

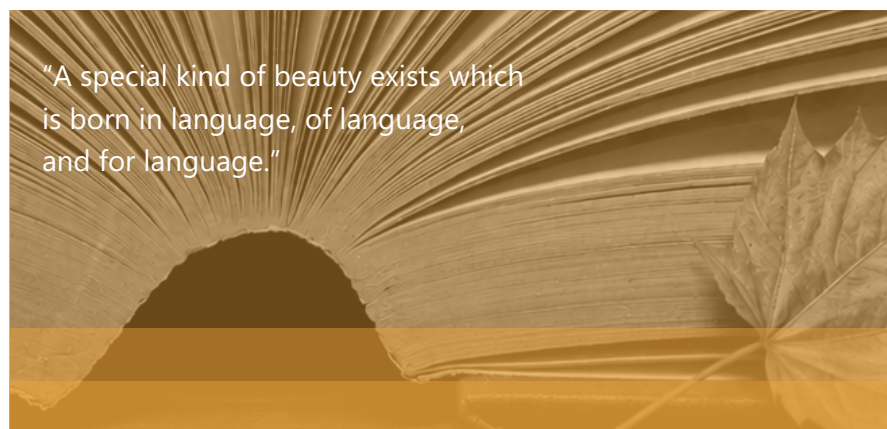


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"A special kind of beauty exists which
is born in language, of language,
and for language."



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Historical evolution of the self-government body: socio-political and spiritual aspects

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Annotation

The article examines the historical evolution of the mahalla institution in Uzbekistan from early communal forms to its contemporary legal and political status as a citizens' self-government body. The study considers the development of territorial communities, craft and religious associations, urban mahallas, forms of local social solidarity, and mechanisms of collective responsibility during the medieval period, the khanates, the colonial and Soviet eras, and the years of independence. Particular attention is paid to the continuity between historical community practices and the modern functions of the mahalla in civil society, social assistance, moral education, and local participation. Using historical-comparative and problem-chronological approaches, the article argues that the mahalla should not be mechanically equated with a modern administrative unit, but should be understood as a historically changing institution whose social, political, spiritual, and self-governing functions have been repeatedly transformed while preserving important elements of continuity.

Keywords

Mahalla, self-government, historical continuity, civil society, urban community, social solidarity

O'zini o'zi boshqarish organining tarixiy evolyutsiyasi: ijtimoiy-siyosiy va ma'naviy jihatlar

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Annotatsiya

Maqolada O'zbekiston hududidagi mahalla institutining qadimiy jamoa shakllaridan boshlab fuqarolarning zamonaviy o'zini o'zi boshqarish organigacha bo'lgan tarixiy evolyutsiyasi tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqotda hududiy jamoalar, hunarmandchilik va diniy uyushmalar, shahar mahallalari, ijtimoiy hamjihatlik hamda jamoaviy mas'uliyat mexanizmlarining o'rta asrlar, xonliklar, mustamlaka va sovet davrlari hamda mustaqillik yillaridagi rivoji yoritiladi. Mahallaning tarixiy shakllari bilan uning fuqarolik jamiyati, ijtimoiy yordam, ma'naviy-axloqiy tarbiya va mahalliy ishtirokni ta'minlovchi zamonaviy funksiyalari o'rtasidagi vorisiylikka alohida e'tibor qaratiladi. Tarixiy-qiyosiy va muammoli-xronologik yondashuvlar asosida mahallani zamonaviy ma'muriy birlik bilan mexanik tarzda tenglashtirish metodologik jihatdan noto'g'ri ekani asoslanadi. Mahalla ijtimoiy, siyosiy, ma'naviy va boshqaruv vazifalari turli davrlarda o'zgarib borgan, biroq muhim tarixiy vorisiylik unsurlarini saqlagan murakkab institut sifatida talqin etiladi.

