



THE UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE AND UZBEKISTAN: PATHWAYS OF REFORM AND COOPERATION

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ABSTRACT

This article explores Uzbekistan's engagement with the United Nations Human Rights Committee (HRC) within the framework of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). It highlights the reforms undertaken by Uzbekistan to comply with international human rights obligations and underscores the constructive role of the HRC's recommendations in shaping national policy. The article provides a citizen's perspective on tangible improvements in justice, labor practices, civil society development, and international dialogue. It argues that Uzbekistan's cooperation with the HRC reflects not only adherence to treaty commitments but also a strategic choice to modernize governance and build a more just society.

Introduction. The United Nations Human Rights Committee, established under the ICCPR, is a key treaty-monitoring body that evaluates States Parties' compliance with civil and political rights obligations. Uzbekistan ratified the ICCPR in 1995, thereby committing itself to periodic reporting and dialogue with the Committee (United Nations Treaty Collection, 1995).

For Uzbekistan, a young state navigating political, social, and economic transformation, cooperation with the HRC has provided both challenges and opportunities. While the Committee has identified areas for further progress, its concluding observations also serve as a roadmap for reform. From a citizen's viewpoint, this process reflects Uzbekistan's openness to constructive criticism and its determination to improve governance in line with international standards.

Uzbekistan's Treaty Commitments and Engagement with the HRC

Uzbekistan joined the ICCPR soon after independence, signaling its commitment to universal human rights principles. Ratification was an important step in consolidating international legitimacy and integrating into global governance structures (Human Rights Committee, 2020).

Since ratification, Uzbekistan has submitted five periodic reports to the HRC, with the most recent examined in 2020. The reporting process has created opportunities for dialogue

between state authorities, civil society, and international experts. As a citizen, I observe that this dialogue has become more transparent in recent years, with reports being publicly available and discussed domestically.

Judicial reform and protection against torture. The HRC has consistently emphasized the importance of safeguarding imprisoned individuals from torture and ill-treatment. In response, Uzbekistan introduced amendments to the Criminal Code that criminalize torture in line with international standards. Independent monitoring of detention facilities has expanded, and judicial oversight of investigations has improved (Human Rights Committee, 2020). These reforms not only strengthen compliance with the ICCPR but also restore citizens' trust in the justice system.

Labor rights and the eradication of forced labor. One of the most significant achievements has been the elimination of systemic forced labor, especially in the cotton sector. For decades, Uzbekistan's international image suffered due to reports of coerced labor during harvest seasons. However, by 2021, the International Labor Organization (ILO) confirmed that forced labor had been effectively eradicated (ILO, 2022). This reform not only improved human rights protection but also enhanced Uzbekistan's global reputation, opening new markets for cotton exports.

Civil society and freedom of association. In line with the HRC's recommendations, Uzbekistan has worked to strengthen civil society institutions. Legal barriers to registering non-governmental organizations have been reduced, and state grants have been introduced to support NGO initiatives (OHCHR, 2021). Citizens now have greater opportunities to participate in public life, reflecting a gradual shift toward inclusivity.

Transparency and international cooperation. Another area of progress is Uzbekistan's engagement with international organizations. The government has invited UN special rapporteurs and cooperated with international partners to implement recommendations. This openness demonstrates the country's readiness to align national laws with international standards (Human Rights Committee, 2020).

In recent years we can notice tangible changes resulting from these reforms:

- Courts are becoming more open, and hearings are increasingly accessible to the public.
- The annual cotton harvest, once associated with forced mobilization, is now a source of pride as it reflects fair labor practices.
- Civil society organizations are more active in promoting community development, education, and human rights awareness.
- Dialogue with international partners is no longer seen as external pressure but as a partnership for national progress.

However, while progress is evident, the reform process is ongoing. The HRC continues to recommend:

- Ensuring full independence of the judiciary.
- Expanding access to legal aid.
- Guaranteeing that all citizens can freely exercise their right to peaceful assembly and association.
- Strengthening the role of the Ombudsman and other national human rights institutions (Human Rights Committee, 2020).

Addressing these issues requires persistence and political will. However, Uzbekistan's track-record suggests a clear commitment to moving forward.

The example of Uzbekistan shows that cooperation with the HRC is not a one-sided process. Instead, it is a mutually beneficial partnership:

- For Uzbekistan, it provides technical guidance and international recognition.
- For the HRC, it demonstrates how constructive engagement can foster reform in a transitional society.

This dynamic strengthens the legitimacy of the international human rights system while ensuring practical benefits for citizens.

Conclusion. The Human Rights Committee has played an important role in Uzbekistan's human rights journey. Its recommendations have guided legal and institutional reforms that are now visible in citizens' everyday lives. As a citizen, I feel proud that my country has taken serious steps to eradicate forced labor, strengthen the judiciary, and open more space for civil society. Uzbekistan's ongoing cooperation with the HRC proves that human rights are not merely abstract ideals but practical tools for building a more just, fair, and prosperous society. The path ahead is challenging, but the direction is clear: continued reform, stronger institutions, and deeper engagement with international partners.

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