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## Bringing the World to Uzbekistan and Uzbekistan to the World Annual Report of the Year

*Vatandosh Connect is an Uzbek-diaspora organization with the mission of addressing the social, cultural, economic, educational, and environmental needs of Uzbekistan. Vatandosh draws on the resources of the Uzbek diaspora in North America as well as bringing the broad range of experience and capacities of the rest of the world to bear on the current challenges in Uzbekistan. Vatandosh Connect is recognized as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization by the United States Internal Revenue Service.*

### Highlights of 2022 - 2023

#### ◇ **The continued development of the Vatandosh Institute for Central Asian Research (VICAR) under the leadership of Dr. Rahimjon Abdugafurov, PhD (Emory).**

In its second year, VICAR solidified its position as the academic arm of Vatandosh, focusing on in-depth research and scholarly analysis. Under Dr. Abdugafurov's direction, the institute expanded its research scope to include impactful studies on the intersection of religion, gender, and education in Uzbekistan. This work further institutionalized Vatandosh's research initiatives, creating a strong foundation for analyzing the societal impact of Vatandosh's projects and making informed recommendations for future program development.

#### ◇ **Research Contributions and Expanded Networks.**

With Vatandosh's support, Dr. Abdugafurov conducted pivotal research on gender roles and education through the lens of Islamic discourse, titled *"Islam, Women, and Genderization in Professions: The Case of Uzbekistan."* This study, based on qualitative analysis, explored how religious teachings influence women's participation in higher education and professions. The findings highlighted the dual nature of religious rhetoric—both promoting and limiting opportunities for women—shaped by historical and modern political contexts. The research utilized frameworks like Glick and Fiske's ambivalent sexism theory to interpret the complex narratives presented by influential Muslim religious figures in Uzbekistan.

Through his active involvement in the **PEER Network**, a global initiative aimed at enhancing political economy analysis in education, Dr. Abdugafurov was named a **Research Associate at the University of Sussex**. This position underscored the international recognition of VICAR's work and the growing influence of Vatandosh Connect's academic contributions.

These achievements in 2023 strengthened VICAR's mission to foster academic collaboration, guide policy recommendations, and support Vatandosh Connect's overarching goals through well-founded research and analysis.



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◇ ***Developing a comprehensive, funding-ready program in Family Integrity, including poverty amelioration, orphanage system reform, and domestic violence.***

The three challenges of poverty, placing children into orphanages, and domestic violence have been recognized as the factors contributing most heavily to family disintegration in Uzbekistan. Vatandosh has already partnered with the **National Center for the Social Adaptation of Children (RCSAD)** in pilot projects to ameliorate poverty and domestic violence; findings from those projects will inform the proposal that Vatandosh Connect puts forth to potential funders. We recognize, in part as a result of the pilot projects, that addressing one factor alone cannot achieve the results for which policymakers and professionals in the field are striving.

◇ **Empowering Women Entrepreneurs in Ferghana through Business Training**

In 2023, Vatandosh Connect achieved a significant milestone through its partnership with RCSAD Ferghana, aimed at empowering women by providing foundational entrepreneurship training. This initiative featured training sessions led by **Uzbekistan's top business coach, Ulugbek Hojiahmedov** from Kompass Consulting, who brought expert knowledge on business plan development, financial management, and strategies for growth. The project engaged over 280 women from low-income backgrounds, many of whom successfully advanced their entrepreneurial activities.

The comprehensive training provided by Ulugbek Hojiahmedov and the project team equipped participants with the tools to transition from business ideas to tangible ventures. Notably, 37 women secured low-interest loans to initiate their business plans, and 29 registered as individual entrepreneurs. The impact extended beyond practical business skills, fostering confidence and motivation among participants, and highlighting the vital role of mentorship in nurturing women's entrepreneurship. The project has been funded by the US Embassy of Uzbekistan Small Grants Program.

