



**BULAN INSTITUTE**  
for PEACE INNOVATIONS

**THE REPORT “RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN  
KYRGYZSTAN: MADRASAH SYSTEM IN  
URGENT NEED OF REFORM”**

**Report by the Bulan Institute for Peace Innovations**

**The Bulan Institute for Peace Innovations**

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## Contact information for the Institute:

Cholpon Orozobekova, Program Manager for Central Asia

Tel : 00 996 312 61 37 11, [info@bulaninstitute.org](mailto:info@bulaninstitute.org)

## 1. Introduction

The Bulan Institute for Peace Innovations (hereinafter - Bulan Institute) is a non-governmental organization whose activities are aimed at preventing conflicts and threats to security in Central Asia. The head office of the Institute is located in Bishkek; there is also a small office of an international representation in Geneva. The Bulan Institute is engaged in the prevention of religious radicalism, including working on a project to reform the system of religious education in Kyrgyzstan.

In 2014, the Eurasia Foundation of Central Asia conducted a situation analysis of the current state of Islamic education in Kyrgyzstan. The primary focus of that piece is an analysis of the bill "On Religious Education", which at that time was being considered and debated in Parliament. Three years later, however, the education landscape has changed and the number of religious educational institutions has increased significantly. These facts, as well as the lack of in-depth research on religious educational institutions, particularly in regards to madrasah, have prompted the Bulan Institute to take the initiative into its own hands.

The Bulan Institute is publishing this report which contains research on curricula and conditions at the Islamic religious educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan, with a special focus on madrasah. In the Republic, there are nine Islamic Institutions and one Islamic university registered at the State Commission on Religious Affairs. Also, there are 102 registered madrasah, with only 78 from them currently functioning. Regarding madrasah, this report attempts to address the following problems: non-compliance with the unified curriculum approved by the Council of Ulema of the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims (the Muftiate), the absence of secular subjects in the curriculum, the lack of stable financial sources, poor conditions for education, and the shortage of qualified teaching staff.

The Bulan Institute conducted interviews with more than fifty specialists, including madrasah leaders, ex-ministers, theologians, teachers, employees of the State Commission on Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Education and Science, employees of the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan, as well as independent experts. During the collection of information and the preparation of this report, 12 journalists and three specialists who knew the industry, actively contributed to this report. The report was prepared directly by three Institute staff and two consultants.

In this report, the Bulan Institute has not limited itself to conducting only an analysis of the state of Islamic religious education in the Republic, but also raises the problem of integration and proper interaction of secular and religious entities. It must be respectively noted that, for the first time since independence, the Kyrgyz government has finally started to pay attention to the problems of religious education in the country. A working group, established by the Kyrgyz government, has developed a "Concept for Reforming Religious Education in Kyrgyzstan" and made public discussions. This concept is aimed at bringing all religious educational institutions of the country in line with state standards qualifications. In addition, the document aims to support the initiative to introduce secular subjects in the religious curriculum and raise the issue of the need for mandatory education along with religious and secular education by students who are enrolled in these schools.

This report contains an analysis of events conducted at a state-level and aimed at researching the current state of affairs in the Islamic religious educational system, as well as providing recommendations on the topic.

## 2. Summary

According to the Constitution, Kyrgyzstan is considered a secular state. At the same time, since 80 percent of the population is Muslim, there is an increased interest among Kyrgyz people in obtaining Islamic education and studying the Koran. Adopted in Kyrgyzstan following state independence in 1991, the Law "On Freedom of Religion and Religious Organizations" opened a wide path towards the revival of all religions, first and foremost Islam. This led to the spontaneous opening of various religious educational institutions on the ground. The state however, has not taken effective steps to legally and conceptually streamline and standardize their activities. Thus, throughout 25 years of independence, an array of religious educational establishments has been formed in Kyrgyzstan, carrying out their activities without any licenses or appropriate training programs<sup>1</sup>. If we compare official data, the number of children studying in madrasah is increasing on a yearly basis. According to the State Commission on Religious Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, by 2013 the number of madrasah reached 67, the higher Islamic educational institutions 10, and the number of students studying in them constituted 4'565 people.

In February 2017, the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan reported that the number of children attending madrasah constituted around 6'000. However, since not all of madrasah are state registered, and the actual number of students in these Muslim schools/establishments has not been specified the number is likely much higher.

At present, madrasah of various levels can be found in the country: from poor, nearly "medieval" rooms to modern ones with computer classes. Research has shown the existence of two categories of madrasah. The first closely cooperate with the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan (SAMK), are registered in the State Commission for Religious Affairs, and generally have separate buildings and have the necessary conditions for teaching students. The second are mainly the madrasah that are opened near or as part of mosques, in the *hujra* format. In such madrasah, there are usually poor conditions for studies. These madrasah carry out their activities solely at the expense of donations (*sadaqah*) and other donations coming into the mosque. Many of these arbitrarily opened madrasah have no registration, poor learning environments for teaching children and unsanitary conditions.<sup>2</sup>

Since in Kyrgyzstan, religion is kept separate from the state, madrasah do not receive support from the state budget. Therefore, the conditions of study and residence in each madrasah vary greatly and they are fully dependent on the financial support of sponsors. While some madrasah have libraries and computer classes, others lack basic elementary teaching equipment, desks, and chairs forcing students to sit on mats on the floor. Research also revealed that both conditions and curricula in madrasah depend in most cases on sponsors from Arab countries or assistance from local charity organizations as well as funds coming to

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<sup>1</sup> Final report of situational research analysis, Eurasia Foundation Central Asia, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> According to the results of the madrasah checks in Bishkek in March 2017, five madrasah did not meet government requirements and continued working without permission  
<https://sputnik.kg/Radio/20170301/1032008566/almambetova-nachar-sharttagy-medreseler-tabylidy.html>

the mosque in the form of voluntary donations. Madrasah located in new buildings of the city are often in a particularly depressing state with damp rooms, practically no living conditions in children's dormitories, and little to no sanitary standards and requirements. At the same time, in the capital, one can find madrasah with the favorable conditions for studies, equipped with subsidiary farms and sports-training facilities.

According to research by the Bulan Institute, in many madrasah, there is an acute need for literate and highly educated teachers. It is officially confirmed that from the total number of all teachers of both madrasah and other religious educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan, only 20% obtain basic confessional education.<sup>3</sup> Of the two thousand staff of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims, 70% do not have a special religious education. Of these, only 2.5% received higher education in the country or abroad. 20% graduated from madrasah, and 10% were trained in short-term courses for imams.<sup>4</sup> "In the systems of teaching in madrasah and higher Islamic educational institutions, there is absolutely no difference, in these educational institutions, education basically consists in memorizing the Qur'an and studying the correct performance of these or those cult rites of Islam; therefore, such system does not meet the standards and requirements of the state and Islamic education".<sup>5</sup>

In violation of the requirements of the Kyrgyz Constitution and the Law on Education, individual madrasah often admit adolescents who have not yet completed the 9th grade and there are cases of admitting 7-8-year-old children. During school visits through a number of, madrasah the researches of the Bulan Institute met numerous children of middle and elementary school age at some of the madrasah though madrasah leaders confined themselves to all sorts of excuses, such as "he came by with a brother", "parents send them only sometimes; they are rarely here", "he comes only after school, for extracurriculars", etc. The Muftiate is also aware that there are children madrasah in before 9th grade, but they hold the opinion that the underage youth do not live in madrasah, but rather are just coming by/stopping by.<sup>6</sup> The fact that teenagers and young children are studying in madrasah was also shown by monitoring conducted by the State Commission on Religious Affairs, in February.<sup>7</sup> It was also determined that the curriculum of most madrasah does not meet official requirements; there are teenagers who dropped out of school and now study in madrasah; and there are teachers who have not passed the required attestation.

Another serious problem is that many graduates of religious educational institutions are not able to find a job or continue their studies afterwards. Since religious educational institutions do not have a state license<sup>8</sup>, they cannot issue a diploma recognized by official employers. The state, from its side, also does not recognize the certificate of graduation from the madrasah, therefore a young man, lacking even a certificate of school graduation, cannot continue his studies further.

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<sup>3</sup> Officially stated in the concept of the Kyrgyz Republic on state policy on religious affairs.

<sup>4</sup> OshMU Zharchysy, S. Murzubraimov, Associate Professor of Osh State University, Faculties of Theology as a New Alternative in the Distribution of Religious Values, p. 143. Available: <http://www.oshsu.kg/univer/temp/url/ilim/2014-4-2-v.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Specialist of the educational section of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan Kushtarbek Mamatov in an interview with the Bulan Institute.

<sup>7</sup> Kubatbek Chekyrov, Monitoring, revealing problems in religious educational institutions Available: <http://www.bbc.com/kyrgyz/kyrgyzstan-38904209>

<sup>8</sup> Available:

[http://www.vb.kg/doc/356620\\_v\\_kr\\_ni\\_odno\\_medrese\\_ne\\_imeet\\_licenzii\\_na\\_obrazovatelnyu\\_deiatelnost.html](http://www.vb.kg/doc/356620_v_kr_ni_odno_medrese_ne_imeet_licenzii_na_obrazovatelnyu_deiatelnost.html)

The Bulan Institute believes that since there is a need for religious education in society, the religious educational institutions should be working. At the same time, we believe that it is necessary to carry out a reform in this area and the state, together with the Muftiate, should accelerate this process. SAMK, the Ministry of Education, and the State Commission on Religious Affairs should develop and implement a single educational curriculum containing secular disciplines.

