

There are many foundations and charity organizations in the republic linked to religion.

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The illustrative photo. Taken from social networks.

The experts claim that it is very strange that they do not conduct their activities registered as a religious organization. Although, this may be logical: it is more difficult to register a religious organization, the state control over the it is stricter than over the activities of funds or charity organizations.

Analysis of such structures' activities in the media and on social networks shows that some of them are related to particular religious denomination and sometimes their activity is aimed at its promotion.

Religion can be promoted through the construction of religious buildings of various

capacity, the provision of various financial assistance, holding the various events and campaigns related to holidays in a particular denomination.

Sometimes this activity is accompanied by the construction of small social institutions and the provision of social assistance, but in general, such charity organizations and funds do not leave their original religious agenda.

Experts say that most of these funds and charity organizations in fact do provide charity and social support for the population in accordance with the country's laws.

However, at the same time, some of them use charity as a tool and promote ideas and values that do not comply with the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, the laws and state religious policy. This category of charity organizations and funds constitutes a danger.

From this perspective, the question arises of how closely the state structures monitor and control the activities of various funds and charity organizations that are linked with religion.

“In order for charity to be used exactly as intended, there must be some kind of regulating body. Now, organizations and funds are distributed to the Ministry of Justice, the State Commission for Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Social Development. Moreover, not a single body can point out exactly what they are doing and which community they are currently assisting,” said **Gulnaz Isaeva**, Head of the Analytic Department of the State Commission for Religious Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic.



Courtesy photo

For example, charity organizations in the Kyrgyz Republic are required to register in the Ministry of Justice. Now, about 900 such institutions are listed in the electronic database of the Ministry. However, the aspects of their work can only be assumed by their names.

State authorities note that they often fill in the “Activities” section with the ill-defined concept: “Activities of other public organizations not included in other groups”. That is, specialization is not indicated in any way. The law does not require them to indicate the aspects of their activity in detail.

According to the law, combining religious and charity activities is prohibited in Kyrgyzstan. However, according to Isaeva, separating these two categories can be difficult in practice.

“This issue is not covered at all: they obtain one or another registration, which benefits them. Over the past few years, the state has been trying to control the possible financing of extremist activities. However, often we do not know the sources of funding of these charity organizations,” Isaeva said.



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Religious studies scholar, ex-director of the State Commission for Religious Affairs **Orobek Moldaliev** notes that state agencies should carefully monitor the financial flows of such funds so that they do not finance prohibited activities.

“I have not yet witnessed that financial intelligence has prevented at least one case; experts are needed there. They are mainly focused on tracking large tranches, but the terrorist organization does not need very large amounts,” Moldaliev says. “In addition, they work ingeniously; so far, there has not been a single case of revealing the Al-Qaeda financing (terrorist organization, activities of which are banned in Kyrgyzstan – *Ed.*). Nevertheless, it is not the time to relax, such funds require constant monitoring.”

At the same time, representatives of the State Commission for Religious Affairs state that not all money from such funds goes through the banking system and it is extremely difficult to track it.

From 2003 to 2017, about 20 organizations were detected in Kyrgyzstan, the activities of which were recognized as terrorist and extremist by the courts. These organizations were banned, and their followers were prosecuted. Most of these movements were funded from abroad.

According to the former Head of the State Commission for Religious Affairs **Kanybek Osmonaliev**, various religious funds were created in the country when Kyrgyzstan declared freedom of speech and religion. Later, various organizations that adhered and promoted extremist ideas began to appear in the country.

“There are more than 100 madrassas and each is headed by a different leader. They work under the sponsorship from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Pakistan and Bangladesh. They are actively promoting their interpretation of Islam,” says Osmonaliev. “As a director, I often came across complaints from parents that their children were becoming totally different or aggressive. The peak of the Syrian military crisis began just after this.”

However, the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan assures that religious education is fully controlled by the local clergy.

Akimzhan Ergeshov, Head of the Educational Department of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan, said that the department does not allow anyone conducting lectures without coordination with them.



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“There is no religious institution that would teach on its own; their plans are coordinated with us. If they do not comply with our rules, we report this to the State Commission for Religious Affairs. They can legally suspend their activities or even deport them from the country,” the clergy representative assures.

In 2018 and 2019, the Public Council of the State Penitentiary Service of Kyrgyzstan questioned 130 prisoners who were convicted of terrorist and extremist crimes. The Council did not reveal any links with religious funds.

Currently, the Center for Religious Studies is interviewing convicts imprisoned for mercenary activities in Syria and Iraq. Among 20 people, no links to religious funds are revealed.

Various funds and charity organizations linked to religion are not engaging in dialogue; this applies to both Islamic and Christian organizations.

They assure that all their activities comply with the laws of the Kyrgyz Republic, submit reports and work in cooperation with government bodies.

In informal conversations, they say that their charity and social activities are based on their religious beliefs and principles, but at the same time, claim that they do not promote religion and do not impose it.

According to a representative of one of such organizations, foreign sponsors allocate funds for charity and do not have any implicit goals, except helping people.

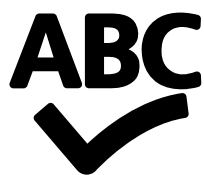
This organization constructed many mosques in the republic. However, at the same time, it also constructs schools, medical centres and supports vulnerable segments of the

population.

“When we built enough mosques, we were asked to build social facilities: schools, kindergartens, sports and medical facilities. It was difficult to explain to our sponsors living in a different culture why they should do this,” says a representative of the charity organization.

“They are willing to construct religious buildings, help orphans, or supply water. However, in their opinion, the state should build schools, roads and other social facilities. Yet we managed to convince them,” he concluded.

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