



COMPREHENSIVE REPORT OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN
UZBEKISTAN
REFORMS AND VIOLATIONS



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The Worldwide Lawyers Association (WOLAS) was established by lawyers and academics working in Türkiye with the aim of operating on an international level. The association, which primarily focuses on human rights advocacy, is open to everyone engaged in this field. One of its primary objectives is to protect individuals' rights against all forms of authority. In pursuit of this goal, WOLAS adopts an approach that constantly questions the assumptions and blind spots in human rights discourse, striving to renew them with a more holistic and inclusive demand for justice.

WOLAS fundamentally upholds the idea that striving for truth is a prerequisite for the pursuit of justice. Committed to ethical principles in all its endeavours, the association actively participates in monitoring and reporting activities concerning countries and regions experiencing humanitarian crises. By establishing a global network of lawyers, WOLAS aims to bring together human rights defenders and legal professionals from around the world for a systematic and collective struggle. From a theoretical standpoint, the association emphasises the necessity of rights-based politics and advocacy, while in practice it provides legal support to victims and places great importance on standing alongside them in their pursuit of justice.

The belief that a collective consciousness is essential for a rights-based struggle is a prominent feature of WOLAS's work. Based in Istanbul, WOLAS is dedicated to leading rights-based efforts to achieve justice. Its mission includes raising awareness among all relevant circles, taking a firm stance against human rights violations, providing necessary training to support this fight, and promoting organised mobilisation.

For more information, please visit our website: wolas.org

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INTRODUCTION

The human rights situation in Uzbekistan has become a significant issue that has drawn the attention of the international community in recent years. The country has remained under authoritarian regime for many years, raising concerns about the serious violation of fundamental human rights. Interventions against freedom of expression, freedom of religion and conscience, and freedom of the press, along with serious human rights violations such as arbitrary detentions, torture and ill-treatment, have been widely reported in Uzbekistan. Although there have been some reform efforts in recent years, these reforms have generally been insufficient, failing to address the deep-rooted causes of human rights violations.

This report provides a comprehensive examination of the current state of human rights in Uzbekistan and evaluates the country's human rights record within the framework of international norms. It aims to provide an overall perspective on human rights in Uzbekistan by examining the government's reform efforts, identifying the areas where these reforms have fallen short, and exploring the challenges faced by human rights defenders. In addition, the report focuses on Uzbekistan's level of cooperation with international human rights mechanisms and the government's stance toward these mechanisms.

In preparing the report, a methodology based on open sources was adopted, drawing from reports by international human rights organizations, media outlets, and especially witness statements. These statements were collected through interviews conducted directly with victims or witnesses by the WOLAS human rights monitoring unit. Considering the risks of security and retaliation, the names of these individuals have not been included in the report. While the witness statements have been documented, their identities remain confidential. This approach enhances the credibility of the report while ensuring the protection of both witnesses and victims.

The report examines human rights violations under ten fundamental headings: Right to Life, Prohibition of Torture and Ill-treatment, Prohibition of Forced Labour, Right to Liberty and Security, Right to a Fair Trial, Freedom of Religion and Conscience, Freedom of Expression and Related Rights and Freedoms, Prohibition of Violence and Discrimination against Women, Deprivation of Citizenship, and Right to Elect and Be Elected. Each heading is thoroughly evaluated, and the report concludes with proposals aimed at preventing further human rights violations.

1. GENERAL OVERVIEW

Uzbekistan is a country rich in cultural heritage and deep-rooted history, located in the heart of Central Asia. Since gaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Uzbekistan has been governed by an authoritarian regime, which has had a significant impact on its social and cultural life. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan, approximately 96.3% of the population identifies as Muslim.¹

The rule of Uzbekistan's first President, Islam Karimov, which lasted from 1991 to 2016, was notorious for repressive policies and human rights violations. During this period, international reports frequently highlighted violations of the prohibition of torture and ill-treatment, the suppression of opposition, restrictions on freedom of expression, and strict control over freedom of religion and conscience. When Shavkat Mirziyoyev became president in 2016, he initiated a broad set of reforms in Uzbekistan. However, despite efforts to alleviate some of the negative effects of the authoritarian regime, these reforms have generally been insufficient, failing to address the root causes of human rights violations. Moreover, no opposition party has been able to operate legally, limiting the democratization process in the country, and international observers have questioned the real impact of the reforms. Reports indicate that torture and other forms of ill-treatment during the Karimov era persisted.²

Politically, fundamental democratic rights such as freedom of expression, press and association are severely restricted in Uzbekistan. Political opposition is almost entirely suppressed, and independent media outlets are forced to operate under strict censorship.

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1 U.S. Embassy in Uzbekistan, 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Uzbekistan, <https://uz.usembassy.gov/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom-uzbekistan/>

2 Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2022 Uzbekistan, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/uzbekistan/freedom-world/2022>.

From a social perspective, the state’s intense control over religion in Uzbekistan is striking. Although Islam remains the dominant religious identity, the state only permits officially approved interpretations of Islam. This has led to significant restrictions on religious freedoms and the persecution of individuals with alternative religious views. The restriction of religious practices and severe sanctions on religious activities not approved by the state have contributed to the suppression of religious practices, which are an important part of social life.

Culturally, there is a tension between traditional values and modernization efforts, in addition to state control. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan entered a period of rebuilding its identity, but the adoption of traditional policies during this process has created serious issues, particularly regarding women’s rights and gender equality. The state’s efforts at social engineering have especially violated freedom of religion and conscience.

These political, social, and cultural dynamics present serious challenges to the protection of human rights in Uzbekistan, creating significant obstacles to aligning with international norms. Despite reform efforts, the failure to address the root causes of these violations remains a key factor preventing improvements in the country’s human rights situation.

2. LEGAL STATUS

2.1. Right to Life

2.1.1. Legislation

Article 24 of the Constitution states that the right to life is an inalienable right of every human being and infringement against it shall be regarded as the gravest crime.

Under Article 97 of the Uzbekistan Criminal Code, the crime of intentional killing shall be punished by imprisonment from ten and fifteen years.

2.1.2. Violations

On 21 March 2023, in the Shahrixon district of Andijan, 12 police officers who beat a 32-year-old man to death while in pretrial detention were sentenced to only 3 to 4 years in prison for the crime of torture.³ Nevertheless, according to Article 97 of the Uzbekistan Criminal Code, the crime of intentional killing shall be punished by imprisonment from ten and fifteen years.

In Nukus, the capital of Uzbekistan’s autonomous Karakalpakstan region, protests against constitutional amendments began on July 1, 2022. During the law enforcement intervention, it was reported that at least 21 people were killed and over 270 were injured. Reports from independent organizations indicate that law enforcement forces used excessive, unnecessary, and lethal force during largely peaceful protests in Karakalpakstan, leading to severe injuries and unlawful deaths.

Witness (A) provided the following statement regarding the events in Karakalpakstan:

“After the intervention of security forces from Tashkent, the protests turned violent, resulting in casualties among both the protesters and security personnel.

.....
3 ibid.

Justice has not been served for the victims and their families. Central security forces in Uzbekistan brutally used live ammunition and grenades against protesters. Some police officers were also killed by the central security forces to incite chaos. Despite the central security forces' claims, the protests in Karakalpakstan were entirely peaceful and aimed at opposing the constitutional amendment proposal, which sought to end the region's autonomy. The central security forces aimed to suppress the protests quickly and without bloodshed, but when they failed to do so, they resorted to excessive force."

In an interview with witness (O)⁴, they stated that their spouse was detained in May 2024 and subjected to such severe torture that there was not a single healthy bone left in their body, and they were unable to go to the bathroom. Their spouse died in July 2024, with the cause of death reported as bone rheumatism. The witness also mentioned that none of their relatives attended the funeral out of fear that they might face arrest or violence.

2.1.3. Evaluation

The violations of the right to life in Uzbekistan raise serious concerns. The state's tolerance for arbitrary law enforcement actions indicates a persistent culture of impunity. These violations undermine the protection of the right to life, as defined in the Constitution and Criminal Code of Uzbekistan.

The conviction of the perpetrators, who beat a person to death in detention, to only 3 to 4 years in prison indicates that deaths from torture are not being addressed with the necessary seriousness. While more severe penalties are foreseen for the crime of intentional killing under Article 97 of the Criminal Code, the fact that the perpetrator received a light sentence is a clear sign that justice is not being served. From a human rights perspective, imposing inadequate penalties for crimes that directly violate the fundamental right to life, such as murder, constitutes a severe violation of justice and human dignity, regardless of the circumstances. Since the right to life is the foundation of all other rights, its protection is one of the most critical obligations of modern legal systems. Moreover, this situation also undermines trust in the judicial system and reinforces a culture of impunity in society.

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The events during the Karakalpakstan protests reveal how the state responds to peaceful demonstrations. The use of lethal force by law enforcement forces against demonstrators, resulting in unlawful deaths, constitutes a violation of the right to life by the state itself. The failure to deliver justice to the victims' families following these events shows that the state does not provide effective mechanisms to address human rights violations.

In conclusion, there is a need for radical reforms in the legal system to protect the right to life and prevent violations in Uzbekistan. Effectively punishing those responsible for serious human rights violations such as torture and deaths, providing compensation to victims, and ensuring accountability for security forces are critical steps toward ending the culture of impunity. Otherwise, the state's failure to fulfill its constitutional obligations will continue to severely undermine the pursuit of justice and trust in the law within society.

2.2. Prohibition of Torture and Ill-treatment

2.2.1. Legislation

Article 26 of the Constitution guarantees that no one may be subject to torture, violence, other cruel or humiliating human dignity treatment, thus legally guaranteeing the prohibition of torture and ill-treatment.

Article 110 of the Uzbekistan Criminal Code defines torture as a criminal offense. If it has not caused the consequences envisaged in Articles 104 and 105, the punishment for torture is a fine of 50 to 100 minimal monthly wages, up to 360 hours of mandatory public service, corrective labour for up to two years, house arrest for up to one year, or imprisonment for up to three years. In cases where a person dies as a result of torture, the perpetrator should be sentenced for intentional killing.

When these fundamental rights and freedoms, classified as crimes against humanity, are violated, no statute of limitations for prosecution or punishment applies under international law.

In the evaluation of the Uzbekistan Criminal Code made by the UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies in 2020, proposals were made to amend Articles 159, 216, 244¹, and 244²

concerning crimes against the state and the constitutional order, as well as Article 157 on high treason. Article 221, which allows for arbitrary extensions of sentences for political prisoners, was also advised to be repealed. Additionally, it was proposed that Article 235, which defines torture, be brought in line with Article 1 of the UN Convention against Torture and Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. These proposals indicate that the Uzbekistan Criminal Code does not fully comply with international human rights standards.⁵

In August 2024, amendments were made to the Law on Humane Treatment of Prisoners, aimed at improving legislation to guarantee the rights and freedoms of prisoners, create more comfortable conditions for them, and further improve their detention conditions.⁶

Uzbekistan has not yet ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

2.2.2. Violations

2.2.2.1. Violations at the Law Enforcement Stage

In an interview with Witness (B), who spent 20 years in prison before being released in 2019, the following statement was made: *“Being a devout person teaching the principles of Islam apolitically was enough for them to arrest me and accuse me of terrorism. I was held for five months in the basement of the State Security Center at the Tashkent Police Department, where I was subjected to severe beatings, electric shocks, nail-pulling, and denial of medical treatment. I did not see any sunlight during this period. One of the most terrifying forms*

5 United Nations Committee against Torture, Concluding Observations on the Fifth Periodic Report of Uzbekistan, CAT/C/UZB/CO/5, January 14, 2020. <https://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2FPPRiCAqhKb7yhsjut9aDww3A3fMqDEftLPyqbeYxDfCWbn1ogeAFSU3PSPiYRszo%2B8eaYik6M3H4LuStZiEAaJob4ZXyo3n-CHgGtGBuqDErPV8vSDNVf5uubb>, United Nations Human Rights Committee, Concluding Observations on the Fifth Periodic Report of Uzbekistan, CCPR/C/UZB/CO/5, May 1, 2020. <https://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2FPPRiCAqhKb7yhsj07MlyGKLOR0JAcDdFOt9%2FmNbr457d5EDo002gTLkDd0XlnHhi3DnhjOdNP-kjrJh9MB4nu%2Fexi%2FgB%2BHfYmilWiOJAibtSI0jRdOeWD%2Fe5>.