### **3. Reform of the madrasah on the territory of Kyrgyzstan in the 19th century (*Jadid Usul*)**

On the territory of Kyrgyzstan in the period of 1836-1860 in Osh, four *datkhi* (a high rank under the Kokand Khanate) Mohammed, Akzhol, Khalmyrzabek, and Alymbek built a madrasah at their own expense. A doctor of pedagogical sciences, Professor Sovetbek Baigaziev noted that in Kyrgyzstan before the Russian revolution Kyrgyz intellectuals were educated in madrasah by the *jadid* method with integrated secular education.<sup>9</sup> The professor noted:

*"For example, in the 17th century a native of Ala-Buka, a man named Kyrgyzbai, built a madrasah in Namangan. It has received the name of "Madrasah of Kyrgyzbai" and has survived to this day. Many Kyrgyz people studied there and liquidated their ignorance. Later, in 1850-60 years, in the south, Madrasah of Alymbek datkhi was opened, thanks to which, for 70 years, hundreds of Kyrgyz children were educated and this was a huge contribution to the education in Kyrgyzstan. It is these facts from history that prove that at that time the Kyrgyz felt that the times of swords and spears had passed, and began to raise a sharp question about the need for a strong desire towards education and sciences,"*<sup>10</sup>

After the entry of Kyrgyzstan into the Russian Empire, Russian authorities opened several Russian-language schools in Osh, Karakol, and Pishpek counties in order to spread the Russian language among the local population. Additionally, four-grade agricultural schools were opened which were later converted into primary higher schools preparing translators, scribes, typesetters and other workers. However, it was madrasah, teaching Arabic script and Koran and Sharia memorization that were predominant in Kyrgyzstan during that period. That period also saw attempts to transfer Muslim schools and madrasah into a new curriculum. This movement, which appeared in the early 20th century, was called the "Methodology of *Jadid*." *Jadid* carried out school reforms leading to the emergence of new secular schools. These new format madrasah were opened where geography, arithmetic, and other secular disciplines were taught; a major reform of the educational process at that time.<sup>11</sup>

"In fact, the need for the reform of teaching methods at schools formed originally in medieval style, was dictated by the time," Professor K. Koylubayev, Professor of Issyk Kul State University named after K. Tynistanov writes. Our first historians also noted that the schools build according the new "*Jadid* method" were warmly received and supported by the local

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<sup>9</sup> Interview of Professor Sovetbek Baigaziev to the Bulan Institute, February 22.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Kubatova, A.E. *Jadid schools in Kyrgyzstan (end of the XIX - beginning of the XX centuries)* [Text] / A.E. Kubatova // Questions of the history of Kyrgyzstan. Institute of History and Cultural Heritage of the National Academy of Sciences of the Kyrgyz Republic. - Bishkek, 2009. - №4. - 5-11-b.

population: "... in 1900, a barefooted Tatar named Zakir Adamilla Abdykashap *uulu* arrived in Tokmok and began to teach at school according to the "the methods of *Jadid*", and since that time the education began to expand and people started to read the newspaper "Tarjiman", produced in Bakhchy-Saray (Crimea).<sup>12</sup>

Further testimony are the words from the №2 issue of the Turkestan regional news bulletin from 1885, saying that a growing number of parents wish to find funds by any means and send their children to school. The bulletin states, "When news of the opening of a new school was heard from afar, people started talking noisily about it, the number of those wishing to give their children to school increased sharply."<sup>13</sup>

In Chon-Kemin, Shabdan Zhantay *uulu* opened just such a madrasah of a new style, combining secular and religious education. Educational supplies were brought from the cities of Kazan and Orenburg. Teachers were also invited from there. "Teachers divided students into grades 1-5 in accordance with their level of education and, alongside religion, they also taught arithmetic and geography; That was the first time we saw a globe" recalled one of the graduates of this school, later holder of the Order of Lenin, Abdirayim Chunkeleev. Shabdan *baatyr* invited teachers from Kazan, Orenburg and Ufa, established all necessary conditions for them and paid them an annual salary in the amount of 500 to 1000 rubles.<sup>14</sup>

Tatar mullahs came and opened further madrasah in Tokmak, Przhevalsk, and Pishpek across different parts of Kyrgyzstan. In their curriculums, alongside religious subjects were mathematics, geography, arithmetic, Russian language, history, geography and other such disciplines. Madrasah, built in accordance with the model of Tatar schools in Chon-Kemin, were named after Shabdan. The first Kyrgyz educator Bazarkul Daniyarov studied at the Shabdan madrasah. At the end of 1880, Sooronbai *uulu* Dur built the first boarding school in the village of Saylyk of the region of Chui, where children from all parts of Kyrgyzstan studied.<sup>15</sup>

According to Sovetbek Baygaziev Bayzak, new madrasah in accordance with the *Jadid* methodology were opened in in Jungal, Kanatkan in Kochkor, Kalpazy in Kurtke, and Manap Sagali in Ton. Tinaali *uulu* Cholponkul opened a school in Sokuluk that existed till Urkun in 1916. The famous madrasah Ykbal in Tokmak, where Moldo Kilic studied, was led by Zakir Kary Vagapov (among the Kyrgyz often known as Zakir kalpa). Ishenaly Arabaev, the Kyrgyz intellectual for whom the state university is named, also received his education in Ufa and Orenburg and made major contributions to the opening of *Jadid* style methodology madrasah across the region.

At present, some experts say it is time to re-reform madrasah in Kyrgyzstan in accordance with the 19<sup>th</sup> Century *Jadid* method. According to Ermek Bekturov, head of the College of Theology at Ishenaly Arabaev University, during the golden age of Islam all sciences came from Islamic states, stating: "Be that geography or medicine, or astronomy, all these sciences were founded in Islamic educational institutions, which made incredible scientific discoveries. Those were the days when exact sciences and natural sciences were on a par with religious

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<sup>12</sup> K. Koilubaev, Educational system of colonial power, ISU them. K. Tynystanov, Available: [http://www.arch.kyrlibnet.kg/uploads/Koilyubaev%20K.K.\\_Otor.pdf](http://www.arch.kyrlibnet.kg/uploads/Koilyubaev%20K.K._Otor.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> MB Asipbayeva, senior lecturer of KNU after Balasagyn, Available: [http://kghistory.akipress.org/unews/un\\_post:1719](http://kghistory.akipress.org/unews/un_post:1719)

<sup>14</sup> Madrasah Shabdan Baatyr is 100 years old. Comp. A. Zhumanaliev, A.Tojchubayev, A.Kubatova, T.Kebekova. - B., 2009. - 261-b.

<sup>15</sup> Interview received from Sovetbek Baigaziev on March 22, 2017

ones, complementing each other. Our university bears the name Ishenaly Arabaev, who at one time was one of those who introduced the "Jadid method" movement. Therefore, it is necessary to reform madrasah, in which children could also receive secular education."<sup>16</sup>

Candidate of historical sciences Shayyrbek Sherov is one of the scientists who, in 2014, investigated the history and state of madrasah in Kyrgyzstan and defended his scientific dissertation on the topic. In his opinion, the current level of Islamic education in comparison with the *Jadid* madrasah is very low and seems to be regressing into medieval levels of education. As evidence for this, below is a curriculum (Table 2) of new madrasah, formed according to the *jadid* method in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In contrast, current madrasah don't even have traces of such secular subjects as physics, chemistry, psychology, astronomy and philosophy. In addition, Nurmoldo taught "Manas", "*Nuskoo*" (instructions) and encouraged children to love their Motherland. Unfortunately, current secondary and higher Islamic educational institutions do not conduct lessons on Manasology and, according to Shayyrbek Sherov, some Islamic teachers openly state in the mass media that Manas is a fairy tale, and our *manaschi* (tellers of the Manas epic) are demonic people."<sup>17</sup>

Shayyrbek Sherov emphasizes that in the history of Kyrgyzstan, after Nurmoldo, who abandoned the old religious scholastic method and turned to the new *jadid* method, there was another outstanding personality, Kyrgyz poet Moldo Kilic. Also, citing the words of N. Borovnikov the head of the Kazan teachers association, he points out that the curricula of the madrasah of the new methodology were on par with the level of secondary schools in Europe, and took 8 years to complete. The typical curriculum of the madrasah of those times can be seen in the table below which included 7 religious lessons and 18 secular lessons.<sup>18</sup>

**Table 2: Lessons in the *jadid* method madrasah**

№	Secular Disciplines	Religious Disciplines
1.	Turkic language and literature	Koranic studies
2.	Arabic language and literature	Dogmatism
3.	History of Islam	General Law
4.	History of Philosophy	Basics of Law
5.	Mathematics	Rules of Behavior
6.	Geography	Laws on Inheritance
7.	History of Natural Sciences	Koranic Interpretation
8.	Physics	
9.	Chemistry	
10.	Astronomy	
11.	Agronomy	
12.	Hygiene	
13.	Logic	
14.	Psychology	
15.	Methodology	
16.	Orthography	
17.	Drawing	

<sup>16</sup> Interview of Ermek Bekturov with the Bulan Institute, February 22, 2017

<sup>17</sup> Interview of Shayyrbek Sherov with the Bulan Institute, February 15, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Sherov Sh.B. Formation of religious Islamic education in Kyrgyzstan: current state and problems: dissertation, Candidate of Historic Sciences Kurumbaeva, G. The genesis of the state educational system of Kyrgyzstan as the main source of the formation of the national intelligentsia (late XIX - early XX centuries.): Dis .... Candidate of Historical Sciences: 07.00.02 / G. Kurumbaeva. - Bishkek, 2008. - P. 91.

