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THE ROLE OF THE UN IN SUPPORTING CIVIL SOCIETY INSTITUTIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN

Abstract. The article analyzes the role and tasks of the UN in supporting the development of civil society institutions in Uzbekistan, the large-scale socio-political, socio-economic, judicial, legal, democratic reforms and transformations carried out in the country.

Keywords: Civil society of Uzbekistan, the United Nations, civil society institutions of Uzbekistan, development of civil society.

Over the last three years, large-scale socio-political, socio-economic, judicial and legal transformations have been implemented in Uzbekistan.

The democratic reform process was conducted in accordance with the Strategy of actions in the five priority areas of the development of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2017–2021, the Presidential Addresses to Parliament, and corresponding acts of legislation [3].

The Action Strategy has been implemented in five stages as a “roadmap” for Uzbekistan to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Nowadays, this document defines the development of civil society, particularly, in terms of improving public administration, the system of countering and preventing crime, increasing the social activity of young people in the process of deepening democratic reforms, and a number of other areas [8].

The world community, the UN, the OSCE, and other reputable international organizations have rightly noted achievements, such as the release of journalists from prisons and psychiatric hospitals; the abolition of forced child labor and the release of political prisoners; Parliament’s “roadmap” for implementing UN recommendations on religious freedom; admission of independent UN experts; a new forest management plan that includes mea-

asures to conserve forest resources and develop ecotourism; additional measures to eliminate the environmental disaster in the Aral Sea region; the malaria eradication; Uzbekistan’s advancement to the top of the “Global Council on Happiness and Well-Being” index; and a number of other transformations [2].

The world’s leading countries praised Uzbekistan’s removal from the List of Countries of Particular Concern in the Sphere of Religious Freedom. The country’s contribution to solving the issue of reintegration of foreign terrorist fighters’ families – their spouses and children – is viewed positively. The global democratic society has a positive attitude to the release of prisoners of conscience; changes in the legislation of Uzbekistan that are aimed at preventing the use of evidence obtained through torture in trials; measures taken in the field of freedom of peaceful assembly and association; ensuring full access to a number of foreign news resources and websites of international human rights organizations; and a number of other positive changes [1].

In addition, the course of state and social construction urges an objective assessment of what has been achieved, identifying new trends, and determining the prospects for the development of civil society [4].

UNDP opened its office in Uzbekistan in January 1993 and has been actively supporting the country's development ever since. UNDP conducts a wide range of activities aimed at assisting the Government of Uzbekistan, civil society institutions, and ordinary people in overcoming numerous difficulties of the country's transition period. UNDP helps governmental and non-governmental institutions gain access to knowledge, experience and resources that are necessary for the successful implementation of economic and social reforms as well as the well-being of Uzbek people.

In Uzbekistan, UNDP's assistance under the current Country Programme Action Plan (2016–2020) focuses on two interrelated objectives. These objectives are to support the Government in implementing economic and democratic reforms, and to expand as well as foster the participation of civil society institutions in the development process at the national and local levels. UNDP's work in Uzbekistan focuses on two subject areas, namely good governance and sustainable development [2].

UNDP maintains mutually beneficial relations with many government ministries of Uzbekistan in the areas of environment and energy, public administration and economic management. UNDP is active in supporting the Government in creating an enabling environment for small businesses, in particular, UNDP assists in establishing Business Support Centers and One Stop Shops to provide public services to the population.

In the public administration sector, UNDP contributes to improving the efficiency, transparency and accessibility of public services at the national, regional and local levels. UNDP plays an important role in creating an e-government system in Uzbekistan, particularly through the development of a national electronic document management system, thereby enhancing the quality of public services. The agency also advocates for the adoption of the WHO protocol on the introduction of antiretroviral therapy (ART) by the Government of Uzbekistan,

ensuring access to treatment for an additional 3.000 people with HIV [9].

