

## **A CHRONICLE OF FORCED CHILD LABOUR: REPORTS FROM THE UZBEKISTAN COTTON HARVEST 2011**

Issue 3, September 26, 2011

The chronicle covers the following regions:

1. Namangan
2. Samarkand
3. Djizzak
4. Kashkadarya
5. Tashkent

There are a total 13 administrative regions in Uzbekistan



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### **Global clothing brands boycott Uzbek cotton**

More than 60 of the world's top clothing labels, including Burberry and Levi, are to boycott cotton from Uzbekistan over claims the government forces children to harvest the crop.

Swedish high street retailer H&M, and sportswear companies Adidas and Puma were among the brands who pledged not to buy cotton from the former Soviet Central Asian country that they know has been collected by children.

The groups have signed a pledge under the Responsible Sourcing Network, a project organised by the US-based advocacy group As You Sow which is organising the boycott.

"We are a major cotton consumer and like many companies, we take a clear stand against child labour, regardless of country," said Henrik Lampa, corporate social responsibility manager at H&M.

US retail industry group American Apparel and Footwear Association, which represents more than 800 companies, had previously signed up for the pledge but Andrew Behar, Chief Executive of As You Sow, said the new individual pledges had extra significance.

"It's about integrity and transparency," he said. "It's different when you sign up individually and put your logo on it."

Source: The Telegraph, 18.09.2011

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/uzbekistan/8771473/Global-clothing-brands-boycott-Uzbek-cotton.html>

### **Schoolchildren are also being sent to pick cotton after the college students**

In Uzbekistan it is now schoolchildren's turn to be sent to pick cotton in the fields after all the other college and lyceum students have already gone.

There are reports that the 6<sup>th</sup> grade children or 12 year old kids are being sent to the fields to pick cotton.

Parents and teachers are under pressure and threats by authorities to recruit children and students to go to pick cotton during the study semester.

Komila Khalimova, a housewife from Yangiyul, is convicted for her religious beliefs.

She told the BBC that she agreed with the college administration and paid bribes in order not to send her son to pick cotton as she is a single mother. But later the college administration violated the agreement.

"I hired a labourer for 70 thousand soms, so he could go and pick cotton for my son's place. That money was

for 700 kilo of cotton. We agreed that he would keep that 70 thousand soms and any amount paid for the cotton he would pick. But the college director violated the agreement, he said that they will keep the 70 thousand soms as a payment for my son's food and he has to come and pick cotton himself", said the mother from Yangiyul.

He says that she brought back her son in the beginning of the cotton season and she does not owe anything for his food for the time he spent in the fields.

Komila Halimova says that her daughter who is a 9<sup>th</sup> grade pupil of Furkat school in Yangiyul district has been in the cotton field for already 5 days now.

"They leave at 8 o'clock in the morning and come back home at dawn. They don't use any transport, they have to walk there and back", she says.

According to the mother's words, her daughter has a medical condition and she has to stay away from the sun and dust, but it is useless to try to keep her from the cotton fields.

"Having a medical certificate is a temporary solution, after 2-3 days her teachers come knock on the door and ask her to go pick cotton. Last year the same thing happened", she says.

The government of Uzbekistan denies the use of child labour in the cotton fields of the country.

Last week two human rights activists from Kashkadaryo, who tried to document child labour in the fields, were arrested by police.

Gulshan Koraeva and Nodir Aahtov were kept under arrest for several hours in Koson district police office.

Source: BBC, 19.09.2011

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/uzbek/uzbekistan/2011/09/110919\\_cy\\_cotton\\_mother.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/uzbek/uzbekistan/2011/09/110919_cy_cotton_mother.shtml)

### **Uzbekistan: For Schoolchildren of the Tashkent Province the Cotton Picking season has begun without any Weekend Breaks.**

On 15 September, schoolchildren of the Yangiyul district in Tashkent province, Uzbekistan went out for cotton picking. They have already been working five days in the cotton fields under the slogan "help" for the local farmers.