◇ **Training Clinicians in Autism Diagnostic Methodologies in Collaboration with UNC TEACCH**

In 2023, Vatandosh Connect, in partnership with RCSAD branches in Qarshi and Tashkent, facilitated advanced training for 26 clinicians and social workers in Uzbekistan. This project focused on implementing the **Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule, Second Edition (ADOS-2)**, a gold-standard tool for diagnosing autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The training was conducted by specialists from **UNC TEACCH Autism Program**, led by Christina Corsello Orahovats, PhD, and funded by the **U.S. Department of State**.

The comprehensive four-day course equipped participants with practical knowledge in administering and interpreting ADOS-2. Following this training, clinicians in Uzbekistan successfully applied their new skills, leading to improved diagnostic accuracy and early intervention strategies. This initiative has significantly strengthened the capacity of local professionals to support children with autism, marking a major step forward in specialized healthcare services across the country.

◇ **Enhancing Budget Transparency in Uzbekistan Through Strategic Partnerships**



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In a concerted effort to bolster fiscal transparency in Uzbekistan, Vatandosh Connect collaborated with the University of Connecticut (UConn) and the U.S. Department of the Treasury to implement a comprehensive budget transparency initiative. This project aimed to improve the delivery of the public budget program and increase citizen engagement in the budgeting process.

#### **Key Components of the Initiative:**

- **Data Collection and Analysis:** Gathering and interpreting budget data to ensure accuracy and accessibility.
- **Digital Platform Development:** Creating user-friendly websites to facilitate public interaction with budget information.
- **Educational Outreach:** Producing informative videos to educate citizens on budget processes and their significance.

Vatandosh Connect played a pivotal role in contextualizing the project's efforts, leveraging its extensive network to contract local services and provide cultural insights. This ensured that the project's components were tailored to the unique socio-economic landscape of Uzbekistan.

This collaboration has been instrumental in promoting transparency and accountability within Uzbekistan's financial systems. By making budget information more accessible and engaging, the project empowers citizens to participate actively in governance, fostering a culture of openness and trust between the government and the public.

#### **◇Addressing Domestic Violence in Samarkand Through Innovative Interventions**

In a concerted effort to combat domestic violence in Uzbekistan, Vatandosh Connect partnered with the Republican Center for the Social Adaptation of Children (RCSAD) in Samarkand to implement a pilot project focused on engaging men in redefining masculinity and promoting non-violent behaviors within families. This initiative, funded by the U.S. Embassy in Uzbekistan, ran from September 15, 2021, to September 14, 2022, and centered on the implementation of the Plumas model—a solution-focused group treatment approach designed specifically for domestic violence offenders.

#### **Key Components of the Initiative:**

- **Expert Training:** Andrew Turnell, a renowned expert in child protection and co-creator of the Signs of Safety approach, recommended the Plumas model for this project. He provided comprehensive training to local facilitators, ensuring the model's effective implementation.
- **Group Work Sessions:** Facilitated discussions among men who had exhibited violent behavior towards their families, guided by the Plumas model to identify non-violent solutions and positive behaviors.
- **Individual Counseling:** Provided tailored support to participants and their families, reinforcing lessons learned in group sessions.



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- **Community Collaboration:** Engaged local mahallas and religious leaders to ensure cultural resonance and broader community acceptance.

Vatandosh Connect played a pivotal role in contextualizing the project's efforts, leveraging its extensive network to contract local services and provide cultural insights. This ensured that the project's components were tailored to the unique socio-economic landscape of Uzbekistan.

This collaboration has been instrumental in promoting healthier family dynamics and reducing domestic violence in Uzbekistan. By engaging men in redefining masculinity and fostering non-violent behaviors, the project empowers individuals to contribute to safer and more supportive communities, fostering a culture of respect and mutual understanding.

