread of extremism and radicalism in Uzbekistan is the maintenance of interethnic and interreligious harmony.

In line with its international obligations, Uzbekistan was one of the first to repatriate its citizens from war 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.

Civil society and local communities are actively involved in rehabilitation processes. The work is based on careful consideration of gender and age characteristics.

As the head of the UN Counter-Terrorism Office Vladimir Voronkov noted, "UN member states urgently



need to develop strategies for rehabilitation and reintegration based on the experience of Uzbekistan. The Tashkent model is aimed at ensuring the rights and dignity of the individual, which is important in the processes of rehabilitation and reintegration".

Speaking about Uzbekistan's leadership in the field of rehabilitation and reintegration, Khalid Koser, Director of the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund, emphasized that Uzbekistan's model serves as a roadmap for other states. This method has demonstrated how citizens can be returned from conflict zones effectively, humanely, and with respect for human rights.

In this context, one of the key points of the conference was the discussion of the activities of the Regional Expert Council on Rehabilitation and Reintegration, 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. It accumulates knowledge, methods and programs that ensure the successful integration of reintegrated persons into a normal and fulfilling life.



"I am convinced that the Council, established in Tashkent at the initiative of the President of Uzbekistan, will contribute to strengthening the exchange of best practices and lessons learned in this area," emphasized Natalia Gherman, Head of UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate.

The Deputy Head of the OSCE Counter-Terrorism Unit, Fejzo Numanaj, noted that the Organization is proud to co-organize the conference on the establishment of the Regional Expert Council on Rehabilitation and Reintegration in May 2024. According to him, "The OSCE was very impressed by the work of local communities in Tashkent, when our representatives visited several mahallas and saw outstanding work on rehabilitation and reintegration of people".

Mattia Toaldo, member of the Permanent Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva, expressed the readiness of the European Union to continue assistance in the field of security in Central Asia, including the repatriation of citizens from war zones. "Uzbekistan is a key partner, and we intend to continue supporting initiatives aimed at maintaining stability in the region," the diplomat emphasized.

The Permanent Representatives of the Central Asian countries to the UN in Geneva also expressed their readiness to cooperate within the framework of the Regional Expert Council on Rehabilitation and Reintegration on the principles of openness and trust, supporting each other's efforts to ensure sustainable development and security in the region.

The event in Geneva marked an important milestone in the discussion of global and regional efforts to address terrorism and extremism, and highlighted the importance of continued cooperation between Central Asian countries, the UN and international organizations.

In conclusion, all participants expressed their readiness for further cooperation and development of joint programs aimed at supporting common efforts to rehabilitate and reintegrate returnees.