6 National Database of Legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan, <https://lex.uz/en/docs/7095866>

7 Witness Number (B) - Documented to support the report and hidden in line with the association’s policies to protect witnesses and victims and prevent retaliation.

of torture I endured was being hung by my wrists for four to five days without food or water.”

In the consideration of the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan on the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights by the Human Rights Committee in 2020, concerns were raised about political prisoners, impunity for torture and ill-treatment, and forced labour in the cotton industry. It was expressed that despite the release of political prisoners, many people remained imprisoned for political reasons, and there were concerns about impunity and lack of accountability for torture and ill-treatment, especially in places of detention.⁸

Muslim blogger Fazilhoja Arifhojaev, who was sentenced to seven and a half years in prison for a Facebook post, reported to his lawyer in September 2021 that while in pretrial detention, police handcuffed Arifhojaev to a pipe and made him sit in a stress position for nearly 12 hours, causing him excruciating pain. However, the Uzbek authorities did not investigate his claims of torture.⁹

In August 2023, a Tashkent court sentenced Abduqodir Muminov, an investigative blogger, to seven years and three months in prison on multiple criminal charges. At his appeal hearing, Muminov said he had been tortured in detention.¹⁰

In an interview, Witness (O)¹¹ stated that their spouse was last detained in May 2024, brutally beaten to the extent that their fingers and hands were broken, their body left without a single healthy bone, and they were unable to go to the bathroom. Additionally, their daughter, who lived alone in Uzbekistan, was threatened with arrest and torture and subjected to verbal abuse to prevent her from telling anyone about her mother’s experiences. The daughter passed away in July 2024. Photos and vide-

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 8 High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Uzbekistan is building a culture of Human Rights, but concerns about political prisoners, torture, forced labour and corruption remain experts of the Human Rights Committee say”, March 3, 2020, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2020/03/uzbekistan-building-culture-human-rights-concerns-about-political-prisoners>.

9 Human Rights Watch, Uzbekistan: Muslim Blogger Faces Eight-Year Prison Term, December 9, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/12/09/uzbekistan-muslim-blogger-faces-eight-year-prison-term>.

10 Human Rights Watch, World Report 2024 Events of 2023, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2024/01/World%20Report%202024%20LOWRES%20WEBSPREADS_0.pdf

11 Witness Number (O) - Documented to support the report and hidden in line with the association’s policies to protect witnesses and victims and prevent retaliation.

os of her body taken after the death were reviewed by the WOLAS monitoring unit, but due to the witness’s request for confidentiality out of fear of violence or threats against them and their family, they were not included in the report.

Dauletmurat Tazhimuratov, a lawyer and journalist, was accused of orchestrating mass riots during the Karakalpakstan events. Tazhimuratov testified that he was beaten by law enforcement, including with a stun gun. He said that the police stood on his head, causing him to lose consciousness.¹² His lawyer, Sergey Mayorov, reported in mid-September that Tazhimuratov continued to face ill-treatment and restrictions in prison. However, authorities have failed to conduct effective investigations into the allegations of torture.¹³

Interviews conducted by the WOLAS human rights monitoring unit revealed that individuals were forced to shave their beards, and those who refused had their beards forcibly shaved.

2.2.2.2. Violations in the Judicial and Enforcement Stages

It has been observed that Uzbek police and courts rely on evidence from “forced anal examinations,” a practice recognized by the World Health Organization as a form of violence and torture during prosecution.

In an interview with Witness (B)¹⁴, who spent 20 years in prison before being released in 2019, the following statements were made regarding the torture and ill-treatment endured in Uzbekistan: “After my arrest, I was charged with attempting to overthrow the government and violating the constitution. I was sentenced to 19 years and 8 months in prison. After the court’s decision, I was placed in the Tash Turma prison, a facility designated for those sentenced to life imprisonment and death penalty. I spent four months in this prison under inhumane and harsh conditions. I was not allowed to inform my family of my whereabouts. When I was transferred to Tashkent 65 prison, my family was

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12 Human Rights Watch, Uzbekistan: 16-Year Sentence in Autonomous Region Protests, January 31, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/01/31/uzbekistan-16-year-sentence-autonomous-region-protests>.

13 *ibid.*

14 Witness Number (B) - Documented to support the report and hidden in line with the association’s policies to protect witnesses and victims and prevent retaliation.

still unaware of where I was being held for the entire year I spent in solitary confinement. Because the prison administration knew I was a Muslim, I was subjected to severe torture. Once, I was brutally tortured by being beaten with iron rods and kicked by guards, resulting in large wounds all over my back. Despite my poor health at the time, I was not allowed to see a doctor. We would pray with our eyes to avoid being tortured for praying, trying to avoid detection by the guards or the criminal inmates tasked with monitoring us for political or religious reasons. We were not allowed to see books, hold pens, or paper, as these were banned. We were beaten for two hours a day when going to the toilet, the bathroom, or returning to our cells. Until 2013, prisoners were prohibited from speaking to each other for political or religious reasons. One of the policies adopted by the prison administration was to incite violent criminals to attack us and torture us, granting them privileges in return. These violent criminals were given iron rods to use against us. I spent a year in solitary confinement in both Tashkent 65 and Tashkent 1 prisons without seeing any sun. After being released from prison, I had to leave my country, as I was afraid of re-arrest or new charges.”

In an interview with Witness (C)¹⁵, the following details were shared about torture and ill-treatment in Uzbekistan: “The suffering endured was not limited to torture, psychological and physical abuse, prohibition of worship, daily harassment, and frequent transfers between prisons, but extended to forced labour for 10 hours a day. While criminal convicts worked under better conditions for 6 hours a day, a person imprisoned for religious reasons was forced to work 10 hours a day, receiving a salary equivalent to only \$30 per month.”

2.2.3. Evaluation

From the statements of witnesses, media, and human rights reports, it is evident that torture and ill-treatment have long been a serious and systematic problem in Uzbekistan. Particularly during detention, arrest, execution, and imprisonment processes, individuals are frequently subjected to physical and psychological violence, torture, ill-treatment, and forced labour. The failure of the Uzbekistan Criminal Code to align

¹⁵ Witness Number (C) - Documented to support the report and hidden in line with the association’s policies to protect witnesses and victims and prevent retaliation.

with international conventions exacerbates the situation, leaving victims of torture and ill-treatment without effective legal protection. Additionally, the widespread use of excessive, unnecessary, and even deadly force during peaceful demonstrations has become a common practice. Authorities fail to adequately investigate allegations of torture and ill-treatment, and such crimes are often left unpunished. The lack of sufficient media coverage and public attention to this issue highlights the significant gaps in the rule of law and human rights protections, creating a sense of vulnerability among citizens. Despite these challenges, the August 2024 amendments to the Law on Humane Treatment of Prisoners offer some hope for the future.

2.3. Prohibition of Forced Labour

2.3.1. Legislation

According to Article 37 of the Constitution, *“Any forced labour shall be prohibited except for punishment under the sentence of a court or some other instances stipulated by law.”*

Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which Uzbekistan is a party, states, *“Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work, and to protection against unemployment.”*

Article 8 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Uzbekistan is also a party, prohibits slavery and forced labour, stating, *“No one shall be held in slavery; slavery and the slave-trade in all their forms shall be prohibited. No one shall be held in servitude. No one shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labour.”*

Uzbekistan has ratified the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) regulated by the International Labour Organization (ILO).

2.3.2. Violations

Uzbekistan has successfully ended systematic forced labour in the cotton harvest. In March 2022, an alliance of human rights non-governmental (NGO) groups, trade unions, and business associations announced the end of the long-standing international

boycott of Uzbek cotton.¹⁶ While independent cotton harvest monitors have found no evidence of systematic, government-imposed forced labour for the second consecutive year, isolated incidents of forced labour and extortion in the cotton fields persists.¹⁷

In preparation for visits by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev to certain regions, roads were paved, walls were painted, and even state institution employees were mobilized to paint walls in some districts.¹⁸ On 14 March 2018, Diana Inikova, a teacher in the Kattakurgan district of the Samarkand region, died after being hit by a truck while painting barriers on a highway.¹⁹

During his visit to the Sirdaryo region, President Mirziyoyev stated that the time had come to completely eradicate forced labour. He also emphasized in his speech at the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly on September 19, 2017 that effective measures were being taken in cooperation with the ILO to eliminate forced labour. On April 17, 2018, the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan held a special meeting prohibiting the participation of medical and educational workers, students, and representatives of social sectors in fieldwork and landscaping activities. As a result, some officials were given warnings or reprimands.²⁰

2.3.3. Evaluation

Uzbekistan, once known as the Soviet Union’s cotton field, has made significant progress in eliminating systematic forced labour in cotton production. The end of the international boycott in 2022 demonstrates that these reforms have been recognized on a global scale.

16 Hugh Williamson, Uzbekistan Ends Systemic Forced Labor, Civil Society Says, Human Rights Watch, March 11, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/11/uzbekistan-ends-systemic-forced-labor-civil-society-says>.

17 Human Rights Watch, World Report 2024 Events of 2023, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2024/01/World%20Report%202024%20LOWRES%20WEBSPREADS_0.pdf

18 <https://www.ozodlik.org/a/%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B4%D0%B8%D0%B6%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B4%D0%B0-%D0%BC%D0%B8%D1%80%D0%B7%D0%B8%D1%91%D0%B5%D0%B2%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B3-%D0%BA%D1%83%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%BB%D0%B3%D0%B0%D0%BD-%D0%B2%D0%B0-%D0%BA-D1%83%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%BB%D0%BC%D0%B0%D0%B3%D0%B0%D0%BD-%D1%82%D0%B0%D1%88-D1%80%D0%B8%D1%84%D0%B8%D0%B3%D0%B0-%D2%B3%D0%BE%D0%B7%D0%B8%D1%80%D0%BB%D0-B8%D0%BA-%D1%9E%D2%9B%D0%B8%D1%82%D1%83%D0%B2%D1%87%D0%B8%D0%BB%D0%B0%D1%80-%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%B2%D0%BE%D1%80-%D0%BE%D2%9B%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%BE%D2%9B%D0-B4%D0%B0/31143860.html>

19 <https://kun.uz/kr/52284664?q=52284664>

20 <https://kun.uz/ru/news/2018/04/20/problems-prinuditelnogo-truda-v-uzbekistane-cast-1>

However, the continued practice of mobilizing public employees for forced labour in preparation for visits by President Mirziyoyev indicates that forced labour persists in different forms. This situation highlights that, despite reform efforts, a deep-rooted change in mindset regarding human rights practices has not yet been fully realized.

2.4. Right to Liberty and Security

2.4.1. Legislation

Article 25 of the Constitution states: *“Everyone shall have the right to freedom and inviolability of the person. No one may be arrested or taken into custody except on lawful ground.”*

2.4.2. Violations

Throughout the report, witness statements and documented violations provide various instances of violations on the right to liberty and security. For brevity, only one specific case is presented here:

In May 2023, blogger Elmurod Odil claimed that he was sentenced to 15 days’ administrative arrest for hooliganism and disobeying authorities after he tried to film a meeting between silk farmers and local authorities. Odil claimed police beat him in custody.²¹

2.4.3. Evaluation

The right to liberty and security in Uzbekistan is one of the most frequently and severely violated human rights. The state often uses violations of this right as a tool for enforcing policies through arbitrary detention, arrest, and unlawful imprisonment. The violation of liberty and security does not only harm individuals but also creates a pervasive atmosphere of fear in society, making it easier for other human rights violations to occur.

In Uzbekistan, the widespread practice of arbitrary detention and imprisonment disregards fundamental human rights. The inefficiency of appeal and oversight mechanisms facilitates the prevalence and persistence of these violations. The violation of

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21 Human Rights Watch, World Report 2024 Events of 2023, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2024/01/World%20Report%202024%20LOWRES%20WEBSPREADS_0.pdf

the right to liberty and security not only leads to individual victimization but also serves as a tool to reinforce the fear of authority within Uzbek society.

