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UZ/25 – 281

The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva presents its compliments to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and has the honour to convey enclosed herewith response of the Government of Uzbekistan to the Joint Communication from the Special Procedures AL UZB 4/2025 dated 30 June 2025.

The Permanent Mission avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the OHCHR the assurances of its highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'S' or 'S' with a flourish.



28 August 2025

Encl.: as stated, 52 pages

Attn.: Special Procedures Branch

Office of the United Nations
High Commissioner for Human Rights
GENEVA

Translated from Russian

Reply of the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the joint communication from the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context; the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights; and the Special Rapporteur on minority issues

1. On 30 June 2025, the Government of Uzbekistan received a joint communication from the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context; the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights; and the Special Rapporteur on minority issues (ref.: No. AL UZB 4/2025).

2. The Government appreciates the attention paid by mandate holders to issues related to the right to adequate housing, the preservation of cultural heritage and the protection of the rights of ethnic minorities in Uzbekistan, which is in keeping with the goals set out in Human Rights Council resolutions A/HRC/RES/43/14, A/HRC/RES/46/9 and A/HRC/RES/52/15.

3. Uzbekistan reaffirms its firm commitment to its international obligations arising from:

- The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (arts. 2 and 11);
- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (arts. 17 and 27);
- The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (arts. 2 and 5);
- The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, of 1972.

4. This consolidated reply was prepared by the National Centre for Human Rights, in close cooperation with the National Commission for UNESCO-related Matters, the local authorities (*hokimiat*) in Samarkand Oblast and the city of Samarkand, the Council (*kengash*) of People's Deputies in Samarkand Oblast, the Cultural Heritage Agency, the Land Registry, the Committee on Inter-Ethnic Relations and Uzbeks Abroad, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Preschool and School Education, the Office of the Procurator General, the Supreme Court, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Human Rights Commissioner (Ombudsman) of the Oliy Majlis, the parliament of Uzbekistan.

5. Uzbekistan is unfailingly committed to fulfilling its international obligations in the areas of human rights and protection of the world's cultural heritage. In planning and implementing regional development projects, the Government is guided by a human rights-based approach, the principles of non-discrimination and consideration of the needs of vulnerable groups, as well as the priority of preserving the authenticity and integrity of Samarkand's historical and cultural environment.

6. The activities being carried out have the legitimate aim of meeting a public need, namely, the improvement of an area of religious and cultural significance through the creation of accessible infrastructure for local residents and pilgrims, along with the reinforcement and preservation of the historical and cultural landscape. All decisions on expropriation for State and public needs are made in strict compliance with national legislation, with payment of fair compensation, provision of alternative housing and access to effective remedies guaranteed.

7. The Government hereby submits the following information, which it considers necessary in order to provide an objective explanation of the circumstances set out in joint communication No. AL UZB 4/2025:

(1) The forced evictions and housing demolitions shall enable an urban development project aimed at constructing a pilgrimage centre, a large 1,500-seat mosque and a parking lot in the UNESCO World Heritage zone of Samarkand.

8. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, adopted by all States Members of the United Nations, have set a universal goal – putting people, planet, prosperity and peace at the forefront by 2030. As a prestigious religious pilgrimage destination, Samarkand is making a significant contribution to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular by preserving heritage, promoting inclusive tourism and supporting local economic development. With regard to Sustainable Development Goal 8 on decent work and economic growth, pilgrimage tourism stimulates the local economy by creating jobs in hospitality, sightseeing, transport, crafts and food production. The steady increase in the number of visitors to places such as the mausoleum of Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi is supporting small and medium-sized enterprises, especially in the rural and remote areas surrounding Samarkand, thus contributing to a sustainable way of life for the local population. Concerning Sustainable Development Goal 11 on sustainable cities and communities, Samarkand's focus on the preservation of religious and cultural heritage is directly in line with efforts to preserve the world's cultural and natural heritage. Investments in infrastructure, accessibility and sanitation at pilgrimage sites improve urban and regional planning, which helps make the city more inclusive, safer and more sustainable for residents and visitors. Regarding Sustainable Development Goal 12 on responsible consumption and production, Samarkand contributes to responsible tourism by promoting sustainable tourism practices, including environmentally sensitive site management, visitor flow management and cultural sensitivity. Efforts to reduce environmental impact, manage waste and preserve historic architecture contribute to more sustainable forms of tourism consumption. Concerning Sustainable Development Goal 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, religious pilgrimage in Samarkand promotes intercultural dialogue, tolerance and mutual understanding, especially at spiritually significant sites associated with Islamic scholars such as Imam al-Maturidi and Imam al-Bukhari. This ensures peaceful interaction between religions and communities, thus promoting inclusive societies and social cohesion. As for Sustainable Development Goal 17 on partnerships for the Goals, the development and promotion of religious tourism in Samarkand often involves cooperation between government agencies, religious organizations, local communities and international heritage organizations. These partnerships strengthen knowledge-sharing, capacity-building and resource mobilization to achieve broader development goals.

9. Projects under the ongoing initiative to rehabilitate the Maturidi Mausoleum religious complex are contributing to the sustainable, stable and equitable development of the city and the region, providing opportunities to capitalize on the economic and social potential of the city's heritage.

10. The Imam al-Maturidi Mausoleum religious complex project is designed to transform a place of historical and religious significance into a place of pilgrimage, knowledge, thought and memories.

11. The project area, on the boundary of the "Samarkand – Crossroads of Cultures" UNESCO world heritage property, is located on a site of exceptional spiritual and scientific significance that was formerly part of the revered Chokardiz Cemetery, one of the most prestigious medieval cemeteries in Samarkand.

12. The initiative is aimed at reimagining the mausoleum, already a sacred place of pilgrimage, as a dynamic centre of scholarship and intercultural dialogue in honour of Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi, one of the founders of Islamic theology.

13. The design concept incorporates the historical uniqueness of the site as a repository of medieval Islamic scholarship and knowledge, while integrating it into the vibrant urban and cultural fabric of Samarkand. It serves as a bridge between past and present, offering a meaningful space for spiritual reflection, education and the promotion of religious and cultural understanding. The gardens around the mausoleum (on the west side) will not be destroyed. The main intervention will take place on the east side.

14. At the heart of this sacred landscape is the influential representative of Sunni Islamic theology, Imam Muhammad Abul-Mansur al-Maturidi (870–944), whose rationalist interpretation of the faith shaped the belief system of most Hanafi Muslim communities in Central Asia and the wider Turkic world. His teachings continue to resonate today, especially in attempts to promote a balanced, inclusive and contextualized understanding of Islam.

15. Construction of a mausoleum was begun in 2000, for the 1,130th anniversary of his birth, bringing renewed attention to the site. The complex is experiencing an increase in visitor numbers not only on account of its spiritual and religious significance, but also as a symbol of cultural continuity, uniqueness and transregional religious heritage, located in the very heart of Samarkand, ready to become a major pilgrimage destination.

16. Pursuant to the Presidential Decision of 9 February 2021 on measures for the further development of domestic and pilgrimage tourism in Uzbekistan, it was planned to improve the Maturidi Mausoleum religious complex, located in Chokardiz Cemetery in Samarkand, including by making improvements to the surrounding mahallas (neighbourhoods), enhancing the area's infrastructure and creating a major pilgrimage site. The project was approved pursuant to the Presidential Decision of 14 March 2025 and the Cabinet of Ministers Decision of 25 February 2025. It received conditional endorsement at the fourth meeting of the Scientific and Expert Council. In addition, the Board of Architecture and Urban Planning endorsed the project at a meeting held on 15 and 16 April 2025.

17. Residential and non-residential structures located in the historic part of Samarkand and in its buffer zone are initially considered by the Scientific and Expert Council of the Cultural Heritage Agency. Urban planning documents must be drawn up on the basis of the findings of this Council.

18. Forced eviction and demolition may be carried out solely in accordance with the procedure established by law. Thus, in connection with the improvements to the Abu Mansur Al-Maturidi Cemetery, the Samarkand mayor's office has filed applications in respect of structures in the Al-Maturidi mahalla subject to demolition. On the basis of the relevant court decisions, compensation payments have been determined for citizens whose houses are to be demolished.

19. Similarly, in connection with the improvements to the Makhdumi A'zam Cemetery in Akdarya District in Samarkand, the local mayor's office has filed applications with the courts in respect of structures in the Dahbed mahalla subject to demolition for State needs, and compensation payments have likewise provided for.

20. The construction project that caused concern to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre involved the demolition of 217 residential and non-residential buildings in the Imam Maturidi and Chokardiz mahallas in order to create a religious complex and improve living conditions for the population. In this connection, the local authorities in Samarkand Oblast and the city of Samarkand conducted a survey of the area, the results of which were as follows: staff of the Oblast's department for emergency situations found that the neighbourhoods are marked by natural and human-made characteristics, are located in a zone prone to erosion and do not meet fire safety standards. In addition, sanitation requirements are not met. Residential buildings do not comply with the seismic resistance requirements for a 5-point zone according to the KMK 2.01.03–96 standards, which poses a threat to human life. In addition, it was found that most of the houses were in a state of disrepair.

21. During the visit to Samarkand by the UNESCO International Advisory Committee for the protection of world heritage properties in Uzbekistan in May–June 2025, all project data were presented.

22. Prior to this, in February 2025, the Samarkand Cultural Heritage Authority studied the original project area. The study found that there are no heritage sites in this area. At the meeting, the objectives of the project, its spatial impact and the proposed compensation schemes for the affected mahallas were discussed.

23. In April 2025, the Deputy Mayor of Samarkand for construction, communications, public utilities, environment and green spaces, Firuz Dzhamoliddinovich Nazhmiddinov, presented the project to property owners in new mahallas developed after the 1950s.

24. In June 2025, representatives of the International Institute for Central Asia (IICAS)* visited the five most affected mahallas (Sharq, Dari Zanjir, Zominiy, Yominiy and Fidoiyar) and conducted informal focus groups and meetings with residents.

* *Translator's note:* in the Russian text, the institute concerned is referred to as both the “International Institute for Central Asia” and the “International Institute for Central Asian Studies”. The abbreviation “IICAS” is used for both titles other than in paragraph 200, where the abbreviation

25. The Director of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Lazare Assomo, and a delegation from Uzbekistan, headed by the Chief Administrator (*hokim*) of Samarkand Oblast, held a consultation meeting at the forty-seventh session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee (6–16 July 2025) on the project planned in the area of the Imam al-Maturidi complex, the Chokardiz mahalla and the "Samarkand – Crossroads of Cultures" site. At the meeting, a moratorium was officially declared on all construction and demolition work pending approval by the World Heritage Centre.

26. Currently, in accordance with paragraphs 110, 118 bis and 172 of the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, any major project that may affect a world heritage site requires the preparation of a heritage impact assessment report prior to the commencement of the works. This report was prepared and sent by the Samarkand mayor's office to the Cultural Heritage Agency by letter dated 8 July 2025.

27. On 9 July 2025, the National Commission for UNESCO-related Matters forwarded the report to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre (ref: No. 231/25).

28. In the context of the study that was conducted, a compilation was proposed containing "Guidelines for the development of competitive and sustainable urban heritage tourism in Samarkand", to be discussed with stakeholders in the city.

29. Employees of the mayor's office have checked the cadastral documents for privately owned structures, inspected the condition and technical state of the structures and negotiated with private owners on compensation for demolition.

30. The location of the proposed parking lot is at two existing major intersections to the north-east of the project area. There will be a passenger drop-off point at the main entrance to the memorial. The parking lot has a neutral effect on Timurid or Afrasiab features.

(2) The affected neighbourhood is historically inhabited by the Multoni community, a disadvantaged Mugat/Roma community whose members are overwhelmingly illiterate and at risk of social exclusion, and as well as by the Tajiks, an ethnic minority. The Multoni community is inherently connected to this particular quarter and the Siyob bazaar since 1915–1920. They have their own cemetery at the location, their own ceremonies and traditions. They usually have large families with 3-6 children; several families often constitute one household.

31. In accordance with article 8 of the Constitution of Uzbekistan, the citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan, irrespective of their ethnic background, constitute the people of Uzbekistan. Article 19 of the Constitution provides that human rights and freedoms are recognized and guaranteed in Uzbekistan in accordance with the generally accepted rules of international law and the Constitution. Human rights and freedoms belong to everyone from birth.

32. In Uzbekistan, all citizens have the same rights and freedoms and are equal before the law, without distinction as to sex, race, ethnicity, language, religion, beliefs, social origin or social status.

33. Members of the Multoni ethnic group live not only in Samarkand Oblast, but in all regions of the country, and have the right to move freely and take part in public life on an equal footing with other citizens. Many residents of the city of Samarkand, regardless of their nationality and ethnicity, are buried in the Shah-i-Zinda Cemetery.

34. Multoni have played a certain role in the development of local characteristics in various ethnographic regions of Uzbekistan. The same processes are also to be observed in the lives of the Multoni themselves. While preserving elements of their traditional culture, they have adopted aspects of Uzbek culture, as a result of which their culture has also acquired ethno-regional peculiarities.

35. It is known that the Multoni have long lived in Uzbekistan, and they are referred to by different names: "Luli", "Multoni", "Jugi", "Roma", "Rum", "Tajiks", "Gypsies", "Zhugi", "Mazangi" (some Multoni in Uzbekistan call themselves by this name). Among the Multoni,

"IICA" is used in reference to the "International Institute for Central Asia". The English translation is faithful to the Russian original.

there are also those who refer to themselves as "Mugat" (from *mug*, meaning "fire worshipper").

36. It should be noted that, according to the *Ethnic Atlas of Uzbekistan*, in 2000 they numbered about 5,000; however, on the basis of research conducted at that time, it was assumed that there were more than 50,000.

37. At present, there are over 85,000 members of the Multoni ethnic group, of whom 45,092 are women and 41,471 men.

38. In order to establish the exact number of Multoni living in Uzbekistan and to find out how many of them had identity cards, a door-to-door survey was conducted in May 2021, as part of which data on 53,666 Multoni were examined.

39. In recent years, a process of sedentarization and social integration has been observed among Multoni ethnic groups, demonstrating the development of their sense of identity.

40. Among them, 38,733 had Uzbek passports, 14,540 had birth certificates, 22 had residence certificates for stateless persons and 3 had residence permits for foreigners. However, there remain issues that require further research – how they experience their identity, how they perceive their affiliation.

41. Work is under way to issue identity cards and appropriate certificates for them. Almost all Multoni living in Uzbekistan are citizens of the country and have passports in which their ethnicity is indicated as "Uzbek".

42. According to sociological surveys, the majority of Multoni explain the entry "Uzbek" in their passports by the desire to show others that they occupy a higher social status. This also explains the increasing number of marriages between Uzbek boys and Multoni girls from wealthy, educated families.

43. Some 7 percent of Multoni have higher education. Among them there are persons who have completed the hajj – hajjis, imams and even hafiz (reciters of the Qur'an).

44. It can be concluded from respondents' answers that Multoni, having reached a certain level of economic prosperity, strive to adapt not only their customs, but also their religious views.

