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RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE POLICY IN UZBEKISTAN: HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE, LEGAL FOUNDATIONS, AND ITS ROLE IN ENSURING SOCIAL STABILITY

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes the historical roots, constitutional and legal foundations, and institutional mechanisms of the policy of religious tolerance in Uzbekistan. The role of guaranteeing freedom of conscience, strengthening an atmosphere of mutual respect between different religious denominations, scientifically studying the religious and educational heritage, and combating ignorance and extremism with enlightenment in ensuring the stability of society is highlighted. The article also puts forward scientific and practical proposals for developing a culture of religious tolerance in the context of globalization and the digital information space.

Keywords: religious tolerance, freedom of conscience, interfaith dialogue, secular state, legal guarantee, enlightenment, religious heritage, civil solidarity, social stability.

Introduction

Religious tolerance is one of the fundamental characteristics of a democratic state governed by the rule of law. It implies the protection of an individual's freedom to profess or not profess any religion, respect for diverse religious beliefs, and the



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prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of religious affiliation. Throughout its long history, Uzbekistan has developed as a crossroads of civilizations, peoples, and religious traditions. This historical experience has contributed to the formation of values such as mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and social harmony within society [1].

Since gaining independence, the promotion of religious tolerance has become one of the priorities of Uzbekistan's state policy. On the one hand, it is necessary to guarantee citizens' freedom of conscience and religion while creating favorable conditions for the lawful activities of religious organizations. On the other hand, legal and educational measures must be implemented to prevent the politicization of religion, religious extremism, fanaticism, and the spread of hatred. Therefore, examining religious tolerance through historical, legal, and socio-political perspectives is essential for ensuring sustainable social stability [2].

The territory of present-day Uzbekistan has historically been home to Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Archaeological monuments, written sources, and architectural heritage demonstrate that these religious traditions developed through continuous interaction. The Silk Road facilitated not only economic exchange but also the movement of scholars, merchants, and travelers, thereby promoting cultural and spiritual dialogue. As a result, tolerance toward different beliefs and traditions became an integral part of social life [3].

During the flourishing of Islamic civilization, Mawarannahr (Transoxiana) emerged as one of the world's leading centers of science and learning. The scholarly legacy of Imam al-Bukhari, Imam al-Tirmidhi, Abu Mansur al-Maturidi, and Burhanuddin al-Marghinani emphasizes the values of human dignity, justice, moderation, the pursuit of knowledge, and the preservation of social peace. In particular, the Maturidi school of theology, with its emphasis on



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the harmony of reason and revelation, moderation in matters of faith, and individual responsibility, continues to provide an important intellectual foundation for the modern culture of religious tolerance [4].

Historical experience demonstrates that religious tolerance should not be understood merely as a state policy but also as a social value rooted in everyday life, neighborhood relations, mutual assistance, and traditional hospitality. At the same time, history should not be idealized; rather, it should be studied objectively and used to address contemporary social challenges. A balanced scholarly interpretation of historical heritage contributes to the development of shared cultural memory and civic solidarity among different religious communities [5]. The legal foundations of Uzbekistan's policy of religious tolerance are established by the Constitution, which guarantees human rights, equality before the law, freedom of conscience, and the principles of a secular state. Religion is separated from the state, and no religion is recognized as the official state religion. This constitutional principle does not seek to exclude religion from public life but rather ensures equal legal conditions for all religious beliefs while maintaining state governance on the basis of universal civic and legal principles [6].

The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations" (Law No. ZRU-699 of 5 July 2021) serves as the principal legal instrument regulating religious affairs. The law establishes guarantees of freedom of conscience, equality of citizens regardless of their religious beliefs, the legal status of religious organizations, and the procedures governing their establishment and operation. Its provisions are intended to maintain a balance between individual freedoms, public security, and the protection of the rights and legitimate interests of others [7].

National legislation concerning religious freedom is consistent with universally recognized principles of international law. Both the Universal Declaration of



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Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights recognize every person's right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. These international instruments guarantee the right to choose, practice, and manifest one's religion individually or collectively while also recognizing the necessity of protecting public order, public safety, and the rights of others [8]. The effectiveness of legal policy depends upon the consistent application of legal norms, the prevention of discrimination based on religious affiliation, and the peaceful resolution of disputes through lawful procedures.

The promotion of religious tolerance in Uzbekistan requires close cooperation among government institutions, religious organizations, civil society institutions, neighborhood communities (*mahallas*), educational establishments, and the mass media. The primary objectives of this cooperative system are to ensure citizens' legitimate religious needs, encourage interfaith dialogue, identify emerging problems at an early stage, and prevent the misuse of religion for destructive purposes. Religious organizations also contribute to social cohesion by promoting charity, family values, ethical responsibility, and moral education [9].