These factors highlight the urgent need for comprehensive reforms to protect and strengthen the right to liberty and security in accordance with international human rights standards. Preventing arbitrary detentions and implementing effective oversight mechanisms would be critical steps in addressing other human rights violations in the country.

2.5. Right to a Fair Trial

2.5.1. Legislation

Article 19 of the Constitution states: *“ A citizen of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the state shall be bound by mutual rights and mutual responsibility. Citizens’ rights and freedoms, established by the Constitution and laws, shall be inalienable. No one shall have the right to deprive or limit them without a court.”*

Article 26 states: *“ Everyone, accused to perform a crime, shall be considered not guilty, so long as his guilt is not established by legal order, public legal proceeding when all possibilities, to protect him, are secured.”*

Article 116 states: *“An accused shall be ensured the right to defense. The right to legal assistance shall be guaranteed at any stage of investigation and legal proceedings.”*

2.5.2. Violations

During an interview with Witness (B) regarding the lack of a fair trial, they explained that they were not granted the right to defend themselves, were not allowed to choose their own lawyer, and that the lawyer assigned to them was merely a formality appointed by the authorities. They were pressured into signing a document waiving their right to appeal. Similarly, Witness (P), a journalist, highlighted another violation of legal rights, revealing that, contrary to Uzbek laws prohibiting a witness from testifying in multiple cases, the government used a witness to give false testimony in order to convict many individuals.

The prevalence of bribery in Uzbekistan also manifests as a violation of the right to a fair trial. In an interview with Witness (N)²², it was shared that the 10-year prison sentence, which was initially given based on police statements not supported by evidence, was overturned by the Court of Appeal in exchange for money.

Another example of this violation can be seen in the case of Witness (E)²³, who shared that in 2002, they were unlawfully taken to a state security center and subjected to horrific torture for three days. After the torture, they were thrown into a cemetery by security officers, feeling as though they were drowning in their own blood. Despite making complaints afterward, an investigation found no police officers involved, without conducting a thorough review of the complaint. During the interview, when discussing the torture they had endured, the witness began to tremble severely and had difficulty speaking, eventually collapsing on the floor.

In the events of Karakalpakstan in 2022, many of those detained were subjected to violence without the ability to communicate with a lawyer.²⁴ Additionally, in March 2023, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk visited Uzbekistan and urged an “after action” review of the Karakalpakstan events, calling for accountability for the loss of lives.²⁵ In a resolution adopted by the European Parliament on October 2, 2023, expressing concerns about Uzbekistan’s poor human rights record. The resolution called for a “genuinely independent, impartial and effective investigation into the events” of July 2022 in Karakalpakstan.²⁶

On November 8, 2023, Uzbekistan appeared before the UN Human Rights Council for its fourth Universal Periodic Review. The Uzbek government was advised to take steps to ensure that perpetrators are not left unpunished.²⁷

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22 Witness (N)- Documented to support the report and hidden in line with the association's policies to protect witnesses and victims and prevent retaliation.

23 Witness (E)- Documented to support the report and hidden in line with the association's policies to protect witnesses and victims and prevent retaliation.

24 Human Rights Watch, Uzbekistan: Police Abuses in Autonomous Region Protests, November 7, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/11/07/uzbekistan-police-abuses-autonomous-region-protests>

25 Human Rights Watch, World Report 2024 Events of 2023, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2024/01/World%20Report%202024%20LOWRES%20WEBSPREADS_0.pdf

26 Human Rights Watch, World Report 2024 Events of 2023, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2024/01/World%20Report%202024%20LOWRES%20WEBSPREADS_0.pdf

27 Human Rights Watch, World Report 2024 Events of 2023, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2024/01/World%20Report%202024%20LOWRES%20WEBSPREADS_0.pdf

2.5.3. Evaluation

The provisions in the Constitution indicate that the right to a fair trial is guaranteed by the Uzbek Constitution. However, this right is seriously violated in Uzbekistan due to both structural and practical deficiencies. The failure to recognize the right to defense and to choose a lawyer, the use of false witnesses, and the lack of independent judicial processes clearly show that trials are often mere formalities. The possibility of influencing the judiciary through bribery further demonstrates that the real decision-making power lies with the executive branch, raising significant concerns about judicial independence. This situation contradicts the rule of law and the principle of justice, making it impossible to effectively protect individuals' rights.

The fact that individuals are forced to give bribes to avoid wrongful punishment reveals the normalization of bribery and judicial corruption in Uzbekistan. Such practices undermine the trust in the judiciary and impede citizens' pursuit of justice.

Without a fair judicial system, individuals cannot seek compensation for the rights violations they have suffered, leading to the perpetuation of these violations. During the Karimov regime, although crimes against humanity such as assaults on bodily integrity and torture were widespread, the lack of effective investigations and the failure to provide compensation to the victims show that the right to a fair trial remains unprotected. According to interviews conducted by the WOLAS human rights monitoring unit, all witnesses who were subjected to torture and ill-treatment stated that they did not receive any compensation and that the perpetrators were not punished.

Considering that torture and ill-treatment are not subject to statute of limitations under international law, the continued culture of impunity for such crimes in Uzbekistan represents a serious obstacle to the administration of justice.

In conclusion, the violation of the right to a fair trial in Uzbekistan directly harms individuals' fundamental rights and freedoms, destroys the independence of the judiciary, and undermines public trust in justice. Bribery and corruption in the judiciary create an environment of legal insecurity, and the failure to initiate necessary investigations to compensate victims highlights the absence of an effective mechanism to prevent human rights violations. Therefore, ensuring judicial independence and

establishing just satisfaction mechanisms for victims in Uzbekistan is an urgent necessity in building a rule of law that respects human rights.

2.6. Freedom of Religion and Conscience

2.6.1. Legislation

According to Article 18 of the Uzbek Constitution, all citizens are equal regardless of their religious beliefs. Article 31 states that freedom of conscience shall be guaranteed to all. Everyone shall have the right to profess or not to profess any religion. A compulsory imposition of religion shall be impermissible. Article 61 states that religious organizations and associations shall be separated from the state and equal before law. The state shall not interfere in the activity of religious associations. Religious organizations include mosques, churches, places of worship, religious schools, and any other officially registered organizations operating within a religious framework.

Nonetheless, according to the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations, all religious organizations must register with the state, and any religious activity not approved by the state is prohibited. In 2021, amendments were made to the law to relax some restrictions. The ban on wearing headscarves and other religious attire in public places was lifted, the process for registering religious organizations was simplified, and only courts were granted the authority to suspend the activities of religious organizations.²⁸

According to Article 184⁴ of the Administrative Responsibility Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan: *“Covering one’s face in public places to the extent that it prevents personal identification, except in cases where a special head covering is worn for medical reasons, traffic safety, work or service activities, or during sporting and cultural events, and in other situations explicitly permitted by law, excluding face covering during these specified activities, shall result in a fine of ten to fifteen times the minimum monthly wage.”*

According to Article 10 of the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations, which is titled as materials of religious content, their production,

28 Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting, <https://cabar.asia/en/uzbekistan-hijabs-may-be-worn-but-not-in-schools>

import and distribution: *“Religious content materials are books, brochures, magazines, newspapers, leaflets, other printed publications, signs, objects, symbols, audiovisual works (television, film and video films, clips, recordings of concert programs, cartoons and others), electronic media (floppy disks, CDs, DVDs, built-in and removable memory cards, materials posted on the Internet, and others) reflecting the dogmatic foundations, history, ideology of religious teachings and comments, the practice of rites of various religious beliefs, as well as the assessment of individuals, historical facts and events from the standpoint of religion. The production, importation and distribution of materials of religious content on the territory of the Republic of Uzbekistan are carried out after receiving a positive conclusion from a religious expertise in order to prevent the spread in society of ideas and views that contribute to the violation of interfaith harmony and religious tolerance, calling for violence and arbitrariness on religious grounds. The procedure for the manufacture, importation and distribution of materials of religious content is determined by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan.”*

Article 244² of the Criminal Code states: *“Establishment, direction of or participation in religious extremist, separatist, fundamentalist or other banned organizations –shall be punished with imprisonment from five to fifteen years.”*

Article 244³ states: *“Illegal production, storage, import, or distribution of materials of religious content, or materials intended for distribution, shall result in the confiscation of such illegal materials and a fine of 20 to 100 times the minimum monthly wage for private individuals and a fine of 50 to 150 times the minimum monthly wage for government officials.”*

Regulations approved by the Ministry of Education prohibit the wearing of headscarves from elementary to high school, and the same restrictions generally apply to universities, although some universities have more flexible rules due to their internal policies.

2.6.2. General Overview

Until 2016, Islamic practices were strongly opposed in Uzbekistan due to fears of the spread of radical views. Women who wore headscarves in public were taken to “pre-

vention stations” for instructive talks, men’s beards were forcibly shaved, and those who expressed religious beliefs were subjected to torture, ill-treatment, and arbitrarily sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. The general attitude towards religion has softened significantly since President Shavkat Mirziyoyev came into power in 2016. In a country where over 90% of the population identifies as Muslim, the wearing of religious attire and participation in religious rituals has become more accepted. The call to prayer is now permitted, and underage boys are allowed to pray in groups. In 2018, the quota for pilgrimage to Mecca was increased, and the cost was reduced. With the 2021 legal amendment, the easing of restrictions on freedom of religion and conscience has been implemented.

2.6.3. Violations

Despite recent reforms, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has recommended that Uzbekistan remain on the Special Watch List due to serious religious freedom violations.²⁹ In an interview with Witness (D)³⁰, the following information was shared regarding restrictions on religious practices in daily life: *“Women are still prohibited from wearing headscarves in government institutions and educational settings. Anyone who attempts to demonstrate their piety, give sermons, or teach religious lessons is at risk of arrest and torture. Restaurants that refuse to serve alcohol to their customers are shut down, and no one is allowed to use Islamic names for business purposes. Social media users are penalized for posting religious content or prayers; for instance, blogger Namaz Murdon was fined \$500 for sharing religious information.”*

In addition to the ban on headscarves, women are also prohibited from wearing niqab. The WOLAS human rights monitoring unit observed that women who wished to wear niqab attempted to bypass the ban by wearing medical masks.

The government continues to maintain tight control over religious practices, especially those that do not comply with the state-approved interpretation of

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29 For more information, see <https://www.uscirf.gov/countries/uzbekistan>

30 Witness (D)- Documented to support the report and hidden in line with the association's policies to protect witnesses and victims and prevent retaliation.

Islam.³¹ For instance, individuals have been prosecuted for possessing or distributing religious materials, even though these materials did not promote violence.³² The following statements were made in an interview with Witness (H)³³ regarding the fact that being religious can lead to encountering many negative attitudes: *“I am a devout Uzbek citizen with no political activities. In 1995, the disappearance of Islamic scholar Abdulvali Qori Mirzaev led to protests, during which 200 of us, including myself, were arrested. We were sentenced to three years in prison after an unfair trial. A year later, we were pardoned. After the 1999 bombings near the Constitutional Court, a large security crackdown ensued against religious communities, resulting in the arrest of around 10,000 people. While 3,000 were released, the remaining 7,000 received sentences ranging from three years to the death penalty. In 2000, after refusing to spy for the security services, I was arrested for attempting to overthrow the government and spent 20 years in prison without a fair trial. Prison transfers were harsh, and I was sent to Jasliq prison, known for its severe conditions, where praying and possessing religious books were forbidden. Even after my sentence ended in 2017, the authorities continued to subject me to harsh conditions. After 20 years of suffering, I was finally released.”*

In the interview with Witness (C)³⁴, the following statements were made: *“In 2000, I was arrested without any reason just because I was a devout Muslim, and our suffering began. My life revolved around running a spare parts shop and taking care of my family. Suddenly, I was thrown into a detention center known as ‘Avolgatskik’, used mostly for foreigners, where 20 people were held in a room designed for five. After two months there, I was transferred to a police cell for 10 days, and then to the ‘Tash Turma’ prison, where I spent a year under inhumane underground conditions. I was accused of terrorism and tried with seven others in a fast and unfair*

31 Catherine Putz, Revisiting Uzbekistan’s Progress on Religious Freedom, *The Diplomat*, March 31, 2023, <https://thediplomat.com/2023/03/revisiting-uzbekistans-progress-on-religious-freedom/>

32 Human Rights Watch, Uzbekistan: Backsliding on Religious Freedom Promises, Muslims Prosecuted; Faith Face Registration Obstacles, May 24, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/05/24/uzbekistan-backsliding-religious-freedom-promises>

33 Witness Number (H) - Documented to support the report and hidden in line with the association’s policies to protect witnesses and victims and prevent retaliation.

