

Uzbekistan Introduces Criminal Liability for Teaching Islam to Children

News:

The Senate of Uzbekistan has approved a law providing for criminal punishment for teaching religion to minors without permission and appropriate education. Such actions may now be punished by imprisonment for up to three years.

The Senate of the Oliy Majlis of Uzbekistan, at a session on June 25, approved a law that strengthens liability for illegal religious education of minors. The document has been sent to the President for review.

Chairman of the Senate Committee on Science, Education, and Healthcare, Bahrom Abdullayev, stated that the country is conducting systematic work to ensure reliable protection of the rights and legitimate interests of children, and to create conditions for their comprehensive development. ***“Special importance is given to the formation in children of legal consciousness and culture, as well as the creation of all conditions for them to receive quality education, which contributes to their physical, intellectual, spiritual and moral development”***, he emphasized.

According to Abdullayev, at the same time, in recent years the republic has seen an increase in cases of illegal religious education of minors, and in this regard, an amendment is being made to Article 229-2 of the Criminal Code (violation of the procedure for teaching religious doctrines).

Comment:

It is noteworthy that, unlike the previous provision where a similar act was punished by an administrative fine or arrest for up to 15 days, now it is immediately a matter of criminal liability if the subject of the education is a minor.

The adoption of this law continues Mirziyoyev's course of tightening control over Islamic revival, and, in essence, returns the country to the practices of the times of the notoriously known former president Islam Karimov.

As is known, the SGB (formerly the SNB) already regularly conducts raids on so-called "hujras" – private, secret madrasas that appeared in Uzbekistan back in Soviet times.

It should be recalled that a similar law was first introduced back in 1998. The Law “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations” imposed strict restrictions on religious activity. In particular, teaching religion was allowed only in officially registered religious educational institutions and only after receiving special education. Article 229-2 of the Criminal Code of Uzbekistan was introduced in the same year; it established criminal liability for “teaching religion in violation of the procedure established by law”.

This ban and the criminal article were often applied in the 2000s and early 2010s, which caused criticism from human rights defenders, as it limited the transmission of religious knowledge even within the family — i.e., people were prosecuted even for teaching Islam to their own children.

When Mirziyoyev came to power, such practices were temporarily suspended, but now they have been reinstated.

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