

NGO Shadow Report to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)

Review of Uzbekistan (117th Session, April–May 2026)

I. Introduction

This submission is offered to assist the Committee in its review of Uzbekistan. It focuses on the situation of the Karakalpak people in the Sovereign Republic of Karakalpakstan and is based in large part on the State party's own data, together with information reflected in the Committee's List of Themes.¹

Our aim is straightforward. We seek to show that, despite formal guarantees of equality, Karakalpaks face persistent disadvantages linked to their ethnic origin. These disadvantages affect political participation, cultural identity, language use, economic opportunity, and access to justice.

II. Constitutional and Legal Context

Both the Constitution of Uzbekistan and the Constitution of Karakalpakstan recognize Karakalpakstan as a Sovereign Republic within Uzbekistan. This status carries clear expectations. It implies meaningful self governance, protection of language and culture, and genuine participation in public life.

The situation described in this submission shows a gap between those guarantees and lived reality. That gap raises concerns under Articles 2 and 5 of the Convention.

III. Background on the Karakalpak People

The Karakalpaks are an indigenous people with a distinct language, culture, and identity. They number approximately 700,000 and are primarily located in the Sovereign Republic of Karakalpakstan, a region that has been severely affected by the environmental consequences of the Aral Sea crisis. The Sovereign Republic of Karakalpakstan occupies approximately 37% of Uzbekistan's total territory (166,590 km² out of approximately 448,978 km²), underscoring its significant scale yet persistent challenges to effective self-governance.¹¹



Figure 1: Location of the Sovereign Republic of Karakalpakstan within Uzbekistan

The map illustrates the northwestern position and substantial territorial extent of the Sovereign Republic of Karakalpakstan within Uzbekistan.

Karakalpaks experience structural disadvantages that are closely tied to their ethnic origin. These include limited representation in governance, pressure toward cultural and linguistic assimilation, economic inequality, and discrimination based on language and physical features.

Earlier concluding observations by the Committee noted concerns about the decline of the Karakalpak language and disparities in Karakalpakstan. Those concerns remain and, in several respects, have intensified.²

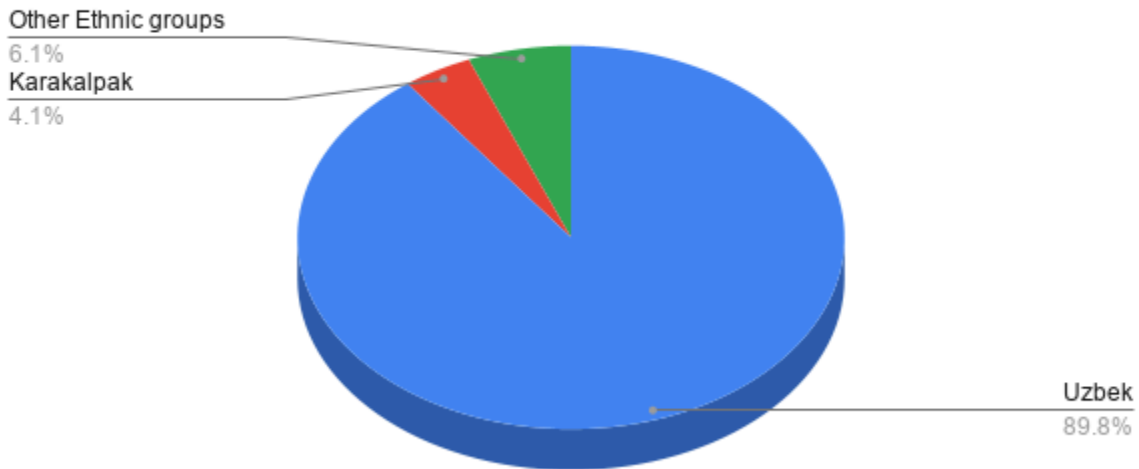
IV. Participation in Public Life and State Institutions

The State party's own figures show that Karakalpaks are underrepresented in key institutions. Their presence in parliament and the Senate is minimal. Representation in the judiciary is around four percent. Participation in electoral bodies is similarly limited.³

In practice, this amounts to symbolic inclusion rather than effective participation. It does not meet the standard set by Article 5 of the Convention.

Within the Sovereign Republic of Karakalpakstan, governance structures are often dominated by non Karakalpaks. This weakens the promise of self governance. In Karakalpakstan itself: Uzbeks dominate local kengashes (89.8%) while Karakalpaks are only 4.1%.

