

DEVELOPMENT OF LABOR RELATIONS IS THE MAIN FOUNDATION FOR BUILDING THE THIRD RENAISSANCE IN THE NEW UZBEKISTAN

Over the past 5 years, unprecedented results have been achieved in Uzbekistan under the leadership of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, both in domestic and foreign policy.

One of the central places among the ongoing reforms in Uzbekistan is taken by the issues of the comprehensive development of labor relations and the labor market, aimed at improving the quality of life of the population and ensuring human interests, which is in line with the UN sustainable development goals.

In this regard, it should be noted that the key indicators of the development of society and the state have become fundamental changes in the public administration of Uzbekistan, which characterize the consistency, coherence, efficiency and timeliness of the implemented measures in the sphere of labor.

The first is the firm establishment of the principle "It is not the people who serve the state bodies, but the state bodies must serve the people". This allowed all representatives of state bodies to work in conditions of priority of the interests of citizens.

The second is the openness of state bodies. We have shown in practice that thanks to openness, both representatives of civil society and the world community were able not only to receive all the necessary information, to implement various projects, but also to establish direct contacts, which is extremely important in the rapidly changing modern world.

The third is the transformation of the model of development of society, in which the principle "society - the initiator of reforms" becomes the main driving force of democratic renewal and development.

These key factors contributed to the fundamental improvement of all areas, including the labor market and labor relations in general, and play an invaluable role in building the foundation of the Third Renaissance in the conditions of New Uzbekistan. The main goal of our efforts is to ensure a comfortable life for the people, to make them look to the future with confidence.

As the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev said: *"In a short time, not a single sphere and industry, city and district, village and mahalla remained in our country, where the breath of renewal would not come."*

Thanks to the political will of the Head of State Shavkat Mirziyoyev, concrete results have been achieved in ensuring human rights and their guarantees, as well as the eradication of forced labor, including child labor. The implemented measures in

the field of labor relations have already become exemplary for the world community.

In particular, on March 10, 2022, the international coalition Cotton Campaign officially announced the abolition of the "cotton boycott" against Uzbekistan.

The leadership of the Coalition noted that "this historic achievement is the result of the leadership of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev to initiate and implement reforms in the field of ending forced labor and developing the cotton sector.

Many reputable international non-governmental organizations, including Human Rights Watch, the American Apparel and Footwear Association, the US Fashion Industry Association, and a number of other organizations, responded positively to the elimination of child and forced labor and called on international brands to cooperate with manufacturers of Uzbek textile products.

In turn, the lifting of the boycott of Uzbek cotton will serve to the creation of millions of new jobs, especially in rural areas, as well as the attraction of foreign investment in the textile industry of the republic and expand the export potential of Uzbekistan.

Speaking about the results achieved, I can say that, in 2016, systemic child labor was completely eliminated. Based on this, the European Parliament ratified the inclusion of a textile protocol to the partnership and cooperation agreement between the EU and Uzbekistan. The document provides for the removal of quantitative restrictions and the reduction of customs duties when importing 3,000 items of Uzbek textile goods into the countries of the European Union. As part of the GSP status, customs rates for textile products from Uzbekistan were reduced and ranged from 4 to 12%.

It should be noted that in 2019, the export of Uzbek textile products to the EU countries amounted to 56.7 million dollars, in 2020 – 74.1 million dollars (+ 36.4%), and in 2021 – more than 141.8 million dollars (2.5 times more than in 2016).

In the 2019 US Department of Labor report, Uzbekistan was rated Moderate Progress in Eliminating the Worst Forms of Child Labor. Later the status was upgraded to the second category.

In October 2020, the US Trade Representative (USTR) decided to complete the work to review Uzbekistan's compliance with the criteria for ensuring labor rights in accordance with the US Generalized System of Preferences (GSP). As a result, Uzbek cotton was removed from the list called "List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor".

Along with this, in December 2020, the European Commission conducted an analysis, on the basis of which it was concluded that Uzbekistan meets the criteria for participation in GSP+. In April 2021, a special system of preferences of the

European Union (EU) for sustainable development and good governance (GSP+) came into force for Uzbekistan.

In 2021, Uzbekistan improved its position in the US Trafficking in Persons Report by receiving a second category.

The successes achieved are the result of large-scale systemic reforms in the field of labor relations, which were carried out in such areas as: 1) strengthening the legislative and organizational and legal framework; 2) implementation of international standards; 3) reforming agriculture; 4) development of institutional framework; 5) conducting systemic monitoring and research; 5) activation of cooperation with civil society and relevant international organizations.

