

# Confessional Politics and Interfaith Relations in Modern Uzbekistan

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*The most important definition of the formation of the foundations of a democratic legal state and civil society is the attitude to religion. The readiness of the confessions operating in Uzbekistan to consolidate in solving the issues of spiritual and moral development of the multinational people, which has been repeatedly noted in practice, is an indicator of the optimal policy in this matter. The philosophy of the confessional policy of independent Uzbekistan includes the following ideological imperatives: respect for the religious feelings of believers; recognition of religious beliefs as a private matter of a citizen or association; equality of citizens regardless of their attitude to religion, equality of all faiths; inadmissibility of using religion for destructive purposes, separation of the education system from religion.*

*Keywords: Uzbekistan, religion, confessions, confessional policy, Islam, inter-confessional relations, religious tolerance*

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## Introduction

Uzbekistan is home to representatives of many nationalities, who are traditionally identified with different faiths (Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians – Orthodox, Poles – Catholics, Armenians – Gregorians, Germans – Lutherans, Jews – Judaism, etc.). They are united not only by the territory, state, economic and social interests, but also by many common features in origin, language, culture, traditions and customs. At the moment, 2,276 religious organizations representing 16 denominations coexist peacefully in the Republic. Non – Muslim denominations include 183 religious organizations, of which 166 are Christian: Korean Protestant Churches – 55 organizations, Russian Orthodox Church – 39, Baptists – 23, Full Gospel Christians (Pentecostals) – 22, 7<sup>th</sup>-day Adventists – 12, Roman Catholic Church-5, New Apostolic Church – 4, Lutherans – 2, Armenian Apostolic Church – 2, Jehovah's

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Witnesses – 1, Voice of the Lord Church – 1. In addition, Jewish organizations – 8, Baha’i – 6, Hare Krishna – 1, Buddhist temple – 1, interfaith “Bible society” – 1.

The majority of the population is made up of Uzbeks and other ethnic groups that traditionally profess Islam. There are 2,093 officially registered Muslim organizations in Uzbekistan (including 6 Shiite mosques). There are more than 160 famous Muslim shrines on the territory of Uzbekistan, which allow us to talk about a special significance of Uzbekistan for the entire Muslim world (Rtveladze & Rtveladze, 1996).

There are also the Administration of Muslims of Uzbekistan, the Kaziyat of Muslims of Karakalpakstan, the Tashkent Islamic Institute, 10 madrasas, the Central Asian Metropolitan District (which unites the Tashkent, Bishkek and Dushanbe dioceses) of the Russian Orthodox Church, 1 Orthodox and 1 Protestant seminary (The Russian Orthodox Church, 2011: 45-46). In 2019, 5,000 pilgrims from Uzbekistan made the “Hajj” to Mecca and Medina. They were provided with the services of 30 people of the working group, 30 doctors, and 10 cooks.

### **Organizations that implement confessional policies**

In order to develop a culture of inter-confessional communication, the Public Council for Religious Affairs of Uzbekistan was formed under the Committee for Religious Affairs of Uzbekistan, which includes leaders of the most representative faiths.

In response to the requests of many religious organizations operating in Uzbekistan, the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan adopted Resolution No. 196 of April 23, 2004, on the establishment of a Public Council for Religious Affairs under the Committee on Religious Affairs. On May 5, 2004, the Constituent Assembly of the Council was held. The body includes, in addition to its chairman—the State Adviser to the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan and three employees of the Committee on Religious Affairs, 7 other representatives of the most significant faiths in Uzbekistan: Muslim, Orthodox, Catholic, Evangelical Lutheran, Baptist, Full Gospel Christians, and the Jewish religious community.

The Council’s tasks include coordinating the joint activities of traditional religious organizations in strengthening and developing their dialogue, developing and implementing joint measures to prevent the penetration of ideas of religious extremism and fanaticism into the territory of Uzbekistan, developing recommendations aimed at ensuring constant communication between the Council and local government bodies, etc. The Council for Religious Affairs plans to ensure that religious denominations present truthful information in the media about the history of religions, religious holidays and the role of religion in the life of society (Polozheniye, 2021).

Religious newspapers and magazines are published in the Republic to cover the spiritual and religious life of the population. The Office of Muslims of Uzbekistan publishes the newspaper “Islom Nuri” and the magazine “Hidoyat” twice a month, the Central Asian Metropolitan District of the Russian Orthodox Church – the newspaper “Word of Life” and the magazine “East from Above.”

