

In Uzbekistan, representatives of LGBTIQ community are systematically facing discrimination. There are no signs that the situation might change anyhow.

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When Shavkat Mirziyoyev became the president, the residents of Uzbekistan were hoping for the changes and improvements in their lives. It doesn't concern homosexual citizens, though.

Despite the fact that in 1992 homosexuality was removed from the International Classification of Diseases (ICD 10) and after the collapse of the USSR, three of five Central Asian states removed homosexual relations from the list of crimes in a criminal code, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan retained the relevant articles and continued the penal practice that used to be in the Soviet Union.

With the previous leader Islam Karimov, who led the country for 27 years actually, LGBTIQ rights were never discussed. In 2016, aged Karimov expressed his attitude towards LGBTIQ at one of his public speeches and noted that these people, in his opinion, "had some deviation in their heads".



When Shavkat Mirziyoyev came to power in September 2016, a few messages were addressed to him asking to pay attention to this area - from the Human Rights Watch and Uzbek gays abroad. However, Mirziyoyev has never said a word about LGBTIQ for all these years. At least, in public.

In the meantime, Uzbek gays still encounter frame-ups, batteries, blackmailing and extortions, to which they have become used.

Spartacus, an international website for representatives of sexual minorities, prepared the [ranking](#) of tolerance of countries to LGBTIQ communities (lesbian, gay men, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer). Among Central Asian countries, Kazakhstan takes 83<sup>rd</sup> place, Kyrgyzstan - 95<sup>th</sup>, Tajikistan - 110<sup>th</sup> by the level of tolerance. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are in the red zone of the ranking and have negative scores almost in all indicators.

The murder of a young gay man in September 2019 in Tashkent on the ground of hatred to people with non-traditional orientation caused public outrage in the Uzbek society. A few local [online media](#) outlets wrote about the murder of a 25-year-old Shokir Shavkatov last September. According to the reports, the young man was murdered by unknown persons sometime after his coming out in his Instagram account.

One of the representatives of the city's gay community told a journalist of CABAR.asia that their community was shocked by his murder. According to him, many people in social media not only approved the actions of the perpetrators, but also wished death to all freaks.

Journalists of CABAR.asia asked the General Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Uzbekistan to comment on the investigation of murder of Shokir Shavkatov. The agency failed to answer by the time of writing the article. The ombudsman failed to comment, either. The office of the Authorised Representative of Oliy Mazhlis on human rights in Uzbekistan ignored our request.

The constitution of Uzbekistan reads that the key tasks of the republic are to "create a humane democratic law-governed state that seeks to provide a decent life to all the citizens of the republic." However, representatives of the gay community wonder why the authorities of Uzbekistan discriminate against them.

A Tashkent-based lawyer, who is a part of the Uzbek LGBTIQ community, on condition of anonymity, explained why sex minorities do not seek help from human rights activists.

According to him, human rights activists in Uzbekistan are mainly tradition-bound aged people who find it unacceptable for Uzbekistanis to have homosexual relations. There are no human rights defenders standing for LGBTIQ rights.

### **Alone with fears and threats**

[According](#) to Central Asian Gender and Sexuality Advocacy Network, an international non-governmental organisation, of the UN Human Rights Council, about 500 men charged with article 120 ("pederasty") of the Criminal Code of Uzbekistan were in prison in 2013. The cases of conviction of journalist Ruslan Sharipov in 2003 and Botir Sultonov in 2012 were widely discussed. There are no updates for 2019.

The last [case](#) was reported in summer 2019. A young couple of gay men were detained at one of the apartments in Tashkent. The authorities initiated a criminal case on this article for the first time in so many years.

“The society in Uzbekistan has negative attitude towards gays. Therefore, we have to live a double life. Some get married for show, even have kids,” a man told to the journalists of CABAR.asia. “The law-enforcement officers blackmail the victims and extort money. Otherwise, they threat to open a criminal case or tell the truth to the family. So, gays don’t complain about the police if they face a blackmail and extortion.”

Also, law-enforcement officers act as gays and meet their victims on the internet. “Then they blackmail, threaten to disclose their identities in public. Sometimes, they don’t stop at extortion. They beat and humiliate the young people,” Abbosali Abbosov, a LGBTIQ activist from Samarkand, now living in the United States, said.

A prominent human rights defender, chair of the Human Rights Alliance of Uzbekistan, Yelena Urlaeva, also said that she does not have any complaints from citizens about the discrimination based on sexual orientation.

“It’s worth mentioning that they represent a modern Uzbek society penetrated with strong homophobia. Tens of videos of mob punishment of people suspected of homosexuality have been posted on the internet in the last few years. Young men are being beaten and humiliated, and then these videos are posted on social media. The actions of such “people’s punishers” rarely lead to criminal cases,” Yelena Urlaeva said.

### **Uzbekistan refuses to recognize the rights of the LGBTIQ community**

In 2016, the UN Human Rights Committee received an official [reply](#) from Uzbekistan regarding the criticism of the LGBTIQ community’s status in the country. The message read that Uzbekistan was not discriminating anyone. Moreover, according to competent authorities, there were no formal complaints about discrimination or sexual abuse from people with non-traditional orientation.

As for article 120 of the Criminal Code of Uzbekistan, “pederasty”, the authorities said they were not going to remove it because “homosexual relations are one of the reasons of distribution of HIV/AIDS in the country” and contrast with the traditions of the people of Uzbekistan.

Also, Uzbekistan refused to follow the 11 UN recommendations on the rights of LGBTIQ community as they are inconsistent with the law of Uzbekistan.

[According](#) to director of the National Human Rights Centre, Akmal Saidov, Uzbekistan received 212 recommendations from the UN, and is ready to follow only 201. 11

recommendations regarding the rights of LGBTIQ community representatives run contrary to article 120 of the Criminal Code of Uzbekistan.

According to the LGBTIQ activist and journalist Luiza Atabaeva, the Uzbek society is still not ready to accept the LGBTIQ. “We have lived according to Islamic canons for a long time and created the image of the traditional family and polygamy. Then, the Soviet culture emerged. Now we live in the age of uyat (“shame” in Uzbek). Moreover, the economic status of the society doesn’t allow us to think of the sexual freedom. Who cares of discrimination against LGBTIQ in Uzbekistan when people cannot meet their basic needs? Lack of food, electricity, gas, good education, jobs, etc.,” she said.

Prominent blogger Umid Gafurov (troll.uz) also thinks that the society is not ready to take representatives of the LGBTIQ community adequately. “Human rights activists do not protect their rights. They mainly protect political prisoners, persons with disabilities, and women, but they don’t care about the LGBTIQ. Such cases are a failure because there is an article for pederasty,” he said.

Instead of public censure of violence against LGBTIQ, the Uzbek authorities keep silent. “This inaction just encourages the vicious circle of discrimination. Besides, it runs contrary to Uzbekistan’s obligations in terms of national law and numerous international agreements it is a party to. Such obligations demand to protect all people, including LGBTIQ, from violence and discrimination,” Uzbek LGBTIQ activists said.

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