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PRESS RELEASE

ADVANCING CULTURAL RIGHTS AND ARTISTIC EXPRESSION IN UZBEKISTAN

TASHKENT, 11 March 2024 - Today, the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), the "Yuksalish" Movement, "Ilkhom" Theatre of Mark Weil and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) are holding an International Public Discussion on "Advancing Cultural Rights and Artistic Expression in Uzbekistan". The event is organised within the framework of "Enhancing the Quality of Uzbekistan's Application of international Law (EQUAL)" project, funded by the European Union.

The discussion aims to serve as a platform to discuss the duty to respect, protect and fulfil cultural rights within the Uzbekistan context. This includes discussions on the government's and civil society's roles in promoting universality and diversity. Additionally, the dialogue seeks to examine the legal frameworks that are instrumental in fostering a safe environment for artistic expressions across a multitude of spaces such as theatres, galleries, and both public and private venues throughout Uzbekistan.

The event is organized in the "Ilkhom" Theatre and it aims to inspire a meaningful dialogue and collaboration among experts, policymakers, and stakeholders to ensure freedom of artistic expression and diversity according to international law and standards in Uzbekistan.

"Uzbekistan, with its rich tapestry of traditions, history, and diverse cultural heritage, recognizes the fundamental significance of cultural rights. These rights encompass the freedom to express one's cultural identity, preserve cultural heritage, and participate in cultural life without any discrimination. Though we see that Uzbekistan is strongly committed to upholding international standards for the freedom of artistic expression and diversity we also see that there are challenges faced by cultural rights activists and artists. Today's open expert discussion is a strong testimony for an open and peaceful society." - said **H.E. Charlotte Adriaen**, Ambassador of the European Union in Uzbekistan.

"The Yuksalish movement strives to build an open dialogue with representatives of the state and society. We consider it important that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates that everyone can enjoy not only their economic, but also social and cultural rights." – said **Mr Bobur Bekmurodov**, Chairperson of "Yuksalish" Movement, member of the Legislative chamber of the Oliy Majlis of Republic of Uzbekistan. "It is important to understand that ensuring cultural rights contributes to the development of intercultural dialogue. This international expert discussion is a good opportunity to hear the opinions of different parties and to identify a range of topical issues. Of course, it is important not only to talk about problems, but also to solve them. We believe that this can only be done by joint efforts through open, multilateral dialogue, in which it is important to hear everyone's opinion" – he added.

"The public discussion about cultural rights in Uzbekistan, which is taking place at the independent Ilkhom Theater, is symbolic and encouraging. Culture is one of the most vulnerable structures that need support. We are open to dialogue. We hope that the country's independent artists will be heard, seen, in demand and "not punished" – said **Ms Irina Bharat**, Head of international relations division of "Ilkhom" theatre.

"Cultural rights as human rights right are enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). This covenant, alongside the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, provides a legal framework that obliges States to respect, protect, and fulfil the wide array of cultural rights, including the freedom of artistic expression. It is the duty of States parties to ICESCR, among which is Uzbekistan, to ensure their comprehensive protection and to advocate for



YUKSALISH



an environment where artists can freely contribute to cultural diversity. This commitment underlines the legal obligation to foster conditions conducive to the flourishing of artistic expression as a fundamental aspect of a vibrant and diverse cultural life”, said Temur Shakirov, Director (ad interim) of the ICJ Europe and Central Asia Programme.

Today's discussion on advancing cultural rights and artistic expression in Uzbekistan signifies an important step toward a broader engagement and understanding of the importance of these freedoms within the national and international legal frameworks. The event underscores the necessity of a concerted effort across various sectors—governmental bodies, civil society, and international entities—to ensure that the environment in Uzbekistan fosters artistic creativity and cultural diversity. This initiative contributes to Uzbekistan’s commitment to uphold international standards and obligations, aiming to enhance the protection and promotion of cultural rights. Moving forward, the collective insights and recommendations garnered at the event should guide actionable strategies to reinforce Uzbekistan's cultural diversity and respect for artistic expression.

The event is 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. The main objective of the EQUAL project is to promote, by supporting civil society, equal protection of economic, social and cultural (ESC) rights for groups particularly vulnerable to discrimination in Uzbekistan.

Background

This is the fifth expert discussion held within the framework of the EQUAL project, [the first being on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), the second on [the effective implementation of the recommendations of the CEDAW and CESCR Committees](#), the third on the [monitoring and coordination of implementation of the UN treaties in Uzbekistan: example of CRC, ICECSR and CEDAW](#), and the fourth on [From Legislation to Action: Effective Measures for Protecting Women and Children from Violence in Uzbekistan](#). Earlier, between 2017 and 2021, six expert discussions took place within the ACCESS ([Advancing Civil Society in Promoting ESC Rights Standards](#)) project implemented by the ICJ under the support of the EU Delegation in Uzbekistan.

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Financial resources:

The Project is financed by the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Uzbekistan
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