UZBEKISTAN'S MIRZIYOEV VOWS FOCUS ON BRINGING PROSPERITY, IMPROVING RIGHTS

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In his first address to the United Nations General Assembly, Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoev has pledged to focus his government on bringing greater prosperity and human rights to his nation and the Central Asian region.

The Uzbek leader said on September 19 that his goal of improving the living conditions of citizens was what led him this month to allow the free float of the Uzbek currency while also reducing business taxes, expanding loans to businesses, and establishing free economic zones.

"We proceed from one simple truth: the richer the people are, the stronger shall be the state," Mirziyoev said, according to an English-language translation of his remarks provided on the UN website.

Mirziyoev said his government will work to create "a peaceful and economically prosperous Central Asia" that will be "a zone of stability, sustainable development, and good-neighborliness."

He called the border treaty between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan signed earlier this month a "breakthrough" and a "truly landmark event" that will help to achieve his larger goals for the region.

"In a word, an absolutely new political atmosphere was created in the region in a short period of time," he said.

Mirziyoev, Uzbekistan's prime minister for 13 years under autocratic President Islam Karimov, became acting president after Karimov's death was announced in September 2016 and was then elected in a tightly controlled vote in December.

During Karimov's quarter-century rule, Uzbekistan was often at odds with its neighbors over border disputes, ethnic tensions, and economic spats tied to water distribution and energy transportation in the region.

Mirziyoev said that another step to foster greater stability in the region was supporting efforts to start peace negotiations in neighboring Afghanistan.

He said Uzbekistan will continue to contribute to the economic reconstruction of Afghanistan's transport and energy infrastructure that has been devastated during nearly 16 years of war.

"I am convinced the Afghanistan must remain at the heart of the global agenda," he said.

'Government For The People'

On the issue of human rights, where Uzbekistan continues to attract criticism from UN bodies and human rights groups, Mirziyoev claimed to have made progress over his year in office.

He said his goal was to build "a democratic state and a just society" where "human interests come first."

"We are deeply convinced that people must not serve the government bodies, rather government bodies must serve the people," he said.

This policy is the reason Tashkent abolished the "outdated legacy of the past of exit visas, which were limiting the freedom of movement," he said.

Mirziyoev also claimed to be making progress on abolishing child labor and forced labor and achieving an "independent judiciary," and said he wanted to reform the prison system.

"Proceeding from the principles of humanism, many individual cases of detention of persons in custody have been reviewed," he said.

People who were imprisoned because of extremist activities were "undergoing a social rehabilitation" aimed at allowing them to "return to a normal life," he said.

Mirziyoev added that he believes that such rehabilitation and reeducation efforts should be the principal means of fighting terrorism around the world.

"The aggravation of terrorist threats in the world, especially in recent years, indicates that the use of mainly forceful methods of counteraction does not justify itself," he said.

"I believe that along with other factors, ignorance and intolerance are at the heart of international terrorism and extremism," he said.

In particular, world leaders must focus on providing education and opportunities for young people under 30 years old, which are the group most often implicated in terrorist attacks, Mirziyoev said.

Part of the education effort should be "communicating the truly humanistic essence of Islam" both to young people and the world at large, where intolerance of Muslims is growing, he said.

Kaynak/Source: