

RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE – THE GUARANTEE OF PEACE AND INTERETHNIC HARMONY

Holikulov P.

University of Economy and Pedagogy

Abstract:

This article explores the concept of religious tolerance and its crucial role in maintaining peace, social harmony, and interethnic unity, particularly in Uzbekistan. It emphasizes the importance of religious freedom, the guarantee of equal rights for all citizens, and the historical and contemporary practices of tolerance in the country. The principles of tolerance in Islam, historical examples, and the ongoing efforts by the Uzbek government to foster interethnic harmony are examined. The paper also highlights the role of international initiatives, such as the UN's "Enlightenment and Religious Tolerance" resolution, in promoting global peace. The article demonstrates how religious and ethnic diversity in Uzbekistan has been a cornerstone of national stability and development, contributing to a peaceful and prosperous society.

Keywords: Religious Tolerance, Interethnic Harmony, Peace, Uzbekistan, Freedom of Conscience, Human Rights, Islamic Tolerance, Global Peace, Tolerance in Islam, UNESCO, United Nations, Social Stability, Multiculturalism.

Introduction

In Uzbekistan, the key issues in defining the relationship between the state and religion are ensuring the secular principles of the state, guaranteeing citizens' rights and freedoms related to freedom of conscience, regulating the legal activities of religious organizations, and strengthening peace and stability in society. This, in turn, serves as the foundation for citizens of peaceful Uzbekistan to freely enjoy the rights and freedoms defined in the Constitution and laws. Today, the concept of tolerance is widely used in various places and contexts. Alongside tolerance, the term "tolerant" (from Greek "tolerantia," meaning patience) is used to describe the ability to be patient with others' way of life, behavior, customs, emotions, thoughts, ideas, and beliefs.

As globalization rapidly progresses, the communication and cooperation between peoples of various cultures and religions, and the establishment of the principles of mutual tolerance, have become increasingly important. In turn, appreciating the value of peaceful, tranquil, and prosperous life in our homeland, and contributing to further strengthening this peaceful life, has become one of the key tasks for every individual today. Every person should feel a sense of responsibility for the future of the nation and contribute to the common cause.

Currently, over 130 nationalities and ethnic groups live in harmony as one family in Uzbekistan. Their rights and freedoms are guaranteed by law. Tolerance is an ancient value of the Uzbek people, and throughout history, various nations have lived side by side in the region without ethnic or religious conflicts, which is a clear historical fact. Since ancient times, our land has been home to various peoples with different cultures, languages, customs, and ways of life. During World War II, more than 200,000 children were brought to Uzbekistan, and not a single one was sent to an orphanage. They found a home in Uzbek families, and in times of severe food shortages, these



families shared their bread with the children. This is a true example of heroism and the highest form of tolerance.

According to Article 18 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, "All citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan are equal before the law and have the same rights and freedoms, regardless of their gender, race, ethnicity, language, religion, social origin, beliefs, or personal and social status. Privileges can only be provided by law and must be in accordance with the principles of social justice."

Our first president, Islam Karimov, said: "The most important achievement of independent Uzbekistan at the initial stage of its development was the maintenance of social-political stability, peace, and interethnic harmony among citizens in our multiethnic society."

Historical sources demonstrate a clear understanding of the principle of tolerance. Particularly, works such as Abu Nasr Farabi's "The Virtuous City," Abu Rayhan Beruni's "Monuments of the Ancient Peoples," Nizam al-Mulk's "Siyasatnama," Yusuf Khass Hajib's "Qutadg'u Bilig," and Timur's "Tuzuklar" exemplify how relations between different peoples should be based on justice and the principles of tolerance.

In recent years, increased attention to religious tolerance and interethnic harmony, gender equality, and the upbringing of young people in the spirit of tolerance have been prioritized. The fifth section of the 2017-2021 Uzbekistan Development Strategy focuses on "Ensuring security, interethnic harmony, and religious tolerance, and pursuing mutually beneficial foreign policy."

The speech of our President at the 72nd session of the United Nations General Assembly attracted international attention due to its content and significance. Despite being brief, it addressed some of the most pressing global issues, including reforms in Uzbekistan, democracy, human rights, youth issues, religious tolerance, international security, regional cooperation, and ecological problems, such as the Aral Sea disaster.

First, the President emphasized the need to protect youth from the growing threats of religious extremism and terrorism and to create necessary conditions for the youth to realize their potential. Second, he highlighted the humanitarian significance of Islam, stating, "We consider it our most important task to convey the true essence of Islam, which is based on humanism, to the world community. We cherish our sacred religion as the embodiment of our eternal values."

One of the key proposals was the adoption of a special resolution titled "Enlightenment and Religious Tolerance," which was adopted by more than 50 countries on December 12, 2018. The main goal of this resolution is to ensure the right to education for all, eliminate ignorance, and promote tolerance and mutual respect. The resolution is aimed at ensuring religious freedom, protecting the rights of believers, and preventing their discrimination.

In addition, the attention given to religion and religious people in Uzbekistan is reflected in national laws. Currently, over 2,200 religious organizations operate in the country, and the "Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations" law, adopted in 1998, regulates all matters related to religion. According to Article 31 of this law, "Everyone is guaranteed freedom of conscience. Every person has the right to choose a religion or not to adhere to any religion. Religious beliefs may not be forcibly imposed on anyone."

The year 1995 was declared by the United Nations as the International Year of Tolerance, and UNESCO was appointed as the coordinating body. During this year, the UNESCO General Conference adopted the "Declaration on Principles of Tolerance," which calls for the observance



of November 16 as International Tolerance Day. The Declaration encourages the organization of special events and programs to spread the ideas of tolerance, supported by governments, non-governmental organizations, and media outlets.

The preamble of UNESCO's constitution emphasizes that "Peace must be based on intellectual and moral solidarity." Similarly, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states in Article 18, "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion," and in Article 19, "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression." It also emphasizes the need for mutual understanding and friendship between all peoples, racial, and religious groups.

International legal documents explicitly condemn xenophobia (fear of other religions, races, and ethnic groups) and discrimination (oppression). Islam emphasizes peace, tranquility, and tolerance, and several Quranic verses and hadiths emphasize that Islam is a moderate religion.

Thus, tolerance and the principle of interfaith harmony established by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) continue to be exemplified in Islamic history.

Uzbekistan has been an important part of the Great Silk Road for thousands of years, where trade, science, and culture have thrived. In this development, the country's inherent tolerance, hospitality, and respect for other cultures played a crucial role. This is why the various peoples' customs and traditions have developed in harmony in our country.

The speech of our President at the UN General Assembly, particularly the adoption of the "Enlightenment and Religious Tolerance" resolution, serves as a foundation for peace, tranquility, and stability in the world.

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