Improvement of national legislation. At the national level, in the period 2019-2021, 32 legal acts were adopted, a number of conventions and protocols of the International Labor Organization and the International Organization for Migration were ratified. In 2021 alone, 16 regulatory legal acts in this direction were adopted, including 4 Laws, 2 Ordinances, 4 Presidential Decrees, 6 Decrees of the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

One of the most effective measures was the toughening of criminal liability for the use of child and forced labor. Thus, Uzbekistan has brought national legislation into line with ILO Convention No. 29 on forced or compulsory labor.

In addition, taking into account international experience and in order to improve national legislation, the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Combating Human Trafficking" was adopted in a new edition.

In order to create favorable conditions for citizens wishing to work in foreign countries, the Law "On Amendments and Additions to the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Private Employment Agencies" was adopted.

Taking into account international standards, the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan developed and approved the Labor Code in a new edition, which is designed to protect the interests of workers by providing them with full and timely payment of wages, create favorable conditions and working regime and, most importantly, effective protection of their rights in case of violations.

As a result, the criminal punishment for forced labor was toughened, which made it possible to completely get rid of this phenomenon. In addition, international standards have been introduced, the regulatory framework and the human rights system as a whole have been strengthened.

Uzbekistan is actively participating in the campaign dedicated to the centenary of the ILO for the ratification of international labor standards. We are proud that the republic annually ratifies 2 ILO conventions on average. To date, the republic has already ratified 19 ILO conventions, including 8 fundamental and 4 directive conventions.

Development of the organizational and institutional base. In Uzbekistan, special attention is paid to the development of institutional framework in the field of combating human trafficking and forced labor.

Since 2019, the National Commission for Combating Human Trafficking and Forced Labor has been effectively functioning, which coordinates the activities of all ministries and departments on these issues, and also carries out systematic work with representatives of civil society and international organizations. It is important to note that the creation of the National and Territorial Commissions to Combat Human Trafficking and Forced Labor, as well as the establishment of the institution of the National Rapporteur on these issues, makes it possible to carry out comprehensive, coordinated and effective work in this direction at the national and local levels.

The National Commission meets quarterly and takes comprehensive measures to improve the activities of relevant ministries and departments, strengthen interaction with civil society, including with foreign partners. When developing comprehensive measures, all recommendations of international partners and representatives of civil society are taken into account.

The Ministry of Employment with its territorial departments and specialized institutions is tirelessly taking all necessary measures to improve labor relations in the republic. Law enforcement agencies, based on their tasks, professionally perform tasks to prevent infringement of human rights, in particular in the sphere of labor.

Systematic measures are being taken in the agricultural sector as part of the Agricultural Development Strategy of the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2020-2030. Priority is given to creating a favorable environment for agribusiness, increasing its investment attractiveness, the widespread introduction of market principles, as well as labor mechanization.

In 2021, more than 30 legislative and regulatory acts in this area were adopted.

An unprecedented step was the development of a cluster system, the purpose of which is to form a single chain that combines all the processes of manufacturing finished products - from growing raw materials to processing them and manufacturing the final product.

Active work is underway to mechanize the process of growing and harvesting cotton. Through the use of cotton harvesting machines, about 12% of raw cotton was harvested (8.5% in 2020).

By the decision of the President, in the next three years, imported cotton harvesters and spare parts for them are exempt from customs duties and recycling fees.

Special attention is paid to the wages of cotton pickers. The payment for 1 kg of hand-picked raw cotton in 2021 has been increased by almost 10 times compared to 2015.

These measures are being implemented to strengthen the system for protecting the rights, freedoms and legitimate interests of citizens, as well as to completely eradicate forced labor in all its manifestations in accordance with international standards.

Monitoring results. Since 2015, the International Labor Organization has been conducting a "Third-Party Monitoring" to prevent child and forced labor in the cotton sector.

In the first years of activity (2015-2017), Third-Party Monitoring was carried out exclusively by international experts. Since 2018, it has been gradually transferred to human rights activists, and in 2021, the monitoring was completely carried out by human rights defenders themselves according to the ILO methodology.

In 2021, 17 human rights activists were involved in this event, who conducted a survey among 11 thousand people, including farmers, foremen, representatives of civil society and pickers.

According to its results, there has been absence of systemic forced labor in Uzbekistan for 5 years.

ILO representatives emphasized that, according to the results of monitoring in 2021, Uzbekistan has achieved an end to the systematic use of forced and child labor in the cotton harvest, and the country's experience in implementing international standards in this area is a model for the world community.