18.	Russian Language	
	<b>Total: 18</b>	<b>Total: 7</b>

#### 4. Madrasah today: The current situation much to be desired

Today, in Kyrgyzstan, there are 112 religious educational institutions, including 102 madrasah, with 78 active. (for comparison, in 2010 the Muftiate registered 45 madrasah), registered by the State Commission on Religious Affairs. According to the Muftiate, there are 5 madrasah in Bishkek, 28 in Chuyskaja Oblast, 4 in Talas, 1 in Issyk-Kul, 2 in Naryn, 6 in Jalal-Abad, 19 in Oshskaja Oblast, 4 in Osh, 9 in Batken. According to Kushtarbek Mamatov, a specialist of the educational department of the SAMK, more than 6000 children study at these madrasah ranging from about 20 in the smallest to 200 at the largest.



## В КЫРГЫЗСТАНЕ ДЕЙСТВУЮТ **78 МЕДРЕСЕ** (102 ЗАРЕГИСТРИРОВАНЫ)



*This infographic contains only official data provided by the State Commission on Religious Affairs.*

If we compare the number of Islamic religious educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan with other countries of Central Asia, the number of those in neighboring countries is much smaller.

*"For example, in Uzbekistan, a country with a population of more than 30 million, there is only 1 Islamic university and 9 madrasahs, while in small Kyrgyzstan with a population of only 6 million, there are about 112 religious educational institutions (Islamic University, various institutes, and madrasah). In addition, in Uzbekistan, the curricula in the Islamic educational*

*institutions are compiled in strict accordance with state ideology and the publication and sale of religious literature is under the vigilant control of the state. We differ from Uzbekistan by the fact that religious educational institutions can be opened by private entrepreneurs, foreign funds, sponsors, etc. And in Uzbekistan such institutions can be opened only with the permission or initiation of the Muftiate or the State Commission on Religious Affairs. In short, we have liberalism, in accordance with democratic principles."*<sup>19</sup>

Those wishing to open a madrasah must first register a religious organization with the Ministry of Justice. Madrasah can be registered only under a religious organization, which means that after collecting all documents necessary for opening a madrasah, these organizations have to present themselves before the State Commission on Religious Affairs. Provided documents should indicate the curriculum of the madrasah, the list of teachers and their resumes, as well as clearly indicate any sources of financing. As confirmed to Bulan Institute at the State Commission, the Muftiate and regional kaziyats<sup>20</sup> also have the right to open a madrasah. "The Muftiate registers them through us as well. Regional kaziyats are also considered to be religious organizations; therefore they have the right to open a madrasah. And the fact that madrasahs are opened under the mosques also does not contradict the law."<sup>21</sup>

Zamir *kary* Rakiev, the head of the educational department at SAMK, does not agree that the number of madrasah is steadily growing. He stated that:

*"We do not open a madrasah under duress. Our people are religious, 90% are Muslims. If the people want, then we meet their needs. Some villagers demand to open a madrasah or open it themselves. Some madrasah are built by entrepreneurs. All madrasah are registered in the Spiritual Administration of Muslims and work legally. How can we limit the rights of parents who wish to send their children to madrasah?"*

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and national independence, religious schools began to appear spontaneously through Kyrgyzstan in the early 1990s. One of the first to open was the Umar madrasah, which later became the Islamic University under the SAMK.<sup>22</sup> Religious educational institutions were also opened with the support of foreign charity foundations or local residents.<sup>23</sup> For example, one of the first such madrasah was opened by the cultural-charitable foundation "Muradiye". This madrasah rented the creative center of the Writers' Union of Kyrgyzstan in the village of Arashan, Chui Oblast. R. Shamilov, the head of the Madrasah, explained that the institution was opened with the help of the Turkish Diaspora and the Turkish Representation in Kyrgyzstan for the benefit of children left as orphans after the 1990 inter-ethnic clashes in Osh.

According to Orozbek Moldaliyev, a specialist on religious affairs, most madrasah are not able to provide high-quality religious education, and secular education within them is practically nonexistent:

*"The current madrasah have no conditions for either educating children or for quality education. These are basically spaces opened by those who found sponsors and now pretend that they teach children. If you yourself have problems with education, how can you teach*

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<sup>19</sup> Sherov Sh.B., Formation of religious Islamic education in Kyrgyzstan: current state and problems: dissertation, 2014.

<sup>20</sup> Religious administrative body subject to a kazi or kadi (Islamic judge or jurist)

<sup>21</sup> Interview of Zakir Chotaev with the Bulan Institute, April 5 2017

<sup>22</sup> Kurbanova, N.U. Islam in the social and political life of Kyrgyzstan. B., 2009. - P. 84

<sup>23</sup> Pustynnikov, N. For the benefit of the human soul // Morning of Bishkek. - 1999. - 22sent. - C. 4

*others? Earlier, all this was checked and the Muftiate was given the recommendation to give some time to those madrasah that have at least some appropriate conditions and educated teachers and close the rest. SAMK did not follow the recommendations. In general, this has turned into a mouse game (lots of work with little results), and as a result only children suffer, being deprived of education and prospects for the future".<sup>24</sup>*

Murat Imankulov, specialist of the Kyrgyz Academy of Education and a member of the Working Group on Reforming Religious Education considers the actions of individual parents who refuse to send their children to general educational schools and thereby depriving them of education as the source for the emergence of extremism. He stated:

*"90 percent of the currently functioning madrasah do not meet any requirements of the day. The knowledge that students acquire there is rather limited. Some madrasah teach the Kyrgyz language, but such subjects as chemistry, biology, and mathematics are absolutely absent. Certificates issued to the children by the madrasah are not recognized by the state. For this reason, a graduate of a madrasah cannot apply to universities afterwards. In this case, the question arises: where can these children find work afterwards? We checked one madrasah in which 20 girls studied after the end of grade 9. At the end of the year, only 10 girls remained. We ask where the rest are, they answer that they are married. This is not a good thing. Many graduates of the madrasah remain outside the community ".<sup>25</sup>*

"Many teachers are not educated themselves," says Kanibek Osmonaliev. He further notes that such terms as algebra, chemistry, algorithms, and trigonometry were developed in part by the Arabs. During his interview Mr. Osmonaliyev elaborated:

*Arabic numerals were introduced and unified [by the Arabs]. The Kyrgyz word kitep (book) is also Arabic. Kit-up means giving education, meaning that Islam developed in accordance with science. The Islamic scientific renaissance lasted from the 8th century to the 14th. It gradually weakened and today there are only radical and fanatical features left. Today, a person who makes new discoveries in physics is considered wicked by radicals, and technological achievements can be considered a demonic affair. At the same time, they themselves use a cell phone as well as bombs made thanks to the science of physics. I have still never met a mullah who is well aware of the achievements of modern science as well as different avant-garde values of religion. In Europe there are such pastors and priests. All we do, is demand that men grow beards, and girls wear hijab."<sup>26</sup>*

At the moment, one third of madrasah are situated in the Chuy oblast. Advanced madrasah with good conditions, located in multiple rooms with computer classes are only found in Bishkek and Chuy Oblasts, and in cities like Osh. For example, among such madrasah with appropriate conditions are the madrasah for girls "Aisha Sidika" in Osh, the madrasah of Abdullah ibn Mas'ut, Kutbilim, and Kolmo in Bishkek. Some madrasah in particular have a high standard of education including the madrasah "Abdullah ibn Maessut" and "Kut Bilim" in Bishkek. Conditions and equipment in these madrasah, which have permanent sponsors, are significantly times better than in public schools.<sup>27</sup> At the same time, we visited madrasah with

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<sup>24</sup> Interview with Orozbek Moldaliev, March 15, published on the website of the Bulan Institute.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Murat Imankulov, February 15, published on the website of the Bulan Institute.

<sup>26</sup> Interview of Kanybek Osmonaliev with the Bulan Institute.

<sup>27</sup> <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ky-kg/1216> 26

very poor conditions and difficult financial situations. We will discuss these in greater detail in the following parts of the report.

There are also illegal madrasah that are not registered at the State Commission on Religious Affairs. In March 2017, the Sverdlovsk Regional State Administration of Bishkek (*Akimiat*) conducted checks of madrasah in the city.<sup>28</sup> During the checks, it was determined that five madrasah (Birinci Kadam, Murtazali, Muskan-Toro, Abubakir Sydyk, and Yiyk Birimdik) have no registration nor meet the standards for education. The *Akimiat* of the Sverdlovsk region sent its conclusion to relevant authorities regarding the closure of these madrasah until they become officially registered and improve education standards.<sup>29</sup> These madrasah were not registered and did not even bother to collect the relevant documents for registration.

