

20. Collins K. *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*. N.Y.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006.
21. Kazantsev A.A. "Great Game" with Unknown Rules: World Politics and Central Asia. M.: Heritage of Eurasia, 2008.
22. Dobaev I.P. Geopolitics and geopolitical processes in the Black Sea-Caspian region. Rostov-on-Don: Fund for Science and Education, 2022. P. 148–160.
23. Dobaev I.P. Islam and Islamism in the modern world. Rostov-on-Don: Fund for Science and Education, 2021. P. 80–96.
24. The US seeks to control Uzbekistan using Islamic radicals (materials of the international conference "Eurasia: New Threats and Challenges", December 24, 2012) // Website "Regnum.ru", 25.12.2012.

Received: 20.03.2023.

Accepted for publication: 04.04.2023.

GOZAL SHARIPOVA. COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE POLICY OF RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE IN THE STATE SYSTEMS OF MALAYSIA AND UZBEKISTAN

Keywords: Malaysia; Uzbekistan;
ethno-confessional harmony; Rukun Negara;
tolerance; Islam; assimilation; culture.

Gozal Sharipova,

DSc(Philosophy), PhD in Religious Studies and
UNESCO on the Comparative Study of World Religions,
Research Associate,

International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan,

e-mail: guzal.sharipova@yandex.ru

© G. Sharipova 2023

Citation: Sharipova G. Comparative Study of the Policy of Religious Tolerance in the State Systems of Malaysia and Uzbekistan // Russia and the Moslem World, 2023, № 3 (321), P. 44–56. DOI: 10.31249/rmw/2023.03.04

Abstract. This article presents a comparative analysis of the policy of religious tolerance in the state systems of Malaysia and Uzbekistan, specifically examining history, law and culture of the

countries. The main question of the paper is whether there is common ground in the area of religious tolerance between two countries. The research is done using the principle of historicism; comparative and system analysis; and problem-chronological, integrated and interdisciplinary approaches.

At the end of the last century, M. Ansel (1902–1990), a prominent French lawyer, noted that foreign law allows jurists to get a better understanding of the law of their country, “since its specifics become especially apparent in comparison with other systems.” [1] Thus, the study and comprehensive analysis of the issue of religious tolerance in Malaysia and the Republic of Uzbekistan allows us to single out similarities and differences in this matter.

Some aspects of the subject have been studied in the works of modern scientists and researchers, such as E.U. Baidarov, K. Randall, N. Ismoilov, R.Kh. Murtazaeva and O.I. Satimov. However, it should be noted that each researcher considered the issue in the context of his own research, since the subject under consideration is relevant to the matters of politics, economics, culture and religion.

Historically, Malaysia – like Uzbekistan – is geographically located at the crossroads of major trade routes. Also, it was both economically and culturally tied to neighbouring and foreign countries, which influenced religious and cultural life of the local population to a great extent. Two states have much in common. For instance, during various development stages, they were characterized by high immigration mobility, assimilation, cross-cultural contacts, as well as convergence of culture and religion. It should also be noted that ethnic diversity in these countries largely shaped their citizens’ concept of respect for representatives of other faiths.

In Malaysia, it’s easy to single out the stages of formation of tolerance, which were associated with the immigration processes in Southeast Asia. The geographical location of the country helped

to turn this region into a place of pilgrimage for believers. Modern Malaysia is a country where old quarters, historical monuments and places of worship organically coexist with modern buildings. Despite the predominance of Muslim population, representatives of other religions live peacefully in the country. For example, in Malacca, there is the Cheng Hoon Teng Temple, a Buddhist temple also called the Temple of Green Cloud. This is the oldest functioning temple in the country practicing the Three Doctrinal Systems of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism. It was built in 1645. There is also the Church of St. Paul, built in 1521; the Sri Poyatha Moorthi Temple, a Hindu temple; the Church of Christ; and the Stadthuys, a Dutch city hall. In the Chinese cemetery tombstones from the Ming Dynasty have been preserved. This is only a small part of the whole variety of religious buildings, and their location in the city center indicates religious tolerance.

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional country, and it should be noted that the country has vast experience not only in the field of religious tolerance as a state policy, but also in the field of education. In particular, the ongoing state policy of the Rukun Negara is designed to achieve a deeper integration of all citizens of the multinational community. The main principles set forth in the declaration are aimed at maintaining a democratic way of life, a respectful approach to the rich and diverse cultural traditions of all the constituent peoples, as well as strengthening the nation.