Kalit so'zlar

Mahalla, o'zini o'zi boshqarish, tarixiy vorisiylik, fuqarolik jamiyati, shahar jamoasi, ijtimoiy hamjihatlik

Историческая эволюция органа самоуправления: социально-политические и духовные аспекты

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Аннотация

В статье анализируется историческая эволюция института махалли на территории Узбекистана – от ранних общинных форм до современного правового и политического статуса органа самоуправления граждан. Рассматривается развитие территориальных общин, ремесленных и религиозных объединений, городских махаллей, механизмов социальной солидарности и коллективной ответственности в средневековый период, эпоху ханств, колониальный и советский периоды, а также в годы независимости. Особое внимание уделяется преемственности между историческими практиками общинной самоорганизации и современными функциями махалли в гражданском обществе, социальной поддержке, духовно-нравственном воспитании и локальном участии граждан. На основе историко-сравнительного и проблемно-хронологического подходов обосновывается необходимость не отождествлять махаллю механически с современной административной единицей, а рассматривать её как исторически изменяющийся институт, социальные, политические, духовные и самоуправленческие функции которого неоднократно трансформировались, сохраняя при этом существенные элементы исторической преемственности.

Ключевые слова

Махалля, самоуправление, историческая преемственность, гражданское общество, городская община, социальная солидарность

Introduction

When studying the history of the mahalla, it is important not to equate it with a modern administrative unit. From a historical perspective, the mahalla was primarily a form of association of people living in a specific territory, based on mutual assistance, customs, crafts, religious-ceremonial life, and collective responsibility. Therefore, rather than linking its genesis to a specific date, researching it as a long-term evolution of territorial-community relations is methodologically sound.

The word "mahalla" originates from the Arabic words "mahal" and "mahallatun," meaning "place," "location," or "community of

people" (Mahalla – fuqarolarning o'zini o'zi boshqarish asosi, 2001; 2). In the National Encyclopedia of Uzbekistan, the mahalla is described as a socio-territorial unit encompassing a specific area of a city, whose population is united into a community based on self-governance (O'zbekiston Milliy ensiklopediyasi, 2003; 548).

The objective of the article is to analyze the historical evolution of the mahalla institution in the territory of Uzbekistan – from ancient community relations to a modern civil society institution – from the perspective of historical continuity and transformation. The main focus is placed on how the mahalla's

functions of territorial community, social solidarity, moral-ethical upbringing, and self-governance changed across various historical stages.

Literature review

Research on the history of the mahalla highlights various aspects of the subject. K. Shaniyazov, analyzing ancient community governance and ethnic processes in the territory of Uzbekistan, provides information regarding the division of Samarkand into dahas and mahallas (Shoniyo'zov, 2001; 197). M. Gulamov focuses on the role of the mahalla as a civil society and historical community (G'ulomov, 2003; 23).

A. Nasirkhodjayev evaluates the mahalla as a space where moral and ethical values as well as traditions are preserved and developed (Nosirxo'jayev, 2011; 29). V. Kochkarov emphasizes that social and personal problems are resolved in the mahalla, fostering the formation of national identity and civic stance (Qo'chqorov, 2003; 18). M. Kirgizbayev analyzes the impact of the self-governance institution on citizens' political participation and political culture in relation to civil society (Qirg'izboyev, 2010; 190).

In legal-political studies, G. Ismailova (2007; 35), M. Mokhovikova (2016; 107), N. Postovoy (1995; 97), and G. Malikova (2009; 19) have covered the issues of self-governance's relationship with the state, its legal foundations, and the powers of local communities. Meanwhile, I. Babajanov analyzed the traditions and innovations in mahalla governance during the Soviet period and under conditions of independence (Bobojonov, 2018; 115).

The existing literature is important for shedding light on specific periods or individual functions of the mahalla. However, it is necessary to view the long historical process—starting from ancient community forms up to the Soviet period and the independence stage – as a unified evolutionary system, without mechanically equating the historical meaning

of the term “mahalla” with the modern institution.

Research methodology

The study was based on the principles of historicity, objectivity, and systematicity. Using the historical-comparative method, forms of community governance across different periods were compared; through the problem-chronological method, the manifestations of the mahalla in ancient and medieval times, its transformations during the khanates, colonial, and Soviet periods, as well as its legal transformation during the years of independence were consistently analyzed.

In interpreting the sources, three criteria were strictly observed: first, the period and origin of the source were taken into account; second, the term “mahalla” was not equated with the community-territorial structures that preceded it; third, the relationships of community, power, religion, craftsmanship, urban planning, and social assistance were considered in interconnection with one another. This approach allows evaluating the mahalla not merely as a modern governance mechanism, but as a phenomenon of long-term socio-historical development.

Analysis and Results

Historical analysis allows for the development of the mahalla institution to be viewed conditionally in five stages:

1. Ancient community-territorial associations;
2. Formation of the urban mahalla and craft-religious communities in the Middle Ages;
3. Strengthening of the traditional self-governance mechanisms of the mahalla during the Khanates and the 19th century;
4. Administrative reorganization and integration into control mechanisms during the Soviet period;
5. Transformation of historical continuity into a legal-political institution after independence.