## **5. A new concept: the integration of religious and secular education**

Currently there is a divide between secular and religious education in Kyrgyzstan and, in the absence of cooperation and a constructive dialogue, and these differences and conflicts are deepening. According to experts, confrontational and hostile attitudes between young people at the secular educational institutions and those who study at religious educational institutions are on the rise.<sup>30</sup> Indira Aslanova, a specialist in religious studies, points out that for the first time in Kyrgyzstan, in its 20 years of independence, the state has started paying attention to improving the quality of religious education. Zaiyrbek Ergeshov, Chairman of the State Commission on Religious Affairs also notes that the state was not concerned with what children at the religious educational institutions are being taught: "In the past 25 years, the state has not paid adequate attention to this field has not been concerned with the curricular and with what children are thought there. Consequently, we have received such a rift and confrontation between the religious and secular education."<sup>31</sup> In 2014, the Defense Council of the Kyrgyz Republic (now the Security Council) convened a special meeting where the "concept on the State policy on the questions of religion for the 2014- 2020" was adopted. One of the goals of the concept is reforming religious educational institutions and strengthening control over their activities.<sup>32</sup>

In order to fulfill this concept, the Kyrgyz government allocated funds to the Yiman Fund, which was tasked with raising the level of education of imams. According to Nurzhigit Kadyrbekov, the head of the fund since 2014, the project titled "Raising the educational level and capabilities of religious workers", has seen 2,959 imams have completed a 12-day training program. Also on the auspices of I. Arabayeva University, a state educational institution, the "Institute of Training and Retraining of the Management of the SAMK" was opened, which will soon receive a license from the Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic. The Institute will annually receive 15 people and will train cadres to work in the SAMK according to a specialized in-depth program combining secular and religious knowledge.

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<sup>28</sup> <https://sputnik.kg/Radio/20170301/1032008566/almambetova-nachar-sharttagy-medreseler-tabylidy.html>

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Chynara Borbasheva, deputy *akim* of the Sverdlovsk region, 29 March 2017.

<sup>30</sup> Indira Aslanova, Problems and successes in the implementation of state policy in the religious sphere in Kyrgyzstan, *CabarAsia*, November 25, 2016.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Zaiyrbek Ergeshov for the report of the Bulan Institute, 6 April 2017.

<sup>32</sup> Available: <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/Act/view/en-us/57409>.

In addition, after several years of discussion, the Kyrgyz government this year launched a pilot program to introduce the subject "History of Religious Culture" into the school curriculum. As the Deputy Minister of Education and Science Salidin Kaldybayev informs, the ministry together with the relevant specialists has developed a pilot training course and prepared books for publication. At the moment, the pilot program has been launched in 10 schools in different regions of the country. In the first half of the school year the subject "History of Religious Culture" is given 16 hours of instruction, and additional educational circles will provide students with additional information about the history of world religions.<sup>33</sup>

In September 2015 the Kyrgyz government ordered the Ministry of Education and Science to establish a working commission to develop a concept for reforming religious educational institutions. Concept development was completed at the end of 2016, after which the State Commission for Religious Affairs opened it for public discussion with hearings in Osh and Bishkek.<sup>34</sup> According to Nurlan Ismailov, one of the authors of the concept, Kyrgyzstan, unlike countries such as Egypt, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and even Turkey, is a multi-ethnic, multi-confessional, democratic secular country. He stated, "Religious workers must correspond with the nature of our state, that is, they must have deep knowledge of not only religion, but social and human sciences. They must very well understand the principles of a secular state and democratic values. Since, in the future, it is them, who will have to fulfill the main connecting role between the state and religion."<sup>35</sup> One of the main goals of the concept was to standardize the curricula of religious schools, create a unified curriculum, and introduce secular disciplines in them. Mr. Ismailov goes on: "After the introduction of a single training program, secular subjects will gradually be introduced. Eight disciplines will be introduced in the madrasas, ten disciplines - in the highest religious schools; the list of disciplines has been specified. These are mathematics, geography, Kyrgyz language, Russian language, law theory, foreign language, history and civics."<sup>36</sup> Since the concept has not yet entered into legal force, however, there are no concrete steps to introduce these disciplines.

The concept says that "state bodies can only interfere in the work of a madrasah in cases of detection of extremist propaganda; in other cases they cannot directly interfere with their activities but only regulate the introduction of secular disciplines in their curriculum." The concept also requires religious educational institutions to be open and transparent. The religious educational institution must have its own website with full information on the curriculum, the names of the teachers, the address of the educational institution, as well as financial sponsors. To this end Mr. Ismailov stated: "It is very important who are funding the educational institutions of a religious nature. The state should know about this. In short, one of the goals of the concept is to achieve transparency in the question of sources of funding of the religious educational institutions."<sup>37</sup>

Based on the demand by the Security Council to improve the quality of education in religious educational institutions, the State Commission for Religious Affairs, the Muftiate and the

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<sup>33</sup> Salidin Kaldybaev, Deputy Minister of Education and Science, interview to the Institute Bulan, February 25, 2017.

<sup>34</sup> "The Concept on religious education" was discussed in Bishkek <http://www.ktrk.kg/post/2440/en>, "The Concept on Religious Education" was presented in Osh <http://www.ktrk.kg/post/10420/en>

<sup>35</sup> From Nurlan Ismailov's report, from March 10, 2017 presented at the conference "National Strategy for Sustainable Development of the Kyrgyz Republic for the period of 2013-2017: on the implementation of the state policy of the Kyrgyz Republic in the religious sphere."

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

Ministry of Education and Science, jointly opened a pilot project theological college as part of the I. Arbaev University. This college provides both a madrasah style religious education as well as secular lessons. Students enter this college only after graduation from grade 9 and receive a diploma recognized as meeting state standards.<sup>38</sup>

In fact, the college is working on the basis of an experimental plan with the program used in it to be gradually introduced into all madrasah. Ermek Bekturov, head of the college, describes the program:

*"At the moment there are still madrasah where the quality of education and the state [of the school] do not meet requirements. All of them in the future should receive a license and become an educational institution in which modern imams will be trained. A modern imam should be both a manager and a diplomat. He should also be an authoritative person who knows the philosophy, and at the same time he should master the laws of the Shariah, he should be a prominent figure in the education of the younger generation, as well as be able to represent himself worthily in the council of elders, the ayil okmotu. At the moment, we should introduce and develop exactly this kind of pilot projects in madrasah."*

For many years, control over the work of educational institutions of a religious nature was laid on the shoulders of the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims. The Muftiate exercises direct control over the curriculum, financial condition and conditions of study in these institutions. In 2014, when this issue was brought up at the Security Council meeting, the State Commission on Religious Affairs intensified its activities in this direction and began monitoring madrasah and verifying their curricula and conditions for students. In 2015, the State Commission conducted monitoring in 34 madrasah and in 2016 74 madrasah and issued a warning to individual schools that do not meet the requirements. Since the beginning of this year, the organization has again conducted monitoring operations and a warning from the State Commission has already been received by 27 madrasah.<sup>39</sup> Also in 2016, the department carried out the certification of teachers working in madrasah. As of the result of this, 92% of the madrasahs heads did not pass attestation, due to the lack of higher secular education in their schools.<sup>40</sup> The fact that the State Commission began to demonstrate decisiveness on this issue is encouraging; the Commission is bringing discussions about religious education into the public and openly holding conferences devoted to reforming the system of religious education. According to experts, state authorities did not pay attention to religious education for a long time, referring to the secular nature of the country. In the opinion of Keneshbek Sainazarov, a specialist on the prevention of religious radicalism, the Ministry of Education and Science was particularly reluctant to address these issues, since it considered that the Ministry had nothing to do in regards to religious education. He explained: "Professionals, working in this Ministry, still adhere to the position of non-interference in the activities of religious educational institutions. Therefore, it is precisely because of this attitude and lack of proper support that the initiatives and initiatives of the State Commission are slowing down."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Zakir Chotaev, "The future of religious education in Kyrgyzstan", Knews.kg, August 9, 2016.

<sup>39</sup> Interview of Zakir Chotaev, deputy director of the State Commission for Religious Affairs, with the Bulan Institute.

<sup>40</sup> Available: <https://kloop.kg/blog/2016/02/22/muftiyat-mozhet-uvolit-do-92-rukovoditelej-medrese-bez-diplomov-vuzov/>

<sup>41</sup> Interview of Keneshbek Sainazarov with the Bulan Institute, February 18, 2017

The other side of the matter is that religious schools are currently incorrectly qualified, with the Muftiate dividing them into three categories - primary, secondary and higher, with two years as an acceptable period of study in the primary madrasah, three years for the secondary, and four years for the higher. That said the programs at the madrasah and Islamic University are the same. Therefore, there is a lack of standardization and a legal basis for the regulation of activities of religious educational institutions. In 2013, Kanybek Osmonaliev, a then deputy of the Kyrgyz Parliament, initiated a bill "On Religious Education and Religious Educational Institutions".<sup>42</sup> The objectives of this bill were the accreditation of curriculums, the classification of religious educational institutions, and the regulation of trips to foreign countries for religious education and many other issues. The bill was rejected by parliament; however the need for developing legal norms that would allow regulating the activities of religious educational institutions in the country remains an urgent issue.

