



PRESS RELEASE

Concluding Event

From EQUAL to Empowered: Advancing Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in Uzbekistan

TASHKENT, 15 May 2024 - Today, the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), the "Yuksalish" Movement, and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Regional Office for Central Asia (OHCHR ROCA) held a Concluding Event titled "From EQUAL to Empowered: Advancing Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights in Uzbekistan." The event was organised within the framework of the "Enhancing the Quality of Uzbekistan's Application of International Law (EQUAL)" project, funded by the European Union.

This marks the finalisation of a project initiated in 2021. Its primary goal was to advance the equal protection of Economic, Social, and Cultural (ESC) rights in Uzbekistan through support for civil society.

"Defending human rights and democracy is enshrined in all EU external actions. We are fundamentally committed to these rights. We monitor and ensure respect for human rights and democracy. The EU runs human rights dialogues in all countries in the world. Every action we take is guided by a human rights approach. We have a special budget line to support human rights and democracy, through which we support international organizations, local NGOs, and activists who monitor human rights. Economic, social, and cultural rights are as important as civil and political rights. Of course, COVID had its implications, but we are now putting it back on the agenda. Uzbekistan has made tremendous efforts to enhance human rights, and most of the UPR recommendations have been approved and agreed upon with the authorities. At the same time, we believe that no human rights defender or activist should be threatened, and we are ready to stand side-by-side whenever necessary," said H.E. Erica Gerretsen, European Commission Director of Directorate General of International Partnerships, Directorate G "Human Development, Migration, Governance and Peace."

"It should be acknowledged that sitting here together and discussing subjects that a few years ago would not have been possible is progress. The previous debate on cultural rights at the Ilkhom Theatre was a groundbreaking move that illustrates the openness of all actors. The EU has deepened its strong partnership with the Government of Uzbekistan and maintains a very good dialogue with civil society. Having seen what has been achieved through the EQUAL project on legal reforms, such as the criminalization of domestic violence and other rights related to freedom of expression, we can say that these are extremely important aspects of society and ongoing reforms. The EU will continue to support reforms in Uzbekistan that will impact people's lives in both big cities and rural areas," said H.E. Charlotte Adriaen, Ambassador of the European Union to Uzbekistan.

"Through the EQUAL project, our focus was on strengthening the legal frameworks essential for safeguarding human rights, recognizing both their inherent complexities and the dynamic nature of international jurisprudence. We highlighted the crucial role of justice systems in upholding these rights and demonstrated how international human rights law can effectively bolster national protections. By bringing together international law experts and UN representatives in Uzbekistan, we facilitated critical exchanges of knowledge and best practices. This was particularly significant in light of Uzbekistan's ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. By fostering meaningful dialogue among a diverse range of stakeholders, we hope to have brought international remedies for those whose human rights have been violated," said Temur Shakirov, Director (ad interim) of the ICJ Europe and Central Asia Programme.



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The event served as a platform to showcase the project's outcomes, reflect on valuable lessons learned, and hear directly from partners and beneficiaries who have been at the forefront of human rights work. Attendees participated in thematic discussions led by both international and national experts, focusing on the urgent need to implement international human rights standards within Uzbekistan's national justice system. These discussions confronted ongoing challenges, laying the groundwork for stronger advocacy and more effective protections for victims of human rights violations.

"In recent years, Uzbekistan has made progress in guaranteeing human rights, which have been strengthened in international and national documents. In this regard, foreign experts, political scientists, and international organizations also emphasize progress in areas such as increasing the transparency and accountability of the government, ensuring the rule of law, fighting corruption, and protecting the rights of women, children, and youth. Of course, there are still challenges in guaranteeing the protection of human rights and freedoms. In addressing these shortcomings and promoting economic, social, and cultural rights, the 'Yuksalish' Movement supports continuing similar projects, relying on the experience of foreign partner organizations," said Mr. Bobur Bekmurodov, Chairperson of the "Yuksalish" Movement and member of the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

"As global inequalities and insecurity grow, we, in OHCHR, believe that using human rights, especially economic, social, and cultural rights, as well as the right to development, as a framework for economic policies can give us a chance to achieve SDG targets and to make this world a better place for all of us," said Mr. Pavlo Byalyk, Human Rights Officer, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Regional Office for Central Asia.

The event was organised within the framework of the project "Enhancing the Quality of Uzbekistan's Application of International Law (EQUAL)," funded by the European Union through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) and implemented by the International Commission of Jurists and the Yuksalish Movement.

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