34 Witness Number (C) - Documented to support the report and hidden in line with the association’s policies to protect witnesses and victims and prevent retaliation.

trial without legal representation or any guarantees. By December 2001, after 10-15 hearings, I was sentenced to 10 years in prison. These types of trials are usually just formalities, as the executive authorities appoint certain judges to control the outcomes and severely punish undesirable citizens. I stayed in Jasliq Prison, known for its harsh conditions and severe torture, for three years, one year in Navoi 47 Prison, one year in Navoi 46 Prison, and five years in Navoi 29 Prison.”

A young man in the Samarkand region was sentenced to three years in prison for sending religious music and religious messages via a messaging app. The messages were reviewed, and five religious messages were found.³⁵

A 57-year-old woman from the Navoi region of Uzbekistan was sentenced to three years of restricted freedom in 2018 for liking a religious speech on a social media platform while working as a migrant worker in Türkiye. The imposed sentence included curfews, movement restrictions, and a ban on internet usage.³⁶

An Uzbek website was fined 12 million 250 thousand Uzbek Soms for bypassing the evaluation process of theological experts in the Religious Affairs Committee when publishing religious content. The content was not shared in accordance with the procedures prescribed by law, even though the religious content did not pose a threat to the constitutional order or social stability. A news article titled “ *New Zealand Police introduce hijab to uniform*” was banned because it included the statement, “*I realised more Muslim women were needed in the police. It feels great to be able to go out and show the New Zealand Police hijab as part of my uniform. I think that seeing it, more Muslim women will want to join as well.*” as it was considered likely to incite issues.³⁷

In 2023, Sardor Rahmonkulov, a 21-year-old, was sentenced to five years in prison for sending a religious song to his classmate via Telegram three years ago.³⁸

Some reforms have been implemented in the country, such as removing a large number of names from a blacklist of suspected extremists and registering some non-Muslim religious communities. However, these reforms have not

35 <https://www.gazeta.uz/uz/2024/11/15/nurobod/>

36 <https://kun.uz/kr/news/2023/06/10/navoiylik-keksa-ayol-5-yil-oldin-diniy-maruzaga-klass-bosgani-uchun-3-yilga-ozodlikdan-cheklandi>

37 <https://kun.uz/15456916>

38 <https://kun.uz/kr/news/2023/02/03/telefonidan-diniy-qoshiq-topilgan-21-yoshli-yigit-5-yilga-qamaldi>

been sufficient.³⁹ In an interview with Witness (J)⁴⁰, the following statements were made: *“The ‘blacklist’ of 17,000 names of those wanted or under surveillance has been reduced to 1,000. Although the number has decreased, the existence of such a list without any legal grounds still summarizes the unlawful situation in Uzbekistan. Despite partial improvements, the hijab ban for female students in secondary and higher education continues. Religious education for children is still being obstructed, and arbitrary detentions and interrogations continue for those accused of being ‘extremists’. One issue that I particularly want to raise is the situation of Muslims who were investigated or imprisoned during the Karimov period under accusations of ‘violating the constitution’ or ‘being extremists, fundamentalists, or radical religious individuals’. Some of these individuals, accused solely for their thoughts or beliefs without any alleged actions, are still serving long-term prison sentences; others have been forced to flee to other countries.”*

The Resolution No. 666, which prohibits students from wearing headscarves and any other religious symbols at school, is considered another freedom-restricting issue in the country. In an interview with Witness (I)⁴¹, the witness made the following statements: *“I was an imam at a mosque. During this time, the Resolution No. 666 was issued, which banned growing beards and prohibited students under the age of eighteen from praying at mosques, as well as covering the neck and ears with a headscarf. The government also began pressuring imams to enforce these resolutions. In September 2018, I gave a sermon on the pulpit and recorded a special video asking the President of Uzbekistan not to enforce this resolution. The video went viral on social media, and comments showed I was the only imam out of 5,000 who objected. Afterward, it became routine for the government to summon me for questioning every three days, and I was dismissed. I felt like I was being watched 24/7, which was very frightening. In 2018, I decided to leave the country. Although the government did not directly target us, it created problems through the local civilians who treated us badly —not to mention the words they used against us.”*

³⁹ For more information, see <https://www.uscirf.gov/countries/uzbekistan>

⁴⁰ Witness number (J)- Documented to support the report and hidden in line with the association's policies to protect witnesses and victims and prevent retaliation.

⁴¹ Witness (I)- Documented to support the report and hidden in line with the association's policies to protect witnesses and victims and prevent retaliation.

Witness (J)⁴² stated that opposition or religious Uzbek citizens living abroad are targeted under the accusation of being involved in terrorist activities, and international mechanisms request their extradition. Those who are extradited are subjected to lengthy interrogations, pressure, and even imprisonment upon returning to Uzbekistan.

On-site observations by the WOLAS human rights monitoring unit revealed that praying outside of mosques is prohibited, the call to prayer is recited at very low volumes, and mosque construction is strictly monitored. After Shavkat Mirziyoyev came into power, small mosques were opened in public areas like shopping malls, but by 2024, almost all of them had closed, except for a few in tourist-heavy areas. In the interview with Witness (M)⁴³, they stated that the nearest mosque is several kilometers away from their home, and after the closure of all prayer rooms in public spaces and workplaces, they are unable to pray anywhere except at the mosque and their home. They were also held accountable for praying in a public place and threatened with punishment if this were to happen again.

The WOLAS human rights monitoring unit has observed that in Uzbekistan, there is a state-owned religious foundation named “Waqf,” and no other religious organization is allowed to operate. In Islam, the culture of waqf plays an essential role in maintaining the continuity of religious life and encourages charitable and educational activities. Waqfs contribute to the spread of religion and strengthen social solidarity through mosques and social services. However, in Uzbekistan, religiously motivated foundations and associations are not permitted in order to hindering the contribution of the waqf culture to religion. The government has a monopoly on this power, preventing the establishment of charitable organizations with religious motivations that could engage in social welfare activities and collect donations.

In on-site observations conducted by the WOLAS Monitoring Team, it was observed that despite the large majority of the population being Muslim, there are very few mosques, and the adhan (call to prayer) is so quiet that it cannot be heard. Even though the adhan is broadcast through loudspeakers, the speakers are generally placed on the walls of the mosque facing the ground, rather than on the minarets. It

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42 Witness (J)- Documented to support the report and hidden in line with the association's policies to protect witnesses and victims and prevent retaliation.

43 Witness (M)- Documented to support the report and hidden in line with the association's policies to protect witnesses and victims and prevent retaliation.

was noted that the state adopts a uniform understanding of religion for Muslims and provides very limited freedom in religious matters. Those who step outside this narrow boundary are subjected to legal action on the grounds of “religious extremism” and often punished with ill-treatment by authorities during these legal procedures.

Interviews with the local population revealed that, after the presidential change, there were some improvements in freedom of worship, and mosques were opened in public spaces and certain commercial establishments. However, pressure to close these mosques has led to their closure, and if someone is caught praying in a public space, the police may intervene. There are also requirements for permits to build mosques, but most applications for mosque construction are rejected. Muslims with beards are forced to shave, and intelligence services occasionally target bearded individuals at mosques. In summary, following the change of presidency in 2016, there was a period of improvements, and the country is currently in a better position in terms of rights and freedoms compared to before. Even so, it has been observed that the country is now heading back toward the previous regime’s restrictions, raising concerns that recent gains may be lost.

Witness (K)⁴⁴ shared that while the situation is better than it was during the Karimov era, security restrictions on religious individuals continue. People with beards are arrested and forced to shave. Praying in public places is banned, and those caught praying can face fines or detention, with the option of paying bribes to avoid these penalties. In an interview with Witness (L)⁴⁵, it was stated that they were asked to shave their beard and, in order to avoid being detained for 15 days and fined \$100, they bribed police officers and reached an agreement with them.

2.6.4. Evaluation

Before 2016, it was observed that Uzbekistan imposed strict restrictions on religious life, with the state banning independent religious activities and particularly prohibiting religious attire, such as headscarves, in public spaces. Religious activities and events were tightly controlled, religious education was only allowed in state-controlled insti-

44 Witness (K)- Documented to support the report and hidden in line with the association's policies to protect witnesses and victims and prevent retaliation.

45 Witness (L)- Documented to support the report and hidden in line with the association's policies to protect witnesses and victims and prevent retaliation.

tutions, and independent religious schools were banned. Those expressing their religious beliefs were frequently subjected to torture and arbitrary imprisonment.

Based on witness statements and on-site observations conducted by the WOLAS human rights monitoring team, it is evident that religious freedoms in Uzbekistan are severely restricted. Individuals seeking to exercise their freedom of religion and conscience are subjected to pressure, arbitrary detentions, and unfair trials. The prohibition of wearing beards, headscarves in schools, performing prayers in public areas outside mosques, tight control of mosque construction, the adhan being recited at very low volumes, and the punishment of social media users sharing religious content all highlight the extent of this oppression.

Women are banned from wearing the niqab (face veil). Although this ban is claimed to be for security purposes, such as identifying individuals, the fact that medical masks or ski masks covering the same areas of the face are not prohibited shows that the ban is aimed at restricting the religious practices of individuals belonging to a particular faith.

Individuals subjected to restrictions on freedom of religion and conscience can avoid these limitations and penalties by bribing public officials, which normalizes bribery in the country.

Although reforms regarding religious freedom were introduced in Uzbekistan starting from 2016, restrictions on religious freedoms continue across the country. The government, in particular, imposes strict control over religious practices that deviate from the state-approved interpretations of Islam. Practices such as individuals being prosecuted for possessing or sharing religious materials, despite not promoting violence, indicate that religious freedoms are still under serious pressure.

2.7. Freedom of Expression and Related Rights and Freedoms

2.7.1. Legislation

Article 29 of the Constitution of Uzbekistan states that everyone shall be guaranteed freedom of thought, speech and convictions. The same article further mentions that everyone shall have the right to seek, obtain and disseminate any information, except that which is directed against the existing constitutional system and in some other instances specified by law. Article 79 states that the mass media shall be free and act

in accordance with the law, and that censorship is impermissible. These provisions guarantee freedom of the press. However, the Uzbekistan Criminal Code criminalizes denigration (Article 139), insult (Article 140), and insult against president (Article 158). In 2020, the commission of these offenses through the internet or telecommunications was considered an aggravated form.

The draft of Information Code, published in December 2022, aims to amend the existing eight laws regulating mass media, freedom of expression, access to information, and journalistic activities. The draft includes positive changes, such as the right to free use of information for everyone and the protection of everyone’s right to search, obtain, examine, distribute, use, and store information without discrimination. On the other hand, it also introduces the requirement not only to verify the accuracy of information but also to ensure that all information distributed by any media is true and accurate, thereby imposing broad and disproportionate legal responsibility on media organizations, journalists, and bloggers for spreading false information. The use of vague and broad terms such as “extremism,” “fundamentalism,” and “separatism,” as well as provisions prohibiting information that invites unauthorized participation in meetings without even a condition of promoting violence, restricts freedom of expression. Moreover, the government’s oversight of media organizations without the establishment of an independent media regulatory body is concerning.⁴⁶ Such provisions indicate that if the draft is adopted, it could violate freedom of expression.⁴⁷ The draft is still under review.