In Uzbekistan (as well as in Central Asia as a whole), the moderate Sunni branch of the Islamic religion (Hanifism) prevails.

The land of Uzbekistan has become a place of contact and creative coexistence of Turkic, Iranian, Slavic and other languages and cultures (Yakushik, 2019: 88). This has developed a unique culture of the peoples of Uzbekistan, the main characteristics of which are national and religious tolerance and tolerance.

Initially pursuing a course of broad deployment of processes of ethno-national consolidation, one of the factors of strengthening of which is Islam, the leadership of Uzbekistan from the first years of independence initiated government actions aimed at returning the spiritual origins of the Uzbek people – the religious holidays of Nowruz, Ruza-hayit and Kurban-Hayit, which in the Soviet past were under an unspoken ban. By the decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated March 27, 1997, Ruza-hayit was declared a day off. Navruz and Eid al-Adha are celebrated nationwide, with the participation of representatives of different faiths and nationalities.

At the same time, interest in the study of traditional Islam is encouraged at the government level, information about its values and norms is disseminated through the mass media, and the opening of new mosques is stimulated. At the same time, the necessary conditions are created for the free functioning of other religious communities. Thus, in 1990, the Bible Society was established in Uzbekistan on the basis of a number of confessions professing the Bible.

The political leadership of Uzbekistan is fundamentally pursuing a policy of ensuring peace and tranquility in the Republic, preserving interethnic and inter-confessional harmony. One of the basic ideas is the idea of social solidarity and equal partnership of various social strata, a full reflection of the interests of representatives of various nationalities, religions and social groups of the multinational people of Uzbekistan (Rights, 2000).

### **Objective difficulties in the implementation of confessional policy and their resolution**

At the same time, in the context of a changing paradigm of religious politics, radicalized Muslim religious organizations began to appear on the crest of a rapidly growing flow. In 1990 – early 1991, informal extremist organizations “Adolat” (“Justice”), “Tovba” (“Repentance”), “Islom Uygonish Hizbi” (“Islamic Renaissance Party”), “Islom Lashkarlari” (“Warriors of Islam”), etc. emerged in the Namangan and Andijan regions of the Ferghana Valley. Playing on the religious feelings of Muslims, the leaders of these organizations sought to use the desire of the people to restore the original Islamic spirituality in order to create an Islamic state in Uzbekistan. Members of these organizations preached the ideas of fundamentalism, called for the establishment of a monopoly of Islam in their own interpretation, thereby introducing discord into the public life of the country (Musaev, 2002: 90-101; Kuznetsova, 2000: 44-48).

Taking into account that one of the main factors of civilized social development is harmony and friendship between the titular nation and representatives of other nations and nationalities living in the country, and that various confessions operate in the Republic, the leadership of the Republic paid special attention to blocking forces and socio-political factors that can trigger the mechanism of destructive fire of inter-religious conflicts, cause bloodshed and social upheavals (Rights, 2000: 4-5).

First of all, a deliberate and consistent effort was made to neutralize the nascent religious extremism. It was possible to prevent the scenario of the Uzbek “Shahidon” (the square in Dushanbe, where the rampant bloody fundamentalism and aggressive nationalism in Tajikistan began) (Bushkov & Mikulskiy, 1997).

World experience proves that the transition from one system of social relations to another is inevitably accompanied by a painful breakdown of value orientations, crisis phenomena in spiritual life. Uzbekistan has managed to significantly mitigate these processes. Spiritual revival in the Republic began to be carried out in new historical realities both on the way

back to spiritual origins and in the space of mastering the values of world civilization and developing its own development strategy.

In accordance with this conceptual vision, from the first days of independence, the task of reviving the thousand-year-old spiritual and cultural heritage of the people, including strengthening the role of the religious factor in the life of society, was set at the level of state policy in Uzbekistan. At the same time, special importance was attached to the establishment of civilized relations between the state and religion.

Adhering to the policy of building a secular, democratic state, the political leadership of Uzbekistan initially began to proceed from the principle of secularization. The Republic of Uzbekistan is a country that has chosen a secular path of development, in which religious associations are separated from the state. The current secularization is a basic feature of Uzbek society. In the new Uzbekistan, freedom of conscience is the fundamental principle of the life of society.