Malaysia has come a long way from a colony to one of the most developed countries in Southeast Asia, where constitutional rights are guaranteed; there, constitutional rights are a fundamental pillar and instrument that ensures the existence of ethnic and religious minorities, and also a means of governing intergroup relations in a multi-religious society. Young people are the main driving force in society, which is why particular emphasis is placed on promoting tolerance among this category of citizens. The Malaysian education system has developed a

program aimed at conducting explanatory lessons during extracurricular activities theme weeks for students everywhere.

The territorial and historical proximity of Malaysia with neighbouring states contributed not only to cultural exchange, but also facilitated peaceful assimilation. Naturally, this led to mutual socio-cultural respect and ethno-confessional tolerance.

Lately, there has been an increased research interest in the role Malaysia plays in the Southeast Asia region. In today's world, a high level of religious tolerance is impossible to achieve without the involvement of scholars actively involved in solving pressing problems of the day. The integration of science and education has been officially recognized as one of the principles of world science policy. Today, international organizations such as the UN, UNESCO and the Southeast Asia Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) [2] are equally contributing to the development of an integrated system for the training of qualified scientific personnel, because integration of science and education promotes not only mutually beneficial relations between countries, but also efficient counteraction of ethno-religious discrimination.

The rich historical and cultural heritage of Malaysia and Uzbekistan share many similarities. In both countries, the overwhelming majority of Muslims honour and respect the prominent scientists and thinkers of the East, making it major point of contact between the two countries. One of the major indicators of this was the scientific and practical webinar "Islam and Modernity" that was held in the autumn of 2022 in Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia. It was organized with the assistance of the Embassy of the Republic of Uzbekistan in cooperation with the Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia, the International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan, Imam-Al-Bukhari International Research Center and the Center of Islamic Civilization. The online event was held under the slogan "Uzbekistan - a country of great thinkers" and was dedicated to the vast intellectual and spiritual heritage of

medieval scholars and thinkers who lived on the territory of modern Uzbekistan. [3]

The central territorial location of Uzbekistan had a profound influence on the formation of a tolerant worldview of the population. Long term cohabitation comes with an awareness of the imperative for peaceful coexistence of believers of different religions. A tolerant attitude towards other religious beliefs was formed gradually, which is clearly illustrated by the ancient religious texts that have become widespread throughout the region. For instance, one of the early collections of the sacred books of Zoroastrianism – the Avesta – discusses the issue of religious tolerance: “Listen with your ears; see the obvious with your soul – so that everyone chooses faith for himself.” [4] Indeed, a respectful attitude towards various religious beliefs has been spreading throughout Central Asia since ancient times. This is particularly evident in the ethnic diversity of the population; the society had the right to choose their own religion, which today would be called the recognition of human rights to freedom of religion. That is why there has been such a variety of religious beliefs and movements during the course of the history of Uzbekistan: Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, shamanism, Christianity and Islam. Peaceful coexistence of so many religions in a single territory contributed to cultural assimilation, creating a tolerant system of values in the minds of the population, which is only possible in conditions of peaceful cohabitation. In this connection, let us recall the statement of Albert Einstein, Nobel Prize winner in physics: “All religions, arts and sciences are branches of the same tree.” [5]

Today, there are over 130 ethnic groups and 16 confessions in independent Uzbekistan. Many religious organizations operate in the country simultaneously: Orthodox, Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist, Full Gospel, Adventist and other Christian churches, as well as religious communities of Bukharan and European Jews, followers of the Bahá’í Faith, Krishnaites and Buddhists. [6] This fact allows us to make a conclusion that a sound national policy

promotes successful integration of Uzbekistan into the world community.

The people of Uzbekistan are also distinguished by their respect for the heritage of Eastern philosophers, who had a significant impact on understanding the value of a tolerant attitude towards people who have different religious views. Thus, Khoja Ahmad Yasawi (1103–1166), a prominent philosopher and Sufi, urged people to be tolerant towards the religion of other peoples: “If there is an Infidel in front of you, do not insult him. The Lord turns away from a cruel heart, from the soul of an offender. O Allah, the True King! Such a servant is destined for hell.” The saying of the famous philosopher al-Farabi (872–950) is just as important: “...a group or nation can perceive reflected images of things in a different way than another group or nation. That is why virtuous peoples are different, and virtuous cities may profess different religions and believe in the same kind of happiness. [4]

Given the ongoing globalization process, it has become obvious that no state can exist in the world apart from others, looking after exclusively its own interests. In the world where equality and cooperation constitute the foundation of relations between countries, Malaysia’s experience as a developed and leading country in the area of state policy of religious tolerance is highly useful. A number of major state visits and joint agreements attest to cooperation and friendly relations between Uzbekistan and Malaysia. The course of development of Uzbekistan since its independence can be an important indicator of consolidation of the spirit of democratic reforms and tolerance.