Article 33 of the Constitution states that citizens have the right to participate in social activities, including rallies, meetings, and demonstrations, in accordance with the laws of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Administrative bodies may only prohibit or restrict these activities on essential security grounds. Although the right to assemble and protest is regulated in the Constitution, there are laws, regulations, and other administrative acts that significantly restrict this right. For example, permission from local authorities is required before organizing a protest or demonstration. Authorities may also impose restrictions on where and when meetings can take place.

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 46 OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Joint Opinion on the Draft Information Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan, May 29, 2024, https://legislationline.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/2024-05-29%20-%20ODIHR-R-FoM%20Joint%20Opinion_%20Draft%20Information%20Code_%20Uzbekistan.pdf

47 Human Rights Watch, Uzbekistan: Bill Threatens Freedom of Expression, Media, December 23, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/12/23/uzbekistan-bill-threatens-freedom-expression-media>.

Article 34 of the Constitution guarantees that citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan have the right to join trade unions, political parties, and other social organizations, as well as participate in mass movements. No one may violate the rights, freedoms, or dignity of individuals who form the opposing minority in political parties, social organizations, mass movements, or representative bodies. According to Articles 58 and following of the Constitution, the State ensures the protection of the rights and legal interests of social organizations and provides equal legal opportunities for their participation in social life. State bodies and officials are prohibited from interfering in the activities of social organizations, just as social organizations are prohibited from interfering in the activities of State bodies and officials. Trade unions represent and protect the social and economic rights and interests of workers, and membership in a union is voluntary. The termination, prohibition, or limitation of the activities of social organizations can only occur through a court decision. These articles guarantee the right to organize. Nevertheless, Article 59 prohibits the establishment and activities of political parties based on national or religious principles.

2.7.2. Violations

2.7.2.1. Freedom of Expression

There are numerous examples of restrictions on freedom of expression in Uzbekistan, where criticism is often not regarded as an exercise of free speech. For instance, Valijon Kalonov (52 years old, from Jizzakh) called for a boycott of the 2021 presidential elections and criticized the government. In December 2021, he was sentenced by the court to compulsory psychiatric treatment and was subsequently placed in a psychiatric hospital in Samarkand.⁴⁸ On January 26, 2022, Fazilhoja Arifhojaev, a Muslim blogger who criticized the government, was sentenced to seven and a half years in prison for sharing a social media post and commenting on whether Muslims should celebrate non-Muslim religious holidays. His conviction was upheld on appeal.⁴⁹ Lolagul Kallykhanova, a writer for the Karakalpak newspaper, was arrested after making a public speech against proposed

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 48 Human Rights Watch, Submission to Universal Periodic Review of Uzbekistan, April 5, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/04/05/submission-universal-periodic-review-uzbekistan>

49 Human Rights Watch, Uzbek Blogger Jailed for Facebook Post, January 28, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/01/28/uzbek-blogger-jailed-facebook-post>.

constitutional amendments. On January 31, 2023, she was found guilty of violating public security and sentenced to eight years in prison, with restrictions on her activities.⁵⁰

In May 2023, Elmurod Odil, a blogger from the Kashkadarya region, claimed he was beaten by the police during a 15-day detention after attempting to film a meeting between silk farmers and local authorities. He was charged with hooliganism and disobedience to authorities.⁵¹

Many individuals in Uzbekistan have been prosecuted and sentenced for denigration and insult. The UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies have pointed out that acts of denigration and insult should be decriminalized.⁵² According to Human Rights Watch, the prosecution and imprisonment of bloggers on false accusations led to a significant decline in freedom of expression and the press between 2020 and 2022⁵³. For example, Miraziz Bazarov, a Tashkent-based blogger who publicly claimed government corruption, faced insult charges on political grounds from authorities in March 2021. In January 2022, he was found guilty and sentenced to three years in prison.⁵⁴

There are also individuals who have been sentenced for insulting the president online. For example, on February 3, 2022, Sobirjon Babaniyazov was sentenced by the Khorezm court to three years in prison for insulting the president online.⁵⁵ In October

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50 Reporters Without Borders, Uzbek Authorities Hold Reporter incommunicado, Restrict Coverage of Crackdown on Protests, July 12, 2022, <https://rsf.org/en/uzbek-authorities-hold-reporter-incommunicado-restrict-coverage-crackdown-protests>

51 Human Rights Watch, World Report 2024 Events of 2023, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2024/01/World%20Report%202024%20LOWRES%20WEBSPREADS_0.pdf

52 United Nations Committee Against Torture, Concluding Observations on the Fifth Periodic Report of Uzbekistan, CAT/C/UZB/CO/5, January 14, 2020. <https://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2FPP-RiCAqhKb7yhsjt9aDww3A3fmQDefLPyqbeYxDFcWBn1ogeAFSU3PSPiYRszo%2B8eaYik6M3H4LuStZiEaAJob4ZXYo3n-CHgGtGBuqDErPV8vSDNVf5uubb> ; United Nations Human Rights Committee, Concluding Observations on the Fifth Periodic Report of Uzbekistan, CCPR/C/UZB/CO/5, May 1, 2020. <https://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2FPP-RiCAqhKb7yhsj07MIYGKlOR0JAcDdF0t9%2FmNbr457dEDo002gTLKjDd0XlnHhi3DnhjOdNP-kjrJh9MB4nu%2Fexi%2FgB%2BHFYmilWiOJAibtSI0jRdOeWD%2Fe5>

53 Human Rights Watch, Uzbekistan: Bill Threatens Freedom of Expression, Media, December 23, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/12/23/uzbekistan-bill-threatens-freedom-expression-media>

54 Human Rights Watch, Uzbekistan: Independent Blogger Attacked, March 31, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/31/uzbekistan-independent-blogger-attacked>.

55 Human Rights Watch, Submission to Universal Periodic Review of Uzbekistan, April 5, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/04/05/submission-universal-periodic-review-uzbekistan>

2023, a Samarkand regional court sent a 19-year-old to prison for 2.5 years for insulting the president online.⁵⁶

In cases involving allegations of extortion, sentences have also been issued. For instance, in May 2021, blogger Otobek Sattoriy was sentenced to six-and-a-half-year imprisonment on slander and extortion charges, and the sentence was upheld on appeal.⁵⁷ In July 2023, Ferghana region police arrested the outspoken and critical blogger Olimjon Khaidarov on charges of extortion. Slander and insult charges were added later. On December 1, 2023, an Uzbekistan court sentenced Khaidarov to eight years in prison and ordered his social media accounts blocked.⁵⁸ The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has called for the release of Otobek Sattoriy and for compensation to be paid to him after he was sentenced to six and a half years in prison on extortion charges.⁵⁹

2.7.2.2. Freedom of the Press

The state controls major media outlets and related facilities, and independent outlets were mostly shuttered or blocked under Karimov. However, domestic media, including news websites and live television programs, now cautiously discuss social problems and criticize local officials, reflecting a slight reduction in media repression since Mirziyoyev took power. Some independent news sources have emerged and are not subject to overt censorship, though most outlets still avoid openly criticizing Mirziyoyev and the government.⁶⁰

In an interview with human rights activist and journalist (A)⁶¹, the following statement was made regarding freedom of expression in Uzbekistan: *“The government in Uzbekistan exercises tight control over traditional media, including newspa-*

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56 Human Rights Watch, World Report 2024 Events of 2023, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2024/01/World%20Report%202024%20LOWRES%20WEBSPREADS_0.pdf

57 Mihra Rittmann, “Blogger Jailed for 6.5 Years on Dubious Charges in Uzbekistan,” Human Rights Watch <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/05/11/blogger-jailed-65-years-dubious-charges-uzbekistan>.

58 Human Rights Watch, World Report 2024 Events of 2023, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2024/01/World%20Report%202024%20LOWRES%20WEBSPREADS_0.pdf

59 *ibid.*

60 Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2022 Uzbekistan, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/uzbekistan/freedom-world/2022>.

61 Witness Number (A) - Documented to support the report and hidden in line with the association’s policies to protect witnesses and victims and prevent retaliation.

pers, television, and radio stations. Independent journalism is limited, and state media dominates the narrative, often acting as the government's spokesperson. The government also monitors online activity and blocks access to websites deemed oppositional or divisive. Social media platforms are monitored, and users can face various consequences for expressing oppositional views online."

Ahead of and during the protests in Karakalpakstan in 2022, the government restricted access to the internet and arrested journalists and activists who shared information about the protests.⁶² Witness (A) stated following about the Karakalpakstan events: *"During and after the events, access to information was severely restricted, the internet was shut down, and media broadcasts were limited. Journalists faced pressure, and their equipment was seized."*

In an interview with journalist (P)⁶³, it was stated that no journalist can express their opinion or criticize the government, or share truths related to human rights due to the restrictions imposed. Those who attempt to do so face various consequences, including death, being placed in mental hospitals, or being forced to leave the country. The journalist also mentioned experiencing severe pressure during their career, which has led to fear and panic among journalists in Uzbekistan. This has caused them to refuse to write anything, even if it is not related to human rights or politics. The journalist noted that the union did not contribute to defending journalists' work but instead had a negative impact by siding with the security forces. The journalist also recalled that the Director of Radio and Television was dismissed for not broadcasting the death of former President Islam Karimov, and pressure and extortion were exerted on them to delete some of their articles. After the current president came into power, the situation of increased freedoms only lasted for three years.

In March 2023, approximately 40 journalists and bloggers signed an open appeal to President Mirziyoyev raising concerns about censorship, pressure, and intimidation. Citing pressure, multiple bloggers and independent journalists announced in 2023 that they would cease their work.⁶⁴

62 Freedom House, Freedom on the Net 2023 Uzbekistan, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/uzbekistan/freedom-net/2023>

63 Witness Number (P) - Documented to support the report and hidden in line with the association's policies to protect witnesses and victims and prevent retaliation.

64 Human Rights Watch, World Report 2024 Events of 2023, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2024/01/World%20Report%202024%20LOWRES%20WEBSPREADS_0.pdf

2.7.2.3. Right to Freedom of Assembly and Protest

Uzbekistan’s security concerns effectively prevent the full exercise of the right to freedom of assembly. Despite reforms announced in recent years, the country still maintains a strict regime that limits both freedom of expression and assembly. Uzbek authorities closely monitor attempts to organize protests or rallies. Any unauthorized gathering is quickly dispersed, and criminal investigations are launched against the organizers.

Individuals attempting to organize or even participate in protests in Uzbekistan are frequently arrested. Heavy and violent measures are frequently taken against peaceful protesters. For example, during the protests in Karakalpakstan in July 2022, law enforcement used excessive force to suppress the demonstrators, resulting in numerous deaths and injuries.⁶⁵

2.7.2.4. Right to Freedom of Association

Uzbekistan continues to heavily restrict the work of independent non-governmental organization (NGOs) by imposing excessively strict registration requirements. In recent years, the Ministry of Justice has repeatedly rejected the registration applications of independent human rights groups on unfounded grounds. Agzam Turgunov, the founder of the Human Rights House, has been attempting to register his organization since 2018, but his applications have been rejected, and he had to submit his eleventh application in January 2023.⁶⁶ Despite the pending NGO law, which has not been passed by the authorities, a resolution issued in June 2022 requires local NGOs receiving foreign funding to collaborate with a national partner appointed by the government, ensuring state control over project implementation.⁶⁷ In June 2023, the EU Sub-Committee on Justice and Home Affairs, Human Rights and related issues expressed concerns about increased government control over NGOs receiving foreign funding.⁶⁸

65 See the report’s sections 2.1. Right to Life, 2.2. Prohibition of Torture and Ill-treatment.

66 International Partnership for Human Rights, *The Long Road to Registration: Human Rights House Files Lawsuit Against Ministry of Justice’s Eighth Refusal to Register the NGO*, September 23, 2021, <https://iphronline.org/articles/the-long-road-to-registration-human-rights-house-files-lawsuit-against-ministry-of-justice-s-eighth-refusal-to-register-the-ngo/>

67 Umida Niyazova & Lynn Schweinfurt, *New Regulations in Uzbekistan Effectively Impose Government Control on NGOs*, *The Diplomat*, August 26, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/08/new-regulations-in-uzbekistan-effectively-impose-government-control-on-ngos/>; Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2024 Events of 2023*, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2024/01/World%20Report%202024%20LOWRES%20WEBSPREADS_0.pdf

68 *ibid.*

On November 8, 2023, Uzbekistan appeared before the UN Human Rights Council for its fourth Universal Periodic Review. States recommended that the Uzbekistan government address impunity for torture, ensure NGOs and journalists can work without harassment.⁶⁹

Farmworkers and farmers face restrictions on their rights to organize and engage in collective bargaining. These limitations on independent unions and rights groups continue to pose a threat to Uzbekistan’s progress.⁷⁰

Currently, Uzbekistan does not have any registered political parties representing ethnic or religious minority groups, as this is prohibited by Article 59 of the Constitution.