45. The Multoni Ethnic Cultural Centre was established in Surkhandarya Oblast to promote inter-ethnic harmony, humanistic values and the preservation and development of the culture, language, customs and traditions of the Multoni people.

(3) The majority of the Roma community members cannot read and write and thus face significant barriers to claim their rights. There are also concerns about the schooling of their children, when a school building, allegedly nonfunctional, was auctioned to a private person to build a hotel.

46. At present, there are 18,084 Multoni in Samarkand Oblast. In 30 schools in the Oblast, 80–90 per cent of pupils are Multoni children. In addition, 16 family doctor's offices have been organized for members of this people.

47. In mahallas where they live together with members of other ethnicities, there are Multoni who have achieved high social status.

48. It can be concluded from survey participants' responses that Luli, having reached a certain level of economic prosperity, strive to adapt not only their customs, but also their religious views.

49. Over the last five years, there has been an increasing tendency among them towards integration with the Muslim community, including through self-identification as Muslims. Luli have been observed to take an active part in Friday prayers, perform the hajj and take an interest in studying in local religious madrasas.

50. Today, up to 60 per cent of Luli aged 20–25 regularly attend mosques. Holding joint Eid (Hayit) holidays and other religious ceremonies with Uzbeks has become a tradition.

51. According to the results of monitoring, there are practically no cases of discrimination against Multoni in Uzbekistan. Luli interviewees stated that such situations, especially in official life and in communication with officials, hardly ever arise.

52. Compared to the 1990s, the number of Luli in official positions has increased significantly. According to local monitoring, in places densely populated by Luli, heads of mahallas are also appointed from among their number. However, certain social stereotypes regarding Luli had already formed in Uzbek society.

53. In recent years, it has been established that, in various historical and ethnographic areas of Uzbekistan, Luli live both in compact groups and in a more dispersed manner, with a sedentary way of life. The nomadic way of life among Luli has virtually disappeared. In regions such as Bukhara, Samarkand, Djizak, Navoi, Surkhandarya, Kashkadarya, the Fergana Valley, the city of Tashkent and Tashkent Oblast, they live side by side with Uzbeks in numerous mahallas and *kishlak* (rural settlements) and are actively involved in social integration processes.

(4) Owing to predominant social stigma against the Multoni community, they live overwhelmingly segregated from other Uzbek citizens. In addition, many of the Multoni community members appear not to have any documentation of ownership over their homes or land rights for the plots on which they reside since many decades. While some members of the community have formal work or are self-employed, many depend on informal work, including street vending or street cleaning.

54. In accordance with article 8 of the Constitution, the citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan, irrespective of their ethnic background, constitute the people of Uzbekistan.

55. Article 19 of the Constitution provides that human rights and freedoms are recognized and guaranteed in Uzbekistan in accordance with the generally accepted rules of international law and the Constitution. Human rights and freedoms belong to everyone from birth.

56. In Uzbekistan, all citizens have the same rights and freedoms and are equal before the law, without distinction as to sex, race, ethnicity, language, religion, beliefs, social origin or social status.

57. Members of the Multoni ethnic group move freely and take part in public life on an equal footing with other citizens.

58. The allegations made do not reflect the progress currently being made or the Government's purposeful efforts to ensure the full integration and well-being of all citizens, including members of ethnic minorities. Contrary to what is claimed, our policies and legislative proposals are aimed at directly tackling the problems mentioned by paving the way for inclusive development and equal opportunities.

59. The allegation of predominant social stigma against and segregation of the Multoni community contradicts the fundamental principles and active policies being pursued by Uzbekistan in the field of inter-ethnic relations and human rights. The Constitution expressly prohibits any form of discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, religion or other factors (art. 19), thus guaranteeing equal rights for all citizens. Recent legislative changes, such as the Act of 31 October 2023, have increased administrative liability for advocating discrimination, which demonstrates how seriously the State takes the task of eliminating any manifestation of intolerance.

60. The National Human Rights Strategy (Presidential Decree No. UP-6012 of 22 June 2020) pays special attention to the rights of minorities, seeking to improve mechanisms for the development of the languages and cultures of all nations and peoples living in the country. These mechanisms include more active participation in public and political life and the right to education in mother tongues. The State Framework Policy on Inter-Ethnic Relations, adopted on 15 November 2019, is aimed at strengthening unity, preserving ethno-cultural identity and maintaining inter-ethnic tolerance and harmony.

61. In Uzbekistan, television and radio programmes are broadcast in 12 languages and newspapers and magazines are published in 14 languages, which actively promotes the preservation of cultural diversity and counters segregation. Thus, rather than promoting segregation, the Government is actively creating an environment conducive to the integration and mutual respect of all communities.

62. The statement that many members of the Multoni community do not have documentation confirming ownership of their houses or plots fails to take into account the recent and significant steps taken by the Government to address this problem. Act No. ZRU-937 of 5 August 2024 on Recognition of Title to Plots Occupied without Authorization and

Buildings and Structures Constructed Thereon is a direct and targeted initiative to legalize housing for citizens who have been living on such plots for many decades. This law provides a legal basis for recognizing title to land plots occupied without authorization prior to 1 May 2018, as well as buildings constructed on them, which directly addresses the problem of undocumented ownership for long-term residents.

63. In addition, the restrictive "*propiska*" system (involving registration at one's place of residence), which previously created barriers to permanent registration in large cities, has been abolished as from 12 October 2025. The new law will allow any citizen to obtain permanent registration in the capital and introduces a simplified notification procedure for temporary registration. This removes a significant obstacle to the formalization of residence and access to public services, facilitating greater social mobility and integration of all citizens. Overall, Uzbekistan has seen a consistent increase in housing availability, reaching 18.9 m² per person in 2024, up from 15.7 m² in 2017, indicating an overall improvement in housing conditions.

64. The comprehensive measures taken by the Government to formalize employment and expand social protection actively call into question the claim that many members of the Multoni community depend on informal work. The new Labour Code (ZRU-798), which entered into force on 28 October 2022, explicitly enshrines the "principle of equality of labour rights and the prohibition on discrimination in labour and employment" (art. 4) and provides for "additional employment guarantees for socially vulnerable categories of the population" (art. 96). It is important to note that article 33 of the Code allows for "relations involving the use of personal labour and arising on the basis of a civil law contract to be recognized as individual labour relations", which is a direct mechanism for formalizing informal employment.

65. The "Poverty to Prosperity" programme, adopted pursuant to Presidential Decree No. UP-143 of 23 September 2024, is a key initiative aimed at reducing poverty and providing employment. It incorporates structural analysis of the labour market, development of employment programmes, provision of vocational training and establishment of vocational skills centres for citizens who are unemployed or on a low income. The Innovative Social Protection System for Inclusion of Vulnerable People (INSON) Project, supported by the World Bank, is also aimed at improving access to and quality of social services, including vocational training and employment, for vulnerable groups. These programmes actively promote the transition from informal to formal employment.

66. In addition, the Decent Work Country Programme 2021–2025, developed jointly with the International Labour Organization (ILO), prioritizes social inclusion and the promotion of decent employment. ILO emphasizes an integrated approach to formalization to address the root causes that give rise to informality. These efforts are already bearing fruit: the poverty rate in Uzbekistan fell to 8.9 per cent by the end of 2024, equivalent to 719,000 fewer people living in poverty than in 2023, and real incomes have grown by more than 10 per cent.

67. Thus, the Government is actively and systematically working to remove barriers that could lead to social segregation, lack of housing documents and dependence on informal employment. Our actions are aimed at creating an inclusive society where every citizen has equal opportunities to live in dignity and fully realize his or her rights.

68. In addition, according to the information provided by the Land Registry, of the residential and non-residential structures located in the area adjacent to the Imam Maturidi memorial complex in Samarkand, only 36 per cent are not registered with the State; this does not correspond to the assertion that many members of the Multoni community do not have any documents confirming ownership of their houses or plots.

(5) In 2009, a study reported that 2,065 Multoni/Mugats inhabited the quarter, but the number of residents may have significantly increased since then. It can be estimated that the planned and already carried out demolitions will affect above 1,500 residents. The exact number of project-affected residents is not known, nor more detailed information about their sociodemographic composition and their livelihoods, as authorities reportedly did not carry out any social impact assessment for the planned urban development project before demolitions started.

69. About 1,300 citizens lived in the houses to be demolished. Forced eviction and demolition may be carried out solely in accordance with the procedure established by law.

70. On the basis of court decisions, compensation payments have been determined for citizens whose houses are to be demolished.

71. Building owners are being compensated solely for the market value of the property.

72. Uzbekistan has introduced a multifaceted approach to compensation in order to ensure that the citizens affected receive fair and adequate indemnification. Various forms of compensation are available, including compensation for the market value of the immovable property, relocation expenses (including temporary rental of another home) and lost profits. This comprehensive approach is intended to cover all aspects of the losses suffered by affected residents, ensuring full indemnification.

73. Recent laws and decisions, such as the Act on the Procedure for the Acquisition of Land for Public Needs of 29 June 2022, provide for additional types of compensation for land: (i) monetary compensation; (ii) provision of a plot of land or other property to replace the land or property acquired; and (iii) other forms of compensation as agreed by the parties, taking into account the appraised value of the property.

74. Compensation can be provided in several forms, offering citizens flexibility: monetary compensation or provision of title to equivalent well-appointed housing with a floor space not less than the standard floor space per inhabitant or provision of title to a plot of land. It is important to note that, as part of renovation programmes, homeowners can be provided with turnkey apartments in new buildings, the floor space of which corresponds to that of the previous housing. This is particularly significant because it directly addresses housing needs, not only monetary losses, which is critical to ensuring continuity of residence.

75. The land expropriation process in Uzbekistan involves several levels of transparency and due process. The Cabinet of Ministers in 2020 approved a regulation on the procedure for the expropriation of land plots and the provision of compensation to owners of immovable property located on such plots. There is a requirement to hold open discussions with property owners, with the involvement of the media, and to make preliminary calculations as to the availability of sufficient resources to provide compensation before any decision to expropriate a land plot is made:

- Preliminary calculations are made by the local authorities or the investor and the availability of sufficient resources to provide compensation is examined;

- The Jokargy Kenes of the Republic of Karakalpakstan and councils of people's deputies consider the benefits and costs of expropriating the land plot and, provided that there are sufficient resources to pay compensation and that the benefits of expropriation outweigh the costs, a decision to expropriate may be made. Local authorities are not authorized to make such decisions;

- Immovable property on the land plot to be expropriated is valued by an appraisal organization;

- The local authorities or the investor and the owners agree on the type and amount of compensation and the deadline for providing it, and this agreement is notarized;

- The local authorities or the investor work on providing the compensation to the owners. Demolition of the property without payment of the agreed compensation is not allowed. After the agreed compensation has been paid to the owners:

- The immovable property is vacated;

- A draft decree on demolition of the immovable property is sent by the local authorities to the judicial authorities for issuance of an opinion;

- The judicial authorities, having checked that the compensation has been paid and the housing actually vacated, along with other circumstances, issue their opinion to the local authorities;

- The order to demolish the immovable property may be adopted only if the judicial authorities issue a favourable opinion. Once the agreement has been signed, transfer of immovable property located on the expropriated land plot to another person is allowed only with the written consent of the project initiator or if the agreement is terminated (in the manner provided for by the agreement, with the consent of the parties or in court).

76. An owner who has acquired immovable property subject to demolition is the legal successor to the rights and duties of the previous owner arising from the agreement concluded in accordance with the above provision.

77. The regulation states that the procuratorial authorities are to monitor the fulfilment of the legal requirements with respect to the expropriation of land plots, the demolition of immovable property, the relocation of citizens and the payment of compensation.

78. Contrary to claims that there may be no social impact assessment, recent Uzbek legislation, in particular the Act on Environmental Assessments, Environmental Impact Assessments and Strategic Environmental Assessments, adopted on 24 February 2025, makes it a requirement to carry out environmental assessments, environmental impact assessments and strategic environmental assessments. The Act stipulates the conduct of an assessment of impacts on "human health, socioeconomic conditions and cultural heritage sites". This provision directly refutes the claims that there is no social impact assessment by demonstrating that a comprehensive evaluation of the social aspects of projects is legally required.

79. The objectives of these evaluations include determining the level of environmental risk of proposed or ongoing economic and other activities that may have a negative impact on the environment and human health, as well as the prevention and mitigation of such negative impacts. This underscores the human-centred nature of the evaluation process, which ensures that the well-being of citizens is the primary consideration.

(6) Pictures taken before the housing demolitions indicate that many of the homes appear to have been solid and well maintained, requiring only limited repair, if at all. Only a limited number of homes and backyard structures appear to have been in substandard condition and may have been in such a dilapidated status that rendering them habitable or addressing potential structural risks to their residents would have required disproportionate effort. The pictures do certainly not indicate any necessity to demolish the entire residential area.

80. In the report analysing the planned large-scale reconstruction of the Imam Maturidi complex and the adjacent residential area in Samarkand, it is stated that the aim is to create a major pilgrimage and tourism centre. The project involves the acquisition and demolition of 217 private residential properties. It was found that, while a visual inspection might give the impression that the dwellings are in good condition, a significant number of these properties are in a "dangerous/dilapidated condition" according to the official technical and health and safety assessments (detailed in the expert findings and overall conclusion). This is due to structural problems, non-compliance with health and safety standards and environmental risks. The project is also motivated by broader strategic objectives relating to cultural and tourism development, which are set out in high-level presidential decrees. The legal framework for land acquisition and compensation is robust, emphasizing the importance of public discussion and provision of compensation prior to demolition.

81. The report emphasizes the need to comply strictly with compensation procedures, ensure transparency and establish robust social support mechanisms for affected residents, especially given the prevalence of informal construction and the potential vulnerability of the population.

82. The Imam Maturidi complex is a significant spiritual and historical site, recognized as the burial place of the great Islamic scholar. Its restoration and development are part of a broader national initiative to promote religious tourism. The historic centre of Samarkand (1,123 hectares with an extensive buffer zone of 1,369 hectares) is inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, in recognition of its outstanding universal value as a "Crossroads of Cultures". This international status places strict obligations on Uzbekistan to protect and manage the site.

83. The proposed project is aimed at reconstructing the Imam Maturidi complex, restoring the burial place of prominent scholars in the historic Chokardiz Cemetery and improving the surrounding infrastructure with a view to creating a major pilgrimage and tourism centre.

84. The participation of various government agencies in the working group for the preparation of the report further emphasizes the project's status as a national priority. The project serves as a prime example of the country's broader national strategy of leveraging its rich cultural and religious heritage for economic growth, especially through tourism. It

demonstrates a trend towards large-scale, centrally managed urban transformations in historically significant areas, often with multiple interrelated goals beyond mere infrastructure improvements.

85. Samarkand's status as a UNESCO world heritage site represents an opportunity in that it provides a strong international platform to attract investment and tourism. At the same time, this status is accompanied by strict international requirements for the protection of cultural heritage and obliges the authorities to conduct thorough environmental and social impact assessments. Thus, a project must carefully balance ambitious development goals with strict conservation obligations.