## 6. Curriculum of madrasah and secular education

In Kyrgyzstan, madrasahs distinguish three levels of education: primary, secondary and higher education. These levels are established by the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan and each level has its own curriculum. Zamir *kary* Rakiev, head of the education department of the SAMK explains:

*"In the initial stage of the madrasah, students receive knowledge of religion for two years. Then children are accepted to the madrasahs of the secondary and higher level. The madrasah of the secondary level is taught for three years. In the higher education madrasah, students are taught for four years and they graduate them as scholars, who have deeply mastered the foundations of Islam. The same types of books are distributed at each level of madrasah."*<sup>43</sup>

In 2013, the Ulema Council at the SAMK developed a single curriculum for all three levels of the madrasah; later it was approved by the Muftiate. In the appendix of this report, we cited all three curriculum madrasah approved by the Ulema Council. Therefore, each madrasah must conduct training in accordance with this single program and this should be under the control of the Muftiate. Mr. Rakiev states that the Muftiate conducts a quarterly review of the curriculum, elaborating:

*"I do not agree with the fact that the madrasah are only engaged in memorizing the Koran. At the heart of the programs we have approved are the following disciplines: reading the Qur'an, lessons of hadiths, aqidah, the fundamentals of Sharia law, reading the Quranic basics, the basis of understanding of the hadith, the science of the Koran, which are taught without fail. We regularly check how the training is conducted. Checks are carried out every three months. If we find that they are not working properly, we take action and call for the elimination of errors."*<sup>44</sup>

***The program of the courses of learning the memorization of the Qur'an.  
Adopted on the basis of the resolution of the Ulema Council No. 5 of May 14, 2013.  
Duration of studies: 3 years  
Graduate's direction: Imam and Hafiz (oral translator of the Koran)***

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<sup>42</sup> Available: <http://knews.kg/2013/09/kanyibek-osmonaliev-razrabotal-zakonoproekt-o-religioznom-obrazovanii-vkyrgyzstane/>

<sup>43</sup> Interview of Zamir Rakiev with the Bulan Institute

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

№	Subjects	Used Literature	Course	The total amount	Credit	Exam	Finish	Number of hours of training						
								1st year	2nd year	3rd year				
1.	Complete memorization of the Quran	The Holy Quran		648		1-6	6							
2.	Tajwid	Tajwid		108		1-6		16	18	16	18	16	18	
3.	Fiqh	Taalimul Islam, Islam		432	1-6			1	2	3	4	5	6	
4.	Hadis	chosen 40 Hadis		216	1-6			106	110	106	110	106	110	
5.	History of Islam	The History of the Prophets ( <i>kir</i> )		108	1-6			16	20	16	20	16	20	
								70	74	70	74	70	74	
6.	Ethics	Adabul Islam		108	1-6			34	38	34	38	34	38	
7.	Akiyda	Tauhid		324	1-6			16	20	16	20	16	20	
8.	Physical Culture							16	20	16	20	16	20	
	<b>Total:</b>			<b>1944</b>				52	54	52	54	52	54	

Unfortunately, a unified curriculum, approved by the Muftiate, is not followed by all madrasas. In some of the madrasah there are only two or three teachers working and there is a shortage of teaching staff for teaching individual subjects. The number of madrasah with secular education subjects is very low, making up only 5-7% of the total.

The Ministry of Education does not interfere in the activities of the madrasah and does not control the curriculum. Kylym Sydyknazarova, the specialist of the Ministry of Education and Science notes: "Madrasah is a religious educational institution. According to the law of the Kyrgyz Republic on education, the principles of education are outside religion. Therefore, the Ministry does not control what curriculum that the madrasah follow. If secular subjects were included in the curriculum of the madrasah, then we could exercise control."<sup>45</sup>

Madrasah cannot issue state diplomas, since they do not receive a license according to the state standard. According to the Minister of Education Gulmira Kudaiberdieva, no madrasah has a license for educational activity and, for this reason, graduates are only given a certificate.<sup>46</sup> Kushtarbek Mamatov, the deputy head of the Education section at the Muftiate corroborates this view: "The children who graduated from the madrasah are given a religious certificate or a diploma. This diploma is not considered as a state diploma. With these documents, graduates can work as Imams Khatibs in madrasah or mosques. Those wishing to study at the state's higher educational institutions must first complete their studies at the state schools. Only after that they can study in universities."<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Kylym Sydyknazarova, the specialist of the Ministry of Education and Science to the Bulan Institute.

<sup>46</sup> Available:

[http://www.vb.kg/doc/356620\\_v\\_kr\\_ni\\_odno\\_medrese\\_ne\\_imeet\\_licenzii\\_na\\_obrazovatelnyu\\_deiatelnost.html](http://www.vb.kg/doc/356620_v_kr_ni_odno_medrese_ne_imeet_licenzii_na_obrazovatelnyu_deiatelnost.html)

<sup>47</sup> Interview of Kushtarbek Mamatov, head of the Education Department at the Kyrgyz Muftiate.

The head of the "Yyman" foundation Nurzhigit Kadyrbekov believes that science and religion should fit and go together. He noted that:

*"This demand exists in both the Shariah itself and in religion. Receiving a hour of education is more than voluntary prayer service all night long." The mullahs say that science is divided into two categories. The first one is about God, and the second one is about what he created: astronomy, physics, mathematics, chemistry, etc. Getting education is essential. If necessary, action against those who have not received education should be taken. How did the Soviet state manage to educate 98-100% of the population? The answer is because in those days severe measures were taken. But in religion you cannot solve these issues by force; you need to conduct a dialogue and explanatory work".<sup>48</sup>*

According to Mr. Kadyrbekov, it is wrong to show a disrespectful attitude towards religious education on the pretext that religion is separated from the state. He goes on:

*"All the issues in regards to improving the quality of religious education should not be put on the shoulders of the Muftiate only. It's easy to lure illiterate people. If tomorrow children would not go to the school, they would be easily seduced. This is what the separation of religion from the state leads to. The state itself must teach religion. In Germany, for example, for Muslims or followers of other faiths, school provides religious lessons. If the state does not educate children in religion, it would be extremists, terrorists and other destroyers of Islam who would do that. "*

SAMK claims that it is not against the introduction of secular lessons in madrasah and are waiting for the entry into force of the concept of reforming religious educational institutions. Zamir kary Rakiev states:

*"Teaching secular education in madrasah is undoubtedly the imperative of the times. Good results will be when science and religion interact. Previously, from Al Farabi, Alisher Navoi, to our Moldovan Kilic, Kalygul oluy received education in madrasah. They mastered the Koran, the Sunnah, astronomy, and geometry in the madrasah. Later, because of the proclaimed post-revolutionary slogan that religion is opium for the people, they decided to leave only secular subjects and separate religion from the state."<sup>49</sup>*

The well-known theologian and sociologist Mametbek Myrzabaev believes that it is not right to force madrasah leaders to introduce secular subjects into their schools. He elaborates:

*"The state cannot restrict the rights of citizens to receive religious education. Citizens should be able to teach their children religion both formally (in educational institutions) and informally. It is not right to force the madrasah leaders to introduce secular subjects into their schools. Madrasah are religious, non-governmental, private institutions. According to the law, no one can close the madrasah on the grounds that there are no secular subjects taught there. The lack of secular education among the students of madrasah is not the fault of the madrasah, but rather the fault of the secular education system, which neither parents nor the youth themselves trust ".<sup>50</sup>*

At present the concept of religious education reform has not yet entered into force. Maksatbek azhy Toktomushev, newly elected on April, 4 at the VI Kurultai of Muslims in Bishkek, stated

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<sup>48</sup> Interview of Nurzhigit Kadyrbekov with the Bulan Institute, February 12, 2017.

<sup>49</sup> Interview of Mr. Zamir Rakiev with the Bulan Institute

<sup>50</sup> Interview of M. Myrzabaev with the Bulan Institute, April 5, 2017.

that he supports the policy of President Atambayev and the decision of the Security Council of 2014. Hence, the head of the Muftiate also supports the reform of religious education, which is part of the tasks set in the Concept of State Policy on Religious Affairs. Nevertheless, the question of the realization of all these tasks, which depend on financing, do raise alarm. Who will pay for the work of teachers teaching secular subjects, who will provide educational supplies? Would it remain a headache for the madrasah themselves? These and other issues remain open. For example, the Islamic University, which will soon receive a license from the Ministry of Education, is already raising the issue of funding. "The Islamic University will soon receive a license, and since the integration of secular subjects into the university's program is going on, the management of the educational institution raised the issue of allocating funds from the budget of the Ministry. But so far this issue has not been resolved."<sup>51</sup>

## **7. Children should be admitted to a madrasah only after the end of grade nine (age 14-15)**

Both the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic and Article 16 of the Law On Education state that every child must receive a general secondary education. This means that every child must attend school until grade nine. Primary and secondary education is given free of charge, and the state is obliged to create conditions so that every child is educated at school. Parents' responsibilities are precisely indicated in Article 27 of the Law On Education.<sup>52</sup> Every parent is obliged to create conditions for their children so that they can get education in school and develop spiritually and physically. The article further states that parents (or legal representatives of the child) who do not fulfill their obligations to provide general secondary education to their child are liable under the laws of the Kyrgyz Republic. Consequently, both the state and parents are responsible for creating conditions for the child to receive education at school.