These stages demonstrate that the mahalla institution is a social structure that is simultaneously stable and subject to change.

The mahalla is a method of self-governance characteristic of the traditions and values of our people, and its history dates back to ancient times. As recorded in historical sources, 8 families lived in Sopollitepa, which is a monument of the Bronze Age. Later, more than 100 families joined them. The community of large families was headed by an aksakal (elder) elected from among them. From the 3rd century BCE to the beginning of the 5th century CE, the council of elders also resolved important tasks in the Fergana (Parkana) state. The council was mainly engaged in matters such as concluding peace, appointing the composition of ministers and taxes, declaring war, and mobilizing for community work. Historical sources record that in Samarkand, the central city of Sogdiana, the city was divided into several dahas and mahallas (Shoniyozov, 2001; 197).

This confirms that the mahalla has existed since ancient times. Mahmud Kashgari, in his work *"Diwan Lughat al-Turk,"* recorded the term "mahalla" for the first time as a word representing trade-craft quarters (G'ulomov, 2003; 23). Abu Bakr Narshakhi (11th century), in his work *"History of Bukhara,"* notes that even a thousand years ago there were a number of mahallas, and they functioned as self-governing associations. In the territory of Uzbekistan, as early as the 10th century, the term "mahalla" was encountered as a term defining trade-craft occupations. During these periods, the mahalla held authority in three main areas. In particular, it exercised authority regarding keeping the urban territory clean, ensuring the proper organization of the residential area and lifestyle of the local population residing in the respective territory, and leading them in holding state and local events (Respublika kengashi, n.d.).

This, in turn, indicates that the mahalla began to form as an institution—a unique path of the school of democracy. For example, Jean-

Antoine Duprat, deputy director of the Institute of Urban Planning and Development at Sorbonne University (Paris) and an expert on sustainable development, comparing the evolution of civil society and democratic institutions in Uzbekistan and France, noted that our country achieved significant success in this area over a quarter of a century, stating: "Whereas France built such institutions over 200 years" (Mamaragimov, 2017; 40).

Furthermore, German scholars attribute the authorship of this concept to Prussian Minister Baron vom Stein, who writes that local self-governance is "the active participation of citizens in the management of state affairs." In 19th-century sources, it became customary to use the concept of "self-governance" in relation to state-republics, US states, and Swiss cantons (Jo'raqulov, 2018; 28). However, the above sources substantiate that the mahalla institution, which is the foundation of civil society, has been formed among us since ancient times.

The mahalla is indeed an eastern socio-moral and ethical institution that has historically formed and embodied customs, mentality, rules, and values. "When speaking of the mahalla, a place where moral and ethical values and traditions are preserved and developed is meant" (Nosirxo'jayev, 2011; 29), notes A. Nasirkhodjayev. Indeed, this can be seen in the example of the mahalla institution – a system that preserves and develops national values, customs, and moral qualities.

Mahallas have long been recognized in our country as cradles of education and nurturance, birthplaces of goodness, and national democratic spaces where customs, traditions, and values are revered. Consequently, the mahalla represents an incomparable space that teaches humans to live together with society and educates them in that exact spirit (Saidov, 2017; 14).

In this sense, the mahalla is considered a complex of democratic families that unites and consolidates people on the path of goodness, regardless of their nationality, age, gender,

religion, race, language, beliefs, social origin, or personal and social status. This family lives and operates on the basis of mutual respect, love, and strong friendship among people. "The way the Uzbek people live neighborhood by neighborhood is a unique phenomenon," says political scientist V. Kochkarov. "First, social and personal problems are resolved right here. Second, public opinion – such as national identity, civic stance, and attitude toward the blessings of independence—is also formed mainly in the mahallas" (Qo'chqorov, 2003; 18). This is because problems specific to this space are brought forward within the mahalla community, and solutions to problematic situations and issues are found based on public consensus.

The role of the mahalla as a collective space lies in the fact that, since ancient times, it has emerged as a socio-spiritual space where communities living in that territory live and work by agreement, share all achievements in that area, and jointly resolve problems that need to be eliminated.