86. UNESCO world heritage status, while a prestigious asset, brings with it significant urban development challenges. It requires a high degree of transparency, international collaboration and compliance with global best practices to ensure that development does not undermine the "outstanding universal value" of the site. This can create tensions between local development needs and international conservation standards.

87. Uzbekistan officially ratified the 1972 UNESCO Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage in 1995, thereby undertaking to protect and preserve its cultural and natural heritage of outstanding universal value. Cabinet of Ministers Decision No. 119 (2021) establishes protection zones for State museum preserves, including Samarkand. Importantly, it stipulates that any construction or dismantling work in UNESCO world heritage areas and their buffer zones requires the approval of the Cultural Heritage Agency and, more specifically for world heritage sites, the UNESCO World Heritage Centre.

88. The conclusions of the historical and cultural assessments state explicitly that the 217 residential properties scheduled for demolition are not included in the National List of Immovable Cultural Heritage and are recognized as having no historical value. This is a key legal difference, which distinguishes these structures from protected cultural heritage sites.

89. The legal framework for the expropriation of land plots for public needs is contained in the Act on the Procedure for the Expropriation, with Compensation, of Land Plots for Public Needs. This law defines the specific conditions and procedures for the compulsory acquisition of land. The key principles enshrined in this law include legality, primacy of property rights, inviolability of private property, openness and transparency, and guarantees of compensation. These principles are aimed at protecting the rights of property owners. The law stipulates open public discussions with deed holders, with media involvement, prior to any decision to expropriate land.

90. The relevant decision of the Samarkand Oblast Council of People's Deputies confirms that such public discussions were authorized and were subsequently held for the Imam Maturidi project.

91. It is important to note that the law provides for compensation to be provided prior to demolition and for the conclusion of a notarized agreement with the property owners. The official "Additional Information" in the report explicitly confirms that demolition work will commence once compensation has been paid and written consent obtained.

92. Pursuant to Samarkand City Council Decision VI-91-143-7-107-K/23 of 2023, a moratorium was imposed on the construction of new apartment buildings in the city pending approval of a new master plan, with the exception of projects undertaken on the basis of decisions of the President or the Cabinet of Ministers. This directly concerns the Imam Maturidi project, allowing it to continue despite the general moratorium.

93. The broader framework policy on urban planning in Uzbekistan emphasizes public interests, including: citizens' right to a congenial living environment, the prevention of environmentally harmful impacts from economic and other activities, the making of environmental improvements, the development of the utilities, transport and social infrastructure of communities and adjacent areas, as well as the preservation of cultural heritage sites.

94. The Act on Environmental Assessments, Environmental Impact Assessments and Strategic Environmental Assessments is a key legal instrument. Its definition of "environmental impacts" explicitly includes "human health", "socioeconomic conditions" and "cultural heritage sites". This law stipulates the principles of public participation, openness, transparency and comprehensive assessment of potential impacts on human health

and socioeconomic conditions. These provisions are vital to ensure due regard for the social dimension of development projects.

95. Large-scale urban development projects in UNESCO-listed areas or their buffer zones require a delicate and often complex balance between national development aspirations and international conservation obligations.

96. The conclusions of the historical and cultural assessment (Sam/0013 of 24 February 2025) provide a critical evaluation, in which it is explicitly stated that the overall technical condition of the 217 residential buildings is "dangerous/dilapidated". This is in direct contradiction with the initial visual inspection. Specific technical problems cited in the assessment include: burnt brick foundations in "poor condition"; walls "damaged as a result of natural disasters", leaving them in a dangerous condition; roofs "severely damaged by natural precipitation"; and wooden elements "rotted by natural precipitation." These are structural flaws that would not necessarily have been obvious from exterior photographs.

97. In addition to structural integrity, a significant number of structures (133 out of 217) were found to be "totally non-compliant with sanitation requirements". This points to serious public health problems.

98. Furthermore, 27 residential courtyards were identified as being located in a "zone extremely prone to erosion" marked by natural and human-made characteristics and were found not to meet environmental protection, environmental safety, fire safety or general sanitation standards. This emphasizes the environmental hazards affecting habitability.

99. The lack of basic modern utilities such as heating, mains water, hot water, proper waste management, fire safety systems and alarms further contributes to poor living conditions and safety problems in the affected area.

100. The comprehensive assessment concludes that these conditions cumulatively create a "very high probability of serious health and safety impacts" for residents.

101. The inventory conducted by the working group revealed that, in the course of two years, construction work was carried out in 43 residential buildings without the necessary planning documents and that the structures in question do not comply with established urban planning standards.

102. The conclusions of the historical and cultural assessment state unequivocally that the 217 residential properties are not included in the National List of Immovable Cultural Heritage and are officially recognized as having no historical value. This is a key finding that alleviates potential concerns about the demolition of historically valuable structures.

103. By the first quarter of the twentieth century, burial of Muslims in the Chokardiz Cemetery had been banned and, by 1948, the cemetery had been demolished and residential courtyards had begun to be built on the site. Tombstones were mostly used in constructing the foundations of the houses.

104. The historical context of the area identified as the ancient Chokardiz Cemetery, where houses were built on remains, possibly using gravestones as foundations, supports the likelihood of inherent structural instability over time, regardless of surface maintenance.

105. This discrepancy highlights the critical difference between a visual impression and a professional, interdisciplinary technical assessment.

106. For large-scale urban renewal projects, comprehensive technical, environmental and health assessments are necessary to ensure a sound and legitimate basis for interventions, even if they contradict initial observations by members of the public.

107. The observations based on the photographs supplied form a natural and understandable visual assessment. Many of the exterior facades in the gallery of images do give the impression that they are structurally sound and in a good state of repair overall, which might lead one to conclude that they are "solid and well maintained". However, it is critical to recognize that often external appearances can be deceptive and may not accurately reflect underlying structural integrity, internal conditions or compliance with current safety and health standards.

108. While the immediate concern for displaced residents is the loss of housing, forced relocation can cause a cascade of broader socioeconomic problems, including disruption of

livelihoods, loss of community ties and altered access to basic services (e.g. schools, healthcare and markets). The existence of national poverty reduction and social protection programmes points to a government framework for addressing these broader issues. The success of relocation will largely depend on how effectively these general programmes are specifically tailored and applied to meet the unique needs of the displaced population, ensuring a comprehensive approach to their well-being. Successful forced relocation goes far beyond simple financial compensation or the provision of alternative housing. It requires a comprehensive and integrated approach that combines housing solutions with robust social support, livelihood restoration programmes and guaranteed access to basic services. This ensures that displaced persons and families are not worse off socioeconomically after relocation, which is in keeping with the spirit of international human rights principles.

Developments resulting in the ongoing housing demolitions

(7) On 20 March 2025, the Council of People's Deputies of Samarkand Oblast issued Resolution VII-9-39-7-0-K/25 approving the withdrawal of land plots for public needs and requiring to initiate open discussions with owners of the affected area. Annexed to this resolution was a list of addresses of 220 residential and non-residential objects to be expropriated for public needs to create the planned large Pilgrimage Centre. This document also included two particular properties from the list of Cultural Heritage of Uzbekistan: the Faqih Abu Lays Mosque and the Chilla Mozor ziyoratgohi.

109. The Government understands the concerns regarding the status of the Faqih Abu Lays Mosque and the Chilla Mozor ziyoratgohi as cultural heritage sites.

110. The Samarkand Oblast Council of People's Deputies, by its Decision VII-9-39-7-0-K/25 of 20 March 2025, did indeed approve the expropriation of land plots for public needs, including the Fakih Abu Lays Mosque (site No. 46) and the Chilla Mozor ziyoratgohi (site No. 220), in order to create a major pilgrimage centre around the Imam Maturidi complex.

111. Although the historical and cultural assessment of the 217 residential buildings in this area concluded that they are not on the National List of Immovable Cultural Heritage and have no historical value, the approach taken with respect to significant religious sites, such as the mosque and the ziyoratgohi, in the context of a project on the scale of the creation of a pilgrimage centre, has its specificities.

112. Thus, even though the Faqih Abu Lays Mosque and the Chilla Mozor ziyoratgohi are subject to expropriation for public needs, this does not mean that they will be totally destroyed. On the contrary, in the context of the creation of a major pilgrimage centre, which is intended to revitalize and strengthen the spiritual and cultural significance of this place, facilities such as the mosque and ziyoratgohi are likely to undergo renovation and integration into the new complex. This will preserve their spiritual function and historical memory while modernizing their infrastructure and making them accessible to more pilgrims and visitors.

113. The goal of the project is not simply demolition, but rather a comprehensive transformation of the area to create a modern and functional spiritual centre, which implies careful treatment of significant religious structures through their reconstruction and inclusion in the overall architectural concept. This is in line with the country's overall strategy for the preservation and development of cultural and religious heritage.

(8) Following the approval of this resolution, a gathering was reportedly organized by the local authorities in which residents were informed about the withdrawal of their land plots and the planned urban development project. The meeting however did not provide any opportunity to affected residents to raise objections. Also in late March, government officials allegedly came to the area and started to inform verbally residents that demolitions would be carried out.

114. The Government is attentive to community engagement in the context of urban development projects and would like to clarify the procedures for providing information to residents and for their participation in the land expropriation process. It is alleged that the meetings organized did not provide an opportunity for objections and that demolition notices were solely verbal; this is not consistent with the relevant legislation and the procedures actually followed.

115. Uzbek legislation provides for strict and transparent mechanisms to ensure participation by citizens and protection of their rights at all stages of the expropriation of land plots for public needs.

116. Decision VII-9-39-7-0-K/25 of the Samarkand Oblast Council of People's Deputies of 20 March 2025 approving the expropriation of land plots for public needs simultaneously initiated and allowed for the conduct of open discussions with property owners in the affected area.

117. The Act on the Procedure for the Expropriation, with Compensation, of Land Plots for Public Needs clearly regulates the procedure for such discussions. According to article 20 of this law, the project initiator is obliged to inform the deed holders about the purposes, conditions and likelihood of expropriation of land plots and listen to their opinions.

118. These public discussions should be held within one month of the adoption of the decision on expropriation; deed holders must be notified in writing of the time and place of the meeting, which must also be announced on official websites and in the media.

119. Moreover, the law requires that audio and video recordings be made of the entire public discussion process and that the media participate. Following the discussion, a record must be drawn up of the opinions expressed during the discussion; this record must be signed by the participants. The record is published in full on official websites (<https://samshahar.uz/en/news/turar-va-noturarjoy-obyektlari-mulkdorlari-bilan-ochiq-muhokama-bolib-otdi/>).

120. Thus, the meetings are not purely informational but provide for active interaction and an opportunity for residents to express their positions, which must be noted down.

121. It is alleged that officials informed residents verbally that demolitions would be carried out; this would run counter to established legal standards. Uzbek legislation provides that demolition of immovable property is not permitted without prior provision of agreed compensation.

122. Implementation of renovation projects is allowed only after the signing of a notarized amicable agreement with all property owners. This agreement legally binds the parties and fixes the type and amount of compensation and the deadline for payment.

123. The Act of 29 August 2024 amending the Housing Code states explicitly that no one may be deprived of their home except by court order and in accordance with the law, and that the owner is guaranteed prior compensation in an amount equivalent to the value of the home and the losses incurred.

124. Regarding the Imam Maturidi complex project, official documents confirm that demolition work on 217 properties will be carried out only once compensation has been paid and written consent obtained from the owners.

125. Thus, the process for expropriation of land and demolition in Uzbekistan is strictly regulated and is aimed at ensuring transparency, participation of citizens and full protection of their property rights. Mechanisms for public discussion, written notifications, notarized agreements and prior compensation are an integral part of the process, ensuring that residents' views are heard and their rights respected.

In April 2025, the UNESCO World Heritage Centre reportedly raised concerns about the construction project brought to its attention by a third party.

126. In April 2025, the UNESCO World Heritage Centre did indeed express concern about a construction project reported to it by a third party. This concern was noted, and the Government took immediate steps to ensure full transparency and compliance with international standards.

127. Uzbekistan maintains an ongoing and constructive dialogue with UNESCO on the preservation of cultural heritage. The secretariat of the National Commission for UNESCO-related Matters reports regularly on the state of conservation of the historic centres of Samarkand and Bukhara. Moreover, the National Commission regularly sends official letters to local authorities, including those in Samarkand Oblast, with urgent reminders of the requirement for approval by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee of any planned construction, reconstruction, restoration or other work in areas adjacent to world heritage sites.

128. In response to the concern expressed, the secretariat of the National Commission for UNESCO-related Matters sent a letter, on 4 June 2025, requesting the resubmission of the heritage impact assessment report prepared in relation to the establishment of a major pilgrimage centre through the reconstruction and restoration of the Imam Maturidi memorial complex. The letter emphasized the need to bring the report into line with the format prescribed by UNESCO and ensure its subsequent approval as soon as possible.

129. This dialogue culminated in a consultation meeting between the Director of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Lazare Assomo, and a delegation of Uzbekistan, which also included the Chief Administrator of Samarkand Oblast. The meeting took place at the forty-seventh session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee (6–16 July 2025). At the meeting, a moratorium was officially declared on all construction and demolition work pending approval by the World Heritage Centre.

130. Thus, the Government has demonstrated full commitment to international obligations and standards in the field of cultural heritage conservation by actively cooperating with UNESCO.

131. Currently, in accordance with paragraphs 110, 118 bis and 172 of the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, any major project that may affect a world heritage site requires the preparation of a heritage impact assessment report prior to the commencement of the works.

132. On 9 July 2025, the National Commission for UNESCO-related Matters forwarded this report to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre (Ref: No. 231/25).

(9) On 2 May 2025, the Council of Deputies of Samarkand Oblast approved its Decision #VII-12-69-7-0-K/25 "permitting to withdraw land plots for public needs" (CoD Decision of 2 May 2025). The content of the decision was however not published, as it was argued that "the content of this decision is concealed due to containing information about a person, custody or other kind of information that is limited to dissemination according to law."

133. Uzbekistan understands the importance of transparency in the activities of government agencies and the need to make information available to the public.

134. Uzbek legislation provides a clear framework for restricting the dissemination of certain information:

- The Personal Data Act of 2 July 2019 regulates the collection, organization, storage, use, provision and dissemination of personal data. Under the Act, information containing citizens' personal data may not be freely disseminated without their consent, except in cases expressly provided for by law. Decisions of local authorities regarding expropriation of land plots may contain sensitive information about the owners, such as their names and addresses, the amounts of compensation payable and information in relation to other personal or family circumstances that falls within the definition of personal data. The placing of such information in the public domain without an appropriate legal basis or the consent of the persons concerned would be a violation of their rights to privacy and protection of personal data;

- The State Secrets Act (No. ZRU-1016 of 27 December 2024) and other regulatory instruments govern information classified as State, commercial or official secrets. The Freedom of Information Act (art. 9) states explicitly that State bodies may not provide information containing State Secrets or other secrets protected by law;

- If a decision of the Council contains elements related to confidential financial arrangements, strategic development plans that may be classified as commercial or official secrets, or information related to law enforcement activities, its dissemination will also be restricted.

