

## **A CHRONICLE OF FORCED CHILD LABOUR: REPORTS FROM THE UZBEKISTAN COTTON HARVEST 2010**

Issue 10, December 6, 2010



*With this issue, we conclude our chronicle of forced child labour in Uzbekistan in 2010.*

*According to the results of this year's cotton campaign, we can conclude that neither the ratification of ILO nor the boycotts of the Uzbek cotton helped to change the situation for better. The Uzbek authorities as usual kept using the cheap labour of schoolchildren and students who had to pick cotton for two months instead of studying during the school term.*

*This year students and schoolchildren were sent to cotton fields from the 10<sup>th</sup> of September and have stayed there until the 10<sup>th</sup> of November. Mobilisation of the students and children into work has taken place based on the orders of the administration of educational institutions, in their turn, they received orders from the local mayors' offices.*

*Like previous years, the workers were assigned with a daily target depending on their age group and it was between 30 to 60 kg a day. The payment for the work was 3 USD cents per kilo of cotton.*

*According to the reports of local monitors, after the return of schoolchildren to studies, approximately up to mid November the school administration forced pupils to bring 5-10 kg cotton to school. Based on the obtained information, this cotton was sold to those farmers who could not fulfil the yearly target quota of the harvest.*

*This year the local authorities took extra security measures in order to hide the information about the mobilisation of schoolchildren to cotton harvest. In some districts the teachers were instructed to report unknown people in the fields and the children were supposed to tell that they are working with their own will and helping their families.*

*By the end of the cotton season in Uzbekistan the price of the cotton in world market rose*

*up to a record value which is 147 USD cents per pound. The Uzbek people are paying for the cotton with their own price which is life, health and low education level of youth in the country.*

## **Uzbekistan marks Holiday of Cotton.**

Hundreds of thousands of public-sector workers who have been involved in the cotton harvesting campaign in 2010 marked the Holiday of Cotton without holiday mood on the last Sunday of November in Uzbekistan. Along with schoolchildren, servicemen, students, doctors, teachers and other employees from state-run organizations take part in cotton harvesting each year in Uzbekistan.

In order to avoid the campaign, people bribe their superiors or hire day-labourers, who make up almost half of all cotton pickers. However, not many public-sector workers have money to do this.

A doctor said that in previous years doctors from Tashkent had been sent to pick cotton only one day, whereas this year they had been sent for 10 days. Those who refused to pick cotton faced dismissals. Moreover, the authorities did not care about patients when doctors picked cotton.

The doctor said that about 500 employees of his clinic had been dumped at the dilapidated building of the former Yangiyul cultural facility in Tashkent Region without water supply or sewage systems. "We shared that dirty place with cockroaches, mice and rats," the doctor told Uznews.net. "We better not discuss the quality of food we were given."

Doctors slept on the floor, as they were not provided beds, he said. The doctor questioned the logic in sending doctors on a humiliating stint to pick cotton when there was no cotton to pick in October.

Uzbekistan also marked the Day of Medical Workers on the 14<sup>th</sup> of November and World Health Day on the 21<sup>st</sup> of November. Prior to both holidays, doctors were called to clean up territories around their clinics.

This sort of campaign based on free labour has become frequent in the past 12 to 18 months. "For me all these November holidays are another excuse to consider whether or not I want to leave this country which shows such disrespect for professionals," the doctor concluded.

The problem is aggravated by the fact that public-sector workers do not even think to defend their violated rights in courts because they are afraid of losing their jobs that pay modest, but stable, wages.

Source: [Uznews](#), 29.11.2010

[http://www.uznews.net/news\\_single.php?lng=en&sub=hot&cid=4&nid=15772](http://www.uznews.net/news_single.php?lng=en&sub=hot&cid=4&nid=15772)

## **Uzbekistan to Establish Direct and Guaranteed Supply of Cotton in Bangladesh in Exchange for Investments.**

From 7-11 of November, a delegation of the Bangladesh government, headed by the Trade Minister Farooq Khan, visited Uzbekistan. The foreign visitors and the Uzbek leadership discussed the creation of a direct channel for the delivery of raw cotton.

According to Financial Express, the Government of Bangladesh proposed to Uzbekistan a direct investment in the production of cotton and textile industry. The Uzbek side has agreed to provide Bangladesh with 200 thousand tons of cotton annually in exchange for investments in the production of 200 tons of yarn. Uzbekistan promised a 15 percent discount on the price of cotton and a seven-year tax holiday. In addition, Bangladesh will have access to a free trade volume regime of \$6 billion with the CIS countries.

According to Farooq Khan, the Trade Minister of Bangladesh, trade between Bangladesh and Uzbekistan makes up for \$500 million a year, of which \$450 million consist of Uzbek cotton imports and other

commodities, and \$50 million are composed of exports of various commodities.

Bangladesh - a country where child labor is used more than anywhere else in the world. The population of Bangladesh is 140 million - 63 million, or 44 percent of the total population are children. 30 % of those aged ten to fourteen are working. As a result, child labor in Bangladesh is more than 12 percent of the total workforce.

Earlier, under pressure from global brands, which announced a boycott of Uzbek cotton won from the use of child labor, Bangladesh was planning to refuse fiber imports from Uzbekistan. In 2007, the president of the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association, Abdul Hai Sarker, said in an interview with the Daily Star that a number of famous brands have warned the country about the possible termination of cooperation, if Bangladesh continues to use Uzbek cotton.

