



***THE EMBASSY OF THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN
TO THE KINGDOM OF BELGIUM
MISSIONS TO THE EUROPEAN UNION AND NATO***

*Address: Av. Franklin Roosevelt, 99, 1050
Brussels, Belgium*

*t. 322-6728844, f.322-6723946,
e-mail: press@uzbekistan.be*

Studied and Spread: Uzbekistan's Expertise in Women's Role in Civil Society Formation, Public Administration

Samarkand has played host to the international conference entitled "The role of women in public administration and the formation of civil society: the practice of Uzbekistan".

The forum was organized by the Women's Committee of Uzbekistan, the Legislative Chamber and Senate of the Oliy Majlis, the Federation Council of Trade Unions, the National Association of Nongovernment Nonprofit Organizations of Uzbekistan, and the Independent Institute for Monitoring the Formation of Civil Society. The foreign partners included the Regional Bureau of the UN Women for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Savings Banks Foundation for International Cooperation (Germany), representative office of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (Germany) in Uzbekistan.

The conference was attended by members of the Legislative Chamber and Senate of the Oliy Majlis, representatives of related ministries, agencies, civil society institutions, foreign and international social organizations, along with field experts from the U.S., Germany, Italy, China and other countries, as well as journalists.

Prior to the start of the conference, participants visited the Samarkand Textile Industry College and got acquainted with the activities of the staff for the employment of college graduates, familiarized themselves with the hobby club "Diligent Girls" in the Samarkand general education school №21, and called in the mahalla "Chashma". The guests also met with holders of Zulfiya State Prize, winners of international competitions, Olympiads in mathematics, chemistry and foreign languages.

It was stressed at the conference that over the years of independence, wide-ranging reforms aimed at building a democratic state with the rule of law and a strong civil society are being implemented under the leadership of President Islam Karimov. At the same time, among the critical public policy priorities is the enhancement of the role and status of women in society, provision for their rights and interests, creation of all the essential conditions and environment conducive for boosting their sociopolitical and socioeconomic activity, intellectual and spiritual potential – in a

word, their participation in the modernization and renewal of all spheres of state and society.

Corresponding legislative framework has been shaped to this end that unites more than 100 laws and other normative acts, including the presidential decree on additional measures to support the activities of the Women's Committee of Uzbekistan, inked May 25, 2004. All these documents are dedicated to further improve the system of institutional protection of women's rights and fully comply with universally accepted international democratic standards. The Republic of Uzbekistan ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Conventions of the International Labor Organization on Maternity Protection and on Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation.

In our country, women have been making a noteworthy contribution to the implementation of priority tasks in reforming the economy and modernizing the society, uplifting the standards and quality of life, bolstering education and healthcare, science and culture.

The conference participants reviewed the experience garnered in Uzbekistan to enhance women's political activity, augment their participation in elected and other representative bodies of government. It was noted that an important step in that direction was the perfection of the electoral system in accordance with international norms, increasing the quotas for women in legislatures so that 30 percent of all candidates from political parties for membership in the parliament be women, which has greatly added to the possibility of their participation in the sociopolitical life of the nation.

As a result, the latest, December 2014 elections to the Legislative Chamber of Uzbekistan gave rise to 24 women as its members – 16 percent of the total number of deputies in the lower chamber of parliament. In the Senate of Oliy Majlis, the number of women amounted to 17 percent. This shows not only a steady growth in their political and social activity, but it also is indicative of the legislative guarantees for their participation in the representative bodies of government.

“Every time I come to this country I see the mounting role of the Uzbek women in the sociopolitical and socioeconomic life of the nation,” Susan Scanlan, chairwoman of the U.S. National Council of Women's Organizations. “During one of the meetings I came to believe that there are some things American women ought to learn. After all, Uzbek women today are not merely guardians of the family hearth, but are also highly educated specialists, creative individuals, who have been making remarkable accomplishments with their diligence, abilities and responsible attitude.”

A reliable partner of the state in the realization of extensive efforts to elevate women's participation in public life have been civil society institutions enjoying the support of the wider public, nongovernmental nonprofit organizations (NNOs). Currently, in excess of 8.2 thousand NNOs, including more than 530 women's are working in Uzbekistan across diverse walks of life. Their activities are directed mainly at improving the law culture, protecting the rights and interests of women, promoting women's entrepreneurship.

One of the major nongovernmental nonprofit organizations is the Women's Committee of Uzbekistan, whose main task is to ensure the full participation of women in sociopolitical, socioeconomic and cultural life of the nation, their spiritual, creative and intellectual growth. For example, the Women's Committee, the Microcreditbank, political parties adopted a joint decision in March 2015 to organize seminars for the development of women's entrepreneurship in remote areas of our country. Also, the Women's Committee with the Central Bank of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Association of Banks of Uzbekistan approved a plan of joint actions concerning the employment of female college graduates, primarily involvement in small business, farming, services and work at home, especially in rural areas. Over the past period more than 350 workshops have been conducted, whereby in excess of 250 thousand women were advised on the ways to establish their own businesses and improved their economic knowledge.

"Our organization has for many years been working closely with the Women's Committee of Uzbekistan in the framework of the project "Improving the financial literacy of the population", Matthias Fohs, director of department at the Savings Banks Foundation for International Cooperation (Germany), has said. "The outcome of our joint efforts was the establishment of counseling centers for women entrepreneurs in all regions of this country. The project has already proved its effectiveness; more than 15 thousand businesswomen received advice on lending, micro-insurance and other issues.