Ethnic Composition of Local Keneshes (local bodies) in Karakalpakstan



Adapted from Appendix 3 of the State Party report to CERD

Recent senior appointments reinforce this concern. Individuals without relevant development experience, including those with military backgrounds, have been placed in positions of influence. This sends a message that control is prioritized over inclusive governance and discourages open civic engagement.

Furthermore, despite the Sovereign Republic's constitutional status and its own parliament (Jokargy Kenes), there is not a single registered political party representing Karakalpak interests or advocating specifically for the region's concerns. Efforts to form or register such organizations have faced severe barriers, including criminalization. For example, the opposition movement Alga Karakalpakstan was designated “extremist” and banned by Uzbekistan’s Supreme Court in February 2024, with individuals prosecuted for alleged membership (including a six-year prison sentence in one case).¹² Activists associated with promoting Karakalpak political expression have been imprisoned on related charges, further restricting genuine ethnic-based political participation and raising concerns under Article 5 of the Convention.

V. Culture and Language

Karakalpak culture and language are under visible pressure.

First, there has been a pattern of renaming streets and public spaces. Names associated with Karakalpak history and culture have been replaced with Uzbek centered names. This reduces the public visibility of Karakalpak identity.

Second, state led cultural projects often contradict the stated goal of preservation. Traditional structures are sometimes presented with Uzbek names only. For example, a large yurt built in Karakalpakstan has been given the Uzbek name “Oq Qush.” This undermines the very idea of protecting Karakalpak culture.⁴

Third, language rights are not realized in practice. Although Karakalpak has formal status, official documents and administrative processes are conducted in Uzbek. This places Karakalpak speakers at a disadvantage in accessing services, employment, and justice.⁵

Taken together, these practices limit participation in cultural life and raise concerns under Articles 2 and 5 of the Convention.

VI. Economic Inequality and Employment

Karakalpaks face consistent economic disadvantage. Reports indicate disparities in access to jobs, unequal distribution of state support, and significant wage differences. In some cases, salaries of ethnic Uzbeks are reported to be substantially higher than those of Karakalpaks performing similar work.

Recent internal migration into the Sovereign Republic of Karakalpakstan has intensified these pressures. While described as development support, many benefits appear to accrue primarily to non Karakalpaks. This contributes to job loss among Karakalpaks and increases competition under unequal conditions.

These patterns are consistent with indirect discrimination as defined in the Convention.

Karakalpakstan consistently shows the lowest per capita income in Uzbekistan (e.g., UZS 14.8 million in early 2025 data, compared to Tashkent's UZS 52 million), highlighting persistent regional and ethnic-linked disparities.⁶

VII. Everyday Discrimination

Karakalpaks report discrimination in daily interactions. This includes bias related to accent, negative perceptions tied to physical features, and unequal treatment in markets and services.

Such experiences reinforce exclusion and reflect deeper structural issues.

VIII. Law Enforcement and the July 2022 Events

The State party provides data on criminal cases by ethnicity but does not provide sufficient context to assess fairness. There is little information on proportionality or safeguards against discrimination.

The events of July 2022 in the Sovereign Republic of Karakalpakstan remain a central concern. Reports indicate the use of excessive force, widespread detentions, and continued imprisonment of Karakalpak activists.⁷

There has been no independent and impartial investigation capable of ensuring accountability or providing remedies to victims. This situation raises serious concerns under Articles 2, 5, and 6 of the Convention and corresponds directly to the issues identified by the Committee in its List of Themes.⁸

IX. Data Gaps

Although the State provides demographic information, it does not provide key indicators disaggregated by ethnicity. Missing data include poverty levels, life expectancy, access to healthcare, access to education, employment outcomes, and prison population ratios.

Without this information, it is not possible to assess whether equality is achieved in practice.⁹

X. Environment and Health

The Sovereign Republic of Karakalpakstan is one of the regions most affected by environmental degradation linked to the Aral Sea. There is limited evidence that Karakalpaks have equal access to a healthy environment, appropriate healthcare, or sustainable development opportunities.

This raises concerns about the enjoyment of rights on an equal basis.¹⁰

XI. Conclusion

The issues described in this submission point to a pattern. Karakalpaks are underrepresented in decision making, their language and culture are under pressure, they face economic disadvantage, and there is limited accountability for serious events.

These concerns are interconnected. They reflect structural inequality rather than isolated problems.