135. Thus, the incomplete publication of Samarkand Oblast Council Decision No. VII-12-69-7-0-K/25 is not an attempt to conceal information, but rather a necessary step to comply with the legislation of Uzbekistan aimed at protecting the rights of citizens to privacy and to confidentiality of certain information.

136. At the same time, Uzbekistan remains committed to the principles of transparency in the process of expropriating land plots for public needs. As noted earlier, the legislation

requires that open public discussions be held with owners. In addition, demolition of immovable property is only allowed after the provision of agreed compensation and the signing of a notarized agreement with all owners. These mechanisms ensure that, despite restrictions on the publication of certain details, the rights and interests of affected citizens are respected and protected.

(10) In mid-May 2025, the concerned residents received eviction notice letters dated 3 May, stating that their land plots will be withdrawn for public needs and that their property would be evaluated by independent assessment persons and compensated according to market rate.

137. The 3 May eviction notices were sent to residents under the statutory procedure and served to inform citizens of the forthcoming process of land expropriation for public needs. Their content was in full compliance with the current legislation of Uzbekistan, which guarantees fair compensation on the basis of equivalence.

138. Uzbek legislation clearly establishes that forced eviction may not be carried out until compensation has been paid in full. Under article 26 of the Act on the Procedure for the Expropriation, with Compensation, of Land Plots for Public Needs, the deed holder loses ownership of the immovable property and is obliged to fully vacate it only once all compensation envisaged in the agreement has been provided in full.

139. Once all compensation has been provided in full, the deed holder is given six months to fully vacate the immovable property (residential and non-residential, production premises, other buildings and structures) located on the expropriated plot of land. During this six-month period, structures may not be disconnected from utilities, including water supply, wastewater disposal, electricity, communications, heat and gas. Only in case of failure to vacate the property within this period does the project initiator have the right to apply to the court for forced eviction.

140. Samarkand Oblast Council of People's Deputies Decision No. VII-12-69-7-0-K/25 of 2 May 2025 authorizing the expropriation of land plots for public needs stipulates strict compliance with the requirements of the above-mentioned Act. This means that all procedures, including the time frames and conditions for the release of property, must be carried out in exact conformity with the Act.

141. The notices informed residents that their property would be valued by independent appraisers and compensation paid at market value. This is in line with the requirements of the Act, which provides for the valuation by an appraisal organization of the immovable property and the deeds to the plot of land to be expropriated.

142. Official documents on the Imam Maturidi complex project confirm that demolition work on 217 properties will be carried out only once compensation has been paid and written consent obtained from the owners. This is an additional assurance that residents' rights will be respected.

143. Thus, the allegations of possible forced eviction without compensation or immediate demolition are not true. The process of land expropriation in Uzbekistan is strictly regulated, ensures prior and equivalent compensation and provides sufficient time to vacate the property once such compensation has been received, which is a reliable protection of citizens' rights.

Pressure exercised on residents to agree to self-demolition of their homes

(11) Reportedly, psychological and other pressure was imposed by the police and local authorities on the mostly illiterate, poor and uneducated inhabitants to sign papers indicating that they would “voluntary demolish” their homes against compensation offered to them. Some residents were also brought to court to sign such declarations. As an incentive to speed up the process, they were also allowed to sell the bricks and other materials of their demolished dwellings.

144. Presidential Decision No. 102 of 14 March 2025 on the celebration of the 1,155th anniversary of the birth of Imam al-Maturidi and the Cabinet of Ministers Decision of 25 February 2025 stipulated the design, reconstruction and restoration of shrines in Samarkand Oblast, in particular the Abu Mansur al-Maturidi complex, as well as the improvement of the roads and roadside infrastructure leading to them and the organization of works to enhance the appearance of structures in adjacent areas, in connection with which it was decided to expropriate residential and non-residential structures located in the areas subject to

improvement around the shrines and cultural heritage sites, with the granting of compensation under the statutory procedure for losses incurred by the owners.

145. In this connection, the Samarkand municipal civil court received 173 applications from the Samarkand mayor's office to expropriate land plots for public needs and carry out forced evictions, with compensation, to allow the demolition of residential buildings in the Al-Maturidi mahalla.

146. A civil case was initiated in respect of each application; to date 161 cases have been heard and 12 are pending.

147. In 124 cases, a decision was made to grant the application, namely, to expropriate the land plot and evict the respondents living in the residential buildings after payment of compensation. In 37 cases, proceedings were discontinued on the basis of article 124 (1) (4) of the Code of Civil Procedure because the parties had concluded an amicable agreement and the agreement had been approved by the court. Under the terms of each amicable agreement, the applicant undertook to pay the respondent(s) an amount of compensation mutually agreed on by the parties, and the respondent(s) undertook to voluntarily vacate the residential premises upon receipt of the compensation from the applicant.

148. As is clear from the court documents, the respondents did not dispute either the expropriation of the land plots or the evictions and requested payment of the compensation due. Furthermore, in only 17 cases did the respondents disagree with the amount of compensation offered to them; during the proceedings in these cases, the court ordered an expert appraisal to assess the market value of the residential buildings to be demolished, which was carried out by the Sulaymonova National Forensics Centre. However, the amounts of compensation determined by the court were not those set as a result of the court-ordered appraisals, but rather higher sums based on the agreements reached by the parties in court.

149. The total amount of compensation for demolition of residential buildings, determined by all court decisions and rulings approving amicable agreements, was 174.713 billion sum.

150. Moreover, deed holders who wished to receive the construction materials from which the demolished residential buildings were built were granted that right, which was reflected in judicial instruments.

151. Hearings in all cases were conducted with both parties participating.

152. All amicable agreements between the parties were approved by the court on the basis of voluntary written statements by both parties and, in cases where the respondents accepted the application, the applications were granted by court decisions based on their agreement to the applicant's demands.

153. The judicial instruments in respect of 114 cases became final as they were not appealed, with no cassational appeals or protests filed; no complaints or protests have been filed against the judicial instruments in the other 47 cases considered, but the time limits for appeal have not expired.

154. No statements were made by the respondents during the consideration of the civil cases about any coercion or pressure brought to bear on them by representatives of government agencies, nor was any testimony given by citizens during the court proceedings about such actions.

155. The inter-district administrative court in the city of Samarkand has not received any complaints about the acts of administrative bodies or actions or omissions of their officials in connection with the expropriation of land plots from the deed holders and demolition of residential buildings for the purpose of improvements to the Abu Mansur al-Maturidi Cemetery.

(12) One resident reported that police had called him in every evening from 18:00 until midnight for 3 days. He was told there that the courts were in their hands and that if they wanted, they could seize the property without offering any compensation and that, accordingly, it would be better to take whatever compensation was provided. In another case, an individual was reportedly arrested for an alleged insult and detained for three days. Reportedly a family member living in one of the affected homes was placed for six months in a psychiatric institution, but early released after the head of the household had signed papers to accept the demolition of her home and the compensation offered.

Reportedly, electricity and gas were also cut off to some households to make them vacate their homes or force them into signing compensation agreements.

156. Such reports are unfounded and unsupported by specific facts, names or dates, making it impossible to verify their substance. We wish to emphasize that such actions would directly contradict the fundamental principles of the Constitution and current legislation, which guarantees the protection of the rights and freedoms of every citizen.

157. Claims that "the courts were in their hands" and that property can be seized without compensation are totally unacceptable and are not consistent with the constitutional order of Uzbekistan.

158. The Constitution clearly establishes that justice is to be administered only by the courts. The judiciary in Uzbekistan operates independently of the legislative and executive branches, political parties and voluntary associations (art. 130).

159. Judges are independent and subject only to the constitution and the law. Any interference in their work in the administration of justice is inadmissible and punishable by law (art. 136).

160. The Courts Act (art. 66) expressly prohibits any interference in the work of judges and establishes criminal liability for the exercise of influence on judges to prevent the objective consideration of a case or to obtain the issuance of an unlawful judicial instrument.

161. Reports of arrests, detentions and forced placement in psychiatric institutions owing to refusal to sign documents also constitute serious allegations of conduct that would be completely contrary to Uzbek law.

162. The Constitution guarantees the right of everyone to liberty and security of person (art. 27).

163. No one may be subject to arrest, detention or imprisonment or have their liberty otherwise restricted except as prescribed by law. Arrest, detention and imprisonment are allowed only pursuant to a court order. A person may not be detained for more than 48 hours without a court order (art. 27).

164. The Code of Criminal Procedure obliges all government agencies and officials responsible for criminal proceedings to protect citizens' rights and freedoms. Judges and prosecutors must immediately release anyone who is unlawfully deprived of liberty or detained.

165. Under the Psychiatric Care Act, a person may be subjected to coercive treatment or involuntary hospitalization in a psychiatric hospital only pursuant to a court order. Persons under treatment or examination in a psychiatric hospital have the right to meet with a lawyer in private. Thus, any action involving restriction of liberty or involuntary hospitalization without a court order is illegal and incurs severe penalties.

166. The alleged cutting off of electricity and gas to force residents to sign agreements also fails to comply with current norms: the Act on the Procedure for the Expropriation, with Compensation, of Land Plots for Public Needs clearly regulates the process for vacating property. In accordance with article 26 of this law, after all the compensation envisaged in the agreement has been provided in full, the deed holder is obliged to fully vacate the immovable property within six months.

167. Importantly, once compensation has been provided in full, structures cannot be disconnected from utilities, including water supply, wastewater disposal, electricity, communications, heat and gas, until they have been completely vacated.

168. Only in case of failure to vacate the property after six months does the project initiator have the right to apply to the court for forced eviction.

169. In addition, it is prohibited to decide to demolish a property in the event of a dispute related to the provision of compensation if the dispute has not been considered under a pretrial procedure or if there has been no final court decision on the dispute (Act, art. 35).

170. Official documents on the Imam Maturidi complex project confirm that demolition work on 217 properties will be carried out only once compensation has been paid and written consent obtained from the owners.

171. Uzbek legislation provides clear mechanisms for resolving any disputes related to the provision of compensation.

172. Disputes are provisionally considered by compensation commissions under a pretrial procedure (Act on the Procedure for the Expropriation, with Compensation, of Land Plots for Public Needs, art. 34).

173. A party disagreeing with the decision of the Compensation Commission may appeal to a court in the manner prescribed by legislative acts (art. 34).

174. The Government adheres to the principles of the rule of law, protection of human rights and transparency. Any actions that violate the above regulations are illegal and subject to investigation and prosecution of the perpetrators. We encourage citizens who have experienced such violations to contact the law enforcement and judicial authorities with specific and confirmed facts for proper investigation and the restoration of justice.

Compensation

(13) Residents were reportedly offered compensation ranging from around USD 32,000 - 120,000 for their properties. The concerned homeowners appear not to have received any compensation offers in writing that could have been checked, nor were apparently assessments of the value of their land and homes carried out by independent evaluators. Reportedly authorities indicated the amounts of compensation orally and afterwards fixed these amounts in declarations to be signed by the concerned homeowners accepting the compensation and the demolition of their homes.

175. Written opinions from independent appraisal organizations were provided to the owners.

176. In addition, it was explained to the owners that they could apply independently to appraisal companies for expert valuations.

177. At the same time, 56 enforcement orders relating to forced evictions and demolition of housing located in the protected area of the Abu Mansur Al-Maturidi Mausoleum and Chokardiz Cemetery are being processed by the Samarkand municipal office of the Enforcement Bureau on the basis of court decisions; 13 have been executed under article 41 of the Act on the Enforcement of Judicial and Other Decisions.

178. In addition, 33 enforcement orders issued in favour of 33 citizens are being processed by local units of the Bureau's department for Samarkand Oblast to recover compensation in an amount of 31.3 billion sum owed by the mayor's office in the city of Samarkand for demolished homes located near the Mansur Al-Maturidi Mausoleum and the Chokardiz Cemetery.

179. Compensation owed to eight citizens in the amount of 4.9 billion sum has been collected in the course of such enforcement actions, and measures are being taken to execute the remaining enforcement orders for compensation in an amount 25 billion sum.

Impact of the housing demolitions

(14) After demolition, most of the affected persons were left homeless and had to seek emergency shelter with other families or family members. The eviction and home demolitions have also reportedly resulted in psychological trauma and strong feelings of injustice by the affected community. Furthermore, there appears to have been no plan in place before the evictions started to ensure that children affected by the project would have continued access to schooling. Nor were any specific arrangements made for the care of older persons or persons with disabilities living in the area.

180. National legislation, in particular the Act on the Procedure for the Expropriation, with Compensation, of Land Plots for State and Public Needs, clearly establishes that demolition work will begin only once compensation has been paid to homeowners as provided for by law and their written consent has been obtained. This is a fundamental principle, which is strictly observed. Property owners are offered various forms of compensation to ensure continuity of residence and prevent homelessness, including monetary compensation, provision of equivalent well-appointed housing or provision of a plot of land for the construction of a new house. As part of renovation programmes, homeowners can be provided with turnkey apartments in new buildings. Moreover, after receiving full compensation, the deed holder has six months to fully vacate the immovable property and,

during this period, structures cannot be disconnected from utilities, including water supply, wastewater disposal, electricity, communications, heat and gas. Only in case of failure to vacate the property within this period does the project initiator have the right to apply to the court for forced eviction. This ensures that no family is left homeless and that there is enough time to organize the move.

181. The Government realizes that any changes in the lives of citizens may cause emotional discomfort. This is why the land expropriation process is built on the principles of openness, transparency and guarantees of compensation. Open discussions must be held with property owners, with the involvement of the media, before a decision on the expropriation of a land plot is made. These discussions are not a formality but an opportunity for residents to express their views, which should be recorded in the minutes and published. In case of disagreement with the expropriation decision or the amount of compensation, citizens have the right to appeal in court. The judicial system of Uzbekistan is independent and any interference in the work of judges is inadmissible and incurs liability. During the consideration of the civil cases related to the expropriation of land for the Imam Maturidi complex, there were no reports from the respondents of any coercion or pressure on the part of representatives of government agencies, nor was there any testimony from citizens concerning such actions. This confirms the voluntary nature of the agreements and the absence of psychological pressure.

182. Uzbekistan prioritizes continuity of education for all children. Children affected by the project are registered in schools and enrolled in specialized secondary education institutions. The INSON project, supported by the World Bank, is aimed at improving access to and quality of social services for vulnerable children, including their development and learning. Under this project, 7,000 children from vulnerable groups will receive access to services at local social service centres.

183. The country is actively developing and strengthening the social protection system, giving special attention to vulnerable groups. The National Social Protection Strategy, adopted in July 2022, constitutes a significant step towards strengthening the national social protection system and is aligned with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. The National Social Protection Agency, established in June 2023, is empowered to design, roll out, coordinate and monitor the implementation of social protection programmes. The INSON Project, funded by the World Bank, is aimed at increasing access to and quality of social services for thousands of vulnerable people, including older persons and persons with disabilities. As part of the project, it is envisaged to increase access on demand to quality social services.