According to Western political scientists, the concept of "self-governance" is associated with the formation of the independence of citizen communities relative to the state. The capabilities inherent in the institution of self-governance are so high that it is considered an unparalleled factor in creating conditions for the broad political participation of citizens and forming elements of their political culture. Ultimately, the activities of these bodies ensure the overall stability and flexibility of the political system (Qirg'izboyev, 2010; 190).

Today, self-governance starting from the lower tier in society is reaching the upper tier—the state level. Through these aspects, the mahalla, as a self-governance body, develops vertically in a socio-political manner.

It should be acknowledged that citizen self-governance is an objective phenomenon of societal life, manifesting as one of the forms of self-organization, and representing one of the liberal forms of governance that can be

organized in a specific residential territory (Ismailova, 2007; 35).

Russian political scientist M. Mokhovikova gives the definition: "Mahalla is an active resource of state institutions" (Mokhovikova, 2016; 107). Another Russian theoretical scholar, N.V. Postovoy, states: "Self-governance existing in society is subordinate to the state. If the state adopts a legal norm regarding self-governance, self-governance develops; if the state does not adopt such a norm, self-governance does not progress" (Postovoy, 1995; 97). In our view, citizen self-governance in Uzbekistan forms a single whole with state power, embodying the self-governance of the people alongside it. This is supported by Article 16 of the Law "On Citizen Self-Governance Bodies," which establishes that "decisions made by citizen self-governance bodies and their officials within the scope of their authority are mandatory for execution by citizens living in the respective territory, as well as by legal entities (and their officials) located in the territory of the township, village, aul, and mahalla."

In our country, the essence and daily activity of citizen self-governance is viewed as an institution consisting of communities that form the integral community of the state; it can also be described as an association of citizens that unites organized communities and representatives of social strata to hold a certain position in society.

The mahalla can also be defined as an association of citizens uniting the living community and representatives of social stratification (social layers) to achieve a certain standing in society. For example, the local self-governance system in India ("Panchayati Raj") also possesses unique features. In that state, self-governing cities represent a system brought as close as possible to the Anglo-Saxon model. It features direct competitive elections across territorial electoral districts to elect panchayats (local self-governance bodies), alongside a system that reserves seats in panchayats at all levels for representatives of

the most socio-economically underdeveloped strata of Indian society (Utamuradov, 2018; 140). Today, this system is also drawing increasing interest from the broader public and international experts.

L. Levitin concludes: "Local communities are the only union that fully accords with the nature of human beings; wherever people gather, local communities emerge spontaneously there... It is precisely in the local community that the strength of free peoples finds expression. Local communities play an important role in establishing democracy" (Levitin, 2001; 117).

All the views expressed regarding the value and significance of citizen self-governance for the development of civil society show that improving the legal regulation of democratic mechanisms creates momentum for ensuring the real participation of the population in forming citizen assemblies and carrying out matters of local importance. Inter-coordinating the activities of citizen self-governance bodies with state authorities, developing the institution of citizen self-governance, and elevating its prestige enable any state to become powerful, stable, organized, and truly democratic (Malikova, 2009; 19).

Practice shows that an important guarantee for the development of citizen self-governance manifests in the presence of a real civil society. However, it cannot be validated without the means of improving self-governance bodies and restoring democratic institutions. In exercising citizen self-governance, the participation of local-territorial communities and their realization that they are the true representatives and executors of social power in their mahalla territory constitute a necessary foundation and condition for the development of civil society.

During the Soviet era, at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the local population was left with virtually no opportunity for self-governance, and the mahalla functioned stripped of its

legal status. It was only by 1932 that a Regulation on Mahalla Committees in the cities of Uzbekistan appeared for the first time, yet even then, the rights and powers of mahallas remained restricted (Bobojonov, 2018; 115).

During the years of independence, the status and essence of the mahalla institution underwent a radical transformation in our country. Mahallas, functioning as self-governance bodies, carried out work on as wide a scale as possible. The establishment and legal consolidation of family businesses starting in 2012 served as an important factor in securing employment for youth and enhancing the dignity and value of the family.

