

“From time to time, negative incidents related to the activities of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, such as the use of torture, beatings and frequent cases of corruption in the ranks of the internal affairs bodies, only strengthen the negative attitude of ordinary citizens towards their “defenders”, mentions Farkhod Mirzabaev, an independent analyst, participant of the CABAR.asia School of Analytics from Tashkent.

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An employee of the Yukorichirchik district police department of the Tashkent region of Uzbekistan swears on the Koran not to take bribes. December 2018.

Many people associate the beginning of reforms in the structures of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Uzbekistan with the entry into force of the law on internal affairs bodies on March 16, 2017.^[1] According to the Uzbek authorities, this law draws a dividing line in the history of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of independent Uzbekistan on “before” and “after”.

The long-awaited law, which replaced the existing Charter on the Activities of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, adopted back in 1990, clearly delineated the powers and responsibilities

of the internal affairs bodies, which was received with cautious optimism by local and international experts and human rights activists. For many years it was believed^[2] that it was law enforcement officials in general, and the police in particular, who were responsible for the largest number of human rights violations in the country.

Even the police officers themselves did not hide their joy at the adoption of this law, since the law also protected the rights of the main contingent of minor staff members and in many respects exhausted by the irregular working days of the internal affairs officers, clearly schedule a 40-hour working week, mandatory payment of overtime allowances and other benefits, and creating the necessary living conditions for middle and lower-level employees.

Nevertheless, ordinary employees later complained^[3] that many of the requirements of the new law regarding the labor and social protection of employees themselves were not at all observed by the leadership of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, even after the new law came into force.

More than three years after the adoption of this law, real results show that in many respects the law has not brought the desired positive changes. The positive changes achieved are mainly related only to some areas of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, such as services for the issuance of passports and residence registration (registration at the place of residence), and are not systemic, and as experience shows, the most problematic areas of activity of this ministry still cause great discontent among the population.

From time to time negative incidents related to the activities of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, such as the use of torture by investigators in relation to the accused, beatings of prisoners in places of detention and frequent cases of corruption in the ranks of the internal affairs bodies only strengthen the negative attitude of ordinary citizens towards their “defenders”.

To fully understand the situation, it must be said that Uzbekistan has always had rather humane and well-thought-out laws. Let us consider the main law of the country - the constitution, for example, the use of torture or other illegal actions on the part of employees of the internal affairs bodies has always been prohibited. However, despite all existing laws, all these negative aspects of the activities of law enforcement agencies have always continued to exist. Therefore, it would be overly naive to expect that by the adoption of several new laws or presidential decrees, everything will work out in a positive way.

The main task is to restore public trust

President of the country Shavkat Mirziyoyev, who, according to many observers, sincerely wants to carry out the necessary reforms in all spheres of the life of the state, outlined the “restoration of public trust” as the main task of the entire reform of the internal affairs bodies of the country. With this slogan, the head of state acknowledged that over the past years, the population has accumulated a lot of negativity in relation to the country’s law enforcement agencies.

Probably, the president also understands perfectly well that in the realities of Uzbekistan, it is impossible to achieve the desired result by adopting a new law or signing a new decree.

Laws and existing realities can demonstrate two distinct realities.

In such a situation, an effective tool for the successful implementation of the planned systemic reforms in the sphere of the Ministry of Internal Affairs can be the provision of broad public control over the activities of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and its subdivisions, honestly, and not as a distraction, to increase their accountability to society and ensure transparency of their activities.

However, as recent events show, the Ministry of Internal Affairs still remains a hidden organization that not only is not ready to open its doors for effective public control, but also does not tolerate criticism, even if this criticism is expressed not in revealing journalistic investigations, but simply in humorous programs, where petty corruption among inspectors on the roads are displayed.

Representatives of the comic groups “Shirdanak” and “Kalpok” were forced to publicly apologize for ridiculing corruption among traffic police officers, which caused public outrage among the population, as a result of which a high-ranking representative of the Ministry of Internal Affairs had to explain the actions of his colleagues in a defensive manner.

Most importantly, the recent series of negative incidents involving the use of torture, which resulted in the death of citizens, clearly demonstrated that the Ministry of Internal Affairs itself is not capable of regulating shortcomings in its activities.

In the case of two deaths from torture in Kashkadarya and Andijan regions, criminal cases against the officers who used torture were not opened immediately after the illegal actions were committed, but only after the desperate relatives of the victims spread video messages and showing bodies of their dead relatives a few weeks later after these tragedies took place.

Only after giving wide publicity to the case, official investigations were carried out, as a result of which criminal cases were opened.

The death of a 43-year-old resident of the Andijan region caused a wave of displeasure among the population, which was joined by officials; the president even had to hold a separate video conference call on the implementation of reforms in the structures of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The death of citizen A. Abdukarimov, a resident of the Andijan region, after torture by the Interior Ministry officers, caused widespread public outrage, President Mirziyoyev had to hold a separate government meeting after this incident on the ongoing reforms in the structures of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The answer to the main question was still not voiced, why if a person was tortured in the building of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, “in full view of other employees and officers”, and if the beaten body was taken by ambulance from this building, why official investigation was not conducted before, but only after the sister of the deceased release a video appeal almost a month after the incident.

A safe crime rate is above all else

One of the tendencies that has been observed in recent years is the fact of not conducting criminal or even an administrative investigation following a complaint from the victim party.