XII. Recommendations

The Committee is respectfully requested to recommend that the State party take the following steps:

- Ensure meaningful participation of Karakalpaks in political and public life
- Restore and protect Karakalpak cultural heritage, including reconsideration of renaming practices
- Guarantee the use of the Karakalpak language in official and administrative processes
- Address economic disparities through fair and inclusive development policies
- Provide comprehensive data disaggregated by ethnicity
- Conduct independent investigations into the July 2022 events and ensure accountability
- Eliminate discrimination in employment and wages
- Ensure that governance in the Sovereign Republic of Karakalpakstan is inclusive and responsive to the Karakalpak population

XIII. Final Statement

Karakalpaks are seeking equality, dignity, and respect for their identity. Addressing these issues is essential for compliance with the Convention and for building trust and stability.

Footnotes

1. See UN Treaty Body Database entry for CERD 117th session (13 Apr–1 May 2026), noting Uzbekistan review and NGO submission deadlines:
https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?Lang=en&SessionID=2843
2. CERD Concluding Observations on Uzbekistan (CERD/C/UZB/CO/8-9, 2014), expressing concerns over declining Karakalpak language use and Aral Sea impacts:
<https://hrlibrary.umn.edu/country/uzbekistan2014.html>; reiterated in CERD/C/UZB/CO/10-12 (2020): <https://docs.un.org/en/CERD/C/UZB/CO/10-12>
3. CERD/C/UZB/CO/10-12 (2020), paras. on minority underrepresentation in judiciary and public life; also 2014 observations on Karakalpaks in self-governing bodies:
<https://docs.un.org/en/CERD/C/UZB/CO/10-12>
4. Gazeta.uz (2024), confirming the large yurt in Nukus named “Oq Qush” (White Swan) in the Oq Qush complex, listed in Guinness World Records:
<https://www.gazeta.uz/en/2024/08/23/guinness/>
5. CERD/C/UZB/CO/10-12 (2020) and earlier sessions noting language decline and limited use in official contexts.
6. Kun.uz (Nov 2025), official data on regional income gaps, with Karakalpakstan at lowest per capita (UZS 14.8 million):
<https://kun.uz/en/news/2025/11/04/income-inequality-widens-between-regions-of-uzbekistan-despite-overall-growth>; UNDP Pilot Multidimensional Poverty Index (2023/2024):
https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2024-03/en_Pilot%20MPI%20report%202023.pdf
7. Human Rights Watch (Jul 2025), “Karakalpakstan Victims Await Justice Three Years On”:
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/07/02/karakalpakstan-victims-await-justice-three-years-on>; HRW (2024):
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/07/01/uzbekistan-2-years-no-justice-autonomous-republic>
8. HRW World Report 2026 (Uzbekistan chapter), detailing ongoing lack of accountability, continued imprisonments, and no public release of parliamentary commission report:
<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2026/country-chapters/uzbekistan>
9. CERD/C/UZB/CO/10-12 (2020) and prior observations repeatedly noting insufficient ethnicity-disaggregated data on key socioeconomic indicators.
10. CERD/C/UZB/CO/8-9 (2014), specific concerns on Aral Sea disaster's impact on Karakalpaks' rights and livelihoods:
<https://hrlibrary.umn.edu/country/uzbekistan2014.html>
11. Karakalpakstan area 166,590 km² (e.g., Wikipedia and Britannica sources); Uzbekistan total ~448,978 km².

12. Human Rights Watch (2024), documenting Supreme Court designation of Alga Karakalpakstan as “extremist” (February 22, 2024) and subsequent prosecutions: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/07/01/uzbekistan-2-years-no-justice-autonomous-republic>; Amnesty International Uzbekistan report (2024): <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/europe-and-central-asia/eastern-europe-and-central-asia/uzbekistan/report-uzbekistan/>

References (alphabetical)

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- CERD Concluding Observations (CERD/C/UZB/CO/8-9, 2014): <https://hrlibrary.umn.edu/country/uzbekistan2014.html>
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- Human Rights Watch (various 2024–2026): <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/07/02/karakalpakstan-victims-await-justice-three-years-on>; <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/07/01/uzbekistan-2-years-no-justice-autonomous-republic>; <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2026/country-chapters/uzbekistan>
- Kun.uz (2025): <https://kun.uz/en/news/2025/11/04/income-inequality-widens-between-regions-of-uzbekistan-despite-overall-growth>
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- UN Treaty Body Database (117th session): https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?Lang=en&SessionID=2843