Moreover, UNDP implements projects aimed at solving environmental problems and advocates for the rational use of energy resources in the country. UNDP plays an important role in drafting the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Water and Water Use", which embodies an important transition of the country from a fragmented to an integrated approach to water resources management. Over the last decade, UNDP has been actively supporting the creation of Uzbekistan's first biosphere reserve. UNDP has also assessed and mapped the unique flora and fauna of the republic on the Ustyurt plateau.

In today's complex circumstances, while the pandemic increases in its scope, threatening peace and stability, the role and responsibility of the UN increases as it is a universal international organization designed to bring member states together to promote peace and security, stability, protection of human rights, and sustainable development [10].

In Uzbekistan, human rights protection is seen as one of the priorities of interaction with the UN. At present, our country has established a stable political system that meets modern criteria of democracy and human rights, the legislative, executive and judicial authorities of all levels are actively working. But most importantly, respect for the principles of the rule of law and human rights is being established in society.

One of the most important priorities of state policy is increasing the culture of tolerance and humanism, strengthening inter-ethnic and civil understanding as well as harmony. Today, representatives of more than 130 nations and nationalities live in Uzbekistan as one family. In the country, religious organizations of 16 denominations operate freely. State educational institutions teach in seven languages, the National TV and Radio Company broadcasts its programmes in 12 languages, whereas newspapers and magazines are published in more than ten languages. Uzbekistan highly appreciates the efforts of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for

Human Rights (OHCHR) to strengthen the protection of human rights around the world, as without ensuring human rights it is impossible to solve the problems of socio-economic and spiritual as well as humanitarian development of the state.

Any society can achieve social progress and prosperity only when it is based on peace, the observance and protection of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.

Civil society institutions are playing an ever-increasing role in ensuring human rights. It is impossible to imagine a modern, open, strong civil society without a developed system of stable and effective political parties that represent the interests of various social groups and broad segments of the population, non-state non-profit organizations, independent mass media, and other civil society institutions [8].

Currently in Uzbekistan there are more than 9.000 non-governmental organizations, 2.239 religious organizations, and 1.400 media outlets. These figures clearly demonstrate the role played by civil institutions in the life of our society.

The key motives leading to all ongoing reforms in the country are clearly education and enlightenment. Uzbekistan has been actively participating in the UN World Programme for Human Rights Education. All government agencies, civil society institutions, media outlets and educational institutions are involved in the process of disseminating universal ideals and values as well as the principles of respect and observance of human rights among the population.

It is not a coincidence that 7 percent of the country's state budget goes to education. In 2016, the Parliament passed a new Law "On State Youth Policy" to deepen our involvement in this area [7]. The texts on human rights of the main international documents of the UN, ILO, and UNESCO have been translated into the state language and are widely used in school, specialized secondary, vocational, and higher edu-

cational systems. Human rights classes are held during the preparation and advanced training of judges, prosecutors, lawyers, jurists, law enforcement officers, military personnel, and representatives of the business community.

Uzbekistan joined the United Nations (UN) as a new, sovereign, independent state in 1992. A year later, a UN office opened in Tashkent. Currently, the UN country team in Uzbekistan consists of 24 UN agencies, funds, and programs that work together to advance national development priorities in accordance with the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals [5].

As it is known, informing society about the activities of state and economic management bodies, ensuring their accountability to the population is a necessary condition for implementing the norm of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan stating that "The people are the only source of state power". The concept put forward by the President Sh. M. Mirziyoyev conveys that "Not the people must serve state bodies, but state bodies must serve the people" [2].

An objective and critical analysis of the civil society condition reveals that the course of democratic reforms was generally based on the implementation of the most important constitutional norms that are social justice, continuous dialogue with the people, the openness of public administration, and the development of the mass media as the "fourth estate" [6].

In Uzbekistan, civil society development trends are characterized by the active implementation of the "Human Interests Above All" principle, the prioritized idea "From National Renewal to National Progress", the establishment of the middle class as the basis of democratic reforms, effective public control, a competitive multi-party environment, and, finally, by ensuring further improvement of people's living standards and quality of life.

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