On every field the children get protected (to be exact – protected from inquiring eyes) by six cars from the local administration, including that of the chairman of the mahalla committee (which is an organ of local self-administration) and others. The observers, stretched out in their car seats, watch over for these young cotton pickers from morning until night.

It should be noted that the children were sent to the fields not visible from the highway. This was done to mask the use of forced child labour and to hinder random visits of human rights activists and journalists.

The correspondent of "Fergana" visited the cotton fields close to the settlements of Nurobod and Halkabad in Yangiyul district, Tashkent province.

On Saturday 17 September, he managed to get to the fields where children from school No. 56 had been working. From both sides of the field, "the inspectors", stretched out in cars, idly watched the scene.

Unfortunately, it did not work out to take this picture - the camera gave up.

On Sunday morning, the diligent children went out again to pick cotton. They were told in school that it is necessary to bring the harvest in before it starts getting cold, which is also the reason for picking without any breaks on the weekend.

If one comes closer to the students, it gets clear that all cotton pickers from the territory had been gathered and that only the children had gathered at their meeting place, in order to subsequently go cotton picking on another field. Before my very eyes a line of 15 boys went quickly to the cotton field, where they got instructed by their teachers. I managed to speak with some girls, who restrained themselves timidly.

“We are helping farmers, come with us, the teacher and the director of the school are there, you can take as many pictures as you want”, they said.

As a reply to the question, which class they attend, the children answered that they are in class 8 at school No. 56 in Nurobodski district. As local residents reported to “Fergana”, at the moment lessons are given in the aforementioned school only to students from the first to the fifth class. The others are on the field, “helping” farmers.

Source: Fergana News, 19.09.2011

<http://www.fergananews.com/news.php?id=17311&mode=snews>

## **Pensioners, pregnant students, schoolchildren- everybody to the field!**

This year the cotton harvest has spared neither pregnant students nor pensioners.

### **A pregnant student should also go to the field!**

Pregnant students of Jizzak Pedagogy Institute are forced to go to the cotton field, otherwise, they are threatened to be expelled from the Institute.

The spouse of one of the pregnant students, desired not to be identified, informed Radio Liberty about this issue.

“My wife is pregnant and her due date is December. Indeed, she is unable to go to the field, if God wills, since she is in the sixth month of her pregnancy. They threaten her with expulsion from the Institute; otherwise, they demand 200 US dollars from us. I am a teacher as well. My salary is not 200 US dollars, but 200 Uzbek Sums. They warned my wife that if she was expelled during the first study year she would not be readmitted again. I do not know what to do now.”

The assistant of the Head of the Jizzak Pedagogy Institute Ne'mat Olimov, partially affirmed the fact that pregnant students were required to go to the field. However, he denied the cases of threat of expulsion from the Institute.

“As a matter of fact, we do not expel them. We have 571 students who are married and have children. It is a nature of Uzbek tradition: if a student chooses to continue studying after the delivery and is unable to go to the field during the harvest, then she is required to send somebody else to replace her. Nobody forces her to go to the field in person. Certainly, she has some siblings and she can ask them to go instead.”

According to Radio Liberty sources, pensioners of Tashkent Region are required to provide a letter of confirmation verifying their agreement to go to the field. As stated by a pensioner resident of Tashkent Region, who did not want to be identified, families who refuse to go to pick cotton are being threatened with termination of electricity and gas supplies.

“They go to the houses and demand people to sign confirmation letters. They said that if I do not go to the field, they will cut off my electricity and gas supply. When I claimed that I did not have any past due balance in my electricity and gas bill to terminate my supply, they said that cotton harvest was compulsory for everybody.” States a woman- a resident of Tashkent Region.

### **Sixty schoolchildren in a truck**

According to the statements of Ziyodulla Razzoqov, a school teacher in Zarbdor province of Jizzak, his students have been deployed to the cotton fields since September 15. Razzoqov describes the poor transportation conditions in which the schoolchildren are sent to the field.

“The kids have been carried like potatoes. 60 children are placed in one truck, which operates on gas. Smoke that comes out from the truck makes it difficult to breath. Poor children! They do not have another choice other than to cope. Schoolchildren are of 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades. They take them to the field early in the morning and bring them back home by 9pm. Parents are displeased with the conditions of transportation of their children as well as with the payment being distributed late.”