Over the past fifteen years, the attention paid to mahallas has risen to the level of state policy. Throughout the independent development of Uzbekistan, more than 50 important regulatory documents were adopted that served to increase the contribution of mahalla citizen assemblies to the implementation of democratic reforms in the state (O'zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidenti, 2017; 34). The significant aspect of these documents is that, while the mahalla fully protects the socio-economic, political, and spiritual interests of citizens residing in that territory as an independent institution in Uzbek society, it also strengthened their right to participate directly through this institution in the reforms taking place in society. Furthermore, it serves as a legal and regulatory basis for the gradual transfer of state administrative functions and authority belonging to lower tiers over to self-governance bodies. The First President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, I. Karimov, commented on this as follows: "As the political consciousness, political culture, and political activity of the people grow, it is necessary to gradually transfer state functions over to non-governmental structures and citizen self-governance bodies. In this regard, raising the authority and status of self-governing bodies and mahallas, as well as granting them more

rights, acquires great significance" (Karimov, 2000; 333).

Today, mahallas are becoming centers of moral upbringing. State policy also approves social initiatives in this direction. For example, with the aims of landscaping the territory of mahallas, creating decent conditions for the prosperous living of the mahalla population, comprehensively developing existing infrastructure, as well as building road and transport infrastructure, engineering communications, and social sector facilities, and establishing modern sports facilities and mahalla community centers [OKOZ: 01.02.00.00 Fundamentals of State Administration / 02.08.00.00 General Issues of State Administration in the Sphere of Economics and Socio-Cultural Construction / 02.08.01.00 State Programs, Concepts, etc.], Decree No. UP-5467 of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On the "Obod Mahalla Program" was issued on June 27, 2018 (Qonun hujjatlari ma'lumotlari milliy bazasi, 2018). In 2018 alone, 3 trillion soums were allocated for construction and landscaping work under the "Obod Qishloq" and "Obod Mahalla" programs, resulting in 416 villages acquiring a new appearance (O'zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidenti, 2018); while in 2023, the designation of 8 trillion soums from the State Budget to fund projects formed on the basis of public opinion–of which 4 trillion soums were directed toward the "Obod Qishloq" and "Obod Mahalla" programs – can be cited as confirmation of the above views. Furthermore, target parameters of measures to be implemented regarding the landscaping of populated areas within the framework of the "Obod Qishloq" and "Obod Mahalla" programs for 2022–2026 were developed, and targeted socio-economic support was provided on this basis (O'zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidenti, 2022).

In our country, the activism of citizens, the protection of their interests, and the role of public organizations in raising the moral and ethical standard of citizens are determined by the full motion of democratic processes.

Ensuring a healthy lifestyle in families within the mahalla territory, organizing a system to enhance the qualifications of parents in matters of child upbringing, assisting in increasing the legal, moral-ethical, pedagogical, psychological, and medical knowledge of family members—particularly parents – and further improving work in this area practically demonstrate the free functioning of the mahalla as a moral-ethical structure. Considered from this perspective, the adoption of the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers on August 11, 2017, regarding the improvement of the activities of the "Parents' University" public structure under the Citizen Assembly, became a historic innovation in Uzbekistan. This is because in many developing countries around the world today, the mahalla institution itself has not yet been introduced. The mahalla institution sets before itself not only the interests of families in the neighborhood, but also ties its mission directly to the interest, honor, and dignity of society. In carrying out these tasks, the functions of the deputy chairman of the Citizen Assembly—advisors on youth affairs – serve as the primary factor.

Ensuring that the promotional work and classes of the "Parents' University" are conducted effectively is also aimed at bringing forth the results of an individual's not only spiritual, but socio-economic, legal-cultural worldview and attitude toward current reforms.

Attention must be paid to another aspect: establishing a healthy medical and spiritual environment in the family, along with the consistency of economic and social support, serve as leading means of ensuring family stability. In particular, councils for coordinating the activities of citizen self-governance bodies, the "Mahalla" Charitable Public Fund of Uzbekistan, as well as state organizations and non-governmental non-profit organizations in the area, provide methodical and practical assistance in effectively organizing the activities of the "Parents' University". Today, it is advisable for this institution to acquire a

specific status based on the principle of "family assistant." This is because the foundation of the "family assistant" system (Ismailova, 2016; 22) – aimed at developing labor relations within the framework of the "Social Work (with the elderly and disabled)" project under citizen self-governance bodies – is also formed and developed in the mahalla.

Further perfecting the organizational and legal framework of the mahalla's activities in society, implementing its political activity and action program, and determining the dynamics of its development as a moral-ethical institution as a result of establishing close mutual relations with non-governmental non-profit organizations, public associations, and other civil society institutions are considered urgent. Indeed, "It is noteworthy that many events have also been carried out in terms of strengthening the spiritual environment in mahallas, studying, promoting, and advocating exemplary traditions and values that have been forming within its heart over the centuries..." (Karimov, 2004; 100-101). In our view, the widespread implementation of practical measures that envisage the optimization of social, economic, and spiritual resources ensures the stabilization of self-governance bodies as a moral-ethical institution.