As ILO Director General G.Ryder noted, after 7 years, this year's ILO report showed that *Uzbek cotton is free from child and forced labor. Uzbekistan now has an opportunity to realize its goal of moving up the value chain and creating millions of decent full-time jobs in the textile and clothing industry.*

At the same time, in addition to monitoring the third party of the ILO, the National monitoring of trade unions of Uzbekistan, monitoring of the Labor Inspectorate is carried out annually, moreover, by the decision of the Chairman of the Senate of the Oliy Majlis, Parliamentary control is also established.

During the National Monitoring and Parliamentary Control, no cases of child and forced labor were identified.

In the cotton harvest season, the Labor Inspectorate brought to administrative responsibility 62 officials for violations of labor legislation. Of these, 5 officials were brought to administrative responsibility for allowing forced labor.

A unique system of international cooperation has been created. The National Commission on Combating Human Trafficking and Forced Labor, as a permanent

platform, regularly takes comprehensive measures to strengthen cooperation with foreign partners, such as the ILO, the World Bank, the IFC, IOM, UNODC, the US Department of State and the US Department of Labor, as well as with coalition "Cotton Campaign", etc.

Today, comprehensive action plans have been successfully implemented based on the recommendations of the International Labor Organization, the US Department of State and Department of Labor, as well as the Cotton Campaign coalition on combating human trafficking, forced labor and ensuring workers' rights.

In this direction, the International Labor Organization plays a key role, which over the past years has been strongly supporting democratic reforms in Uzbekistan and is implementing joint comprehensive measures to develop labor relations. Uzbekistan considers the International Labor Organization as one of its key partners in the international arena and attaches great importance to the development of comprehensive and mutually beneficial relations.

Over the past 10 years, fruitful work has been carried out with the International Labor Organization in such areas as the fight against forced labor, monitoring the observance of labor rights, as well as the implementation of international standards in the field of labor relations.

Uzbekistan is a country with a high demographic burden on the labor market. At present, the working-age population is about 20 million people, the number of employed is 15 million people, the number of people in need of work is 1 million 300 thousand people, annually more than 500 thousand young people enter adulthood and need employment.

As an effective solution to this issue, Uzbekistan, with the support of the International Labor Organization, is developing a National Employment Strategy.

As you know, decent work has occupied and continues to occupy a central place on the agenda of the International Labor Organization throughout its century of activity. But only in the last decades of this century, this issue has acquired a comprehensive, global character.

This is more due to the growing need of states and societies to provide citizens with work, their social protection throughout the world.

In such conditions, it is the actions of states and international organizations on the principles of decent work at all levels - state, regional and global, that will open up new strategic opportunities and effectively solve the remaining problems in the field of the labor market and labor relations.

Moreover, economic, social, food problems are directly related to the created conditions for decent work. When decent work is not provided in the state, citizens face problems in finding employment, poverty, inequality and social tension.

At the same time, strengthening the decent work system is relevant not only for Uzbekistan, but for the entire world community.

The International Labor Organization estimates that in 2022 the number of unemployed in the world will rise to 207 million, which is 21 million more than in the pre-crisis 2019, and the damage to labor markets from the pandemic may become irreversible. The effects of the pandemic on labor markets are being felt in every region of the world. The severe impact of the pandemic has been on women's employment, and it is likely that they will be felt over the coming years.

To resolve this issue, as well as to develop new approaches and opportunities, Uzbekistan is actively working with the International Labor Organization, with which in recent years bilateral relations have reached a completely new level of development.

In this direction, the first major program - the Decent Work Country Program for 2014-2016, which was extended until 2020, was successfully and fully implemented, and in 2021 the parties signed the Decent Work Country Program for 2021-2025. It is important to note that Uzbekistan is one of the first countries that developed the Country Program taking into account the new requirements imposed by the reform of the UN system.

The new Country Program pays special attention to addressing such strategic issues as:

- 1) improving the legal framework governing labor relations;
- 2) expanding employment opportunities and decent work;
- 3) expanding the access of the most vulnerable groups of the population to quality and inclusive education and social protection;
- 4) strengthening social dialogue and institutional capacity of social partners.

These key indicators of decent work in the future will contribute to the development of economic opportunities, employment of the population, the creation of millions of new jobs, and most importantly, the sustainable development of society and the state.

In addition, these issues are reflected in the Development Strategy of the New Uzbekistan, designed for 2022-2026. This document includes almost all human rights and decent work standards.

Uzbekistan is also working with international partners on the implementation of international standards in the field of labor relations - "Better Work" and "BCI". At the end of 2021, Uzbekistan applied to the ILO and the World Bank to consider the possibility of assisting in the adoption of "Better Work" and received positive responses.

Thus, it should be noted that the ongoing concrete measures in the field of ensuring human rights, creating decent working conditions, improving labor relations have laid a solid foundation for building the Third Renaissance in New Uzbekistan.



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