In on-site observations conducted by the WOLAS human rights monitoring unit, the presence of a state-established religious organization named “Vaqf” was noted. The public welfare foundation “Vaqf,” established in accordance with the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan of April 16, 2018, No. DP-5416 on Measures to Radically Improve Activities in the Religious and Educational Sphere, aims to engage in various activities. These include the construction, repair, and reconstruction of mosque buildings and religious educational institutions, providing financial and social support to instructors, teachers, researchers, specialists, and students in religious education institutions, and offering material and moral support to vulnerable segments of society, including people with disabilities. During on-site observations, no other organization carrying out active work with religious motivation was encountered.

2.7.3. Evaluation

When examining witness statements, media reports, and other human rights sources, it is clear that there are significant restrictions on freedom of expression, freedom of the press, right to freedom of assembly and protest, and other related rights and freedoms in Uzbekistan.

While freedom of expression is protected by law, in practice, it is tightly controlled, and individuals or journalists who express anti-government views face pressure. People

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69 *ibid.*

70 *ibid.*

sharing content criticizing the government on social media are at risk of law enforcement action. Uzbekistan’s criminal laws criminalize denigration, insult, and criticism of the president, and these laws are often used to silence dissenting voices and punish journalists and activists critical of the government. Journalists, bloggers, and activists face harassment, including arbitrary detention, interrogation, and physical violence, as methods used to silence them and deter others from speaking out. Despite denigration being a crime under the Criminal Code, the separate regulation of insulting the president contradicts the principle that criminal law should be a last resort.

It should also be noted that during interviews conducted by the WOLAS human rights monitoring unit, several challenges were encountered, such as witnesses being reluctant to speak, refusing to provide certain information, agreeing to meet only in person due to fear of being overheard, or, as previously understood, denying any communication and refusing to meet when contacted. These incidents, personally witnessed by the monitoring unit, further illustrate the deep fear individuals have of the state and the severe restrictions on their freedom of expression.

Freedom of the press is similarly restricted. Media outlets are mostly under state control, and independent journalistic activities are threatened by censorship and pressure. During periods of protest or political unrest, internet shutdowns and media suppression are carried out by the Agency of Information and Mass Communications in a non-transparent manner. Many individuals and media organizations engage in self-censorship due to fear of retaliation, avoiding sensitive topics or criticism of the government. This self-censorship further diminishes the diversity of opinion and restricts public discourse.

Despite the reforms announced in recent years, there are still significant restrictions on the freedom of assembly in Uzbekistan. Demonstrations and protest attempts are closely monitored by authorities. Unauthorized gatherings are quickly dispersed, and severe penalties are imposed on the organizers of such events. Peaceful protesters are subjected to violent interventions and harsh penalties. The events in Karakalpakstan in July 2022 serve as one of the most striking examples of this repressive attitude, where the excessive use of force by security forces resulted in numerous deaths and injuries. Despite these violations, the lack of an independent investigation and the continued impunity clearly demonstrate serious deficiencies in the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms in Uzbekistan.

Although freedom of association is officially recognized, non-governmental organizations and political opposition face significant obstacles to operating independently. The heavy and excessive registration requirements placed on NGOs, particularly those representing ethnic or religious minority groups, severely limit their ability to represent their interests and gain political representation. Additionally, the imposition of various sanctions on social media users for expressing dissenting views hinders the development of a more democratic and free civil society in Uzbekistan and restricts freedom of expression.

2.8. Prohibition of Violence and Discrimination against Women

2.8.1. Legislation

The Uzbek government accepted the proposal to sign the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 2018, committing to continue efforts to eliminate gender-based violence.⁷¹

In April 2023, amendments were made to the Uzbek Criminal and Administrative Codes to better protect women and girls from abuse and strengthen measures against child abuse. These changes included defining domestic violence as an independent crime, increasing penalties for sexual violence, including those against children, and the introducing administrative sanctions for sexual harassment and stalking.⁷²

Furthermore, a presidential decree was issued aimed at accelerating systematic support for families and women, with the goal of ensuring the protection of women's rights and legitimate interests. Under this decree, in cases of gender-based violence, family mediation and reconciliation were prioritized over criminal prosecution.⁷³

71 UNICEF, UNICEF Calls for an End Violence against Women and Children in Uzbekistan, June 21, 2022, <https://www.unicef.org/uzbekistan/en/unicef-calls-to-end-violence-against-children>. Human Rights Watch, World Report 2024 Events of 2023, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2024/01/World%20Report%202024%20LOWRES%20WEBSPREADS_0.pdf

72 Amnesty International, Violence Against Women in Eastern Europe and Central Asia: Protect Women from Violence in Crisis and Beyond, December 14, 2022, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur04/6281/2022/en/?utm_source=annual_report&utm_medium=epub&utm_campaign=2021.

73 International Partnership for Human Rights, Uzbekistan: Failure to Protect Women from Domestic Violence, Joint NGO Submission to CEDAW Ahead of the Consideration of Uzbekistan's Sixth Periodic Report at its 81st Session in February 2022, January 2022, <https://www.iphroline.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Joint-NGO-submission-to-CEDAW-2.pdf>.

2.8.2. Violations

2.8.2.1. Violence against Women

Between January 2021 and November 2021, approximately 36,000 cases of violence against women were reported⁷⁴, with more than 12,000 of these being physical violence cases. Although Uzbek authorities have prioritized policies aimed at improving women’s access to justice and protection services, they acknowledge that violence against women, including domestic violence, remains widespread.⁷⁵

In June 2023, the senior gender advisor of Türkiye and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) visited Uzbekistan for a three-day trip. During meetings with Uzbek officials, the advisor emphasized the need to strengthen accountability for perpetrators of gender-based violence and ensure their punishment.⁷⁶

In 2023, a total of 40,055 cases of violence and harassment against women were identified, with protection orders granted to 39,263 women.⁷⁷ The Ministry of Internal Affairs reported that protection orders were issued in favor of 32,783 women and girls who were victims of violence. Women’s rights activists noted that many women do not report abuse due to shame or fear of retaliation from abusers, meaning that the reported figures represent only a portion of actual incidents.⁷⁸

In the report titled “Information Received from Uzbekistan on Follow-Up to the Concluding Observations on its Sixth Periodic Report: Committee on the Elimination of

74 International Partnership for Human Rights, “Uzbekistan: Joint NGO Submission to CEDAW ahead of the Consideration of Uzbekistan’s Sixth Periodic Report at the 81st Session in February 2022”, January 2022, <https://www.iphroline.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Joint-NGO-submission-to-CEDAW-2.pdf>.

75 Amnesty International, Violence Against Women in Eastern Europe and Central Asia: Protect Women from Violence in Crisis and Beyond, December 14, 2022, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur04/6281/2022/en/?utm_source=annual_report&utm_medium=epub&utm_campaign=2021.

76 OSCE, OSCE Senior Gender Adviser concludes three-day visit to Uzbekistan, June 22, 2023, <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/546875>

77 CEDAW, Information Received from Uzbekistan on Follow-Up to the Concluding Observations on its Sixth Periodic Report, March 7, 2024, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolNo=CE-DAW%2FC%2FUZB%2FFCO%2F6&Lang=en

78 Amnesty International, Violence Against Women in Eastern Europe and Central Asia: Protect Women from Violence in Crisis and Beyond, December 14, 2022, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur04/6281/2022/en/?utm_source=annual_report&utm_medium=epub&utm_campaign=2021.

Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)⁷⁹, published on March 7, 2024, the legislative changes in Uzbekistan were evaluated. The report generally assessed the steps taken to protect and advance women's rights as positive. It praised the preparation of the national action plan, the implementation of legal regulations regarding gender equality, and efforts to protect women from violence and harassment. Developments such as increased participation of women in education and healthcare, as well as the accessibility of modern contraceptive methods, were also considered positive. On the other hand, the report highlighted several areas that still require improvement. These include the low participation of women in decision-making mechanisms, gaps in combating gender-based violence, and the insufficient support services for victims of violence. It also pointed out the barriers faced by women in rural areas in accessing healthcare and education, and the challenges in implementing gender equality policies. The report emphasized that more efforts need to be made, especially in areas such as the economic empowerment of women and increasing their participation in the workforce.

2.8.2.2. Domestic Violence

New legal changes have taken significant steps towards eliminating gender-based violence and aligning with international human rights obligations. However, human rights defenders express concerns that, despite physical violence being classified as a crime, economic and psychological violence are still not being adequately addressed.⁸⁰

In February 2022, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women raised concerns about the high levels of gender-based violence against women in Uzbekistan. The Committee urged the government to explicitly criminalize domestic violence, ensure effective investigation and prosecution of perpetrators, strengthen victim services and protections, and amend the legislation

79 CEDAW, Information Received from Uzbekistan on Follow-Up to the Concluding Observations on its Sixth Periodic Report, March 7, 2024, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolNo=CE-DAW%2FC%2FUZB%2FFCO%2F6&Lang=en

80 Amnesty International, Uzbekistan: Parliament Passes Long-overdue Legislation Criminalizing Domestic Violence, April 6, 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/04/uzbekistan-parliament-passes-long-overdue-legislation-criminalizing-domestic-violence/>

to include a consent-based definition of rape, among other recommendations.⁸¹ In 2023, Article 126¹ was added to the Criminal Code, criminalizing domestic violence.⁸²

According to UNICEF's research, despite Uzbekistan's commitment to continue its efforts to eliminate gender-based violence by accepting the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, domestic violence remains a serious issue in the country.⁸³

Due to the excessive emphasis placed on protecting the family in domestic violence cases, legal protections are often weak.⁸⁴ Authorities focus more on family reconciliation and reunification rather than the protection of women. Discriminatory attitudes, gender role definitions, treating domestic violence as a private family matter, and even blaming victims by authorities contribute to the normalization of violence against women and girls, leading to impunity for perpetrators.⁸⁵

Despite CEDAW's contrary recommendation, family mediation and reconciliation have been prioritized over criminal prosecution in gender-based violence cases.⁸⁶

2.8.3. Evaluation

Although the Uzbek government has decided to sign the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and has made legal changes in 2023 to better protect women and girls from abuse, significant challenges remain in enforcing these regulations.

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81 UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Concluding Observations on the Sixth Periodic Report of Uzbekistan, February 7-25, 2022, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fUZB%2fCO%2f6&Lang=en.

82 Uzbekistan Criminal Code, <https://www.lex.uz/en/docs/-111453>

83 UNICEF, UNICEF Calls for an End Violence against Women and Children in Uzbekistan, June 21, 2022, <https://www.unicef.org/uzbekistan/en/unicef-calls-to-end-violence-against-children>.

84 *ibid.*

85 See, for example, International Partnership for Human Rights, Uzbekistan: Failure to Protect Women from Domestic Violence (CEDAW Submission), February 14, 2022, <https://www.iphroline.org/uzbekistan-failure-to-protect-women-from-domestic-violence-cedaw-submission.html> ; EurasiaNet, Uzbekistan: Survey Reveals Troubling Levels of Tolerance for Domestic Violence, May 19, 2021, <https://eurasianet.org/uzbekistan-survey-reveals-troubling-levels-of-tolerance-for-domestic-violence>

86 Amnesty International, Violence against Women in Eastern Europe and Central Asia: Protect Women from Violence in Crisis and Beyond, December 14, 2022, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur04/6281/2022/en/?utm_source=annual_report&utm_medium=ePub&utm_campaign=2021

Despite new laws criminalizing domestic violence, the state's priority of preserving family unity often takes precedence over the protection of victims' rights. As a result, domestic and gender-based violence continue to be widespread, and legal protections remain inadequate. Gaps in women's access to justice and state protection contribute to the normalization of violence against women, leading to impunity for perpetrators. This remains a major obstacle in Uzbekistan's pursuit of gender equality.