According to the statements of secretary girl at the Department of National Education of Zarbdor province of

Jizzak Region, there has been nobody capable to comment on the issues regarding schoolchildren being deployed to pick cotton due to the fact that all the staff members were sent to cotton field as well.

### **A local hokim beats a store owner.**

According to the reports of human rights activist Bahtiyor Hamroyev, who conducted an observation during the cotton harvest in Jizzak Region, not only farmers but people of different professions are experiencing severe pressure, too.

“For instance, on September 15, a funny incident took place in Navbahor community of Pahtakor district. While our respected local hokim Sayfuddin Umarovich Ismoilov was walking around the community he saw one-two grocery stores to be opened. He called upon a manager of the store and beat him for leaving the store open during the harvest time. Moreover, hokim of the region broke all the windows of the store,” said Bahtiyor Hamroyev.

It was impossible to receive any comment from the hokim’s office of Jizzak Region regarding this issue raised by human rights activist.

### **Victims of 2011 Cotton Harvest**

This year the cotton harvest is not without victims. According to Radio Liberty sources, a first year student of the History Department at the State University of Andijan, died during cotton harvest. The first year student died after being severely beating in a fight against fourth year students.

A resident of Ziyodullo Kuldashev’s Mahalla in Muzrobod District of Surhandarya Region, 50-year old farmer Ismoil Turanazarov hung himself after being humiliated in a field by the hokim of the region.

Source: Ozodlik, 19.09.2011

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/24333323.html>

### **Uzbek Activists Detained Photographing Child Cotton Pickers**

Two Uzbek rights activists say they were detained by police for taking pictures of schoolchildren picking cotton in the southern Kashkadarya region, RFE/RL’s Uzbek Service reports.

Gulshan Karayeva and Nodor Ahatov, members of an unregistered Uzbekistan’s Human Rights society, were held by local authorities for 10 hours on September 15 while taking the photos.

“We saw the fourth-graders picking the cotton as we were monitoring allegations of child labor in our region,” Karayeva told RFE/RL.

“[The students] pick cotton from the early morning till the afternoon and then they are supposed to go to school afterward,” she added.

According to Karayeva and Ahatov, Koson district police destroyed all the notes the pair had taken while observing the child labor, including such things as the names of the children involved.

Karayeva said she initially succeeded in hiding the digital camera card from police before they searched her from “head to toe” and confiscated the card.

Karayeva told RFE/RL they were then warned by police that they would be arrested if they return to the cotton fields.

International and domestic human rights organizations have long charged Uzbek officials with using schoolchildren and university students to bring in the country’s annual cotton harvest.

The Uzbek government has repeatedly rejected charges that it forces students to pick cotton.

Several large international clothing retailers have refused to stock garments made with Uzbek cotton because of the use of child labor.

Cotton is Uzbekistan’s main cash crop as the country is one of the world’s leading cotton producers.

Source: Cotton Campaign, 19.09.2011

<http://www.cottoncampaign.org/2011/09/19/uzbek-activists-detained-photographing-child-cotton-pickers/>

## **The medics are picking cotton: both harvest, and medical duty.**

Medical doctors, who were sent to pick cotton with President Karimov's decree, now have been burdened with two special responsibilities.

On 19<sup>th</sup> of September News Media of Uzbekistan published news which said that during the period of cotton harvesting season, the main attention should be paid to create conditions for cotton growers who are working in the fields and their health should be regularly monitored.

According to what Kobiljon Tojiboev the deputy chief of the Tashkent region Healthcare department said to the News media of Uzbekistan, nowadays about thousand medics are involved in cotton harvesting and were sent to the fields.

The Radio Liberty reporter tried to get a response from medic cotton pickers about the conditions of people who are picking cotton in Tashkent region cotton fields and the medical aid they are receiving.

Almost all personnel of Chirchik city medical centre were sent to pick cotton, according to the information taken from that centre.

- Our medics are attendants. They provide medical aid to the cotton growers. Then they go to pick cotton and attend the other requests. They all go from the 13<sup>th</sup> of September, says the worker of the Chirchik Medical centre.

