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Delegation of Uzbekistan

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**Working session 1: Democratic institutions, including: democratic
elections, democracy at the national, regional and local levels, citizenship
and political rights**

Democratic elections in Uzbekistan

Mr. Chairperson,
Distinguished Conference participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The legislative bases have now been created in Uzbekistan for the formation of a bicameral, professional Parliament. Already in operation is the Legislative Chamber, in which political parties are represented, including the parliamentary majority and the parliamentary opposition. A Senate representing the interests of the regions has been formed.

The powers of the chambers of Parliament have been expanded, the practice of holding votes of confidence in the government has been instituted and control functions are being exercised (parliamentary inquiries, parliamentary hearings, and reports by the Office of the Prosecutor General, the Ombudsman, the General Accounting Office and the Central Bank).

Following the reform of the electoral legislation, political parties have the right to put forward candidates for seats in the Legislative Chamber. The laws envisage the introduction of a 30 per cent quota for women among the candidates for seats both in the local representative bodies and in Parliament. A total of 15 seats in the Legislative Chamber have been set aside for the non-governmental Environmental Movement of Uzbekistan.

International election standards have been incorporated into the laws and the way they are applied. Greater importance has been attached to the practice of monitoring by international and foreign observers.

The most recent elections to the supreme and local representative bodies were held in 2009, once again demonstrating the democratic nature of the national electoral system and the accurate and meticulous observance of the laws and international standards by all participants at all stages of the electoral process.

A total of 17,215,700 citizens of Uzbekistan are included in the electoral register, more than 15,108,000 of whom took part in the election, representing 87.8 per cent of the total number of voters. More than 300 observers from 36 countries and 4 missions from international organizations – the OSCE, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference – monitored the elections. The elections were covered by 500 domestic media outlets and more than 200 foreign ones.

These polls resulted in the election of 150 deputies to the Legislative Chamber, including:

- 53 deputies from the movement representing entrepreneurs and business people – the Liberal Democratic Party of Uzbekistan;
- 32 deputies from the People’s Democratic Party of Uzbekistan;
- 31 deputies from the Milliy Tiklanish Party;
- 19 deputies from the Adolat Party;
- 15 representatives of the Environmental Movement of Uzbekistan.

Of the 150 deputies elected, 33 (or 22 per cent) were women. A Senate was established, of which 84 members were elected by local representative bodies and 16 members were appointed by the President. Of the 100 members of the Senate, 15 per cent are women.

Detailed and fairly objective assessments of the parliamentary elections were provided by the relevant authorized bodies and by domestic and foreign observers, including those working with international organizations.

The parliamentary elections demonstrated a strong political culture on the part of the population, the growing level of the public’s political and civil awareness and its broad support for further efforts to intensify the democratization and modernization of the country.

The country has adopted systemic measures to develop a multiparty system and ensure a diversity of opinions in society. A study of the multiparty system in independent Uzbekistan shows that during the years of independence the country has put into place a serious legislative basis to ensure the proper conditions for enabling political parties to operate in a wide range of socio-political areas. The following laws have been adopted: the Law on Public Associations, the Law on Political Parties and the Law on the Financing of Political Parties.

Today it is impossible to examine the work of political parties and their significance without considering the development of parliamentarianism. In fact, the active involvement of political parties in the law-making process is one of the most effective ways of achieving their programmatic goals. These goals envisage the preparation of draft legislation and the introduction of amendments and supplements to existing legislation to reflect the need to protect and promote the interests of the parties’ electoral base and their pre-election programmes.

Another point to be noted is the importance of the Constitutional Law on Increasing the Role of Political Parties in the Renewal and Further Democratization of Governance and the Modernization of the Country. This Law forms the legislative foundation for the further pursuit of democratic reforms and for the structuring of the political interests of the electorate and the deputies.

Uzbekistan is gradually moving towards a qualitatively new level of political development, where parties are becoming a more finely tuned instrument operating within the democratic process and a vehicle for increasing the public's involvement in the management of the affairs of society and the State.

All this means greater responsibility towards society on the part of political parties for the successful implementation of the reforms in progress. The parties must themselves seek ways of developing the political system, must propose reform initiatives, must work on improving their own organization and must develop within themselves a kind of self-sufficiency. Only in this way can they achieve maturity, win a permanent electoral base and enjoy a strong presence in Parliament, and successfully meet the commitments they have assumed vis-à-vis those who have voted for them.