### **Legal aspects of the confessional policy of Uzbekistan**

According to article 31 of the Constitution of Uzbekistan, “freedom of conscience is guaranteed for all. Everyone has the right to profess any religion or not to profess any. It is unacceptable to forcibly inculcate religious views” (Konstitutsiya, 2020: 15). In this regard, it is appropriate to note that the principle of freedom of conscience was enshrined in the Constitution of the Turkestan ASSR, adopted in 1920 (Article 15) and in the Constitutions of the Uzbek SSR (1937, 1978). However, like many other republics of the former Soviet Union, Uzbekistan did not have legal acts that generalize and regulate the relationship between the state and religion. In this case, an important event for the people of Uzbekistan was the first edition of the Law “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations,” adopted by the Supreme Council of the Republic on the eve of independence – on June 14, 1991.

After achieving independence in the young state, the religious issue, taking into account the multi-confessional composition of the population, became a priority. In particular, for the purpose of purposeful implementation of modern religious policy, a special Committee on Religious Affairs was established under the Cabinet of Ministers by the Presidential Decree of March 7, 1992.

The Government of the modernizing Uzbekistan paid close attention to the formation of an effective legal framework regulating the issues of freedom of conscience and the activities of religious organizations. At the same time, the content and legislative foundations of confessional policy from the first steps of sovereign development began to be based on international principles of humanitarian law.

To date, Uzbekistan has ratified more than 60 international legal acts of a humanitarian nature. Among them are the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance, and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (1981), etc., in which the norms concerning the freedom of citizens to profess religion, as well as the rights of religious organizations, are set out in the most detail. Uzbekistan, which has ratified these international legal acts, has assumed obligations to comply with them strictly.

The legal foundations of the modern confessional policy of the Republic of Uzbekistan are specifically reflected in the Constitution, in the Laws “On Freedom of Conscience

and Religious Organizations” (1991 and 1998), “On Citizenship,” “On Property,” “On Alternative Service,” “On Education,” in the Civil and Family Codes and other legislative documents. They define, in accordance with international legal standards, that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; they regulate the mechanism for the implementation of this right; the principles of relations between the secular state and religious associations are formed (Yunusova, 2000: 58).

An important distinguishing feature of the religious life of modern Uzbekistan is the inadmissibility of establishing the advantages or limitations of one religion or belief in relation to others.

Taking active efforts to put this principle into practice, the Government of the Republic immediately gave priority not only to the revival of Islam, which is practiced by the majority of the country’s population, but also to other faiths. Thus, following the introduction of the law “On Property” (1990; new version-May 1993 and September 1994), all religious organizations in the country were provided with an equal right to property. On the basis of this law, they acquired the opportunity to own buildings, objects of worship, objects of social and industrial significance, other property necessary to ensure their activities, as well as money.

Active measures were taken by the leadership of Uzbekistan to promote the opening of new religious societies, confessional educational institutions, places of joint confession of faith, the performance of services, rites and rituals by religious organizations.

The Strategy of Action on the five priority areas of development of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2017-2021 specifically emphasizes: the peace and tranquility, friendship and unity, mutual respect and interethnic harmony that remain in the Republic are priceless wealth and the main achievement of independence (Action strategy, 2017).

In March 2021, the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On measures to radically improve the system of spiritual and educational work” was adopted, which emphasized that one of the key areas of work of the Republican Center for Spirituality and Enlightenment is “education of the population, especially young people, respect for the Islamic religion, other faiths and their philosophy, conducting spiritual and educational activities to further strengthen the atmosphere of interethnic harmony and mutual respect in society” (Resolution, 2021).

In the “Concept of organizing spiritual and educational work in the internal Affairs bodies,” adopted in April 2021, among the important tasks of the Ministry of Internal Affairs bodies is noted: “together with the Committee on Religious Affairs under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan, meetings are held aimed at explaining to employees the essence and content of the religion of Islam, increasing religious literacy, promoting the ideas of tolerance and interethnic harmony, strengthening ideological immunity against alien ideas, as well as increasing the attention and vigilance of employees of the internal affairs bodies” (The concept, 2021).

## **Islam in the life of modern Uzbekistan**

Islam is the second-largest number of adherents of religions in the world after Christianity. The total number of people professing Islam, according to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> centuries was more than 800 million in the countries of Asia, Africa, Europe, America, Oceania, and today it has already exceeded 1 billion persons.

The reasons for the activation of the role of Islam in the life of Uzbek society are diverse.