Thus, as a result of the joint work by the Women's Committee and its partners, women embarking on entrepreneurship received more than 685.7 billion soums of loans in the first half of 2015, which is a 31.5 percent increase compared to the same period of the last year. In particular, more than 5.3 thousand new jobs were created thanks to the loans assigned by the Microcreditbank to businesswomen for over 45.4 billion soums.

The Women's Committee of Uzbekistan and its regional units have been undertaking a great deal of organizational efforts on employment and securing jobs for college graduates. To this end, special centers have been set up in all provinces of Uzbekistan to provide consulting services to young people on the creation of new jobs and doing business. Together with civil society organizations more than 23 thousand events have been spearheaded in 2015 designed to ensure employment for college graduates, 9.8 thousand educational programs have been implemented to bolster their legal, economic and entrepreneurship knowledge.

International experts were introduced to Uzbekistan's experience in providing for women's full-fledged engagement in the cultural life of the nation, enhancing their role in the family and society, promoting healthy lifestyle.

It was stressed that today there is barely any sphere, be it economic, political, social, cultural, where the woman of Uzbekistan has failed to demonstrate her professional and creative abilities. It has been possible largely owing to our country's labor legislation, which guarantees equal rights of women, right for childcare leave for up to three years, benefits for pregnant women and women with children up to three years. It prohibits engaging women in difficult and risky jobs and working in night shifts. Seminars are organized on a regular basis for employers, so are outreach

works to explain legislation on the protection of women's work. Under constant scrutiny is compliance with working rights of women.

"Impressed by the high level of activity of the Women's Committee and the measures taken by the government toward the empowerment of women in Uzbekistan," said Bharati Sadasivam, gender practice team leader at the UNDP Regional Center in Istanbul. "For example, in the framework of the international conference we've met chairwomen of mahallas, talked with the winners of the Zulfiya State Prize. Moreover, with great interest have I listened to the reports of women in high government positions. Undoubtedly, all this suggests that this nation is intent on keeping with the enhancement of women's rights in the process of making important decisions for the country."

Extensive efforts are undertaken in Uzbekistan to boost women's health, promote the practice of healthy family, assist the advancement of female and family sports, and encourage healthy lifestyle.

In particular, the conference participants said that as a result of consistent and comprehensive measures taken in Uzbekistan's socioeconomic sphere, life expectancy within the last 20 years has increased from 67 to 73 years, and 75 years among women. This has greatly been facilitated by the qualitatively new network of medical institutions created in the country and meeting the highest requirements. Moreover, enlightenment works are spearheaded in schools, colleges, lyceums and higher education institutions, organizations and mahallas within the thematic cycle "Healthy mother – healthy child" designed to shore up medical culture in families, shape the skills of healthy lifestyle, and improve reproductive health of the population. To this end, more than 200 thousand various events have been held covering over 2 million households.

Instrumental in reforming the national healthcare system has been the establishment of more than 3,000 rural health units outfitted with the latest medical equipment, as well as the institution of 10 national specialized scientific-practical medical centers. In addition, a potent, high-performance network of medical institutions for the protection of motherhood and childhood is created in the country. Screening centers are working in all provincial centers and the city of Tashkent. Last year alone, more than 230 thousand will-be mothers passed medical examination there. At the same time, a network of perinatal centers has been advancing dynamically. Over the past ten years, 11 such centers have been set up; they provided with a highly skilled specialist care to more than 206,000 mothers and newborns in 2014, which is 1.3 times as many as in 2010.

Special significance is attached under the leadership of President Islam Karimov to the promotion of sports among the population, particularly among women, as it was underscored at the conference. More than 35,000 units and gyms have been organized in 39 types of sports across the entire nation. In excess of 4.2 million women attended sporting classes in 2014, as against 2.5 million in 2008.

International experts of the conference said they appreciated the level of education among Uzbek women – not inferior to those in advanced democracies. And it is not surprising because steps are being taken in our country to support and nurture a comprehensively advanced youth, encourage the achievements of gifted young

women in the field of literature, arts, science, culture and sports. A case in mind is 226 girls awarded the Zulfiya State Prize. Many of them are currently activists and leaders, while others are busy in scientific research. 20 laureates were awarded presidential state scholarships as well as Alisher Navoi and Ibn Sino scholarships. 30 of them are winners of national, Asian and world championships and competitions.

“It’s the first time I am in Uzbekistan and impressed by the achievements in providing for the legitimate rights and interests of women,” Gu Syuzhuan, director of department at the Shanghai Women’s Federation, has shared her views with us. “I was particularly struck by the system of support for women in Uzbekistan. In particular, the establishment of Zulfiya State Prize is a unique practice of government support for women, because it inspires them to achieve successes in all areas. It is rather appealing for us.”

In general, the international conference became a platform for the exchange of views between representatives of national and foreign research and analytical circles on issues concerning the broader dissemination of Uzbekistan’s positive expertise in furthering the government policy goals sought to bolster the role of women in society and elevate their political and law culture as well as civic participation. Experts deliberated also on the development of civil society institutions.

Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Uzbekistan – Chair of the Women’s Committee Elmira Basitkhanova delivered a keynote speech at the conference.