In this way, the political parties of Uzbekistan have become a major instrument for increasing the political and social engagement of the citizens, for expressing the will and views of the public in the exercise of electoral processes, and for participating directly in State executive bodies in the capital and in the regions. All this is imparting a powerful impetus to the further democratization and modernization of our country.

However, much work still remains to be done and there is a great potential that the parties need to tap into. Specifically, they must, among other things, learn to do the following: constructively oppose one another while at the same time joining as partners in defining the government's strategy, train and put forward from their own ranks persons capable of participating competently in the management of State and public affairs, and raise the political culture of the population.

Distinguished Conference participants,

Uzbekistan attaches great attention to the development of civil society institutions. It has adopted a Law on the Guarantees for the Activities of Non-State Non-Commercial Organizations. A public fund has been established to support these organizations and other civil society institutions, along with a parliamentary commission to manage this fund. The responsibility for State funding for civil society institutions has been transferred from the executive branch to Parliament. A system of public oversight (monitoring) is being established. The legislative framework has been put into place to enable citizens to effectively govern themselves.

Recent years have seen the adoption of around ten legislative instruments directly aimed at further democratizing and liberalizing the media, at increasing their role in ensuring transparency and openness in the socio-political and socio-economic reforms being undertaken, and at introducing advanced information and communication technologies into the media space.

The number of domestic print media has doubled over the last ten years. Today, a total of 1,156 media outlets are registered in the country, including 702 newspapers, 244 magazines, 79 television channels and radio stations, 4 news agencies and 108 websites. Of these media, 590 (or 51 per cent) are privately owned.

The necessary organizational, legal and technical conditions have been created for the establishment and development of public and non-State institutions and structures in the information area. The following organizations and agencies are active in the country: the Creative Union of Journalists, the Union of Writers of Uzbekistan, the National Association of Electronic Media, the Public Fund to Support and Develop Electronic Media and the Public Fund to Support and Develop Independent Print Media and News Agencies.

Particular importance is ascribed to the work of non-State non-commercial organizations. More than 5,000 such organizations are currently working in Uzbekistan. Some 50 of these organizations are foreign or internationally owned. The State provides these organizations with support in the form of subsidies, grants and social service procurement. More than 400 non-State non-commercial organizations have received support for their work in the form of financing from the Public Fund to support non-State non-commercial organizations and other civil society institutions.

Mention should also be made of the importance of the *mahallas*, a kind of citizens' council, which perform more than 30 functions that formerly were the prerogative of the local authorities. The election of *mahalla* elders provides schooling in direct democracy. In 2008, elections were held in 10,124 such councils, with the participation of more than 576,000 electors. Women accounted for 11.5 per cent of the council heads.

Uzbekistan and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) have positive experience of co-operation in this area. Dialogue is under way on the prospects for the further development of the laws on political parties and non-State non-commercial organizations, bringing them into line with the provisions of instruments of international law and OSCE documents. Also of particular practical significance is the experience gained through participation in ODIHR missions to monitor the various periodic elections organized and held in the Republic of Uzbekistan.

On 15 July 2010, Tashkent hosted an international round table entitled "International Standards and the Improvement of National Legislation on Political Parties and Non-State Non-Commercial Organizations". This event was organized by the National Human Rights Centre of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Parliamentary Commission for the management of the resources of the Public Fund to support non-State non-commercial organizations and other civil society institutions, the Ministry of Justice, the Institute for the Study of Civil Society, the National Association of Non-State Non-Commercial Organizations of Uzbekistan, the ODIHR and the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Uzbekistan.

The round table was attended by deputies from the Legislative Chamber and members of the Senate, representatives of ministries, departments, national human rights institutions, political parties, civil society institutions and the media as well as representatives of international organizations and diplomats accredited in Uzbekistan.

The results of that forum once again confirmed the need for the further development of the organizational and legal conditions if political parties are to exert an active influence on the process of forming government bodies of the executive branch and if the regulatory

legal basis for the work of public institutions and of non-governmental and non-commercial organizations is to be improved so that they can take their rightful place in the decision-making system, while defending the interests of those sectors and segments of society that they represent.

Thank you for your attention.