But apparently, Bangladesh cannot refuse Uzbek cotton given its comparative cheapness. It is not reported how it settles the relationship with the world retailers boycotting Uzbek cotton.

Source: [Ferghana.ru](http://www.ferghana.ru), 29.11.2010

<http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=6817>

## 'Experts of the International Labour Organization should be permitted into Uzbekistan'.

Markus Löning the high government official and the Human Rights Commissioner of Germany, demands Tashkent officials to permit the experts of the ILO to come to Uzbekistan to hold an investigation.

According to reports, the State Secretary of the United States Hillary Clinton who recently finished her official visit to Uzbekistan also raised the issue of child labour during talks with President Islam Karimov.

Despite well documented facts that Uzbekistan uses child labour in harvesting cotton, which is one of the main exported products in Uzbekistan, the officials of Tashkent continuously deny it.

Mr Löning noted in his interview with the BBC Uzbek radio:

Answer: Of course there are many other countries which use illegal child labour, but the place of Uzbekistan among those countries is different! Here the forced child labour is organized by the government, this situation has been documented by different sides. Government's sending entire school courses to pick the cotton harvest is I say to you, a very incomparable situation.

BBC: Did you talk with Uzbek officials about these issues and expressed your concerns?

Answer: When I visited Uzbekistan last summer, I raised this issue with the officials. But I couldn't get any satisfying response to that. I also wrote them a letter, but never got a reply. In this letter I asked about the situation this year and when they would open the doors for the UN experts to come and investigate this case.

BBC: Did you mean the use of child labour?

Answer: Exactly. Uzbekistan has signed relevant international conventions regarding this issue. The International Labour Organisation is interested in finding out about the process of implementing these conventions in practice and would like to investigate the situation...Uzbekistan always denies the use of child labour. Therefore, there should be transparency regarding this issue. The experts should be permitted in to Uzbekistan and learn the situation for themselves.

Source: [BBC](#), 4.12.2010

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/uzbek/uzbekistan/2010/12/101204\\_cy\\_uzbekistan\\_rights.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/uzbek/uzbekistan/2010/12/101204_cy_uzbekistan_rights.shtml)

## Uzbeks Seek Closer UK Trade Ties

The Uzbek government will use an annual meeting with British officials to seek assistance for the agricultural sector, analysts say.

The December 9<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Uzbek-British Trade and Industry Council will take place in the capital Tashkent.

An official from Uzbekistan's foreign economic relations ministry said the government was keen to access western technologies to revive the farming sector.

"Britain's Plant Breeding Institute [John Innes Centre] and the Institution of Environmental Sciences count among the world's leading research centres and their expertise would be useful to us," he said.

A member of the upper house of Uzbekistan's parliament said opportunities for selling more cotton would be explored at the meeting. Uzbek cotton exports have in recent years been hit by a boycott by leading clothing manufacturers and retailers, imposed because of the used of child labour on cotton plantations.

Uzbekistan regards Britain as a major trading and economic partner.

Source: [iwpr.net](#), 24.11.2010

<http://iwpr.net/report-news/uzbeks-seek-closer-uk-trade-ties>

## **EJF photo exhibition in Houses of Parliament exposes the continued use of forced child labour in Uzbekistan.**

With support from Alistair Carmichael, MP and fashion model Lily Cole, EJF's event and week-long photo exhibition highlights forced child labour in Uzbek cotton production, and calls for policy actions to resolve this problem.

EJF's new briefing 'White Gold; Uzbekistan, slave nation for our cotton?' released today, summarises the information provided by independent journalists and human rights activists, and together with the exhibition shows the presence of young children picking cotton at the behest of their government. Uzbekistan is the world's 6<sup>th</sup> largest producer of cotton and the government, which has a monopoly on trade, makes around \$1 billion each year from exports.

Despite signing international laws to end child labour, the Uzbek government and public agencies once more demanded that children leave their classrooms and head to the fields to each collect a daily quota of many kilos of cotton. Each year, up to 2 million children some as young as 10 years old are coerced into the fields, handpicking cotton in the physically arduous autumn harvest. The 2010 harvest was notable for the increased security in order to prevent documentation of the issue; and the compulsion of wedding and funeral guests to pick a quota before they were allowed to attend the ceremonies. Military, police and public workers were all compelled to labour in the fields.

Recommendations to the UK Government include a review of public procurement, to ensure that Uzbek cotton is not used in public sector uniforms or UK banknotes, and for the UK to take a strong position on human rights in Uzbekistan. The briefing is produced in partnership with the Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights, which monitors, photographs and reports on the abuse of human rights in cotton production.

Download briefing: '[White Gold; Uzbekistan, slave nation for our cotton?](#)'

[http://www.ejfoundation.org/pdf/ejf\\_uzbek\\_harvest\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.ejfoundation.org/pdf/ejf_uzbek_harvest_WEB.pdf)

Source: EJF, 29.11.2010

<http://www.ejfoundation.org/page698.html>

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Feel free to disseminate these reports further and post them on your websites.

More reading:

FAQ: <http://www.cottoncampaign.org/frequently-asked-questions/>

Academic view of the subject: <http://www.soas.ac.uk/ccac/events/cotton-sector-in-central-asia-2005/file49842.pdf>

Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights, 2010, <http://www.uzbekgermanforum.org/>