184. The Government adheres to the principles of the rule of law, protection of human rights and transparency. All activities related to the Imam Maturidi reconstruction project are carried out in strict compliance with national legislation and international standards, ensuring decent living conditions and comprehensive support for all affected citizens.

Protection of residential homes as part of World Cultural Heritage

(15) Samarkand was inscribed in 2001 to the List of UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The listing of objects protected by UNESCO in Samarkand include “Traditional Dwelling Houses” which form part of the listing of the most significant objects of historical part of city. When Samarkand was inscribed, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) stressed that “the principal significance of the historic town of Samarkand relates to its being at the crossroads and melting pot of different cultures and to its role in the development of Timurid architecture and building types. In this evolution the historic town should be seen as a whole rather than as a collection of separate monuments. Even though the residential part of the city obviously dates from the post-Timurid period, it does represent traditional continuity and qualities that are reflected in the neighbourhood structure, the small centres, mosques, and houses.” ICOMOS stressed the need to protect the integrity of the site, despite some losses during the 19th century, stating that “the old town still contains substantial areas of historic fabric with typical narrow lanes, articulated into districts with social centres, mosques, madrassahs, and residential housing.”

185. The project for the reconstruction of the Imam Maturidi complex is being carried out with deep respect for cultural heritage and in strict compliance with the national legislation and international obligations of Uzbekistan. The project is aimed at fulfilling the vital need to develop Samarkand as a major centre of pilgrimage tourism, in line with the Presidential Decree on measures for the further development of domestic and pilgrimage tourism in

Uzbekistan, and is contributing to the preservation of the historical integrity of the site of what was once the most prestigious cemetery of Samarkand – Chokardiz.

186. With regard to the residential structures that are affected, it is stated unequivocally in the historical and cultural assessment (Sam/0013 of 24 February 2025) and the conclusions of the working group that the 217 residential buildings located around the Imam Maturidi complex are not included in the National List of Immovable Cultural Heritage and have no historical value. These buildings are privately owned and were built at various times, mostly after the 1980s, with some older structures demolished and rebuilt after 2005. Thus, they do not represent the kind of "traditional fabric" referred to by ICOMOS as having unique historic value.

187. Moreover, a technical assessment revealed that most of these buildings are in an unsatisfactory or dangerous state. The burnt brick foundations are in poor condition, the walls have fallen into a catastrophic state owing to erosion, the roofs have been significantly damaged by precipitation and the wooden floors have rotted. A significant number of structures (133 out of 217) are totally non-compliant with sanitation requirements, and 27 courtyards are located in a zone extremely prone to erosion, which poses a high risk to human health and safety. It was also found that 43 residential buildings had undergone unauthorized construction without planning documents having been drawn up and that 67 buildings lacked cadastral documents. These facts demonstrate the need for intervention, not only from a development standpoint but also with a view to ensuring safety and improving the living conditions of the population.

188. The Government maintains an ongoing and constructive dialogue with UNESCO. The secretariat of the National Commission for UNESCO-related Matters regularly reports on the state of conservation of Samarkand's historic centres, and all projects in UNESCO world heritage areas and their buffer zones require the approval of the Cultural Heritage Agency and the UNESCO World Heritage Centre. The Agency's Scientific and Expert Council approved the project and recommended that the World Heritage Centre be informed thereof. A heritage impact assessment report has been prepared and sent to the World Heritage Centre for review and issuance of a formal opinion. Moreover, in a consultation meeting with the Director of the World Heritage Centre, Lazare Assomo, a moratorium was officially declared on all construction and demolition work pending approval by the World Heritage Centre.

189. The secretariat of the National Commission for UNESCO-related Matters regularly submits reports to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee on the state of conservation of the "Samarkand – Crossroads of Cultures" site. On the basis of the recommendations received from UNESCO, official requests were sent to the relevant ministries and agencies (secretariat letter No. 222/23 of 10 October 2023).

190. Furthermore, in accordance with the decisions adopted at the forty-fifth session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee (held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia) – 45COM 7B.174, 45COM 7B.50 and 45COM 8B.13 – an official letter (No. 248/24 of 6 August 2024) was sent by the secretariat requesting the submission of state of conservation reports for the "Samarkand – Crossroads of Cultures" site no later than 7 October 2024. In addition, in letter No. 175/25 of 4 June 2025, the National Commission for UNESCO-related Matters requested the resubmission of the heritage impact assessment report prepared within the framework of the project to establish major pilgrimage centres through the reconstruction and restoration of the Imam Maturidi memorial complex located in Chokardiz Cemetery in the city of Samarkand and the Makhdumi A'zam Cemetery in Akdarya District, as well as the improvement of the adjacent areas and infrastructure. The letter stated that the report needed to be brought into line with the format prescribed by UNESCO and resubmitted to UNESCO for approval as soon as possible (see attachment).

191. Thus, the Government is acting in full compliance with international standards and national legislation, ensuring that the development of Samarkand as a major pilgrimage centre not only contributes to economic and cultural growth, but also respects its outstanding universal value while improving the living conditions and safety of its citizens.

Recommendations by the World Heritage Commission

(16) UNESCO original documentation further underlines that “any further demolition of traditional housing areas should be avoided and measures should be taken to encourage

their sustainable development and rehabilitation as part of [a coherent urban conservation and planning policy]."

192. In order to prevent further demolition of traditional residential neighbourhoods and to support measures for their sustainable development and rehabilitation as part of [a coherent urban conservation and planning policy], the National Commission for UNESCO-related Matters submits regular reports to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee on the state of conservation of the "Samarkand – Crossroads of Cultures" site. On the basis of the recommendations received from UNESCO, official requests were sent to the relevant ministries and agencies (secretariat letter No. 222/23 of 10 October 2023). In addition, to monitor the state of conservation of the sites, UNESCO representatives and international experts carry out regular visits, and detailed reports thereon are prepared and submitted to higher authorities. In 2024–2025, experts from the International Advisory Committee twice visited world heritage sites in Uzbekistan and sites included in the tentative list. The first visit, led by Lazare Assomo, Director of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, was to the cities of Shakhrisabz, Samarkand and Bukhara, from 15 to 21 November 2024 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs letter No. 11-18414 of 25 November 2024).

193. The second visit took place on 21 May and 1 June 2025, to Surkhandarya Oblast, the Republic of Karakalpakstan and the cities of Khiva, Samarkand and Shakhrisabz (Ministry of Foreign Affairs letter No. 1-12933 of 5 June 2025). During the visits, technical assessments and monitoring of the level of outstanding universal value and related attributes of world heritage sites and sites included in the tentative list were carried out. At these meetings, work was organized, in cooperation with local authorities and specialists in the field of cultural heritage protection, to avoid further demolition of traditional residential neighbourhoods and ensure that measures are taken to encourage their sustainable development and rehabilitation as part of [a coherent urban conservation and planning policy].

194. Based on the outcome of the forty-seventh regular session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, held from 6 to 16 July 2025 at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, the reports on the state of conservation of sites in Uzbekistan inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List were considered and approved. In this connection, the corresponding information letter (No. 242/25 of 21 July 2025) was sent to the relevant ministries and agencies.

(17) Similar recommendations were made by the latest UNESCO/ICOMOS monitoring mission in January 2020, which considered that a presidential moratorium from August 2019 prohibiting any demolition and new construction in the protected area and its buffer zone was appropriate as a timely and significant intervention to protect the Outstanding Universal Value of the area and explicitly recommended that such a moratorium should be maintained. In the mission report, the monitoring body expressed concern that "the projects in some of these areas [the protected property and its buffer zone] involve the relocation of communities on the basis that housing is sub-standard, but no precise details have been provided on the areas nor on social consequences." It also considered "large-scale development projects, both implemented and planned" and the "conservation of the historic urban fabric" as main potential threats to the site.

195. The Maturidi Mausoleum is located east of the city of Samarkand, on the site of the former Chokardiz Cemetery.

196. The area around the Maturidi Mausoleum was formerly the Chokardiz Cemetery, located east of Registan Square in the Timurid-era city. Chokardiz Cemetery was the most prestigious cemetery in Samarkand during the high Middle Ages. According to legend, 3,000 scholars and theologians were buried there. Men of science, jurists and religious figures have found rest in this cemetery, making it famous as a treasure trove of learning. This has been confirmed by archaeological studies, the most recent of which was conducted by the University of Bologna in collaboration with the Samarkand Institute of Archaeology in 2025.

197. The assessment of potential impacts is as follows: actions associated with the construction of the mosque and mixed-use building will be irreversible if the foundation reaches the basement level. They will be carried out once and have a long-term effect. The change to the attributes that convey the outstanding universal value of the "Samarkand – Crossroads of Cultures" site may be irreversible and permanent if archaeological remains are found there that constitute an element of the site's outstanding universal value.

198. The degree and quality of the change are considered to be "minor", and the potential impact is assessed as "minor adverse". Appropriate measures are proposed to prevent this impact.

199. The secretariat of the National Commission for UNESCO-related Matters, in cooperation with UNESCO, regularly submits reports to the World Heritage Centre on the state of conservation of the historic centres of Samarkand and Bukhara, cities of great historical significance for Uzbekistan. The staff of the National Commission also regularly take part in missions organized by UNESCO. Pursuant to paragraph 8 of Decision 43 COM 7B.77 and paragraph 11 of Decision 43 COM 7B.78 of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, specialists from ICOMOS and the World Heritage Centre carried out an emergency monitoring mission to the cities of Samarkand and Bukhara from 13 to 21 January 2020.

200. According to paragraphs 110, 118 bis and 172 of the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, any major project intervention that may affect a world heritage property must undergo a heritage impact assessment before any work can commence. Based on the above provisions, the Samarkand mayor's office mandated the International Institute for Central Asia (IICA) to conduct the heritage impact assessment. The impact assessment was supported by the Samarkand Oblast Cultural Heritage Protection Department and the Samarkand Archaeological Institute. The results were incorporated into the final design documents submitted by the Samarkand Cultural Heritage Protection Authority in July 2025. The National Commission for UNESCO-related Matters submitted the heritage impact assessment report to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre by letter No. 231/25 of 9 July 2025.

(18) In relation to the demolition of residential neighbourhoods (mahallas), the report explicitly stated that "Samarkand is a living city, which must respond to the reasonable needs of its residents. However, the residential 'Mahalla' areas are also an important attribute of the property and vital to the physical and visual setting of the property provided by its buffer zone. There should be no further precinct-scale demolitions within the Mahallas that are inside the property or buffer zone (including potential additional buffer zone areas), and a presumption against demolition, although individual intrusive buildings may be demolished to enable their replacement with more-sympathetic structures Any such proposals for demolition within the Mahallas should be evaluated carefully, so that their heritage impact is understood, and can inform approval decisions. The Mahallas should be provided with appropriate statutory protection."

201. During the study of this area by the staff of the Oblast's department for emergency situations, it was established that the neighbourhoods are marked by natural and human-made characteristics, are located in a zone of extreme environmental degradation and do not meet fire safety standards. In addition, they are totally non-compliant with sanitation requirements. There are also no sewage disposal routes. There are no sewage disposal lines for wastewater used by the population; wastewater accumulates in wells dug by the population. When studying the seismic resistance of the residential buildings, it was found that they were not designed to withstand a 5.0 magnitude earthquake and do not meet the requirements of KMK 2.01.03–96, which poses a threat to human life.

202. The Samarkand Oblast Council of People's Deputies considered the issue of improvements to the living conditions of citizens residing in the areas covered by the citizens' assemblies of the Sharq, Dari Zanjir, Zominiy, Yominiy and Fidoiylar mahallas in the city of Samarkand.

203. In Decision No. VII-9-39-7-0-K/25 of the Council of 20 March 2025, it was agreed to hold an open discussion with property owners based on the requirements of the Act on the Procedure for the Expropriation, with Compensation, of Land Plots for Public Needs.

204. Pursuant to paragraph 2 of the Decision, the Deputy Mayor of Samarkand for construction, communications, public utilities, environment and green spaces, Firuz Dzhamoliddinovich Nazhmiddinov, held an open discussion with the owners, as required by the Act.

205. During the discussion, the property owners were given an explanation regarding the full payment of compensation in accordance with the requirements of Cabinet of Ministers Decision No. 911 of 10 October 2019 on additional measures to guarantee the property rights

of individuals and legal entities and improve the procedure for the expropriation of land plots and the provision of compensation.

206. Furthermore, conclusions and proposals were formulated for the improvement of the area around the Imam Maturidi complex with a view to enhancing the living conditions of citizens there and increasing the flow of foreign and local tourists. The study conducted had found that there are no heritage sites in this location. In addition, most of the houses are in poor condition and sanitation services are inadequate. The study found that basic infrastructure in the area, including heating, mains water, hot water, garbage collection, firefighting equipment and alarms, is lacking. In June 2025, IICAS visited the five areas initially affected. The team conducted informal environmental discussions and focus groups with members of the five mahallas (Sharq, Dari Zanjir, Zominiy, Yominiy and Fidoiylar).

207. With regard to the planned construction and improvement works in the area of the Imam Maturidi memorial complex in Samarkand, a heritage impact assessment report (No. 231/25 of 9 July 2025), prepared with the participation of IICAS and international experts from ICOMOS, was sent to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

(19) In 2023 the World Heritage Committee adopted furthermore decision 45 COM7.B50, requesting “that the overall moratorium on demolition and new development [should] remain until the integrated Master Plan for the city, the further revised Management Plan for the property and the Urban Design Guidelines are finalised, submitted to the World Heritage Centre and positively reviewed by the Advisory Bodies.” It also reiterated its request “to fully implement the recommendation of the 2020 Reactive Monitoring Mission.”

208. The National Commission for UNESCO-related Matters and the Cultural Heritage Agency, together with experts from the International Advisory Committee, are carrying out practical work on the further revision of the Management Plan for the historic centre and the urban design instructions, as well as on the full implementation of the recommendations of the 2020 Reactive Monitoring Mission. An updated management plan for the historic centre will soon be submitted to the World Heritage Centre.

209. In accordance with the decisions adopted at the forty-fifth session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee (held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia) – 45COM 7B.174, 45COM 7B.50 and 45COM 8B.13 – an official letter (No. 248/24 of 6 August 2024) was sent by the secretariat requesting the submission of state of conservation reports for the "Samarkand – Crossroads of Cultures" site no later than 7 October 2024. In addition, in letter No. 175/25 of 4 June 2025, the National Commission for UNESCO-related Matters requested the resubmission of the heritage impact assessment report prepared within the framework of the project to establish major pilgrimage centres through the reconstruction and restoration of the Imam Maturidi memorial complex located in Chokardiz Cemetery in the city of Samarkand and the Makhdumi A'zam Cemetery in Akdarya District, as well as the improvement of the adjacent areas and infrastructure. The letter stated that the report needed to be brought into line with the format prescribed by UNESCO and resubmitted to UNESCO for approval as soon as possible.

