

## **Uzbeks Want Their Language Official**

**Author:** [IWPR](#)

By Bashir Guakh and Hasina Sulaiman in Kabul (ARR No. 86, 16-Dec-03)

Plans for the national anthem to be sung in Pashto only have already provoked controversy. And now Uzbek delegates are pressing their tongue the third official language in the constitution, after Pashto and Dari - but they are facing opposition.

There are no recent official figures for the ethnic make-up of Afghanistan, but estimates say Pashtuns are at least 40 to 45 per cent, Dari-speaking Tajiks 25 per cent, Hazaras 10 to 19 per cent and Uzbeks six to eight per cent, with other groups making up the remainder of the population.

Students at the Uzbek literature department at Kabul University are in no doubt that Uzbek should be recognised.

Abdul Hamid Sherzad said it should replace Pashto as an official language. "The Pashto language is not rich and does not have a long history," he claimed. Another student, Abdul Momen, said, "We don't want official billboards and government and administrative documents in the Uzbek language, but the prejudice that Pashtuns showed us under the Taleban oblige us to call for our language to be made official."

But Uzbek campaigners are meeting with stiff resistance from other ethnic and language groups, who say too many official languages would be confusing, unworkable and would endanger national unity.

The chief editor of Brekhna Magazine Masjidi Malyar said Uzbeks should drop their claims to have an official language, and concentrate instead on the more important issues facing the country.

"When the formalisation of two languages have brought up so many problems, what will happen if we create three official languages?" he said.

And the deputy of the information and culture ministry, Abdul Hameed Mubariz said, "Anyone wanting to make Uzbeki official are only fanning prejudices."

The former chairman of the Afghanistan Youth Centre, Dr Khaled Hemmat, said that Pashto did have a rich history which went back thousands of years. "Pashto should be recognised as both the official and national language of Afghanistan - and if other people are making claims for their language then Arabic, the language of the Quran and Hadith, should be recognised as official," he said.

Some blame Afghanistan's neighbours for inflaming the language controversy.

A former member of the country's science academy, Sabz Ali Talimyar told IWPR, "As Afghanistan is heading towards peace and tranquillity, neighbouring countries have again begun their efforts to create disorder in our country by interfering in the controversial issue of language."

Bashir Guakh and Hasina Sulaiman are participating in IWPR's Loya Jirga reporting project.

**Location:** Afghanistan

**Topic:** Constitutional Loya Jirga, 2003

**Focus:** Afghanistan

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**Source URL:** <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/uzbeks-want-their-language-official>