First, Islamic spirituality in Central Asia has thousands of years of historical roots. The territory of modern Uzbekistan was famous for its Islamic shrines. Only in the Tashkent region, there are more than 20 of them, in Samarkand-more than 40, Bukhara-13, Kashkadarya-26. The cities of Samarkand and Bukhara are world Islamic centers, hundreds of educational institutions, holy places, madrasas, mosques, tombs, khanaks (Sufi dormitories) were located here. Of particular importance are the Shahi-Zinda necropolis, Bibi-Khanum mosque, Imam Bukhari Mosque, Ulugbek Madrasah (Samarkand), Samanid Mausoleum, Bahautdin Naqshband Mosque (Bukhara), Hazrat Ali tomb (Ferghana), Kukeldash madrasah (Tashkent).

Uzbekistan and Central Asia as a whole have been the life-giving center of Islamic philosophy, science, and theology for many centuries. Scholars of the region have made a significant contribution to the development of Islamic spirituality, to the scientific justification of the teachings of Islam. All this has led to the special role of the ulama of Uzbekistan in the Muslim world. This factor objectively serves to increase the authority of the country and the people, strengthen the sense of national pride, and make the broad masses aware of the spiritual identity of Central Asian Islam.

Secondly, as in pre-Soviet times, the Islamic factor has an important foreign policy dimension for the state. The restoration of religious spirituality contributed to the integration of the Republic into the world Islamic community. In particular, Uzbekistan joined the OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation, until 2011 it was called the OIC – Organization of the Islamic Conference) (Khasanov, 1997: 48-49), established relations with the Arab world and other Islamic states (Iran, Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, etc.), and supported the Cairo Declaration of Human Rights (Kairskaya deklaratsiya, 2021).

Third, despite the ideological pressure and persecution to which believers were subjected during many decades of the Soviet past, the commitment to religion and Islamic values remained. After all, Islam has since ancient times entered the way of life and thinking of local peoples. The Soviet regime, by placing religion under the control of the state, transformed its integral organization. Most of its elements have been preserved only at the individual or local level, in individual customs and household ceremonies. Nevertheless, the Muslim religion has acquired a kind of “invisible” form. The vast majority of the population of Uzbekistan, including party and Soviet workers, continued to secretly observe religious rituals. After gaining independence, when the previous obstacles and restrictions disappeared, people were presented with real freedom of religion and other rights, the Islamic religion began to actively revive, especially in rural areas.

Fourth, socio-economic difficulties played a significant role in the active revival of religious principles in the minds of people, especially in the first years of the difficult transition period of independent development: environmental degradation, the devaluation of many ethical norms, tensions in inter-ethnic relations, and the loss of ideological guidelines.

Fifthly, the fact that the political leadership of sovereign Uzbekistan from the first days of independence has set the task of reviving the thousand-year-old spiritual and cultural heritage of the people, strengthening the role of the religious factor in the life of society, has had a significant impact. At the same time, Islam was officially declared part of the cultural and historical heritage of the country.

The experience of the last years of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries convincingly shows that often in the modern world, such concepts as “renaissance,” “Islamic renaissance,” and other terms in relation to the religious upsurge are interpreted very widely. Among the

“forces of the renaissance” are those who advocate economic and cultural transformations, as well as representatives of extreme religious movements, supporters of a return to the Middle Ages, who perceive the desire to return to the old and good values primarily through the prism of rejection of modernity and denial of the need to modernize society (Kobzeva, 2015: 199-208).

The understanding of the negative consequences associated with such a vision led the Republic to turn to “a deeply thought-out approach, to develop the implementation of a set of political, economic and cultural programs aimed at increasing the positive, creative nature of spiritual revival, ... a differentiated approach to the revived heritage, choosing first of all the most important, ethically significant traditions and customs that enrich universal values and meet the requirements of democracy and the renewal of society” (Abbasova, 2001: 142-143).

Among the achievements of the Muslim renaissance in Uzbekistan and Central Asia as a whole, we should highlight the rapid increase in mosques, the resumption of the Hajj pilgrimage to holy places, and the development of Islamic education. For example, by the beginning of 1992, about 2 thousand mosques were restored or built anew in the Republic. At the same time, in 1991, 1,500 people made a pilgrimage to Mecca from Uzbekistan with the financial support of the government, whereas in the 1980s, no more than 30 people a year had such an opportunity throughout the USSR. By the end of the 1990s, more than 30 thousand people had undertaken the Hajj. citizens of Uzbekistan, and umrah (small Hajj) – more than 50 thousand. Thus, in the Andijan region, before the Declaration of state sovereignty, there were 12 mosques, and in 2003 – 180, of which 120 were cathedral mosques.