Nosir Berdiev who went to pick cotton together with college students last year, says that the main medical problems among children and adults are stomach and kidney problems and diarrhea, and the main reason for that is the provision of drinking water.

- Well, mostly they go to a different district than their own and they don't know where to find clean water. So the drinking water is dirty and they get sore throats. Also girls get ill with female illnesses. Stomach and kidney problems are quite often. The conditions in the fields vary from hot to cold. Depending on that, we would allow children to stay home. The rest of them go to pick cotton.

One of the students who was sent to pick cotton in Tashkent region says that the conditions for the cotton pickers are quite bad and they caught a cold on the first week of the cotton season.

- First of all, our sleeping area is not in a good condition. We sleep in the field farmhouse, it has neither windows, nor doors. Many of us caught cold because of a heavy draft. There is a doctor who gives us tablets when we are ill. If we have temperature, they let us stay for a day, but then again we have to go to pick cotton the next day. With our cold we still have to work in dusky fields and get wet, says a student from a college in Tashkent, who wanted to stay anonymous.

We asked psychologist Nodir Hojakulov who is picking cotton in the fields what he thinks about the children being sent to pick cotton:

- I think it is a good idea to contribute to the cotton harvest, it is the national wealth of our government. Besides, it is a good educational process for children. They learn to appreciate hard work, the value of their parents and the customs. I think it is a good thing. For our country we should save neither our strength, nor our efforts, says Nodir Hojakulov, doctor from Tashkent.

Nosir Berdiev a medic from Samarkand expresses his opinion differently than his colleague:

- It's a government's politics. They force college and lyceum students to go to pick cotton. Of course my opinion is negative. A child should study. Besides, these children indeed become ill in cotton fields. They all are small children. What can we do now, we have to, they all are sent to the fields anyway, says Nosir Berdiev, a medical doctor who is picking cotton.

Source: Ozodlik, 20.09.2011

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/24334415.html>

## **Children of Namangan have become “rubbish cleaners”.**

The child members of three groups with the name of “Yashil Patrul” (green patrols) in school 11 of Namangan city are involved in cleaning the rubbish in the city.

The school director Odiljon Husanov said that the group members are fulfilling the “rubbish cleaners” duty along with taking their classes.

“We started actions after the meeting held by the Hokim over the weekend. We started on the 12<sup>th</sup> of September. First, we made three groups, selected team leaders for each group and also these groups have 18 members each. They all go and check the neighbourhoods, roads to schools and streets once a week on Saturdays. But until then they collect trash, plastic bottles and papers everyday and bring them back to the special containers we organized and then go to their classes. Even at school, during the breaks they will be collecting trash and put them in special bins provided. Our goal is to clean the roads and the school area from trash, papers, and plastic bottles”, says Odiljon Husanov.

The new mayor of Namangan city, Tolkin Dadaboev who came up with this “idea” of using child labour in cleaning the refuse piles in the city has been widely published in Uzbek media and the mayor is receiving positive feedback.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of September, Tolkin Dadaboev held a meeting in the city mayor’s office and suggested the idea of involving schoolchildren in cleaning the refuse piles.

The Hokim Dadaboev’s “request” more correctly his order started taking place in schools from the 12<sup>th</sup> of September.

Abdukodir Sattorov, doctor from Andijan notes that there is a big risk for children who are involved in cleaning the rubbish piles to get infected with various dangerous deceases.

“From a medical point of view, it is inappropriate. Each of these rubbish piles contains many different infections and germs. They can be viruses transferred through air or through touching. As a result, children can get infected with various deceases”, said Abdukodir Sattorov, doctor from Andijan.

Source: Ozodlik, 20.09.2011

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/24334389.html>

## **Primary school children can buy their way out of cotton harvest**

In the Yukkorichirchick district of Tashkent region, the authorities have informed parents that their young children will be excused from cotton harvesting duties if parents hand over a payment of 20,000 sums (around US\$8.00).