Professor Kanybek Osmonaliev told the Bulan Institute:

*"Unfortunately, same as many other laws in our state, these norms are also being violated. Parents who do not wish to send their children to school are to be given a warning for the first time, administrative measures are to be applied for the second time and a criminal case is to be initiated for the third time. However, up to date, there is not a single fact of the detention or arrest of such parents. Sometimes the directors themselves do not know how many children come to the classes or how many of them are absent. Of the total number of 1,200,000 students in Kyrgyzstan, there are 200,000 students who are not going to school"*

According to Gulshan Abdyldaeva, an expert at the Ministry of Education and Science, in 2012 the number of children not attending schools due to religious beliefs reached 2845. "At the moment, this number has decreased significantly. In order to work with parents who do not want to send their children to school and lock them at home, as well as in order to prevent similar phenomena, we opened preventive rooms in 1750 schools, where a lot of control and monitoring work is carried out," the expert notes. During a joint inspection by the Ministry of

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<sup>51</sup> Interview of the Director of the State Commission for Religious Affairs Zaiyrbek Ergeshov with the Bulan Institute.

<sup>52</sup> Available: <http://edc.kg/zakonodatelstvo/zakony-kr.html>

Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Education of the Kyrgyz Republic in 2016, 82 children under the age of the 9th grade were identified in the madrasah and 29 of them were enlisted in evening schools.

"The Children's Code contains articles on juvenile justice. The Code describes in detail the responsibilities of the parents. For example, in Soviet times, all children, including those whose parents were repressed or shot, were registered at the village councils and the education departments, conditions were created for them to go to school, and the state exercised constant control over it. The state was always aware of where they live, which school they go to. If even one child did not visit the school in some village, the principals of the schools were severely punished. We need to introduce such a system again. Nobody wants to take a responsibility" said Ex-Minister of Education and Science Ishengul Boljurova.

The Bulan Institute visited 21 madrasah in the country. In 10 of them we met children between 7 and 14 years old who were sitting in the Qur'an lesson or just entering or leaving the madrasah. The managers of the madrasah however consistently tried to convince Institute visitors that these children are also attending a rural school or just stopping by with their brothers. In one of the madrasah of the village of Jany-Jer in Sokuluk region, we saw minor children sitting in a class (see the photo taken in the madrasah in the annex). The head of the madrasah informed us that there are additional after school classes for the children of the under 9th grade age. As about the fact that there were children of young age sitting in the classroom, the head of the madrasah said that they "come here only during the holidays".

Some observers note that the number of young children dropping out of school in order to go to the madrasah or attending Friday prayers and being late for the school hours or completely refusing to study at a general educational institution is on the rise. The former deputy minister of education and science Guldzhigit Sooronkulov regards this as a real threat:

*"I recently went to my smaller homeland in Bakay-Ata district. There are 3 schools and 7 mosques in the center of the district. Their influence is very strong. In particular, in the southern regions of the republic, junior and senior students do not go to school on Fridays at all because on this day they go to Friday prayer. Basically, this is equivalent to the fact that on Fridays, studies at schools practically stop. Our girls began to hide their faces and wear long dresses from a young age. Some of our teachers also began to dress in this way. The Ministry of Education cannot resist this. If the authorities fail to pay due attention to this, then the end will be bad. Eloquent mullahs in mosques lead children into temptation. Even teachers with university degrees cannot resist them."<sup>53</sup>*

During the visit to Batken Madrasah, our specialists saw that out of 30 students 20 were students between 6th to 9th grades (ages 11-15). The head of the institution A. Yunusov explained that these children attend the school during the first half of the day and come to madrasah in the second half.<sup>54</sup>

Our specialists have found a mother, Anara, whose child is studying in a madrasah starting from the 5th grade. It turns out, her son became a student of a madrasah in Naryn at the age of 11. She explains:

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<sup>53</sup> Interview of Guldzhigit Sooronkulov given to the Bulan Institute. Published on the Bulan Institute website.

<sup>54</sup> Interview of A. Yunusov, the Head of the "Batken" Medrese in the town of Batken / Sh. Sherov. - Batken, March 16, 2017.

*"Our son does not live with us. He studies in a madrasah and lives there. We take him home only on weekends. After consulting with my husband, we chose a madrasah in the city of Naryn. Before that, we researched and compared other madrasah. In some madrasah, they were only forced to memorize the Quran and do not teach other subjects. We were afraid that our child would develop one-sidedly and that's why decided to send him to this madrasah. Here, along with the Koran, other disciplines are taught. For example, there are teachers who teach English, Russian and math,"*

The crisis in teaching and educational work of the state general educational institutions pushes parents to search for the alternatives in religious schools. Such problems as fighting in schools, a lack of discipline, and racketeering forms the basis of the conception in the minds of people that good obedient children are brought up only in madrasah. According to the expert on religion Kanata Murzahalilova, many parents send their children to madrasah in the hope that there they will become obedient and kind. "I think, such problems in schools as endless collections of money, purchase of books, as well as social and economic situation in the family, pushes for children to be sent to but madrasah, rather than secondary schools."<sup>55</sup> A mother named Mayram, whose child is studying at a madrasah in Chuy, is sure that the school will not be able to give the child a decent upbringing. During a conversation with representatives of the Bulan Institute, she talked about motherhood and the disrespect towards the elders among students in schools stating: "You see, in schools they cut each other with knives and students die. There is no proper upbringing in schools. Teachers are indifferent, they conduct lessons in a uninspired fashion. Students dress up as models, do not study, and watch obscene videos on the Internet. Therefore, why should I not send my children to madrasah? What's wrong if the child will become God-fearing and obedient?"<sup>56</sup>

According to Kanybek Osmonaliev, the ex-Minister of Education, who led the State Commission on Religious Affairs for several years, when secular teachers, due to insufficiency pay and support from the state, are searching for the ways to survive the cause of raising children is taken over by the mullahs. "We now move from one extreme to another, under the influence of various religious movements. Each missionary seeks to realize his sabotage work. Now there are a myriad of them. The illiterate mullahs, under the influence of missionaries, educate our children as religious fanatics."<sup>57</sup> In his opinion, after the age of atheism, the number of religious radicals, swinging from one extreme to another, is rapidly growing.

## **8. Sources of financing madrasah**

Many madrasah work on a private basis and are funded by parents whose children are enrolled, as well as through the charitable funds received by SAMK and the mosques. There are fears in Kyrgyz society that madrasah are solely financed by the Arab countries that might propagate dangerous religious trends. Out of 21 madrasah, where we met with the heads, 14 gave us the following answer on the question of who finances them: "funds are coming from the local population and the parents of the students." Five madrasah answered that they were "assisted by charitable foundations of Kyrgyzstan". Our observations have showed that the

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<sup>55</sup> Interview of Kanat Murzakhilov with the Bulan Institute.

<sup>56</sup> Interview of the mother, whose daughter is studying in a madrasah in Osh. Received on February 20.

<sup>57</sup> Interview of Kanybek Osmonaliev with the Bulan Institute. Published on the Bulan Institute's website.

heads of the madrasah are reluctant to answer questions concerning sources of funding, monthly budget, teachers' salaries, and other issues.

The SAMK recognizes that until 2013, the madrasahs received funds from countries such as Pakistan, Turkey and Egypt. Zamir *kary* Rakiev stated that "we do not deny the acceptance of funds from outside but there is no need to look only for the bad. For example, the education systems of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan have different curriculums, but the main goal remains providing students with quality education, right? Although we do receive funds from outside, the main goal remains to educate the children in accordance with *iman*, meaning morality and ethics."<sup>58</sup> Mr. Rakiev goes on:

*"Madrasahs are not allocated with funds from the state budget. For example, there is a madrasah with 200 students funded by only one sponsor. Take for example "Adep Bashaty" association, "Mutakallim" and "Dilmurok" charity funds which fund our madrasah. Speaking of private sponsors, the name of Sheikh Said Bayumi, who finances many madrasahs and is known to every Kyrgyz, needs to be mentioned. There are cases when teachers are paid a salary on the basis of an arrangement with sponsors. Some teachers refuse money, saying that they do the work out of mercy. Some give their zakat to the madrasah. There are also those people who bring potatoes, apples, flour during harvesting season."*

The above-named Sheikh Said Bayumi is a philanthropist who was born in Egypt. He is active on the territory of Kyrgyzstan, and can often be seen at the opening ceremonies of mosques along with ambassadors from Arab countries.<sup>59</sup>

The material-technical base and living conditions differ dramatically from madrasah to madrasah. For example, in the madrasah named after Imam Agzam in Kara-Balta there is a training hall, a pond for raising fish and even a small stable. Children are taught to take care of livestock, gardening, and also trained to participate in national equestrian sports games.<sup>60</sup>

At the same time, there are many madrasah in Kyrgyzstan that are in a dire need of material support. For example, the madrasah "Az-Zahra" in Jalal-Abad published a letter-appeal to the public with a request for help on the Internet (see figure #).

The Bulan Institute tried to find out the reasons for the appeal and it turned out that the madrasah is in a difficult financial situation since there are no permanent sponsors. Parents of children collect food for 500 som every month, and regional charities from charitable funds are also helping. Recently, the city mayor's office inspected the madrasah and concluded that the conditions in its dormitory did not meet legal requirements. In winter, the heating system does not work and the building needs repairs. Accordingly the city hall issued a demand to close the madrasah's dormitory until repair work is done. One of the teachers of the madrasah who asked not to be named, told us the following: "It would be nice if the madrasah had sponsors that help monthly because there are not enough funds to feed children. Parents pay only 500 som per month, and some cannot even pay this amount. If sponsors helped, we could

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<sup>58</sup> Interview of Zamir *kary* Rakiev, the Head of the Education Department of Muftiate with the Bulan Institute, March 17.