With the provision of religious opportunities, the clergy began the task of broad Muslim education, so that every believer not only performed the rites, but also knew the basics of the faith. In this regard, mosques have restored their functions as a kind of centers for the development of religious knowledge, raising the level of spirituality and enlightenment. In the Republic, the Koran, collections of hadiths, popular Muslim literature were published in the Uzbek language, and Islamic periodicals began to be published.

At the same time, the process of reviving the national spiritual school has gained a wide scope in Uzbekistan. In the first years of independence, 9 new madrasas were opened in the Republic, although there were only two of them in the entire Central Asia of the Soviet era. Enrollment in Muslim educational institutions in the country increased 10-fold in 1992. Currently, there are 10 specialized secondary Islamic educational institutions in Uzbekistan. Among them – “Khadichai Kubro” in Tashkent, “Mir Arab” and “Zhuboyri Kalon” in Bukhara, “Sayyid Muhiyiddin Makhdam” in Andijan, “Fakhriddin Ar-Roziy” in Urgench, “Hozha Bukhori” in Kashkadarya region, “Mullah Kirghiz” in Namangan, “Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Beruniy” in Nukus, etc. As religious organizations, they are not accountable to state structures in their educational activities, but only to the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Uzbekistan, which has a special department of education. These educational institutions train middle-level specialists for the needs of Islamic religious organizations. They are equipped with modern educational equipment, have everything necessary for the implementation of effective educational work.

The Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of the Republic was also assigned to the current one since 1971 Islamic Institute in Tashkent. Now it accepts students not only from Uzbekistan, but from all over the world, including the CIS countries and Europe. The Institute has the opportunity to publish its textbooks and other printed materials, traditional Islamic literature. All teachers are citizens of Uzbekistan, and all of them have received higher education within

the country or have achieved academic degrees in well-known higher educational institutions abroad, such as Al-Azhar (Egypt). According to the institute's program, about 10 students are trained annually to become "hafiz" of the Qur'an (people who know all the surahs of the Qur'an by heart). Students of the Institute receive diplomas after completing a four-year program and mastering all the languages in which they studied, including Arabic, Turkish and Persian.

In 1999, the Tashkent Islamic University was opened, which trains secular specialists in the field of Islamic studies. Here students learn all aspects of Islam, including fiqh (jurisprudence), Quranic Arabic, tafsir (interpretation of the Qur'an), hadith and their interpretation, and modern Arabic. After graduation, students receive bachelor's and master's degrees. There is also a women's department at the University. In 2003, the first bachelor degree students graduated, and in 2005 – the master degree. The University also has an Academic Lyceum.

Both of these educational institutions are funded by the government, as well as by additional funds and donations, and the leadership of Uzbekistan promotes the sending of gifted students of Islamic educational institutions for training and internships abroad.

Special importance in modern Uzbekistan is attached in the context of the implementation of a large-scale program for the revival of the spiritual and religious foundations of society, the culture of Islam, the restoration of Muslim shrines and the bright memory of outstanding Islamic religious figures of the past. In particular, the celebration of the anniversaries of outstanding theologians, hadith scholars, and the founders of Sufism in Central Asia – Al-Bukhari, Al-Termizi, Mahmud Al-Zamakhshari, Khoja Ahrar Wali, Najmiddin Kubro, Imam al-Maturidi, Burkhoniddin Margiloni, Bahauddin Naqshband, Ahmad Yassawi, and other authoritative interpreters of Islamic teaching-had a wide resonance in the country.

In 2007, by the decision of the Council of the Islamic Organizations for Education, Science and Culture (ISESCO), Tashkent was declared one of the four capitals of Islamic culture (Tashkent, 2007; Tashkent, 2007a).

### **Religious tolerance as an important factor in inter-confessional relations**

In 2016-2021 scientific-theoretical and scientific-practical conferences, round tables, seminars were held in Uzbekistan on the following topics: "Interethnic and interreligious harmony-a factor of stability," "Interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance-a guarantee of stability of society," "Islamic studies in Uzbekistan: achievements and prospects," "Independence and religious education," "Transformations in the field of religious education," "Independence and development of religious values," "Religious tolerance – the factor of peace and stability," "Tolerance, mutual understanding, solidarity and harmony," "Culture, religious traditions and customs of the peoples of Central Asia," etc., which considered such issues as the importance of inter-confessional dialogue in the context of globalization, religious tolerance and inter-ethnic national harmony as the basis for prosperity, the formation of spiritual immunity and countering religious extremism and terrorism, tolerance and the future, increasing the role of Uzbekistan as a country of inter-ethnic and inter-confessional harmony.

