

# *The International Strategic Studies Association*



DEDICATED TO STRATEGIC POLICY PROFESSIONALISM WORLDWIDE

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## Statement of The International Strategic Studies Association Observer Mission **Elections in the Republic of Uzbekistan** December 22, 2019.

The International Strategic Studies Association (ISSA) has attested that the elections in Uzbekistan on December 22, 2019, were free, fair, and legitimately representative of the will of the electorate. The elections represented a milestone in the exercise of democratic authority not only for the voters of Uzbekistan, but for the international community as a whole. They were conducted peacefully, and without significant procedural protest.

ISSA was pleased to be invited to observe the December 22, 2019, elections for the 150 seats of deputies for the Republic of Uzbekistan's Legislative Chamber (lower house) of the Oliy Majlis (Parliament), and the elections for deputies of regional, district, and city kengashes (councils) throughout the 12 regions, the Republic of Karakalpakstan, and Tashkent city.

Beginning well before the election day, we observed a wide array of voting stations and electoral commissions from the Fergana region in the east of Uzbekistan to areas in Karakalpakstan in the north-west, including the areas of remote Karakalpakstan's environmentally-challenged towns and cities around the Aral Sea region. In every instance in the many polling and electoral facilities visited we observed a strong commitment to ensuring a voting environment which allowed for the free and unchallenged ability of voters to cast their votes without being subject to any influence.

Electoral rolls were prepared and available well in advance of election day, and early voting was available and used by voters when required. There was evidence a strong commitment to ensuring that electoral rolls realistically mirrored the eligible voters, including voters living outside the country. Electoral rolls were visible in each voting station and could face scrutiny by the local population, who had the ability to question whether deceased or fraudulent names were present.

The total commitment of volunteers from the electorates to preparing and manning election facilities and voting stations, as well as the ability of those local officials and Mahalla (grassroots organization) representatives to undertaking vote counting post-election under scrutiny from officials from each of the five political parties, as well as from monitors from international and other observer teams, ensured that the process was as free as possible from potential distortion or manipulation.

However, the greatest guarantor of the success and free exercise of electoral authority by Uzbekistan voters was the ownership which the Uzbek population took of the electoral process. The Government of Pres. Shavkat Mirziyayev has, since December 2016, undertaken a series of steps since taking office to liberalize and open the political process. As a result, there was very broad enthusiasm within the electorate for the electoral process, and the election was seen by voters as a mark of a “new Uzbekistan”, regardless of which party gained control of the legislative chambers. As a result, the exploration by the candidates from the five parties of the process of debate began to show real differences in policy proposals debated in advance of the election in an atmosphere which was civil and without intimidation.

It was important that Pres. Mirziyayev himself stayed away from the country on official visits in the days before the election so that there could be no suggestion of him visibly attempting to sway the direction of voters. Even so, his Government had ensured that the elections themselves were well publicized to encourage the broadest possible voter turnout.

ISSA has observed many elections in recent years, and can say that the elections in Uzbekistan were among the most transparent and free of any elections our organization has observed. It is worth noting that this observation was able to be made when ISSA, by comparison, had observed, and strongly criticized, a number of elections held elsewhere in the world during 2019. The December 22, 2019, electoral program in Uzbekistan was the result of widespread debate among the community and showed a positive evolution from elections held in the Republic since it gained independence from the USSR in 1991. It also demonstrated a commitment by the Government of Uzbekistan to learning from the electoral experiences of other countries, and included the creation of legislative and legal processes and an election court to ensure that any voting disputes could be handled impartially and rapidly.

The deliberative process of shaping and conducting the elections in Uzbekistan seems likely to result in the election of a Parliament which will have considerable trust, respect, and prestige earned from the Uzbek public and foreign observers. This will, in turn, provide the international community, including the global investment community, with an Uzbekistan Government which is trusted by its electorate to be answerable to the voters. It will also create a climate in which Uzbekistan can play an increasingly significant leadership role in the critical geopolitical and economic space of Central Asia.

*Signed:*



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