Currently, the following spiritual and educational measures are being implemented in citizen self-governance bodies, in particular:

- organizing cultural-ethical and educational conversations and meetings with a broad segment of the population in mahallas;
- collaborating with partner community organizations, state, and non-governmental organizations, and providing regular socio-spiritual support;
- creating a social map of existing families within the mahalla territory;
- working individually with families of troubled youth in resolving upbringing problems;
- exchanging experience with active and exemplary mahalla advisors;

Widespread adoption of the life, activities, and experience of exemplary families and mahallas, which is measured by the creation of a morally and ethically healthy environment in society.

In addition, the Commission on Enlightenment and Spiritual Issues has been established in mahallas, serving as the main assistant in organizing religious enlightenment and moral-ethical educational work in mahallas. "Ensuring the stability of a healthy spiritual environment, enhancing feelings of loyalty to the homeland and respect for our cultural heritage in the minds of citizens, educating youth in the spirit of national and universal human values, protecting them from the negative vices of "mass culture", and ensuring the execution of spiritual and educational programs adopted for organizing and holding universal and national holidays at a high level among the population within the territory of the citizen assembly also fall within the competence of this commission" (Alimova et al., 2014; 13).

Now, the mahalla institution is no longer limited merely to maintaining the peace and tranquility of families and individuals within that mahalla; rather, as a structural layer – a tier – of society, it functions as a bridge between citizens and the state, and as a supporting pillar uniting governance institutions with members of society. President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh.M. Mirziyoyev commented on this as follows: "The transformation of the mahalla institution into a companion and helper of the people on the ground – if one may say so, into a scale of justice – will undoubtedly further strengthen people's trust in the state" (Mirziyoyev, 2017). This is because other state administration bodies or local governance bodies may not know the existing problems in the mahalla and family as well as those within that territory. A citizen residing in that area knows the positive and problematic situations of their own territory well and may even become a direct participant in them. In this sense, the members of the mahalla should

be considered the people who determine the development of that corner.

Conclusion

Considering that the number of citizen self-governance bodies in our country currently exceeds 10,000, the wide expansion of their activities and the integrated setup of their efforts ensure that, as a loyal structure of the people, they operate as an effective mechanism of the moral-ethical institution across all regions of the republic.

It should also be emphasized that today there are aspects required for citizen self-governance bodies to stabilize as a moral-ethical institution and to further develop their targeted dynamism.

In particular:

- It is considered necessary to increase the importance and interest of citizen self-governance bodies for the flourish of civil society, to resolve issues of local importance, and to ensure the cooperation and real participation of mahallas together with other civil society institutions in increasing the spiritual-enlightenment and socio-political activity of society members;

Today in Uzbekistan, perfecting the mahalla institution, further accelerating its development, preventing crime in mahallas, and creating a crime-free environment for citizens to live a peaceful and tranquil life stand among the important issues at the focus of attention of all state administration bodies and public organizations. For example, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan,

considering the policy of reducing crime in mahallas and proactively eliminating commission of crimes as essential, highlighted that no crime was committed in 3,205 mahallas in 2018, while emphasizing not to fall into complacency (O'zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidenti, 2018) and asserting that maintaining public order will always remain a pressing issue. Furthermore, it should be specially noted that in 2023, no crime was permitted in nearly 50 percent of the existing 9,251 mahallas (Mirziyoyev, 2023; 147).

- It is also advisable to develop the "family-mahalla-society" concept that promotes the broad implementation of initiative, creativity, and production in mahallas based on the "citizen-society-state" principle, making this a strict rule for all members of the mahalla;

- Dynamically developing and stabilizing the activity of citizen self-governance bodies sets necessary measures to be resolved not only before chairmen and deputy chairmen of citizen assemblies, but also poses important tasks before local state administration organizations as well as state and public organizations. Therefore, in order to raise its status as a moral-ethical institution and strengthen its collective impact, it will be advisable to develop a "service to the mahalla citizen assembly" mechanism that practically demonstrates and monitors the social and spiritual mobilization of citizens in mahallas, leading their activities toward positive results.

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