<sup>59</sup> The grand opening of two mosques was held On the Issyk-Kul, Available: <http://www.muftiyat.kg/ky/news/ysyk-koloblusunda-eki-mechittin-achylysh-azemi-bolup-ottu>

<sup>60</sup> This was said in an interview with Zamir *kary* Rakiev; in addition, this information is also available at: <http://www.turmush.kg/ru/news:118174>

open a library, a computer class and create good conditions for learning. We have only three computers, and two of them broke down. "

## **9. Without permission and without conditions**

Some of the madrasahs that the Bulan Institute specialists visited in order to familiarize themselves with their current state had good conditions, while others lacked any adequate conditions and were on the verge of closure.

### **Madrasah "Abdullah bin Abbas"**

The madrasah "Abdullah bin Abbas" in Bishkek counts itself among the number of madrasah with good conditions. Opened in 2001, the madrasah is regularly funded by sponsors and has 85 children studying there. There is 1 computer class, 3 dormitories, a library and a building for household purposes. 7 teachers and 2 educators are employed. Children live in the madrasah premises and eat free meals three times a day. "Salary to staff is transferred from the public charitable foundation "Ihsan Khairia. Parents also provide assistance." said madrasah mentor Asylbek Tashtemirov.

Children who graduate from this madrasah master the specialty of the *mudaris* of the religious sphere in the sciences of *Sharia* and Koranic memorization as well as the study of Imam Khatib. "If the child has enough patience to finish his studies, then he will have the opportunity to become a *hafiz*, that is, speaking in Kyrgyz, *кары (kary)*, who has completely mastered the Holy Quran. Memorizing the Koran is our most important task. In addition, the Arabic language, *tafsir* of the Koran, *hadith*, *sira*, *aqidah* and *fiqh* are taught. Beginning from the 3rd year, students learn *khitab*, that is, oratory. We also attach significant importance to computer literacy," Asylbek Tashtemirov said.

On the question of teaching secular lessons, he assured Bulan researchers that "an arrangement with the village school is made for the teachers to come over and hold secular lessons."

### **Medrese "Ravza"**

Madrasah "Ravza" is located in the village of Jany-Djer, Sokuluksky district of Chui region. Opened in 2000 the madrasah is registered at the SAMK and the Ministry of Justice. Currently, 61 boys and 36 girls study at the madrasah. The head of the madrasah, Oskon Kalandarov, familiarized us with the current conditions at the educational institution.

The Madrasah is located in a three-story building (see photo of the madrasah in the annex). With the funding of the US Embassy together with the AVEP Foundation and the Center for Education girls are additionally taught sewing with machines bought by the school. This year 20 girls are intended to receive a certificate of a seamstress profession. The boys live in the madrasah while the girls are from the local village, returning home at the end of the school day. The institution has all the necessary conditions for study. There is a library, a medical room, a sewing workshop, and a dining room. Classes are equipped with desks as in state schools. Oskon Kalandarov assured the Institute that the lessons are conducted according to the curriculum approved by the Mufti. "We mainly teach children to memorize the Koran. In addition, lessons are being conducted on *fiqh*, *tafsir*, *hadith*, Arabic and basic lessons on *aqidah*. The training period consists of three years," says the head of the madrasah.

### **Madrasah "Abu Bakir Sydyk"**

When Institute researchers arrived at the madrasah "Abu Bakir Sydyk" in the village of Kara-Bak in Batken district, construction was taking place in the yard. It turned out that the new building was being built with the support of the "Tabarak" foundation. The currently functioning building was in a decaying state (see the photo of the madrasah building in the annex). There are three teachers in the madrasah. According to the deputy director of the madrasa A. Kurbanov, training is conducted in accordance with the curriculum approved by the Muftiate for the primary madrasah. The representative of the madrasah, however, was not able to show us the schedule of the lessons. Out of 40 children studying, 30 are students between grades 6 to 9. "These children go to school before lunch, and come here after lunch. We also check how they study at school and check their diaries," said Kurbanov. On the question of whether the respective state bodies conduct checks, and provide remarks and suggestions regarding the educational process and housing conditions of children, the representative of the madrasah answered that "children are trained in accordance with the parents' demands" and noted that there is a signed assurance by the parents of each child.

### **Medrese "Batken"**

Madrasah "Batken" in the town of Batken was opened in 1997 on the initiative of the regional *kaziyat*, with the financial support of the Tabarak charitable foundation in Bishkek and was registered with the State Commission on Religious Affairs and the Muftiate. According to the information given by A. Yunusov, the Head of the educational institution, education in the madrasah is carried out in accordance with the program "Preparation of the *kary*".<sup>61</sup> Currently, 30 children study at the madrasah; 20 of those are children between grades 6 to 9, the remaining ten are from grades 9 to 11. With regard to 20 minor children, the head of the madrasah assured that "they study at school in the morning, and come to the madrasah after lunch".<sup>62</sup> Some of these children are residents of the town of Batken, the rest are from various villages of the Batken region. There are only 4 teachers in the madrasah. Children pay a tuition of 1000 *som* every month; this however is only enough to cover expenses for three meals a day.

### **Madrasah "Birinchi Kadam"**

Despite teaching children, Madrasah "Birinchi Kadam" in Bishkek positions itself as a "charity institution" and claims that it is not a madrasah. In a recent raid, organized by the Sverdlovsk regional *akimat*, the curriculum of this madrasah was claimed to be inadequate and the institution was working without permission. The madrasah building is located in the heart of Bishkek. During the Soviet Union the building served as a dormitory for workers of the women's clothing factory. It was obvious to Institute researchers, that the old building was thoroughly renovated. The floors are covered with carpets and one needs to take off their shoes when entering. Nematulla Nabiyeu, the head of institution "Birinchi Kadam" said:

*"We are not madrasah, we are being misunderstood. We are a charitable institution, we teach young people morality, courtesy and faith. We are registered in both the State Commission on Religious Affairs and in the Muftiate as a charitable institution. Since our activities are connected with charity, we organize religious and other events. They are conducted in the*

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<sup>61</sup> Interview of A. Yunusov, the head of the "Batken" Madrasah in the town of Batken / Sh. Sherov. - Batken, March 16, 2017.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

*form of various actions and courses. There are about 70 students studying here. They come in the evenings and after dinner the classes begin. The classes last just 1-2 hours. Those who wish may live here and may come here every day. The curriculum is introduced as a course on iman (faith). In general, we are teaching people to be polite and courteous. Since these qualities are particularly valued in the Islamic religion, students are also taught the corresponding hadiths of the Qur'an. At the end of the course we are entitled to issue a certificate "on studies of iman."*

In the given educational institution the class/training length is not established and ends when the course on *iman* is completed. Nabiyeu continued, "We do not directly perform the functions of the madrasahs, we teach *Iman* only to those who graduate from schools and continue their studies at the universities and already have sufficient secular education."

As already mentioned above, following the results of monitoring by the Sverdlovsk District Executive Committee, the recommendation was made close down five madrasah, including the "Birinci Kadam". We have observed, however, that despite the warning by the state institution, the educational institution continues to work.

### **Madrasah "Umnuzajiya"**

In the village of Nizhne-Vostochny in Jany-Djersky rural district, Sokuluk region of Chui Oblast, there are two madrasah with the names of "Aziret Umar" and "Umnuzajiya". They are both managed by one man, Nazhibullo Magomedov. After arriving in the village, Institute researchers were not allowed into the girl's madrasah "Aziret Umar" nor were we allowed to film or take photographs. Currently, there are 15 girls enrolled and three teachers working at the "Azireti Umar" madrasah. We were surprised to hear that teachers work without getting paid. "Teachers work without a pay. Students also study free of charge. The food is provided by the well-off fellow villagers and sponsors, and I am infinitely grateful for that", says Najibullo Magomedov. We were told that the male madrasah "Umnuzajiya" is also closed for vacation and were not allowed to go inside. Information about this madrasah was found in the notes of the candidate of historical sciences Shaiyrbek Sherov. Here is how Shaiyrbek Sherov describes the moment of visiting the madrasah:

*"There are 40 children in the madrasah. Education is given in the order of the old Hijra; because of the absence of their own premises. The children are trained sitting on the carpet, inside of the mosque. There are no desks and no tables. In addition, there is no curriculum developed by the Muftiate. If you don't take the manager into account, there are three teachers in the team, one of who has Tajik nationality, the other two Kyrgyz. Maybe this is the influence of the old methods of teaching, but the students replace their own names with sunnata, meaning that they replace their own names by the names of prominent personalities of Islam. For example, the student Bayzhigit changed his name to Abdalbasha, the other student changed his name to Nurullo Islam, as the student Tumon became Umar."*<sup>63</sup>

The above-named manager of the two madrasah, Nazhibullo Magomedov, answered our questions briefly by phone. "We teach in madrasah only in accordance with the program approved by the Muftiate and we will not allow any other religious directions in the schools" he said. The manager also informed us that there are 15 boys studying at the madrasah, and the period of training depends on the abilities of each student. "Some people learn the Koran

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<sup>63</sup> Sherov Sh.B., "Formation of religious-Islamic education in Kyrgyzstan: current state and problems", Dissertation, the Candidate of Historical Sciences. / Sh. Sherov. – Bishkek, 2007. – p. 95.

in just six months," he added. Therefore, this madrasah does not teach children, according to the single curriculum implemented by the Council of Ulema under the Muftiate.