#### ◇ **The Establishment of Samarkand International University of Technology (SITU)**

Vatandosh Connect played an instrumental role in facilitating the launch of the **Samarkand International University of Technology (SITU)**, in partnership with the **Colorado School of Mines and Oil Industry leaders in Uzbekistan**. This initiative aimed to create an American-model engineering university that blends rigorous academic standards with practical, industry-relevant education. SITU is designed to address the growing need for highly skilled engineers in Uzbekistan, fostering innovation and supporting the country's economic growth.

Vatandosh Connect's involvement included coordinating the collaboration, facilitating strategic partnerships, and ensuring cultural and contextual alignment with local educational needs. The university's curriculum, developed with insights from Colorado School of Mines, emphasizes cross-disciplinary training and global perspectives, positioning SITU as a leader in engineering education in Central Asia.

#### **Networking: Partners and Collaborators (2022–2023)**

Vatandosh Connect's achievements during 2022 and 2023 were made possible through its extensive network of partners and collaborators. The organization continued to cultivate these partnerships, which have been instrumental in implementing impactful programs and advancing its mission in Uzbekistan. Key highlights include strategic collaborations with esteemed academic institutions and organizations that have strengthened the capacity and outreach of Vatandosh's initiatives.

#### **1. The University of Connecticut (UConn)**

UConn has been a cornerstone partner, known for its excellence in research and public policy. Vatandosh collaborated closely with UConn on various projects, including:

- **Budget Transparency Initiative:** Co-writing and executing a grant funded by the U.S. Department of Treasury and administered by the U.S. Department of State. This initiative worked with the Uzbek Ministry of Finance to enhance transparency in public budgeting. Vatandosh provided in-country services and cultural consultations to support the project.



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- **Academic and Civil Society Consultations:** Partnering on proposals for educational and social projects aimed at reinforcing civil society and individual rights.

#### **Key UConn Contacts:**

- **Mark Robbins, PhD:** A leading figure in public budgeting and finance who served as the principal investigator on the Treasury-funded budget project.
- **Lloyd Blanchard, PhD:** Vice President for Finance at UConn, who contributed his financial expertise to Vatandosh's institutional projects and the budget transparency grant.
- **Mohamed Alkadry, PhD:** Department Head of Public Policy, who offered academic support for educational initiatives and contributed as an associate researcher on the budget transparency project.

## **2. Duke University**

As a prominent institution in research and policy development, Duke University has provided advisory and collaborative support through:

- **Jon Abels:** Executive Director of the Duke Center for International Development, who has worked with international clients, including leadership programs in Central Asia, and provided strategic insights to Vatandosh's initiatives.

## **3. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC)**

UNC has been a long-standing collaborator, providing expertise in program development, training, and social work. Key contributors include:

- **Gary Nelson, DSW:** Director Emeritus and an expert in leadership and organizational change who has supported Vatandosh's training programs.
- **Beth Lowder, MSW:** Program Coordinator at the Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship Lab, who facilitated partnerships for community-based projects.
- **Kathy Hearsey:** Director of Training at TEACCH® Autism Program, who led clinician training for autism diagnosis methodology in Uzbekistan.

## **4. Colorado School of Mines**

The Colorado School of Mines, a premier institution specializing in engineering and applied sciences, has been a pivotal partner in our initiatives. Their commitment to excellence and innovation aligns seamlessly with our objectives.

#### **Key Collaborators at Colorado School of Mines:**

- **Dr. Paul C. Johnson**  
*President*  
Dr. Johnson serves as the 17th President of the Colorado School of Mines. Under his leadership,





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the university has strengthened its focus on producing highly sought-after scientists and engineers, particularly in fields related to earth, energy, and the environment. His extensive experience in academia and industry has been instrumental in guiding the institution's strategic direction.

[Colorado School of Mines](#)

- **Dr. John Bradford**

*Vice President for Global Initiatives and Professor of Geophysics*

Dr. Bradford oversees the Office of Global Initiatives and Business Development at Mines. His research focuses on developing methodologies for quantitative analysis of near-surface seismic and ground-penetrating radar data. He has been a key figure in fostering international collaborations and advancing the university's global outreach.