Diplomatic relations between Uzbekistan and Malaysia were established on February 21, 1992. [7] In a short period of time, the countries signed a number of bilateral agreements covering a wide range of issues, such as the Memorandum dated November 14, 1995 on culture and science, aimed at promoting mutual understanding in this area. In particular, paragraph (e) of Article 2 of this memorandum states the following: “Support for mutual assistance is discussed in many parts of this memorandum, such as

taking steps to allocate grants to the parties for continuing their studies in higher education institutions; development of ties between national libraries, museums and archives; and exchange of published and unpublished texts of historical, cultural and scientific significance in the sphere of culture". [8] This facilitates the formation of an idea of cultural diversity and value systems in the minds of the citizens of the two states, given that numerous researches link the increasing risk of conflict with the fact that the citizens neglect studying the history of their state.

Today, fundamental changes regarding religious freedoms are an integral part of political and legal reforms in Uzbekistan. These changes are envisaged by the objectives defined by the Development Strategy of Uzbekistan, which are aimed at ensuring interethnic accord and religious tolerance. On December 12, 2018, the UN General Assembly adopted a special resolution "Enlightenment and Religious Tolerance"; it was initiated by President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev and is considered a historic event. [9]

In recent years, Uzbekistan has taken steps to ensure the implementation of international obligations of the Republic in the field of human rights. The Government has developed mechanisms to monitor respect for the rights and freedoms of citizens, and has taken consistent measures to expand cooperation with international and regional structures that protect human rights and religious freedom. The large-scale reforms in the country entail the need for further improvement of the mechanisms for ensuring the rights and freedoms of citizens, as well as effective implementation of international norms and standards in the area of human rights protection. [10] The model of political system that Uzbekistan works to implement brings together state structures and political institutions developed according to internationally accepted standards that are based on the principles of democracy and feature a historically shaped system of values inherent in Eastern civilization. The current and future development path of the republic is based on creative

implementing the accumulated international experience, while taking full account of national characteristics and cultural traditions. [11]

To date, the Republic of Uzbekistan has signed more than 80 international human rights instruments, including six core treaties and four optional UN protocols. Uzbekistan annually submits national reports to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and UN Committees. Legislative measures are undertaken to ensure that national legislation conforms to international human rights standards and that of ethno-confessional relations. [12] In December 2020, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the National Center for Human Rights (NCHR) of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia. The signing of the Memorandum was timed to International Human Rights Day. [13] In March 2021, a Memorandum of Cooperation was signed between the Center of Islamic Civilization of Uzbekistan and the Institute of Islamic Civilization of Malaysia. During the talks, the Malaysian side highly appreciated the measures taken in Uzbekistan to promote Islamic theology, exemplified by the initiatives of President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev to establish and develop the Center of Islamic Civilization; international research centers named after Imam al-Bukhari and Imam at-Termezi; the International Islamic Academy; and schools for the study of hadith, Sharia, Sufism and other parts of Islamic tradition. Abdul Wahab, Vice-Rector of the National University of Malaysia (UKM; Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia), expressed hope that the Memorandum between the Center of Islamic Civilization of Uzbekistan and the Institute of Islamic Civilization of Malaysia will foster greater cooperation in exploring the rich Islamic heritage. [14] This statement already set forward a certain integration mechanism. On July 16, 2021, a resolution of President Mirziyoyev on improving the activities of the Center of Islamic Civilization was adopted. [15] The Presidential Decree calls upon the Center of Islamic Civilization

of Uzbekistan to widely promote the idea of New Uzbekistan and Third Renaissance and scientifically study the achievements of the new revival. [16] This resolution is vital for the education of the younger generation, so it could navigate current political, socio-economic and cultural developments. Today, the role of religion in public policies for the protection of human rights increasingly assumes a larger significance. Uzbekistan is carrying out large-scale reforms in this sphere. The Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis conducted a parliamentary hearing on the issue of ensuring freedom of religion and belief. On May 4, 2018, a joint resolution by the Council (Kengash) approved an action plan. According to the figurative expression R. Collins, [17] an American sociologist, "in order to be tolerant of a different culture, you need to understand it" [18]; the quote reflects one of the approaches to understanding religious tolerance.