While important steps have been taken with legal reforms to combat gender-based violence, further efforts are required to prevent domestic violence and address patriarchal attitudes in society. Other forms of violence, such as economic and psychological abuse, continue to be overlooked, exacerbating the discrimination women face. Despite all legislative developments, more comprehensive and effective measures are still needed to protect women's rights and prevent violence in Uzbekistan.

2.9. Deprivation of Citizenship

2.9.1. Legislation

Statelessness is recognized as a serious human rights issue under international law, and various international treaties have been adopted to address this problem. Among the most important are the "1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons" and the "1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness". Additionally, Article 7 of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees the right of every child to a nationality, aiming to minimize the risk of statelessness. These international treaties impose obligations on states not to arbitrarily deprive individuals of their citizenship and to avoid rendering them stateless. That said, Uzbekistan is not a party to either the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons or the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

The Law on Citizenship of the Republic of Uzbekistan outlines the conditions for acquiring and losing citizenship. These conditions include provisions such as "harm to national interests" and "association with extremist organizations," which can be subjectively interpreted during enforcement.

In Uzbekistan, not only the deprivation of citizenship, but also the inability to acquire citizenship appears to be a problem. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, many ethnic Uzbeks or individuals born in Uzbekistan who had previously held Soviet passports returned to Uzbekistan. Upon the adoption of the Law on Uzbek Citizenship on July 2, 1992, these individuals were classified as “stateless person”. According to the Directorate of Migration and Citizenship Registration of the Ministry of Interior Affairs of Uzbekistan, there were 95,857 stateless persons living in the country in 2019. Of these, 49,228 (50.6% of the stateless population) obtained permanent residence permits in Uzbekistan between 1992 and 1995, resulting in their automatic loss of citizenship. According to the previous law, only those who had resided and been registered in Uzbekistan before July 28, 1992, were considered citizens.⁸⁷ However, with an amendment made to the Law on Citizenship in 2020, individuals who arrived in Uzbekistan and were registered as permanent residents before January 1, 1995, were given the opportunity to acquire citizenship through a simplified procedure.

In 2021, a new regulation facilitated the citizenship application process for individuals who had been living in Uzbekistan permanently since before January 1, 2005, and had not yet acquired citizenship. According to this regulation, individuals who have resided in Uzbekistan for at least 15 years are eligible to apply for citizenship, provided they are not citizens of another country and are legally registered as residents in the country. This law aims to provide a pathway to citizenship for long-term residents who have been unable to obtain official status.⁸⁸

Uzbekistan’s legal system does not recognize dual citizenship.

2.9.2. Violations

During the interview with Victim (E)⁸⁹, they shared their experience regarding

87 Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting, <https://cabar.asia/en/uzbekistan-simplified-procedure-for-obtaining-citizenship-what-changed-and-how-does-it-work>

88 <https://m.asiaterra.info/obshchestvo/s-molotkastym-v-karmane-kak-zhitel-uzbekistana-30-let-pytaetsya-poluchit-grazhdanstvo>

89 Witness (E)- Documented to support the report and hidden in line with the association's policies to protect witnesses and victims and prevent retaliation.

their inability to acquire Uzbek citizenship: “When Uzbekistan declared independence in 1991, it was decided that citizenship would be granted to those who had been residing in the country for a certain period. Despite arriving in the country in 1989, I was unable to benefit from this decision because my family, although Uzbek, had previously left the country. Later, security forces accused me of joining an opposition political party and attempted to extort \$2,500 from me to drop the case. I refused, as the accusation was false and baseless. After rejecting the extortion, the threats began. I was forced to choose between leaving Uzbekistan, being arrested, or being abused. With no other option, I left my country and lived in Georgia for about two years.

In March 2022, I received a phone call from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, who informed me that Uzbekistan was moving towards granting citizenship to individuals who had lived in the country for the past 15 years and were facing the same issue as mine. They asked if I wanted to return home and I accepted the offer. Since there were no direct flights to Uzbekistan, I traveled from Georgia to Kazakhstan. After crossing the Kazakh border, I was denied entry due to being on a blacklist and having an entry ban. When I tried to return to Kazakhstan, I was told my visa was only one-way and I couldn’t go back. After several attempts to obtain temporary entry into Kazakhstan, I visited the Uzbek Embassy to resolve my citizenship issue. Unfortunately, I have not received any results so far.

When I wanted to return to Georgia, where I had lived for over two and a half years (from December 2019 to March 2022), I faced the same problem: the authorities did not allow my entry. I then rerouted to Kyrgyzstan and later Armenia. I contacted the UN Refugee Agency, and they directed me to the Armenian migration department. Yet, I couldn’t obtain legal status to settle there. I tried to go to Georgia again, but the attempt failed, and I was sent back to Armenia, where they refused to accept me. After numerous attempts, I was allowed entry for one week. Next, I traveled to Azerbaijan, where I was detained for 8 days. In May 2022, just days before my travel document was set to expire, I managed to obtain a Turkish visa to come to Türkiye.”

In the interview with Victim (F)⁹⁰, (F) explained that they were arrested twice for involvement in human rights violations and opposition to the government. In 1993, they were deprived of their citizenship and forced to seek asylum in another country.

2.9.3. Evaluation

Although the deprivation of citizenship is not a widespread issue in Uzbekistan, it can be used arbitrarily by the government, particularly against political opponents and critics of the regime. The provisions in the Law on Citizenship, which include conditions such as “harm to national interests” and “association with extremist organizations”, are subject to subjective interpretation and raise concerns of legal violations. These conditions should be more clearly and concretely defined. Administrative actions that render individuals stateless, leaving them without legal protection and depriving them of basic rights, must be regulated in accordance with the principle of legal certainty. The deprivation of citizenship severely restricts the victims’ access to education, healthcare, and employment, leaving them vulnerable to discrimination and abuse.

The practice of silencing opposition through the deprivation of citizenship has been condemned by the international community as a violation of fundamental human rights, including the right to nationality. Those who are deprived of their citizenship lose the rights and protections granted to citizens, signaling a regression of freedoms and the rise of authoritarian regime in the country. The deprivation of Citizenship without legal processes, valid legal grounds, or for political motivations raises serious concerns for Uzbekistan.

The limited protective mechanisms for stateless individuals in Uzbekistan, along with the practices of deprivation of citizenship or nationality, do not align with international legal protection standards. Uzbekistan’s failure to join key international agreements on statelessness creates a significant gap in efforts to resolve the issue and protect citizenship rights in the country.

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90 Witness (F)- Documented to support the report and hidden in line with the association's policies to protect witnesses and victims and prevent retaliation.

2.10. Right to Elect and Be Elected

2.10.1. Legislation

Article 117 of the Constitution states: *“Citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan shall have the right to elect and be elected to the representative bodies of state authority. Every elector shall have one vote. The right to vote, equality and freedom of expression of will shall be guaranteed by law.”*

Article 34 states: *“Citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan shall have the right to form trade unions, political parties and any other public associations, and to participate in mass movements. No one may infringe on the rights, freedoms and dignity of the individuals, constituting the minority opposition in political parties, public associations and mass movements, as well as in representative bodies of authority.”*

Article 35 states: *“ A citizen of the Republic of Uzbekistan not younger than thirty-five years, being in full command of the state language and permanently residing on the territory of Uzbekistan for at least 10 years, immediately preceding the elections, may be elected the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. One and the same person may not be the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan for more than two consecutive terms.”*

Article 57 states: *“The formation and functioning of political parties and other non-profit non-governmental organizations, aiming to do the following, shall be prohibited: changing the existing constitutional system by force, coming out against state sovereignty, territorial integrity and security of Uzbekistan, advocating war and social, national, racial and religious hostility, or encroaching on the constitutional rights and freedoms of citizens, encroaching on the health and morality of the people, as well as armed associations and political parties based on the national and religious principles.”*

In the 2023 constitutional referendum, the presidential term was extended from five years to seven years, and several powers were transferred to the Parliament. The rule that a person can be elected president no more than twice in succession

remained, but previous terms are no longer counted toward the limit. This two-term rule also applies to high-ranking officials, including the Chairperson of the Parliament and Senate, regional governors, heads of district and city councils, the Public Prosecutor, and the Chairman of the Supreme Court.

Under the Election Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan, to register a political party, the following requirements must be met: A provisional governing body consisting of at least fifty members must be formed. This body must collect 20,000 supporting signatures from citizens residing in at least eight of the fourteen regions within three months. The collected signatures and necessary documents must be submitted to the Ministry of Justice. Political parties that are registered at least seven months before an election are eligible to nominate candidates.

In presidential elections, only registered political parties have the right to nominate candidates; independent candidates are not allowed to run. Campaign expenses for the election are fully funded by the state, and private donations or political party funds are prohibited as additional sources of funding. Each party nominating a candidate receives an equal amount of money to cover their nominee's campaign expenses.

2.10.2. Violations

In the referendum held in March 2023, a constitutional reform was approved that reset President Mirziyoyev's term, enabling him to run for two additional seven-year presidential terms.

The Ministry of Justice announced rejection of the registration of the Truth and Progress Social Democratic Party on the grounds that it did not meet the necessary conditions for party registration, stating that it did not receive a sufficient number of signatures in 2023.⁹¹

Khidirnazar Allakulov, the leader of the Truth and Progress Social Democratic Party, stated that he had repeatedly applied to register his party but was rejected each time. He highlighted the difficulty of collecting 20,000 signatures.⁹² Allakulov also alleged

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91 <https://adliya.uz/uzb/inner-page/yangiliklar/haqiqat-taraqqiyot-va-birdamlik-demokratik-partiya>

92 <https://www.bbc.com/uzbek/uzbekistan-66518266>

that during the registration process, his relatives and supporters were frequently harassed, and he claimed they were subjected to electrocution on their genitals while in police custody. His son Sherzod, who is a party activist, is currently in prison.⁹³

Jahongir Otajonov, the leader of the Erk Democratic Party, and Aleksey Garshin the leader of the Free Motherland Party decided not to participate in the presidential contest after complaining about intimidation.⁹⁴

The referendum and the subsequent 2023 presidential elections were criticized by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) for being “devoid of genuine competition” and containing “significant procedural errors”.

2.10.3. Evaluation

It appears that the right to elect and be elected in Uzbekistan is directly limited by legislation. The requirement that presidential candidates must have resided in the country for at least 10 years effectively excludes exiled opposition members from running due to political pressure. This residency requirement does not align with international obligations and serves as an obstacle to active political participation by opposition figures.

The participation of opposition parties in elections is severely restricted in Uzbekistan. The requirement for a political party to gather 20,000 supporting signatures from citizens living in at least eight of the fourteen regions creates practical difficulties and prevents the formal recognition of new political movements. In a country where freedom of expression is not fully guaranteed, it is understandable that individuals may hesitate to sign petitions. These barriers not only limit the participation of opposition parties but also restrict the public’s access to alternative political options.

The lack of fairness and transparency in the election process has been criticized by international observers, and calls for reform have been made. When these obstacles

⁹³ https://www-ozodlik-org.translate.goog/a/o-zbekiston-saylov/33174945.html?_x_tr_sl=uz&_x_tr_tl=ar&_x_tr_hl=en&_x_tr_pto=wapp

⁹⁴ OSCE, International Election Observation Mission, Republic of Uzbekistan – Presidential Election, October 24, 2021, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/9/502203.pdf>

are combined with the fact that only officially registered parties are allowed to nominate presidential candidates, the participation of the opposition in elections becomes nearly impossible. This situation highlights the persistent barriers to political pluralism in Uzbekistan.