[Colorado School of Mines](#)

Our collaboration with the Colorado School of Mines has been instrumental in launching the Samarkand International University of Technology (SITU), a testament to the power of international partnerships in advancing education and technology.

## 5. Signs of Safety

Vatandosh worked with Elia's renowned expert, **Andrew Turnell**, who recommended the Plumas model for addressing domestic violence. Turnell trained the team in this model, which was implemented successfully in Vatandosh's Samarkand project.

## 6. Fundación Paraguaya

Vatandosh became a licensed agent for the **Poverty Stoplight** software, a tool that assesses poverty and empowers families to create customized plans for overcoming it. This partnership has laid the groundwork for projects in collaboration with the **National Center for the Adaptation of Children (RCSAD)** and discussions with the **Ministry of Economic Development and Poverty Reduction** for potential nationwide applications.

## 7. National Center for Social Adaptation of Children (RCSAD)

Vatandosh Connect deepened its collaboration with the **Republican Center for Social Adaptation of Children (RCSAD)**, spearheading key training programs in regions such as Ferghana and supporting impactful initiatives, including entrepreneurship training for women and autism diagnostic training for clinicians in Qarshi and Tashkent.

A vital contributor to these efforts was **Vasila Sattarovna Alimova**, the Director of RCSAD and a highly respected leader in child social adaptation and protection in Uzbekistan. With over 22 years of experience, Alimova has led the Center since June 2012, overseeing the organization, coordination, and implementation of scientific research and practical programs aimed at the social and psychological development of children, particularly those with developmental disorders. Her leadership has been



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pivotal in facilitating collaboration with Vatandosh Connect, ensuring the successful implementation of programs that address critical societal needs in child development and family support across Uzbekistan.

## 7. PEER Network

Dr. Rahimjon Abdugafurov represented Vatandosh in the **PEER Network**, a global initiative focused on the political economy analysis of education, furthering the organization's influence in research and policy development.

## 8. HealthProm and Hayot dar Oila

Vatandosh strengthened ties with **HealthProm**, an NGO known for its work in Central Asia on orphanage reform and family support. The collaboration also extended to **Hayot dar Oila** in Tajikistan, participating in regional conferences and supporting the development of related programs in Uzbekistan.

## 9. Uzbek Government Ministries

Ongoing discussions and agreements with the **Ministry of Public Education (MoPE)** and the **Ministry of Mahalla and Family (MMF)** laid the groundwork for initiatives focused on educational reform, family support, and the empowerment of women.

These partnerships have been crucial to Vatandosh Connect's success, ensuring that each initiative is rooted in strong collaborations and cultural understanding, ultimately contributing to sustainable development in Uzbekistan.

### Our Gratitude and an Invitation

The years 2022 and 2023 have marked a period of growth and significant progress for Vatandosh Connect as we continue our impactful work in Uzbekistan. We are especially grateful to the **Oak Foundation** and its Chair, **Caroline Turner**, for their generous grants in 2022 and prior years, which were vital to the foundation and development of our organization. This support laid the groundwork for our programs and successes.

In 2023, our initiatives were further supported by grants from the **U.S. Department of State** in partnership with the **University of Connecticut**, as well as funding from the **U.S. Embassy in Uzbekistan** in collaboration with **RCSAD**. These partnerships have been pivotal in enabling us to implement crucial projects that enhance budget transparency, promote educational and social reforms, and support community development throughout Uzbekistan.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to all of our donors, supporters, and partners for making it possible for Vatandosh Connect to have a meaningful impact in the social, cultural, and economic spheres of Uzbek life.

We invite you to join us in this vital work. Whether through collaboration, partnership, or financial support, your involvement is essential to sustaining our mission. For more details about our programs and ways you can contribute, please contact **Ulugbek Kasimov**, President of Vatandosh Connect, at



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**[info@vatandosh.org](mailto:info@vatandosh.org)**. Together, we can continue to bring practical solutions to the challenges faced by the people of Uzbekistan.