Beginning in 2018, organizational reforms aimed at strengthening religious enlightenment, preserving the intellectual heritage of outstanding Islamic scholars, and promoting this heritage internationally entered a new stage of development. The activities of research centers and educational institutions increasingly focus on the scholarly analysis of religious sources using modern academic methods, providing reliable knowledge to counter distorted interpretations, and strengthening the ideological resilience of young people. The principle of "Enlightenment against Ignorance" seeks to combat religious radicalization not merely through legal restrictions but through education, dialogue, social support, and accurate religious knowledge.



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The adoption of the United Nations General Assembly Resolution "Enlightenment and Religious Tolerance" on 12 December 2018, initiated by Uzbekistan, demonstrated the country's approach to religious tolerance at the international level. The resolution emphasizes education, literacy, intercultural and interreligious dialogue as essential means of strengthening peace and protecting human rights. This initiative illustrates that religious tolerance is not solely a matter of domestic policy but also an important prerequisite for global security and sustainable development [10].

Religious tolerance constitutes one of the principal moral and legal foundations of social stability. When citizens are confident that their religious beliefs are respected, that they will not face discrimination because of their religious or secular convictions, and that their legal rights are equally protected, public trust in state institutions is strengthened. Under such conditions, religious diversity becomes not a source of conflict but an important element enriching the cultural diversity of society. Mutual respect and constructive dialogue significantly reduce the risk that everyday social disagreements may develop into religious tensions.

Religious tolerance is also of great importance from the perspective of national security. Religious illiteracy, social injustice, social alienation, manipulative propaganda disseminated through the Internet, and insufficient attention to the concerns of young people may create favorable conditions for the spread of radical ideologies. Therefore, preventive measures should not be limited solely to law enforcement activities but should be complemented by quality education, employment opportunities, psychological support, family upbringing, community (*mahalla*) cooperation, and open religious and educational dialogue. Legal measures can produce sustainable long-term results only when they are



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applied proportionately, transparently, and with full respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms.

Religious tolerance also contributes positively to the country's international reputation, tourism development, foreign investment, and cultural diplomacy. Islamic, Buddhist, Jewish, and Christian heritage sites located in Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, Termez, and other historical centers reflect Uzbekistan's rich and multi-layered civilizational history. The preservation and objective interpretation of this heritage not only promote pilgrimage tourism but also strengthen intercultural and interreligious dialogue among different peoples and civilizations.

Education plays an indispensable role in cultivating a culture of religious tolerance. Schools and higher educational institutions should provide objective, scientific, and age-appropriate instruction on the history of religions, freedom of conscience, human rights, and the principles of secularism. In this regard, it is essential to distinguish clearly between religious preaching and the academic study of religion while preventing stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes. Educators should possess the professional competencies necessary to manage sensitive religious issues appropriately, resolve conflicts through dialogue, and provide evidence-based answers to students' questions.

The digital information environment creates not only new opportunities but also significant challenges. Unverified religious information, hate speech, quotations taken out of context, and manipulative online videos can spread rapidly through social media platforms. Consequently, improving media and information literacy, particularly among young people, has become an important priority. This includes expanding reliable educational platforms, increasing the availability of clear and evidence-based explanations provided by scholars and religious experts, and strengthening critical thinking skills. Efforts to combat illegal online content



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should focus on preventing violence and incitement to hatred rather than imposing unjustified restrictions on freedom of expression.

Continuous dialogue among civil society institutions, representatives of different religious denominations, and local communities strengthens mutual trust and social cohesion. Joint charitable initiatives, environmental campaigns, youth exchange programs, cultural events, and support for vulnerable social groups unite people of different faiths around common humanitarian values. Such cooperation transforms religious tolerance from a theoretical principle into an everyday civic practice.

Conclusion

Uzbekistan's policy of religious tolerance is founded upon centuries of historical experience, constitutional guarantees of human rights, the principles of a secular state, and modern institutional mechanisms. Its primary objectives are to guarantee freedom of religion and conscience, ensure equal legal conditions for all religious communities, promote interfaith dialogue, and combine educational and legal measures in preventing religious extremism and intolerance.

Religious tolerance represents a strategic factor for ensuring social stability, national unity, national security, and the country's international reputation. Further strengthening this policy requires the consistent implementation of constitutional guarantees in practice, greater objectivity in education and information policy, improved media literacy among young people, and broader cooperation between religious organizations and civil society institutions. Under these conditions, religious diversity will become not a source of social division but a foundation for mutual respect, enlightenment, peaceful coexistence, and sustainable development.



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