Tolerance promotes both bilateral relations and interethnic harmony. On January 27, 2021, during the regular meeting of the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis, the deputies reviewed a draft law on the establishment of Friendship of Peoples' Day. [19] As Speaker of the Legislative Chamber Nuriddinjon Ismailov remarked, "Our people have always treasured friendship; friendship means our old good traditions and shared goals that ensure peace. A large-scale celebration of Friendship of Peoples' Day serves to further strengthen the notion of friendship and tolerance in the minds of citizens, regardless of their nationality." [20]

On April 27, 2021, the Committee on Religious Affairs (CRA), an agency accountable to the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan, organized a regional online conference on religious freedoms in the countries of Central Asia, entitled "Political and Legal Aspects of Ensuring Religious Tolerance, the Rights and Freedoms of Believers: A Review of National Practices". Religious experts from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan took part in the online conference. The expert and analytical community and the public of Uzbekistan were represented by experts from the Committee on Religious Affairs, the Ministry of

Justice, the Institute of Strategic and Regional Studies (ISRS), the National Center for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan, the International Islamic Academy, deputies of the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis, and representatives of various confessions. They discussed the experience of the Central Asian countries in ensuring political and legal guarantees of the rights and freedoms of believers; steps taken to further enhance interfaith harmony, peace and stability; and measures in place to fully protect the rights and freedoms of believers. They also emphasized the importance of developing practical recommendations on the issues under consideration and bringing the positive experience of the Central Asian countries to the attention of the international community. [21]

Normalization of interfaith and cultural dialogue requires the input of all parties. Such a dialogue is relevant while determining the role, place and position of religion in the world divided into traditional and technological states, especially in the context of migration and following adaptation to new living conditions.

On May 25, 2020, at a meeting in Kuala Lumpur, representatives of social, political, scientific and academic circles of Malaysia expressed their opinion on the ongoing changes in Uzbekistan aimed to ensure religious tolerance and mutual understanding between nations and peoples. Thus, Azizan Binti Baharuddin, the Director General of the Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (IKIM), noted the positive dynamics of the ongoing policy seeking to promote friendship between different nations and peoples living in the country, protecting freedom of religion and ensuring religious tolerance. [22] Mohammed Yusuf Haji Osman, member of the National Council of Islamic Religious Affairs of Malaysia, said that the policies of President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev on ensuring tolerance is the quintessence of interreligious dialogue, harmony and cultural diversity. He noted that it helps to create necessary conditions and opportunities for religious needs of all members

of the peoples and nationalities in the country, which will facilitate further development and prosperity of Uzbekistan. [22] The practical aspect of this issue was developed and formalized in the Presidential Decree on measures for further improving interethnic relations and friendly ties with foreign countries. [23]

Uzbekistan has chosen the path of enlightenment against ignorance, since it minimizes the risk of conflicts and threats; a lack of understanding of the diversity and uniqueness of cultures and religious beliefs can lead to alienation of peoples. The importance of the speech of the head of Uzbekistan at the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly should also be noted. He suggested that a convention on the rights of youth should be developed, and also proposed the adoption of a special resolution on Enlightenment and Religious Tolerance. [24]

Today, the state system is being reformed in Uzbekistan, which is reflected in paying special attention to the concept of cultural diversity. The Imam-Al-Bukhari International Research Center was established in Samarkand, the ancient city of Uzbekistan that once was part of the Great Silk Road. Its activities are aimed at studying the rich heritage of the East. The Imam Termizi International Research Center studies the heritage of Abu Isa at-Termizi (824–892) and other thinkers of the region.

* * *

In conclusion, it should be noted that respect for an individual and for others, respect for elders and for people, regardless of their nationality or religion is a fundamental quality of the peoples of Uzbekistan. It provides the moral basis for spiritual and educational activities and constitutes the core of the religious tolerance of the people.

Summarizing, it is worth noting that the social and political stability in Uzbekistan is the result of a well-thought-out policy aimed at ensuring interethnic peace and civil harmony in the country, which in turn helps to enrich moral and ethical values,

and also promotes citizens' understanding of free will and respect for their fellow citizens.