### **Madrasah in the courtyard of the mosque in the village of Manas**

We specifically wanted to visit the madrasah located in the courtyard of the mosque in the village of Manas on the outskirts of Bishkek. The Institute learned about it from the following appeal on social media under the title "children of the madrasah in need of help." The deplorable state of the madrasah and lack of basic conditions was obvious and upsetting. This photo was posted on Facebook in February 2017:

The madrasah in the village of Manas turned out to be a tiny clay house with two rooms. As we entered, Institute researchers saw about ten boys sitting in the corner. Among them there were children aged 6-7. We were greeted by a young man of about 30 years old, named Salimbek Baymatov, who introduced himself as a teacher of the madrasah. "I graduated from a madrasah in Bishkek, which is located at the intersection of Zhibek-Jolu and Kurenkeev. I am working here for the second year. 17 children study in our madrasah. Since it is vacation time at the moment, half of our children have gone home," he said. Children from 6 to 21 years old study in the madrasah. The house, where children live and study is noticeably damp with an unpleasant musty smell. Mr. Baimatov says the madrasah has no financial sponsors. The parishioners of the mosque bring pastries, tea and potatoes. There are practically no conditions to support living or studying here. At the time of our visit the madrasah was worried about how to collect 8,000 som to pay the cook. The main trouble of the madrasah was described as its lack of registration. They say that the documents are under preparation.

### **Madrasah of Murtazali**

Another madrasah in Bishkek without a registration certificate is the madrasah in the Murtazali mosque, located at the intersection of Zhibek-Jolu and Pravda streets. Based on the results of the above mentioned audit conducted in March 2017 by the Sverdlovsk District Akimat, the opinion was sent to the relevant stated bodies that five madrasah, including the mentioned madrasah, are subject to closure.<sup>64</sup> Bulan researchers arrived three weeks later and witnessed that the madrasah is continuing operations normally. About ten children were sitting in the madrasah; as the mentor saw us he asked us to leave the room and talked with us in the yard. He stated that "the madrasah is not working now. We are collecting documents for registration, but did not have time to register yet." There are no educational supplies or books, only the reading of the Koran is taught in the madrasah.

## **10. The social status of children attending madrasah**

We have combined the results of three different surveys conducted among students of madrasah. The first survey on the topic of "Religious life and madrasah" was conducted in 2014 by the I. Arabaev University. A similar survey was conducted by Shaiyrbek Sherov, the Candidate of Historical Sciences using the 377 students from the "Abdullah ibn Abbas" Islamic Institute in the Leilek region, the madrasah of "Abu Hanif" in Batken, "Khazreti Usman" and "Khazreti Ali" in the town of Kyzyl-Kya of the Batken province and the "Moldo

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<sup>64</sup> Gulya Almambetova, "Monitoring of madrasahs functioning without permission", Available: <https://sputnik.kg/Radio/20170301/1032008566/almambetova-nachar-sharttagy-medreseler-tabylidy.html>

Taabaldi” madrasah in the village of Kara-Tash in Nookat district.<sup>65</sup> Due to the fact that several years have passed since those surveys were conducted, the Bulan Institute conducted a new survey among madrasah students in the Bishkek and Chui districts. 87 students of madrasah participated in the survey. Subsequently, we compared the results of a survey conducted by our institute with the results of the two previous ones. The answers turned out to be largely similar, with a difference of one to two percent.

The most noticeable fact was an increased number of students and teachers interested in the introduction of secular subjects into madrasah education. In the survey conducted in 2014 by the I. Arabaev University, 60% of the participants opposed the introduction of secular subjects in the madrasah. This time however, 70% from the 87 students participating in the survey conducted by the Bulan Institute, answered that they would agree to the introduction of secular disciplines. 20% opposed the introduction of secular subjects and 10% said they would agree on the introduction of the most important secular subjects only. 11 of the 21 heads of madrasah whom we interviewed answered that "secular education is our important goal and we are doing everything to realize it." The responses of the eight other heads of madrasah were: "secular education needs additional funds and if there were funds to pay the teachers we would give our consent." Only two heads answered that "if children want secular education, they should go to a neighboring school, we do not mind."

In the course of the survey it was determined that 60% of the parents of the madrasah students have secondary education, 10% special secondary education, and 30% higher education. The survey thus indicates that the majority of parents of the students attending madrasah have secondary education. On the question "How many brothers and sisters do you have in your family" answers were the following: 5% of students have three, 15% - four, 45% - five, 20% - six, 10% - seven. The survey indicates therefore, that the majority of students are from large families.

On the question "What are your plans after completing your madrasah studies", 40% of the respondents answered that they would like to continue religious education abroad, 25% would like to work in the religious sphere (at mosques and madrasah), 5% intend to go on to *dawah* (*preaching*), and 30% wish to continue their education at the secular higher institutions. This indicates a revival of interest in secular education. For example, according to the survey conducted by Shayyrbek Sherov in 2013, with the participation of 377 students, only 5% showed interest in continuing to secular education.

## 11. Conclusions

After a thorough research of the current state, curriculum and legal framework of madrasah in Kyrgyzstan, Bulan Institute has come to the following conclusions:

- In 2014, for the first time after achieving independence in Kyrgyzstan, attention to the quality of education provided in madrasah has been paid on the state level. Although the "Concept of state policy in the sphere of religion for 2014-2020" is showing certain positive shifts, indifference and apathy remain prevalent among authoritative religious figures, as well as in the Muftiate itself. It is necessary to accelerate steps to

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<sup>65</sup> From the field notebook of Shayyrbek Sherov, 2012 No. 3 - 3-7-b.

implement the concept, strengthen control, and find financial sources for their implementation of these activities at the state level;

- The SAMK confirms the number of students studying in madrasah to be around 6000. The number however might be much higher. It is important to also take into account those children who study both at schools and madrasah as well as those, who attend madrasah 1-2 times a week. Our research indicates the lack of an accurate account of children studying in madrasah, both full and part-time;
- Cases of admission to the madrasah of those children who have not finished 9 grades continue to exist. This is a gross violation of the law. Heads of madrasah mask themselves with excuses such as "he comes only on vacation", "they come only after the lessons", "they come with older brothers", etc. This should be controlled jointly by the Ministry of Education and law enforcement agencies; state bodies and the Muftiate should take tough measures against those violating the law;
- Over the past five years, madrasah went through spontaneous stages of development; it is now time for the madrasah to adapt to modern realities. It is necessary to reduce their number by introducing a standardized curriculum in all Islamic educational institutions with appropriate conduct accreditation and licensing;
- Due to the lack of stable financial sources, most madrasah cannot work properly with some of them being on the verge of closure. Therefore, it is advisable to close down the madrasah with no stable financial sources available for the creation of conditions that meet legal educational requirements;
- In 2013, the Council of Ulema under the Muftiate approved a single curriculum for all the madrasah however many madrasah do not comply with it. Lessons are held depending on the availability of funds and are mainly limited to memorizing the Qur'an. The Muftiate should strengthen the monitoring of the implementation of the training process in accordance to the curriculum approved by the Ulema Council;
- The classification of religious educational institutions remains in a chaotic state. We need to create a single state standard for secondary and higher education (bachelor and masters level) at the religious educational institutions. For example, the Muftiate divides madrasah into three categories: primary, secondary and higher. There is also an Islamic university and other institutes that should be logically superior to them. Therefore, it is not considered appropriate to divide the madrasah into three categories, but rather affirm a three-year period of study in the madrasah and then, if the child wants to continue education, he can go to higher educational institutions;

- It is necessary to strengthen control over the rights of mosques and regional *kaziyats* to open madrasah, as well as to strengthen criteria and requirements for the registration of madrasah. Some of the mosques open unauthorized madrasah in the *hujra* format, without any registration in the State Commission. Local state authorities and the Muftiate should conduct a thorough monitoring of all mosques in order to identify such facts. Many of those madrasah also lack any appropriate conditions for children to study there: the sanitary condition is depressing, there are practically no school supplies and textbooks, and children are sitting in damp rooms on the floor on rugs;
- A law regulating and controlling all activities of religious educational institutions should be introduced. The bill "On Religious Education and Religious Organizations", proposed in 2013 by K. Osmonaliev, was rejected during the discussion in Parliament. The law regulating this sphere should be introduced, developed together with the participation of religious scholars and imams, madrasah leaders, the Spiritual Administration of Muslims, the State Commission on Religious Affairs, and the Ministry of Education and independent experts;
- The public discussion of the "the Concept of Reforming of Religious Education and the System of Religious Studies" has finished. The concept should be adopted as soon as possible, endow it with legal power and start its implementation. These activities should be accelerated at the state level and financial and other resources should be found for their implementation;
- Secular subjects are absent in 95% of the madrasah. In the remaining 5%, although secular subjects are taught, they depend on the financial support of the sponsors and therefore have a temporary nature. Students studying at madrasah should be also receiving secular education and conditions should be created to master new technologies.