210. Furthermore, based on the outcome of the forty-seventh regular session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, held from 6 to 16 July 2025 at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, the reports on the state of conservation of sites in Uzbekistan inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List were considered and approved. In this connection, the corresponding information letter (No. 242/25 of 21 July 2025) was sent to the relevant ministries and agencies.

Positive signs

(20) Interventions by residents with authorities have reportedly so far resulted in an agreement that some homes on the Vobkent and Rometon streets – around 40 households inhabited by the Tajik population – will not be demolished.

211. On 2 May 2025, Samarkand Oblast Council of People's Deputies, by Decision No. VII-12-69-7-0-K/25 authorizing the expropriation of land plots for public needs, initially approved the relocation (demolition) of a total of 240 residential and non-residential structures.

(21) While we do not wish to prejudge the accuracy of these allegations, we express our serious concern related to the forced eviction of more than 1,500 residents and the ongoing and planned demolition of around 220 homes in a residential area of the old city of Samarkand adjacent to the Abu Mansur al-Maturidi mausoleum and the Chokardiz cemetery, which are mainly affecting the Multoni community and Tajik minority. We are particularly concerned that the expropriation of properties and the housing demolitions have reportedly been executed without adequate consultation, consent, compensation or provision of alternative and culturally appropriate housing to the affected residents, and about reports that residents have been put under pressure to accept low compensation and to sign declarations to voluntarily demolish their own homes.

212. Written opinions from independent appraisal organizations were provided to the owners. In addition, owners' right to apply independently to appraisal organizations was explained to them.

213. The demolition works are being carried out under special supervision and in strict conformity with the procedure established by law.

214. First and foremost, the principles of humanity are respected in the relocation process.

215. In addition, the Director of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Lazare Assomo, and a delegation from Uzbekistan that included the Chief Administrator of Samarkand Oblast held a consultation meeting at the forty-seventh session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee (6-16 July 2025) on issues related to the "Samarkand – Crossroads of Cultures" site, the Chokardiz mahalla and the area in which the Imam al-Maturidi Mausoleum is located.

216. At the meeting, the UNESCO leadership was informed of the imposition of a moratorium on all construction and demolition work pending approval by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre.

(22) We are also concerned about the unusual short notice and the fact that no genuine efforts appear to have been made to avoid the demolishment of the entire neighbourhood, or to involve the residents living in the area in consultations about the planned new infrastructure for pilgrims, which could have led to proposals on how any such infrastructure could be built without requiring the destruction of their homes, or with significantly less housing demolitions. We deplore that the entire project appears to have been planned, and so far carried out, without the publication of any social impact assessment or resettlement plan for the affected residents, and that no legal aid and advice was reportedly provided to the mostly marginalized and illiterate homeowners to enable them to access justice, to challenge their expropriation or to ensure that they receive either an adequate alternative housing for their families in proximity, or a sufficiently high compensation to cover all material and non-material losses incurred and enabling them to acquire alternative housing of at least similar size and quality in neighbourhood of their choice in proximity.

217. Written opinions from independent appraisal organizations were provided to the owners. In addition, owners' right to apply independently to appraisal organizations was explained to them.

218. The demolition works are being carried out under special supervision and in strict conformity with the procedure established by law.

219. First and foremost, the principles of humanity are respected in the relocation process. In addition, the Director of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Lazare Assomo, and a delegation from Uzbekistan that included the Chief Administrator of Samarkand Oblast held a consultation meeting at the forty-seventh session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee (6-16 July 2025) on issues related to the "Samarkand – Crossroads of Cultures" site, the Chokardiz mahalla and the area in which the Imam al-Maturidi Mausoleum is located.

220. At the meeting, the UNESCO leadership was informed of the imposition of a moratorium on all construction and demolition work pending approval by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre.

(23) If the information received proves to be correct, it appears that the demolitions violate several safeguards and elements of the right to adequate housing as set out in article

11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as the conditions set out by the World Heritage Committee for the preservation of the site of Samarkand. As the demolitions affect mainly a marginalized Roma community and an ethnic minority, the planned erection of a parking ground and pilgrimage centre appears also to result in a discriminatory outcome for marginalized minorities, violating article 2 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, prohibiting discrimination.

221. In Uzbekistan, all citizens have the same rights and freedoms and are equal before the law, without distinction as to sex, race, ethnicity, language, religion, beliefs, social origin or social status. Members of the Multoni ethnic group move freely and take part in public life on an equal footing with other citizens.

222. The allegations made do not reflect the progress currently being made or the Government's purposeful efforts to ensure the full integration and well-being of all citizens, including members of ethnic minorities. Contrary to what is claimed, our policies and legislative proposals are aimed at directly tackling the problems mentioned by paving the way for inclusive development and equal opportunities.

223. The allegation of predominant social stigma against and segregation of the Multoni community contradicts the fundamental principles and active policies being pursued by Uzbekistan in the field of inter-ethnic relations and human rights. The Constitution expressly prohibits any form of discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, religion or other factors (art. 19), thus guaranteeing equal rights for all citizens. Recent legislative changes, such as the Act of 31 October 2023, have increased administrative liability for advocating discrimination, which demonstrates how seriously the State takes the task of eliminating any manifestation of intolerance.

224. The National Human Rights Strategy (Presidential Decree of 22 June 2020) pays special attention to the rights of minorities, seeking to improve mechanisms for the development of the languages and cultures of all nations and peoples living in the country. These mechanisms include more active participation in public and political life and the right to education in mother tongues. The State Framework Policy on Inter-Ethnic Relations, adopted on 15 November 2019, is aimed at strengthening unity, preserving ethno-cultural identity and maintaining inter-ethnic tolerance and harmony.

225. In Uzbekistan, television and radio programmes are broadcast in 12 languages and newspapers and magazines are published in 14 languages, which actively promotes the preservation of cultural diversity and counters segregation. Thus, rather than promoting segregation, the Government is actively creating an environment conducive to the integration and mutual respect of all communities.

(24) We would like to recall that the World Heritage Committee has explicitly requested a moratorium on any demolitions and new constructions in the protected zone and its surrounding buffer zone. The project, if continued, would affect four mahallas and eradicate residential homes located in ten historical streets which include as well mahalla premises and other ceremonial spaces and objects. As the area is located slightly off the touristic route and belonged to a low-income community, its integrity and authenticity was so far even better preserved compared to many other parts of the old town. Thus, for instance, the area still has many traditional homes and constructions around courtyards built with old technics and materials, such as special bricklaying from mud, timber and hay.

226. It is planned to implement the project for the rehabilitation of the Imam Maturidi Mausoleum religious complex, located in Chokardiz Cemetery in the city of Samarkand, in the area and within the boundaries of the "Samarkand – Crossroads of Cultures" world heritage property (C603rev).

227. A heritage impact assessment report has been prepared to assess the impact of the new development and its components on the attributes expressing outstanding universal value.

228. In accordance with paragraphs 110, 118 bis and 172 of the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, as revised in 2024, any major project that may affect a world heritage site requires the preparation of a heritage impact assessment report prior to the commencement of any works.

229. Based on the above provisions, the Samarkand mayor's office mandated the International Institute for Central Asia (IICAS) to conduct the heritage impact assessment. The assessment was supported by the Samarkand Oblast Cultural Heritage Protection Department and the Samarkand Archaeological Institute. The final heritage impact assessment was based on the design documentation submitted by the Samarkand Cultural Heritage Protection Authority in July 2025.

230. The heritage impact assessment was conducted in June–July 2025, based on the methodology set out in the *Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context* (UNESCO et al., 2022). The activities carried out were as follows: detailed research and archival research, including a review of literature, legal documents, world heritage materials and archival data (maps, historical and aerial photographs, and satellite images).

231. The values of the "Samarkand – Crossroads of Cultures" site were defined, including its outstanding universal value, attributes and broader value categories.

232. A field survey of the Maturidi Mausoleum site was conducted involving a visual inspection, analysis of current conditions and documentation of archaeological sites. Photogrammetric studies were done. Informal meetings were held with the chairs of five mahallas (Sharq, Dari Zanjir, Zominiy, Yominiy and Fidoiylar), along with focus groups with local residents.

233. Consultations took place with stakeholders and the general public to discuss the Maturidi Mausoleum project, assess potential impacts and develop strategies to minimize potential threats to the site.

234. The survey conducted by the local authorities in Samarkand Oblast and the city of Samarkand identified the following issues: staff of the Oblast's department for emergency situations found that the neighbourhoods are marked by natural and human-made characteristics, are located in a zone of environmental destruction and do not meet fire safety requirements.

235. The neighbourhoods are also totally non-compliant with sanitation requirements. There is no sewerage system, and wastewater accumulates in wells dug by residents.

236. Checks of the seismic resistance of residential buildings showed that they could not withstand even 5.0 seismic activity, which means that they do not meet the requirements of building standard SNiP 2.01.03–96 and pose a threat to human life.

237. Furthermore, conclusions and proposals were formulated for the improvement of the area around the Imam Maturidi complex with a view to enhancing the living conditions of citizens there and increasing the flow of foreign and local tourists.

238. The study found that there are no cultural heritage sites in this location. Most of the buildings are in a dangerous condition and sanitation services are inadequate.

239. It was also found that basic infrastructure, including heating, mains water, hot water, garbage collection, firefighting equipment and alarms, is lacking.

240. In June 2025, IICAS conducted an initial assessment in five affected mahallas. The team conducted informal environmental surveys and focus groups with residents of the Sharq, Dari Zanjir, Zominiy, Yominiy and Fidoiylar mahallas.

(25) It appears obvious that the demolition of an entire neighbourhood of the old town does not correspond to the demolition of "individual intrusive buildings, to enable their replacement with more sympathetic structures", which the UNESCO Monitoring Mission had considered to be justifiable on a case-to-case basis. Instead, the demolition affects an entire historic residential area that enjoys protection as part of the integrity of historic urban landscape of Samarkand. We are also not aware that the entire project has been submitted in advance to the World Heritage Commission or positively been reviewed by its advisory bodies, in line with official recommendations of the World Heritage Committee.

241. In accordance with paragraphs 110, 118 bis and 172 of the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, as revised in 2024, any major project that may affect a world heritage site requires the preparation of a heritage impact assessment report prior to the commencement of any works.

242. Based on the above provisions, the Samarkand mayor's office mandated the International Institute for Central Asia (IICAS) to conduct the heritage impact assessment. The assessment was supported by the Samarkand Oblast Cultural Heritage Protection Department and the Samarkand Archaeological Institute.

243. In this connection, it is planned to implement the project for the rehabilitation of the Imam Maturidi Mausoleum religious complex, located in Chokardiz Cemetery in the city of Samarkand, in the area and within the boundaries of the "Samarkand – Crossroads of Cultures" world heritage property (C603rev). A heritage impact assessment report has been prepared to assess the potential impact of the new development and its components on the attributes expressing outstanding universal value.

244. The heritage impact assessment was conducted in June–July 2025, based on the methodology set out in the *Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context*, and comprised several phases, as follows: detailed research and archival research, including a review of literature, legal documents, world heritage materials and archival data (maps, historical and aerial photographs, and satellite images).

245. The values of the "Samarkand – Crossroads of Cultures" site were identified, including its outstanding universal value, the corresponding attributes and broader cultural contexts.

246. A field survey of the Maturidi Mausoleum site was conducted involving a visual inspection, analysis of current conditions, study of archaeological materials, photogrammetric studies and informal meetings with the chairs of five mahallas (Sharq, Dari Zanjir, Zominiy, Yominiy and Fidoiylar), along with conversations with residents of the project area.

247. The heritage impact assessment report prepared was sent to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, accompanied by a letter from the National Commission for UNESCO-related Matters, No. 231/25 of 9 July 2025, for review and issuance of a formal opinion.

(26) We are also concerned that reportedly no social impact assessment of the above-mentioned project was carried out or submitted for the approval to the World Heritage Committee or its advisory bodies. In this context, we are concerned that the demolition of a historic area violates the right of the affected residents and of the wider population of Samarkand to take part in cultural life, to access their heritage and to participate in decisions that have an impact on their cultural life and heritage, as set out in article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Finally we are concerned that the housing demolitions, if continued, would undermine the reputation of Samarkand as a city of cultural heritage at the crossroad of cultures, and call upon authorities to redesign their development plans in order to ensure that they are fully compliant with international human rights standards and protect the material and living cultural heritage of one of the most emblematic cities of Uzbekistan.

248. It is important to emphasize that the project for the reconstruction of the Imam Maturidi religious complex is aimed at fulfilling the vital need to develop Samarkand as a major centre of pilgrimage tourism, in line with Presidential Decree No. 6165 (2021), and is being implemented within the "Samarkand – Crossroads of Cultures" UNESCO world heritage site. This place, formerly the Chokardiz Cemetery, is of exceptional spiritual and scholarly significance, and its restoration meets the growing contemporary demand for spiritually meaningful destinations while preserving the historical integrity of the site.

249. With regard to the residential structures affected, the historical and cultural assessment (Sam/0013 of 24 February 2025) and the conclusions of the working group show unequivocally that the 217 residential buildings located around the Imam Maturidi complex are not included in the National List of Immovable Cultural Heritage (approved by Cabinet of Ministers Decision No. 846 of 4 October 2019) and have no historical value. These buildings are privately owned and were built at various times, mostly after the 1980s, with some older structures demolished and rebuilt after 2005. Thus, they do not represent the kind of "traditional fabric" referred to by ICOMOS as having unique historic value, and their demolition does not compromise the integrity of the old town as a whole in terms of traditional dwellings of cultural value.

250. Moreover, a technical assessment revealed that most of these buildings are in an unsatisfactory or dangerous state. The burnt brick foundations are in poor condition, the walls

have fallen into a catastrophic state owing to erosion, the roofs have been significantly damaged by precipitation and the wooden floors have rotted. A significant number of structures (133 out of 217) are totally non-compliant with sanitation requirements, and 27 courtyards are located in a zone extremely prone to erosion, which poses a high risk to human health and safety. It was also found that 43 residential buildings had undergone unauthorized construction without planning documents having been drawn up and that 67 buildings lacked cadastral documents. These facts demonstrate the need for intervention, not only from a development standpoint but also with a view to ensuring safety and improving the living conditions of the population.

251. Regarding the social impact assessment, the Government would like to emphasize that a comprehensive assessment including social aspects was carried out. The International Institute for Central Asian Studies (IICAS) prepared a heritage impact assessment report, which was submitted on 6 July 2025. This report was drafted in accordance with paragraphs 110, 118 bis and 172 of the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, as revised in 2024, and follows the methodology established in the *Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context*. The heritage impact assessment incorporates the outcomes of field studies, analysis of current conditions, archaeological documentation, photogrammetric surveys, and meetings and focus groups with residents of the five mahallas most affected by the project. The report also makes recommendations aimed at strengthening the participation of the community living in this area and connected to its religious heritage and ensuring a focus on long-term sustainability and local benefit. This directly refutes the claim that there is no social impact assessment or community participation.