References

1. Ancel M. Methodological problems of the comparative law // Sketches of the comparative law. M., 1981. [ru].
2. The Southeast Asia Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) is an intergovernmental organization of eleven Southeast Asian countries to promote regional cooperation in education, science and culture. It was established on November 30, 1965.
3. A webinar dedicated to the legacy of the great thinkers of Uzbekistan was held in Malaysia [Imom Buxoriy xalqaro ilmiy-tadqiqot markazi]. URL: <https://www.bukhari.uz/?p=25578&lang=ru> [ru] (date of access: 10.01.2023).
4. Baydarov E.U. Religious tolerance and interfaith harmony in Kazakhstan. URL: <http://camegieendowment.org/2013/08/19/религиозная-толерантность-и-межконфессиональное-согласие-в-казахстане/gjab#>; [ru] (date of access: 27.12.2023).
5. Einstein on religion. URL: <https://bookshake.net/b/eynshteyn-o-religii-albert-eynshteyn> (date of access: 6.01.2023).
6. Committee on Religious Affairs under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan. URL: <https://religions.uz/ru/pages/1#> (date of access: 6.01.2023).
7. Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan on the opening of the Embassy of the Republic of Uzbekistan in Malaysia. URL: <https://lex.uz/docs/514141?ONDATE=22.11.1996%2000> [uz] (date of access: 25.06.2022).
8. Nizomiddinov N.G. History, religion and culture of ancient Malaysia Tashkent Islamic University Publishing and Printing Association Tashkent. 2016. – P. 4.
9. Fundamental changes in the sphere of religious freedom are part of the country's political and legal reforms. URL: https://parliament.gov.uz/ru/events/committee/31099/?sphrase_id=7818319 (date of access: 24.06.2022).
10. Presidential Decision on improving the activities of the National Centre for Human Rights №ПП-4056 10.12.2018
11. Central Asia today: Countries, Neighbors, and the Region. Peter Lang Publishing House, Frankfurt/Berlin/Bern/Brussels, New York / Oxford / Vienna, 2014. – P. 155.
12. Presidential Decree on the adoption of a national human rights strategy №УП-6012 22.06.2020.

13. Uzbekistan – Malaysia: A new phase of human rights cooperation. URL: <https://uzdaily.uz/ru/post/57669> (date of access: 21.11.2022).
14. Memorandum of Cooperation signed between the Centre of Islamic Civilization of Uzbekistan and the Institute of Islamic Civilization of Malaysia. URL: https://dunyo.info/ru/site/inner/podpisan_memorandum_o_sotrudnichestve_mezhdu_tsentromislamskoy_tsivilizatsii_uzbekistana_i_institutom_islamskoy_tsivilizatsii_malayzii-xvA (date of access: 21.11.2022).
15. On additional measures to further improve the activities of the Center for Islamic Civilization in Uzbekistan under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan PQ-5186. 16.07.2021
16. The centre of Islamic civilisation will be transformed. URL: <https://kun.uz/ru/news/2021/07/18/budet-transformirovan-sentrislamskoy-tsivilizatsii> (date of access: 21.01.2023).
17. Randall Collins. The sociology of philosophies. A global theory of intellectual change. Translated from English by I.S. Rozov and Y.B. Wertheim. Novosibirsk: Siberian Chronograph, 2002. – P. 1281.
18. Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tatarstan Centre for Islamic Studies Challenges of Religious Extremism in a Globalising World // Kazan Folio, 2017. – 8 p.
19. Law No. ZRU-672 on the Establishment of Friendship of Peoples' Day 10.02.2021.
20. N. Ismoilov: 30 July as Peoples' Friendship Day. URL: https://parliament.gov.uz/ru/events/other/33493/?sphrase_id=7818319 (date of access: 21.11.2022).
21. Political and legal aspects of religious tolerance. URL: https://parliament.gov.uz/ru/events/other/34334/?sphrase_id=7818319 (date of access: 01.11.2022).
22. Malaysian public circles praised Uzbekistan's initiatives in ensuring religious tolerance). URL: <https://interkomitet.uz/glavnaya/malajzijskieobshhestvennye-krugi-vysoko-ocenili-iniciativy-uzbekistana-v-obespechenii-religioznojtolerantnosti/> (date of access: 21.01.2023).
23. Murtazaeva R.Kh. Manifestation of tolerance of the Uzbek people in polyethnic Uzbekistan in conditions of independence. // Science, technology and education. – 2018. – № 11 (52). – P. 75–80.
24. Satimova O.I. Ideals and values of Islam: morality as one of the best qualities of a Muslim personality // Ideals and values of Islam in the educational space of the 21st century. – 2019. – P. 367.