“People in my own farming collective are quite well off and the authorities expected that they would all pay the 20,000 sum,” said Adelaida Kim, a member of the Human Rights Alliance of Uzbekistan (PAU). She said that the cotton harvest had not yet started, and although the youngest pupils are still in school, teachers are already collecting money from them.

“The children won’t be in class for much longer,” says Petr Li, parent of a child at school No.19. “We have been told that once the cotton harvest begins, they’ll close the school, because all the teachers will be out gathering ‘white gold’.”

“There are two sisters at my school who both suffer from ill health, but to be let off from cotton harvesting each has had to pay 150,00 sums,” says one resident at the Politotdela farm.

All the older local schoolchildren have been bought out of the harvesting, but Adelaida Kim says that many of them stay at home.

“It seems that to make up for the shortfall in numbers of young cotton workers, the authorities have brought in 600 senior schoolchildren from Andijan region,” Kim claims. Responsibility for looking after these

'volunteer' workers has fallen on the local population. Residents say that local village councils are asking for 10,000 sums from each household to cover the expense.

"Although Uzbekistan is signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which prohibits the use of child labour, and has its own 2008 law guaranteeing the rights of children, in agricultural areas the use of schoolchildren to work in the cotton fields has continued," says the leader of the PAU, Elena Uralyeva.

At the end of last year and the start of this year, Uralyeva monitored the use of child labour in the cotton fields and was shocked to find that children are taken out of class each spring and sent to weed the cotton plantations. The authorities are keen to prevent information about children "studying" in the cotton fields instead of in school gaining wider publicity. "Outsiders who ask awkward questions are rounded up, with the help of the police, and are made to delete any photographs they may have of child cotton labourers.

Concern over the hypocrisy of the Uzbek authorities, who continue to use forced child labour in the cotton industry, is growing worldwide. More than 60 global clothing companies have joined a boycott of Uzbek cotton, the Ferganews website claims.

Source: Uznews, 20.09.2011

[http://www.uznews.net/news\\_single.php?lng=en&sub=hot&cid=4&nid=17929](http://www.uznews.net/news_single.php?lng=en&sub=hot&cid=4&nid=17929)

## **Uzbek government is neglecting the cotton boycott**

According to the official the Radio Liberty interviewed, the consumers of Uzbek cotton are more than enough in Asia itself.

Cotton business in Uzbekistan will not suffer from the boycott for the Uzbek cotton.

The official of Uzbek cotton industry gave this opinion and insisted that the customers who will be attending the international cotton fair which will be held in Tashkent in October are more than willing to buy Uzbek cotton.

According to the official, 300 companies applied for the cotton fair to be held on 13th of October, hoping to buy Uzbek cotton.

"The majority of these companies are from Bangladesh, China, India and Pakistan", he says.

- For example, we provided only Pakistan with a million ton of cotton until August of this year, adds the official from Tashkent.

According to the official of the Ministry of Cotton industry in Uzbekistan, companies in Pakistan paid 80 percent advance for Uzbek cotton.

"Cotton fibre is exported through 22 special cotton terminals in Uzbekistan. About half a million ton cotton can be stored in four large warehouses to be sent to these terminals, says official on fibre export.

## **Cotton growers- cotton slaves**

In 1987 Russian journalist Aleksandr Minkin, who visited Uzbek fields brought a new expression to the media vocabulary: "hlopkorab" (cotton slave). The picture of Uzbek little boy who was depicted as a cotton slave on Russian paper shocked the people of Soviet Union at that time. Now after 20 years, the expression "child labour in Uzbekistan" has become the worst nightmare of western textile and fashion companies.

More than 60 western companies refused to buy Uzbek cotton as they realized that the cotton crop in Uzbekistan is picked by forced labour of children. The official of Uzbek cotton industry insisted that they do not need western companies to buy their cotton, that they have enough clients. He added: "the quality of Uzbek cotton is very high, we can certify that".

Therefore public emergency has been issued before the cotton fair kicked off in cotton fields. The special attention has been paid to the fact that children who are working in cotton fields were kept confidential.

Source: Ozodlik, 22.09.2011

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/24336692.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, 2011, <http://www.uzbekgermanforum.org>