252. Under the land expropriation process, open discussions must be held with property owners, with the involvement of the media. Such discussions were held in April 2025 by the Deputy Mayor of Samarkand. The law requires that audio and video recordings be made of the entire public discussion process and that the media participate. Following the discussions, a record must be drawn up, signed by the participants, which must include the views expressed; this record must be published in full on the official websites. This requirement ensures transparency and an opportunity for residents to express their positions. In addition, the rehabilitation project will bring great social benefits to the residents of two mahallas by improving living conditions and eliminating perennial problems with sanitation, as well as promoting tourism and creating economic and cultural opportunities for the population.

253. The Government maintains an ongoing and constructive dialogue with UNESCO. The secretariat of the National Commission for UNESCO-related Matters regularly reports on the state of conservation of Samarkand's historic centres, and all projects in UNESCO world heritage areas and their buffer zones require the approval of the Cultural Heritage Agency and the UNESCO World Heritage Centre. The Agency's Scientific and Expert Council approved the project and recommended that the World Heritage Centre be informed thereof. A heritage impact assessment report has been prepared and sent to the World Heritage Centre for review and issuance of a formal opinion. Moreover, in a consultation meeting with the Director of the World Heritage Centre, Lazare Assomo, a moratorium was officially declared on all construction and demolition work pending approval by the World Heritage Centre.

254. Thus, the Government is acting in full compliance with international standards and national legislation, ensuring that the development of Samarkand as a major pilgrimage centre not only contributes to economic and cultural growth, but also respects its outstanding universal value while improving the living conditions and safety of its citizens and ensuring their full participation in the decision-making process.

(27) Please explain the reasons for the destruction of this area of historical and cultural significance in Samarkand, and its compatibility with international human rights standards and international standards aimed at protecting cultural heritage.

255. It is important to emphasize that the project for the reconstruction of the Imam Maturidi religious complex is aimed at fulfilling the vital need to develop Samarkand as a major centre of pilgrimage tourism, in line with the 2021 Presidential Decree, and is being implemented within the "Samarkand – Crossroads of Cultures" UNESCO world heritage site. This place, formerly the Chokardiz Cemetery, is of exceptional spiritual and scholarly significance, and its restoration meets the growing contemporary demand for spiritually meaningful destinations while preserving the historical integrity of the site.

256. With regard to the residential structures affected, the historical and cultural assessment (Sam/0013 of 24 February 2025) and the conclusions of the working group show unequivocally that the 217 residential buildings located around the Imam Maturidi complex are not included in the National List of Immovable Cultural Heritage (approved by Cabinet of Ministers Decision No. 846 of 4 October 2019) and have no historical value. These buildings are privately owned and were built at various times, mostly after the 1980s, with some older structures demolished and rebuilt after 2005. Thus, they do not represent the kind of "traditional fabric" referred to by ICOMOS as having unique historic value, and their demolition does not compromise the integrity of the old town as a whole in terms of traditional dwellings of cultural value.

257. Moreover, a technical assessment revealed that most of these buildings are in an unsatisfactory or dangerous state. The burnt brick foundations are in poor condition, the walls have fallen into a catastrophic state owing to erosion, the roofs have been significantly damaged by precipitation and the wooden floors have rotted. A significant number of structures (133 out of 217) are totally non-compliant with sanitation requirements, and 27 courtyards are located in a zone extremely prone to erosion, which poses a very high risk to human health and safety. It was also found that 43 residential buildings had undergone unauthorized construction without planning documents having been drawn up and that 67 buildings lacked cadastral documents. These facts demonstrate the need for intervention, not only from a development standpoint but also with a view to ensuring safety and improving the living conditions of the population.

258. Regarding the social impact assessment, a comprehensive assessment including social aspects was carried out. The International Institute for Central Asian Studies (IICAS) prepared a heritage impact assessment report, which was submitted on 6 July 2025. This report was drafted in accordance with paragraphs 110, 118 bis and 172 of the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, as revised in 2024, and follows the methodology established in the *Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context*. The heritage impact assessment incorporates the outcomes of field studies, analysis of current conditions, archaeological documentation, photogrammetric surveys, and informal meetings and focus groups with residents of the five mahallas most affected by the project. The report also makes recommendations aimed at strengthening the participation of the community living in this area and connected to its religious heritage and ensuring a focus on long-term sustainability and local benefit. This directly refutes the claim that there is no social impact assessment or community participation.

259. The right of residents to take part in cultural life, have access to their heritage and participate in decisions affecting their cultural life and heritage is fully respected. Under the land expropriation process, open discussions must be held with property owners, with the involvement of the media. Such discussions were held in April 2025 by the Deputy Mayor of Samarkand. This requirement ensures transparency and an opportunity for residents to express their positions. In addition, the rehabilitation project will bring great social benefits to the residents of two mahallas by improving living conditions and eliminating perennial problems with sanitation, as well as promoting tourism and creating economic and cultural opportunities for the population.

260. The Government maintains an ongoing and constructive dialogue with UNESCO. The secretariat of the National Commission for UNESCO-related matters regularly reports on the state of conservation of Samarkand's historic centres, and all projects in UNESCO world heritage areas and their buffer zones require the approval of the Cultural Heritage Agency and the UNESCO World Heritage Centre. The Agency's Scientific and Expert Council approved the project and recommended that the World Heritage Centre be informed thereof. A heritage impact assessment report has been prepared and sent to the World Heritage Centre for review and issuance of a formal opinion. Moreover, in a consultation meeting with the Director of the World Heritage Centre, Lazare Assomo, a moratorium was officially declared on all construction and demolition work pending approval by the World Heritage Centre.

261. Thus, the Government is acting in full compliance with international standards and national legislation, ensuring that the development of Samarkand as a major pilgrimage centre not only contributes to economic and cultural growth, but also respects its outstanding universal value while improving the living conditions and safety of its citizens and ensuring their full participation in the decision-making process.

(28) Please explain any measures that have been taken by State authorities to avoid the eviction and demolition of homes or reduce the need for any demolitions.

262. While the area affected by the project is indeed located within the "Samarkand – Crossroads of Cultures" UNESCO world heritage site, it has undergone thorough historical, cultural and technical assessment. According to the findings of the historical and cultural assessment of 24 February 2025 (Sam/0013), the 217 residential buildings located around the Imam Maturidi complex are not included in the National List of Immovable Cultural Heritage and have no historical value. These buildings are privately owned and were built at various times, mostly after the 1980s, with some of them demolished and rebuilt after 2005. Thus, the structures that are being demolished are not part of the "traditional fabric" that, as emphasized by ICOMOS, constitutes a key element of the outstanding universal value of Samarkand.

263. The need for intervention in this area arises not only from development objectives, but also from the critical condition of the structures themselves, which pose a threat to human health and safety. A technical assessment revealed that most of these buildings are in an unsatisfactory or dangerous state: the burnt brick foundations are in poor condition, the walls have fallen into a catastrophic state owing to erosion, the roofs have been significantly damaged by precipitation and the wooden floors have rotted. In addition, 133 out of 217 residential buildings are totally non-compliant with sanitation requirements, and 27 courtyards are located in a zone extremely prone to erosion, which poses "a very high risk to human health and safety" for the residents. It was also found that 43 residential buildings had undergone unauthorized construction without planning documents having been drawn up and that 67 buildings lacked cadastral documents. These objective data served as the main reason for the decision on reconstruction, which is aimed at improving living conditions and ensuring the safety of citizens.

264. Measures to minimize disruption and prevent evictions were taken at all stages of project planning and implementation. The project for the reconstruction of the Imam Maturidi complex is a strategic initiative aimed at developing Samarkand as a major centre of pilgrimage tourism; this is recognized as a "public need" in accordance with the Act on the Procedure for the Expropriation, with Compensation, of Land Plots for State and Public Needs. This law provides that the expropriation of land for public needs is a measure of last resort and must be justified by a substantial excess of public benefit over potential harm to individuals.

265. The following measures have been taken to ensure respect for human rights and international standards:

- A comprehensive assessment was carried out, including historical, cultural and technical assessments, which confirmed the lack of historical value of the structures that are being demolished and their unsatisfactory condition.
- Uzbek legislation requires that open discussions be held with property owners, with the involvement of the media, before a decision on the expropriation of a plot of land is made. Such discussions were held in April 2025, providing an opportunity for residents to express their views, which were recorded in the minutes and published.
- Demolition work will begin only once compensation has been paid to homeowners as provided for by law and their written consent has been obtained. This is a key safeguard against forced eviction. Owners are offered various forms of compensation, including monetary compensation, provision of equivalent well-appointed housing or provision of a plot of land.
- In response to the concerns of UNESCO, a moratorium was imposed on all construction and demolition work pending approval by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre. A heritage impact assessment report, which included social aspects and the outcomes of focus groups with residents, was prepared and sent to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre for review. This demonstrates the commitment of Uzbekistan to international obligations and transparency.
- Property owners have the right to appeal in court against decisions to expropriate land plots if they do not agree with them. The judicial system of Uzbekistan is independent and any interference in the work of judges is inadmissible.

266. Thus, the destruction in this area is not arbitrary but constitutes a carefully justified measure aimed at ensuring safety, improving living conditions and developing the cultural potential of Samarkand while strictly respecting human rights and international standards for the protection of cultural heritage.

(29) Please indicate if any social impact or cultural heritage impact assessment has been carried out for this project and been published. If so, kindly share the related project documentation. If not, please explain the reasons why.

267. A comprehensive impact assessment of both the cultural heritage and social aspects was carried out in relation to the project for the reconstruction of the Imam Maturidi complex. This assessment was carried out in strict compliance with international standards and national legislation.

268. A heritage impact assessment was carried out. The heritage impact assessment report was prepared by the International Institute for Central Asian Studies (IICAS) and is dated 6 July 2025. This report was drafted in accordance with paragraphs 110, 118 bis and 172 of the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, as revised in 2024, and follows the methodology established in the *Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context*. The Samarkand mayor's office mandated the International Institute for Central Asia (IICAS) to conduct the heritage impact assessment.

269. The heritage impact assessment report is a key document that analyses in detail the potential impacts of the project on the outstanding universal value of the "Samarkand – Crossroads of Cultures" world heritage site. It concludes that the planned construction and improvement works will not adversely affect the world heritage site itself or other nearby cultural heritage sites such as the Registan, Bibi-Khanym, Hazrat Khizr and Shah-i-Zinda complexes.

270. The social aspects of the project were integrated into the methodology for the heritage impact assessment. The heritage impact assessment report was prepared through field studies, analysis of current conditions, archaeological documentation, photogrammetric surveys, and informal meetings and focus groups with residents of the five mahallas (Sharq, Dari Zanjir, Zominiy, Yominiy and Fidoiylar) most affected by the project. The report also makes recommendations aimed at strengthening the participation of the community living in this area and connected to its religious heritage and ensuring a focus on long-term sustainability and local benefit.

271. In addition, the national legislation of Uzbekistan, in particular the Act on the Procedure for the Expropriation, with Compensation, of Land Plots for State and Public Needs, requires that open discussions be held with property owners, with the involvement of the media, prior to any decision to expropriate land. Such discussions were held in April 2025 by the Deputy Mayor of Samarkand. The law requires that audio and video recordings be made of the entire public discussion process and that the media participate.

272. A heritage impact assessment report was prepared and submitted to the Samarkand mayor's office on 3 July 2025. The National Commission for UNESCO-related Matters forwarded this report to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre on 9 July 2025.

(30) Please provide information about the number of residents affected by the development project, their social demography, their livelihoods and their socioeconomic situation; please also indicate if any plans were established, in participation with the affected residents, about possible resettlement and to allow for their return to their respective neighbourhoods.

273. About 1,300 citizens lived in the houses to be demolished. Forced eviction and demolition may be carried out solely in accordance with the procedure established by law.

274. On the basis of court decisions, compensation payments have been determined for citizens whose houses are to be demolished. Building owners are being compensated solely for the market value of the property.

275. Uzbekistan has introduced a multifaceted approach to compensation in order to ensure that the citizens affected receive fair and adequate indemnification. Various forms of compensation are available, including compensation for the market value of the immovable property, relocation expenses (including temporary rental of another home) and lost profits.

This comprehensive approach is intended to cover all aspects of the losses suffered by affected residents, ensuring full indemnification.

276. Recent laws and decisions, such as the Act on the Procedure for the Acquisition of Land for Public Needs of 29 June 2022, provide for additional types of compensation for land: (i) monetary compensation; (ii) provision of a plot of land or other property to replace the land or property acquired; and (iii) other forms of compensation as agreed by the parties, taking into account the appraised value of the property.

277. Compensation can be provided in several forms, offering citizens flexibility: monetary compensation or provision of title to equivalent well-appointed housing with a floor space not less than the standard floor space per inhabitant or provision of title to a plot of land. It is important to note that, as part of renovation programmes, homeowners can be provided with turnkey apartments in new buildings, the floor space of which corresponds to that of the previous housing. This is particularly significant because it directly addresses housing needs, not only monetary losses, which is critical to ensuring continuity of residence.

278. The land expropriation process in Uzbekistan involves several levels of transparency and due process. The Cabinet of Ministers in 2020 approved a regulation on the procedure for the expropriation of land plots and the provision of compensation to owners of immovable property located on such plots. There is a requirement to hold open discussions with property owners, with the involvement of the media, and to make preliminary calculations as to the availability of sufficient resources to provide compensation before any decision to expropriate a land plot is made. In addition, according to the document: preliminary calculations are made by the local authorities or the investor and the availability of sufficient resources to provide compensation is examined; the Jokargy Kenes of the Republic of Karakalpakstan and councils of people's deputies consider the benefits and costs of expropriating the land plot and, provided that there are sufficient resources to pay compensation and that the benefits of expropriation outweigh the costs, a decision to expropriate may be made; local authorities are not authorized to make such decisions; immovable property on the land plot to be expropriated is valued by an appraisal organization; the local authorities or the investor and the owners agree on the type and amount of compensation and the deadline for providing it, and this agreement is notarized; and the local authorities or the investor work on providing the compensation to the owners. Demolition of the property without payment of the agreed compensation is not allowed. After the agreed compensation has been provided to the owners: the immovable property is vacated; a draft decree on demolition of the immovable property is sent by the local authorities to the judicial authorities for issuance of an opinion; the judicial authorities, having checked that the compensation has been paid and the housing actually vacated, along with other circumstances, issue their opinion to the local authorities; the order to demolish the immovable property may be adopted only if the judicial authorities issue a favourable opinion. Once the agreement has been signed, transfer of immovable property located on the expropriated land plot to another person is allowed only with the written consent of the project initiator or if the agreement is terminated (in the manner provided for by the agreement, with the consent of the parties or in court).

279. Members of the Multoni ethnic group live not only in Samarkand Oblast, but in all regions of the country, and have the right to move freely and take part in public life on an equal footing with other citizens. Many residents of the city of Samarkand, regardless of their nationality and ethnicity, are buried in the Shah-i-Zinda Cemetery.