Many cases are not opened and investigated in order not to spoil the “safe crime image” of a certain mahalla, district, city or region, which will entail disciplinary measures against employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in these areas for unsatisfactory work on crime prevention.

People often read information that employees of police department are taking slow actions or simply inactive when they receive various complaints from the population, mainly from ordinary citizens.

Recently, at the sixth meeting of the Senate of Uzbekistan on August 7, 2020, the head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the country, Pulat Bobozhonov, mentioned that the Ministry of Internal Affairs had abandoned the old practice of punishing prevention inspectors for the growth of crime in the territories entrusted to them, as a result of which, prevention inspectors in order to preserve a safe criminal image of their territory were not interested in increasing criminal or administrative cases



Minister of Internal Affairs of Uzbekistan Pulat Bobozhonov

based on citizens' complaints.

According to the results for the first 6 months of 2020, there is a sharp increase in crimes, especially fraud among the population. However, as the head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs mentioned, many of these crimes were committed in previous years, but only this year, after citizens' appeal, criminal cases were opened.

The priorities are wrong, folks!

Another trend, which is increasingly being monitored in the recent reform years, is the involvement of Interior Ministry employees in various occupations that are not related to their activities. This is not only involvement in the traditional harvest of cotton in the autumn, but also in tracking so that the farmer watered the cotton field on time, surrendered wheat over the plan (sometimes tantamount to forced selection). It comes to the fact that the employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs are instructed to force farmers to buy exactly the seed potatoes that are offered to them from the local administration.

In fact, the employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs have become a private army of local heads of administrations and other chiefs, who in many cases make decisions and actions that are contrary to the laws, rights and interests of citizens and entrepreneurs. In such cases, employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs ensure the safety of illegal demolitions of housing, the selection of crops from farmers, initiated by local authorities, and other illegal actions.

During his recent speech^[4] at a meeting of the Senate, the head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs mentioned that on behalf of the President of the country, the internal affairs officers will be relieved of duties not directly related to ensuring security in their areas, and strict control will be established for unjustified non-interference in their activities from the side of local authorities. As the saying runs, it remains to be seen.

When materials appear in the press about illegal actions of heads of municipalities or districts on the ground, such as beating or publicly insulting farmers, entrepreneurs or other employees of the local administration during meetings, the heads of local internal affairs bodies who participate in these meetings who are sitting in the front rows, are not courageous enough to protect the rights and dignity of a persons, and remind the local officials that their actions contradict the laws and fall under specific articles of administrative or even in cases of beating criminal punishment.

In very rare cases, administrative punishments take place, however, not because of the fact

that the chiefs of the internal affairs bodies who participated in such meetings initiated the accusation due to official duties, but because someone from the audience filmed everything on a hidden camera or recorded audio and made illegal actions and inappropriate behavior of local leaders public, and only then, under pressure from public opinion, local khokims are fined for several million Uzbek sums.



In January 2020, the khokim of the Mingbulak region, Nurshod Khudoyberdiev, was fined 4.4 million sums after an audio recording appeared on social networks, in which one can hear the khokim of the district insulting employees working under his leadership.

It is also a matter of great concern that the Ministry of Internal Affairs is gradually becoming a structure whose main responsibilities include replenishing the state treasury regarding various fines from the population, a kind of second tax committee. And the fines in Uzbekistan are rather high.

During the spring quarantine, people were outraged that even in economically difficult times, when many people lost the opportunity to earn money, ordinary internal affairs officers complained that they were forcefully required to fulfill the daily plan^[5] to issue fines for violators of quarantine measures. For the sake of fairness, it must be said that the Ministry of Internal Affairs does not establish the amount of fines to be paid.

Conclusion

Despite all the shortcomings in the activities of the country's internal affairs bodies, it must also be recognized that for many years Uzbekistan has been occupying the most advanced places in terms of security among the countries of the world. Even experienced foreign diplomats in Tashkent who have traveled to many countries admit that Tashkent and Uzbekistan are generally safe places to live in peace. First of all, this is surely the merit of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and other law enforcement agencies of the country.

Global rating "Global Law and Order" for 2019 confirmed the position of Uzbekistan as a safe country. In this ranking, Uzbekistan is tied for fourth place along with Turkmenistan and Switzerland as the safest countries in the world.

Although any offense on the part of employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in relation to the citizens of the country is unacceptable, it may indeed be unfair to blame the Ministry of Internal Affairs and their employees for all the shortcomings in society, because they might simply carry out orders and guidelines of the country's political leadership.

Moreover, in many cases the state power itself compels the employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs to commit illegal actions to the detriment of their citizens. Involving employees in all kinds of chores not related to their profile distracts them from their direct responsibilities, and inevitably leads to their psychological and physical exhaustion and negatively affects human and professional qualities.

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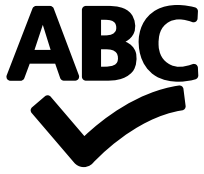
[1] <https://www.lex.uz/docs/3027845>

[2] Mirziyoyev signs law on law enforcement agencies <https://www.bbc.com/uzbek/uzbekistan-37395748>

[3] The Interior Ministry is violating the rights of its employees <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NSRcfE35oV0>

[4] Part 2 of the 6th plenary session of the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LDZ4ebBmTd4&t=10647s>

[5] Is there a "plan" for fines for prevention inspectors? <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2020/07/27/plan/>



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