International cooperation in the spiritual and humanitarian sphere plays an important role in maintaining interfaith tolerance. In 2019, an International "round table" was held to discuss the recommendations of the UN Human Rights Council and international bodies on the results of the consideration of national reports of Uzbekistan in the field of human rights

and freedoms. The event was jointly organized by the National Center for Human Rights of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the UN Office in Uzbekistan.

During 2016-2021, Uzbekistan was visited by many prominent religious figures, religious scholars and experts in the field of confessional politics – the Secretary-General of the OIC Iyad bin Amin Madani, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein, the UN Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur on Freedom of religion and belief Ahmed Shahid, the UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights I. Simonovich, the President of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) Ahmad Muhammad Ali, the Minister of State for Religion and Communities of Great Britain S. Warsi, U.S. Special Representative for Afghan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, delegation of the Congress of Bukharian Jews of the United States and Canada headed by B. Kandov, delegation of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Civil Society of Kazakhstan headed by N. B. Yermekbayev, Secretary General of the Turkic Council Bagdad Amreyev, delegation of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Turkey headed by Director General of the Religious Service of Turkey Bunyamin Albayrak, delegation of the State Committee for Religious Affairs of Kyrgyzstan headed by Director Zayirbek Ergeshov, Rector of the Egyptian University of Islamic Culture “Nur-Mubarak” in Kazakhstan Muhammad al-Shahhat al-Jindi, religious scholar Sonmez Kutlu (professor at Ankara University), Dean of the Malaysian University of Islamic Studies Amir Shahuddin Professor, Al-Azhar University (Egypt) Mahmoud Abdullah, delegation of the Institute of Islamic Theology of the University of Osnabrück (Germany), Rector of the Malaysian University of Islamic Sciences (USIM), Professor Muso Ahmad, Professor of the International Center for Arabic Language Teaching Hassan Alshamrani, delegation of the Center for Islamic Theology of the University of Munster (Germany) headed by Professor Mohanad Korhide, specialist of the Islamic Organization for Education, Science and Culture (ISESCO) Dr. Yusuf Ibrahim, Deputy Chairman of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan Sherzod Pulatov, delegation of the Bulgarian Islamic Academy (Tatarstan, Russian Federation) led by Rector Daniyar Abdrakhmanov, delegation of theologians of Afghanistan led by Mufti Muhammad Yusuf, Director General of IRCICA (Research Center for the History, Art and Culture of Islam) Halit Eren, religious scholar Paolo Sartori (Academy of Sciences of Austria), Religious Affairs Officer of the US Institute of Peace (USIP) Melissa Nocell, religious scholar Ishaq Bhatti (professor of the Australian University “Latrobe”), associate professor of the Kazan Islamic Institute Ramil Adygamov and others.

In February 2017, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan signed a decree on the establishment of the International Islamic Center for the Study of the Heritage of Imam Abu Iso Muhammad at-Termizi. In June 2017, the Presidential Decree “On measures to organize the Center of Islamic Culture in Uzbekistan under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan” was adopted.

The Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On the preparation and holding of the celebration of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the state independence of the Republic of Uzbekistan” notes among the key areas: “work to ensure peace and stability in society, interethnic harmony and religious tolerance, protect the rights and interests of our citizens abroad, implement a mutually beneficial and pragmatic foreign policy, strengthen relations of friendship and cooperation with neighboring countries, and jointly solve regional and international problems” (Resolution, 2020).

## Conclusions

1. Democratic confessional policy is based on such principles as equality of confessional groups, interethnic and inter-confessional harmony, religious tolerance, a combination of ethno-confessional and national interests, a ban on non-democratic approaches to solving religious issues, and support for the rights of minorities to preserve their ethno-confessional identity and originality.

2. The culture of Uzbekistan has objective prerequisites for progressive and dynamic development. There are two main trends in the development of cultures and civilizations: the trend towards independent development and the trend towards integration. The higher the level of integration, the richer the content of each of the participating cultures, and the richer the content – the stronger the desire for interaction.

3. The issue of inter-confessional relations largely determines the stability of society and the sustainability of its development, since the implementation of state policy largely depends on the support of various faiths.

4. In general, inter-confessional relations in the Republic of Uzbekistan are at a fairly high level, and it is important to preserve and multiply this invaluable experience of historical tolerance.

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