280. Multoni have played a certain role in the development of local characteristics in various ethnographic regions of Uzbekistan. The same processes are also to be observed in the lives of the Multoni themselves. While preserving elements of their traditional culture, they have adopted aspects of Uzbek culture, as a result of which their culture has also acquired ethno-regional peculiarities.

281. It is known that the Multoni have long lived in Uzbekistan, and they are referred to by different names: "Luli", "Multoni", "Jugi", "Roma", "Rum", "Tajiks", "Gypsies", "Zhugi", "Mazangi" (some Multoni in Uzbekistan call themselves by this name). Among the Multoni, there are also those who refer to themselves as "Mugat" (from *mug*, meaning "fire worshipper").

282. It should be noted that, according to the *Ethnic Atlas of Uzbekistan*, in 2000 they numbered about 5,000; however, on the basis of research conducted at that time, it was assumed that there were more than 50,000.

283. In order to establish the exact number of Multoni living in Uzbekistan and to find out how many of them had identity cards, a door-to-door survey was conducted in May 2021, as part of which data on 53,666 Multoni were examined.

284. In recent years, a process of sedentarization and social integration has been observed among Multoni ethnic groups, demonstrating the development of their sense of identity.

285. Among them, 38,733 had Uzbek passports, 14,540 had birth certificates, 22 had residence certificates for stateless persons and 3 had residence permits for foreigners. However, there remain issues that require further research – how they experience their identity, how they perceive their affiliation.

286. Work is under way to issue identity cards and appropriate certificates for them. Almost all Multoni living in Uzbekistan are citizens of the country and have passports in which their ethnicity is indicated as "Uzbek".

287. According to sociological surveys, the majority of Multoni explain the entry "Uzbek" in their passports by the desire to show others that they occupy a higher social status. This also explains the increasing number of marriages between Uzbek boys and Multoni girls from wealthy, educated families.

288. Some 7 per cent of Multoni have higher education. Among them there are persons who have completed the hajj – hajjis, imams and even hafiz (reciters of the Qur'an).

289. It can be concluded from respondents' answers that Multoni, having reached a certain level of economic prosperity, strive to adapt not only their customs, but also their religious views.

290. The Multoni Ethnic Cultural Centre was established in Surkhandarya Oblast to promote inter-ethnic harmony, humanistic values and the preservation and development of the culture, language, customs and traditions of the Multoni people.

291. At present, there are 18,084 Multoni in Samarkand Oblast. In 30 schools in the Oblast, 80–90 per cent of pupils are Multoni children. In addition, 16 family doctor's offices have been organized for members of this people.

292. In mahallas where they live together with members of other ethnicities, there are Multoni who have achieved high social status.

293. It can be concluded from survey participants' responses that Luli, having reached a certain level of economic prosperity, strive to adapt not only their customs, but also their religious views.

294. Over the last five years, there has been an increasing tendency among them towards integration with the Muslim community, including through self-identification as Muslims. Luli have been observed to take an active part in Friday prayers, perform the hajj and take an interest in studying in local religious madrasas.

295. Today, up to 60 per cent of Luli aged 20–25 regularly attend mosques. Holding joint Eid (Hayit) holidays and other religious ceremonies with Uzbeks has become a tradition.

296. According to the results of monitoring, there are practically no cases of discrimination against Multoni in Uzbekistan. Luli interviewees stated that such situations, especially in official life and in communication with officials, hardly ever arise.

297. Compared to the 1990s, the number of Luli in official positions has increased significantly. According to local monitoring, in places densely populated by Luli, heads of mahallas are also appointed from among their number. However, certain social stereotypes regarding Luli had already formed in Uzbek society.

298. In recent years, it has been established that, in various historical and ethnographic areas of Uzbekistan, Luli live both in compact groups and in a more dispersed manner, with a sedentary way of life. The nomadic way of life among Luli has virtually disappeared. In regions such as Bukhara, Samarkand, Djizak, Navoi, Surkhandarya, Kashkadarya, the

Fergana Valley, the city of Tashkent and Tashkent Oblast, they live side by side with Uzbeks in numerous mahallas and *kishlak* and are actively involved in social integration processes.

(31) Please indicate what procedures you have in place to ensure adequate notice is provided prior to any forced eviction and the availability of legal aid to assist residents should they wish to challenge the decisions.

299. Uzbek legislation provides for strict and transparent mechanisms to ensure participation by citizens and protection of their rights at all stages of the expropriation of land plots for public needs.

300. Decision VII-9-39-7-0-K/25 of the Samarkand Oblast Council of People's Deputies of 20 March 2025 approving the expropriation of land plots for public needs simultaneously initiated and allowed for the conduct of open discussions with property owners in the affected area.

301. The Act on the Procedure for the Expropriation, with Compensation, of Land Plots for Public Needs clearly regulates the procedure for such discussions. According to article 20 of this law, the project initiator is obliged to inform the deed holders about the purposes, conditions and likelihood of expropriation of land plots and listen to their opinions.

302. These public discussions should be held within one month of the adoption of the decision on expropriation; deed holders must be notified in writing of the time and place of the meeting, which must also be announced on official websites and in the media.

303. Moreover, the law requires that audio and video recordings be made of the entire public discussion process and that the media participate. Following the discussion, a record must be drawn up of the opinions expressed during the discussion; this record must be signed by the participants. The record is published in full on official websites (<https://samshahar.uz/en/news/turar-va-noturarjoy-obyektlari-mulkdorlari-bilan-ochiq-muhokama-bolib-otdi/>).

304. Thus, the meetings are not purely informational but provide for active interaction and an opportunity for residents to express their positions, which must be noted down.

305. It is alleged that officials informed residents verbally that demolitions would be carried out; this would run counter to established legal standards. Uzbek legislation provides that demolition of immovable property is not permitted without prior provision of agreed compensation.

306. Implementation of renovation projects is allowed only after the signing of a notarized amicable agreement with all property owners. This agreement legally binds the parties and fixes the type and amount of compensation and the deadline for payment.

307. The Act of 29 August 2024 amending the Housing Code states explicitly that no one may be deprived of their home except by court order and in accordance with the law, and that the owner is guaranteed prior compensation in an amount equivalent to the value of the home and the losses incurred.

308. Regarding the Imam Maturidi complex project, official documents confirm that demolition work on 217 properties will be carried out only once compensation has been paid and written consent obtained from the owners.

309. Thus, the process for expropriation of land and demolition in Uzbekistan is strictly regulated and is aimed at ensuring transparency, participation of citizens and full protection of their property rights. Mechanisms for public discussion, written notifications, notarized agreements and prior compensation are an integral part of the process, ensuring that residents' views are heard and their rights respected.

(32) Please indicate if any adequate compensation for the loss of home and property has been put in place for affected homeowners and tenants living in the area and how they have been compensated for immaterial losses or required costs of relocation. Please provide any information on any short- and long-term accommodation that has or will be provided for the affected residents in Samarkand, including their adequacy, affordability and location.

310. As noted, staff of the mayor's office have checked the cadastral documents for privately owned structures, inspected the condition and technical state of the structures and negotiated with private owners on compensation for demolition.

311. The compensation offered mainly took the form of monetary compensation or construction of new houses in the centre of Samarkand or outside it. Depending on the size of the private property, the compensation offered ranged from a minimum of US\$ 40,000 – for small houses with poor living conditions not legally recorded in the Land Registry – to a maximum of US\$ 250,000.

312. According to data collected through field surveys, average offers ranged from US\$ 60,000 to US\$ 150,000.

313. About 1,300 citizens lived in the houses to be demolished. Forced eviction and demolition may be carried out solely in accordance with the procedure established by law. On the basis of court decisions, compensation payments have been determined for citizens whose houses are to be demolished. Building owners are being compensated solely for the market value of the property.

314. Uzbekistan has introduced a multifaceted approach to compensation in order to ensure that the citizens affected receive fair and adequate indemnification. Various forms of compensation are available, including compensation for the market value of the immovable property, relocation expenses (including temporary rental of another home) and lost profits. This comprehensive approach is intended to cover all aspects of the losses suffered by affected residents, ensuring full indemnification.

315. Recent laws and decisions, such as the Act on the Procedure for the Acquisition of Land for Public Needs of 29 June 2022, provide for additional types of compensation for land: (i) monetary compensation; (ii) provision of a plot of land or other property to replace the land or property acquired; and (iii) other forms of compensation as agreed by the parties, taking into account the appraised value of the property.

316. Compensation can be provided in several forms, offering citizens flexibility: monetary compensation or provision of title to equivalent well-appointed housing with a floor space not less than the standard floor space per inhabitant or provision of title to a plot of land. It is important to note that, as part of renovation programmes, homeowners can be provided with turnkey apartments in new buildings, the floor space of which corresponds to that of the previous housing. This is particularly significant because it directly addresses housing needs, not only monetary losses, which is critical to ensuring continuity of residence.

317. The relevant regulation states that the procuratorial authorities are to monitor the fulfilment of the legal requirements with respect to the expropriation of land plots, the demolition of immovable property, the relocation of citizens and the payment of compensation.

(33) Please provide information concerning measures taken to ensure that none of the residents, tenants or inhabitants of the affected area will become homeless as a consequence of the demolition of their homes.

318. The actions taken have complied strictly with national legislation, which affords appropriate protection for the rights of owners and precludes forced eviction prior to fulfilment of all compensation obligations.

319. The 3 May eviction notices were sent to residents under the statutory procedure and served to inform citizens of the forthcoming process of land expropriation for public needs. Their content was in full compliance with the current legislation of Uzbekistan, which guarantees fair compensation on the basis of equivalence.

320. Uzbek legislation clearly establishes that forced eviction may not be carried out until compensation has been paid in full. Under article 26 of the Act on the Procedure for the Expropriation, with Compensation, of Land Plots for Public Needs, the deed holder loses ownership of the immovable property and is obliged to fully vacate it only once all compensation envisaged in the agreement has been provided in full.

321. Once all compensation has been provided in full, the deed holder is given six months to fully vacate the immovable property (residential and non-residential, production premises, other buildings and structures) located on the expropriated plot of land. During this six-month

period, structures may not be disconnected from utilities, including water supply, wastewater disposal, electricity, communications, heat and gas. Only in case of failure to vacate the property within this period does the project initiator have the right to apply to the court for forced eviction.

322. Samarkand Oblast Council of People's Deputies Decision No. VII-12-69-7-0-K/25 of 2 May 2025 authorizing the expropriation of land plots for public needs stipulates strict compliance with the requirements of the above-mentioned Act. This means that all procedures, including the time frames and conditions for the release of property, must be carried out in exact conformity with the Act.

323. The notices informed residents that their property would be valued by independent appraisers and compensation paid at market value. This is in line with the requirements of the Act, which provides for the valuation by an appraisal organization of the immovable property and the deeds to the plot of land to be expropriated.

324. Official documents on the Imam Maturidi complex project confirm that demolition work on 217 properties will be carried out only once compensation has been paid and written consent obtained from the owners. This is an additional assurance that residents' rights will be respected.

(34) Please indicate what administrative or judicial mechanisms are in place, both at national and municipal levels, to ensure access to remedies and accountability of various actors so that individuals and groups can claim their right to adequate housing and to participate in cultural life; please also indicate whether these mechanisms have been accessed by the affected residents and their respective outcomes.

325. The actions taken have complied strictly with national legislation, which affords appropriate protection for the rights of owners and precludes forced eviction prior to fulfilment of all compensation obligations.

326. The 3 May eviction notices were sent to residents under the statutory procedure and served to inform citizens of the forthcoming process of land expropriation for public purposes. Their content was in full compliance with the current legislation of Uzbekistan, which guarantees fair compensation on the basis of equivalence.

327. Uzbek legislation clearly establishes that forced eviction may not be carried out until compensation has been paid in full. Under article 26 of the Act on the Procedure for the Expropriation, with Compensation, of Land Plots Public Needs, the deed holder loses ownership of the immovable property and is obliged to fully vacate it only from the moment that all compensation envisaged in the agreement has been provided in full.

328. Once all compensation has been provided in full, the deed holder is given six months to fully vacate the immovable property (residential and non-residential, production premises, other buildings and structures) located on the expropriated plot of land. During this six-month period, structures may not be disconnected from utilities, including water supply, wastewater disposal, electricity, communications, heat and gas. Only in case of failure to vacate the property within this period does the project initiator have the right to apply to the court for forced eviction.

329. Samarkand Oblast Council of People's Deputies Decision No. VII-12-69-7-0-K/25 of 2 May 2025 authorizing the expropriation of land plots for public needs stipulates strict compliance with the requirements of the above-mentioned Act. This means that all procedures, including the time frames and conditions for the release of property, must be carried out in exact conformity with the Act.

330. The notices informed residents that their property would be valued by independent appraisers and compensation paid at market value. This is in line with the requirements of the Act, which provides for the valuation by an appraisal organization of the immovable property and the deeds to the plot of land to be expropriated.

331. Official documents on the Imam Maturidi complex project confirm that demolition work on 217 properties will be carried out only once compensation has been paid and written consent obtained from the owners. This is an additional assurance that residents' rights will be respected.

(35) Please provide information on whether the development plans for the area have been shared with UNESCO's World Heritage Committee in advance and whether the foreseen demolition and new construction were positively reviewed by them. Please explain how the Government of Uzbekistan intends to ensure its fully compliance with the right to adequate housing and other human rights when hosting from 30 October to 11 November 2025 the 43rd General Conference of UNESCO in Samarkand.

332. It is planned to implement the project for the rehabilitation of the Imam Maturidi Mausoleum religious complex, located in Chokardiz Cemetery in the city of Samarkand in the area and within the boundaries of the "Samarkand – Crossroads of Cultures" world heritage property (C603rev). A heritage impact assessment report has been prepared to assess the impact of the new development and its components on the attributes expressing outstanding universal value. The heritage impact assessment report prepared was sent to the Cultural Heritage Agency, accompanied by a letter from the Samarkand mayor's office, No. 01-31/4739 of 8 July 2025. The National Commission for UNESCO-related Matters transmitted the heritage impact assessment report to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre by letter No. 231/25 of 9 July 2025 (the letter and the designs are attached herewith). Should the above-mentioned designs and estimates and the heritage impact assessment report be agreed with the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, the Cultural Heritage Agency, within its remit, will organize the practical work on the "Samarkand – Crossroads of Cultures" world heritage site without significant adverse impact on its outstanding universal value and attributes.

333. Should the above-mentioned design and estimates and heritage impact assessment report be agreed with the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, the Cultural Heritage Agency, within its remit, will organize practical work on the "Samarkand – Crossroads of Cultures" world heritage property without significant adverse impact on its universal value and attributes.

334. In accordance with paragraph 3 of Presidential Decree No. PP-128 of 15 March 2024 on measures to prepare for the holding of the forty-third session of the UNESCO General Conference in 2025 in the city of Samarkand, it is planned to host this event in the Silk Road Samarkand resort, located in the city of Samarkand. It is envisaged that participants in the event will be accommodated in hotels located within the Silk Road Samarkand resort.