All these issues demonstrate that democratic norms have not yet fully taken root in the country, and reforms have been lacking in practice. The government's failure to remove these barriers to freedom leads to elections that lack real political competition.

3. PROPOSALS

3.1 Right to Life

The following proposals have been put forward by Uzbekistan to ensure the effective protection of the right to life:

- Guaranteeing an independent and impartial judicial process in cases of violations of the right to life, enforcing the penalties imposed, and preventing a culture of impunity.
- Ensuring transparency in investigations related to violations of the right to life and regularly updating the public. Open information sharing about investigation processes will help strengthen the public's trust in state mechanisms.
- Establishing independent oversight mechanisms to monitor violations of the right to life, and creating an independent monitoring body to review and report violations transparently.
- Providing both pecuniary and non-pecuniary compensation to the families of victims whose right to life has been violated.
- Organizing comprehensive training programs to ensure law enforcement officers respect the right to life.

3.2 Prohibition of Torture and Ill-treatment

To effectively implement the prohibition of torture and ill-treatment, Uzbekistan should approve relevant international treaties and strengthen its cooperation with the United Nations. The following solution proposals have been put forward to eliminate incidents of torture and ill-treatment in the country:

- Ratifying the UN Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, in line with international human rights standards, to establish strong protective mechanisms against torture and inhuman or degrading treatment and increase national transparency and accountability.
- Approving the UN Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, and granting the Committee on Enforced Disappearances the authority to receive and evaluate petitions from victims or other states.
- Adopting the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to strengthen the protection of economic, social, and cultural rights, ensure the effective investigation of violations, and increase international accountability, along with opting for participation in the investigations and interstate procedures.
- Acknowledging the scope and severity of torture in Uzbekistan by the government's public admission of the issue, ensuring comprehensive investigations into all allegations of torture, and holding perpetrators accountable.
- Implementing measures to prevent torture and inhuman or degrading treatment in detention centers and ensuring that those responsible are investigated and held accountable.
- Amending Article 235 of the Uzbekistan Criminal Code to align the definition of torture with Article 1 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
- Repealing Article 221 of the Uzbekistan Criminal Code (Disobedience to legitimate orders of administration of institution of execution of penalty), which permits arbitrary extensions of the sentences of political prisoners.

3.3 Prohibition of Forced Labour

- Establishing comprehensive monitoring and complaint mechanisms to prevent cases of forced labour in cotton fields, ensuring they are accessible to the public.
- Clarifying the job descriptions of public employees and prohibiting the assignment of non-mandatory tasks that could be considered forced labour.
- Conducting awareness-raising trainings and activities for both public officials and society in general on the prohibition of forced labour.
- Providing opportunities for independent NGOs and trade unions to monitor working conditions and report violations.

3.4 Right to Liberty and Security

- Establishing and enforcing laws that explicitly prohibit arbitrary arrests and detentions, ensuring such violations are punishable, and aligning these laws with international standards.
- Creating transparent and accessible complaint mechanisms to report violation of rights.
- Ensuring the independence of the judiciary and establishing effective judicial processes for addressing violations, with all judicial processes being subject to public oversight.
- Ensuring the right to legal counsel for detainees and informing individuals of their rights regarding liberty, security, and appeals.
- Implementing effective disciplinary and penal mechanisms for officials who abuse their power.
- Strengthening cooperation with international human rights mechanisms.

3.5 Right to a Fair Trial

- Strengthening judicial independence to prevent interference by the executive branch in judicial processes.
- Guaranteeing the right to a defense by ensuring that defendants can choose their lawyers, and establishing control mechanisms to ensure appointed lawyers can provide effective defense.
- Taking effective measures to prevent bribery and corruption in the justice system, conducting transparent investigations into bribery cases, and establishing a strict control system within the justice system.
- Preventing practices that undermine fair trials, such as perjury, and applying effective criminal sanctions for such violations, while taking strict measures against evidence manipulation.
- Establishing a transparent and independent complaint mechanism for individuals whose right to a fair trial has been violated.

3.6 Freedom of Religion and Conscience

The solution proposals developed by Uzbekistan to effectively ensure freedom of religion and conscience are outlined below:

- Amending existing laws to strengthen legal protections so that they explicitly protect the right to freedom of religion and conscience. This includes worshipping, spreading religious content, and practicing faith without state intervention, while ensuring that legal provisions against extremism are clearly defined, narrow scoped, and not targeting peaceful religious practices.
- Ending the arbitrary detention of individuals due to their religious beliefs or practices.
- Guaranteeing a fair trial by ensuring access to legal representation and the ability to appeal decisions for all individuals, including those accused of religious offenses, to ensure the implementation of fair and transparent legal processes.

- Reviewing and overturning convictions for individuals prosecuted for peaceful religious practices and compensating those unjustly imprisoned.
- Allowing religious groups to operate freely without unnecessary restrictions or discrimination, simplifying the registration process for religious organizations, and eliminating arbitrary decisions and bureaucratic obstacles.
- Lifting restrictions on the dissemination of religious materials, including online content, preventing penalties for sharing religious contents and ensuring that individuals can freely share religious ideas both offline and online without fear of retaliation.
- Establishing independent bodies to monitor and report on religious freedom and human rights in Uzbekistan, cooperating with international human rights organizations, and conducting independent investigations into claims of religious oppression.
- Providing comprehensive training to law enforcement officers regarding religious freedoms and human rights, and establishing clear guidelines and oversight mechanisms to ensure that law enforcement practices comply with international human rights standards.
- Promoting open and inclusive dialogue between the government, religious communities, and NGOs, addressing complaints, and encouraging participation in policymaking processes to ensure adequate representation of religious groups' concerns and rights.
- Amending the Articles 216 (Illegal establishment of public associations or religious organizations), 216¹ (Inducement to participate in operation of illegal public associations or religious organizations), and 216² (Violation of legislation on religious organizations) of the Uzbekistan Criminal Code to remove restrictions on religious freedom and ensure that laws are not used to undermine freedom of religion and conscience.

3.7 Freedom of Expression and Related Rights and Freedoms

The solution proposals developed by Uzbekistan to effectively ensure freedom of expression, press, and association are detailed below:

- Conducting comprehensive, rapid, and independent investigations into all reports of assault, harassment, or intimidation of human rights defenders, independent journalists, bloggers, and civil society activists, ensuring that those suspected of being responsible are held accountable.
- Securing freedom of expression by ending pressures and illegal prosecutions against media personnel, journalists, writers, and bloggers.
- Ensuring that media workers, journalists, writers, and bloggers can work freely without fear of retaliation for expressing critical views or addressing issues the Government finds sensitive.
- Repealing recent legal changes that restrict freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and the right to peaceful assembly, and aligning regulations concerning the activities, funding, and registration of NGOs with international human rights standards. This would allow such organizations to register through a simple, transparent procedure and carry out their activities without unnecessary state intervention.
- Fully cooperating with UN human rights mechanisms, particularly the Special Rapporteurs on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, and on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association. This includes ensuring that these rapporteurs conduct their visits without any restrictions in terms of duration and scope, and also allowing them to meet with human rights defenders, independent journalists and civil society activists without any obstacles.
- Ensuring the right to freedom of association by allowing independent human rights organizations, including those previously denied registration, to operate freely and respecting the right to organize.
- In the Uzbekistan Criminal Code:

- o Taking necessary measures to prevent the arbitrary misuse, at least in practice, of Article 139 on denigration and Article 140 on insult, which are debated regarding whether they should be considered crimes,
- o Preventing the misuse of Article 157 (High Treason) and 159 (Attempts to Constitutional Order of Republic of Uzbekistan) regarding crimes against the state),
- o Amending Articles 244¹ (Production and dissemination of materials containing threat to public security and public order), 244² (Establishment, direction of or participation in religious extremist, separatist, fundamentalist or other banned organizations), and 244³ (Illegal production, storage, import, or distribution of religious material) concerning crimes against public security to ensure freedom of religion and expression. These articles should even be abolished to prevent their arbitrary misuse in practice.

3.8 Prohibition of Violence and Discrimination against Women

The solution proposals developed by Uzbekistan to ensure the effective implementation of the prohibition of violence and discrimination against women are detailed below:

- Adopting comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation that prohibits all forms of discrimination and ensures protection for all individuals.
- Implementing administrative and criminal regulations aimed at preventing all forms of domestic violence, including psychological, economic, and sexual violence, and ensuring these regulations are effectively enforced.
- Ensuring that cultural, religious, social, or traditional norms do not provide justifications or legal grounds for avoiding responsibility in cases of domestic violence under criminal law and criminal procedure law.
- Preventing the misuse of alternative dispute resolution methods, such as mandatory mediation, in cases of violence and ensuring these methods are used to resolve conflicts, rather than suppressing victims.

3.9 Deprivation of Citizenship

The solution proposals developed by Uzbekistan to prevent negative outcomes resulting from the deprivation of citizenship are detailed below:

- Implementing measures to prevent individuals from becoming stateless as a result of deprivation of citizenship.
- Ensuring that any deprivation of citizenship is based on clear legal grounds and is carried out in accordance with fair trial standards, in compliance with international law.
- Preventing the arbitrary deprivation of citizenship and protecting individuals from statelessness by ratifying and implementing the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.
- Making the criteria for deprivation of citizenship publicly available and accessible, developing transparent, fair, and consistent legal procedures that include a fair trial, legal representation, and the right to an independent review in cases of deprivation of citizenship, and ensuring that all decisions are subject to judicial review.
- Guaranteeing that deprivation of citizenship is not used as a political tool or to silence opposition, and investigating past cases where citizenship was revoked for political reasons, restoring citizenship where appropriate and compensating individuals.
- Providing assistance and support to individuals who lose their citizenship, including access to legal aid and other basic services, minimizing the impact of deprivation of citizenship on families, especially children, and implementing measures to keep families together, prevent homelessness, and address other challenges.
- Publishing regular reports and statistics to ensure transparency in cases of deprivation of citizenship and establishing independent bodies to monitor decisions regarding the deprivation of citizenship, ensure accountability, and prevent the abuse of power.

- Ensuring access to basic rights and services such as education, healthcare, and employment for individuals at risk of losing their citizenship throughout the legal process and providing a legal status to those rendered stateless to allow them access to these essential services.
- Cooperating with international human rights organizations and civil society to develop policies that protect individuals from arbitrary deprivation of citizenship and encouraging NGOs to monitor such cases.

3.10 Right to Elect and Be Elected

The solution proposals developed by Uzbekistan to effectively secure the right to elect and be elected are detailed below:

- Reducing the required number of signatures for political party registration from 20,000.
- Allowing independent candidates to participate in elections by removing the requirement that only political parties can nominate candidates.
- Strengthening legal protections to prevent intimidation and harassment of opposition parties and individuals.
- Establishing an independent mechanism to ensure election security, in collaboration with international observers.

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ABSTRACT

Human rights violations in Uzbekistan are attracting the attention of the international community. Violations of fundamental human rights in the country, which has been under authoritarian rule for many years, have reached serious levels. Serious human rights violations such as interference with freedom of expression, freedom of religion and conscience and freedom of the press; arbitrary arrests, torture and ill-treatment have been widely reported in Uzbekistan. Some of the reforms undertaken in the country in recent years have been insufficient and have failed to address the root causes of human rights violations

This report provides a comprehensive overview of the current human rights situation in Uzbekistan, assessing the country's human rights record in line with international norms, examining the government's reform efforts, areas where these reforms have fallen short, and the challenges faced by human rights defenders

The report sheds light on: Excessive use of force by security forces, arbitrary arrests and a culture of impunity, torture and ill-treatment, detention and prison conditions, forced labour, violations of the right to liberty and security, problems of independence and impartiality in the context of the right to a fair trial, bribery and corruption, restrictions on freedom of religion and conscience. The report discusses in detail the repression of freedom of expression, press and assembly, legal and de facto restrictions on journalists and dissidents, inadequate reforms of women's rights, impunity and reconciliation policies in cases of domestic violence, denaturalisation practices and restrictions on the right to vote and be elected

In addition, the report proposes various solutions to prevent all these violations, which weaken Uzbekistan's human rights record and make the need for reform urgent

