

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

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### Cotton from Children`s Hands

Fashion companies want to renounce the use of raw material from Uzbekistan

By Frank Nienhuysen

Moscow – Gulnara Karimova is a beautiful woman with many characteristics. She is the Uzbek ambassador in Spain, a professor of political science; she represents her country at the United Nations in Geneva and, besides, has a special sense for jewelry and clothing. She was supposed to show her collection at the “New York Fashion Week” two weeks ago, but the designer moved quickly to a different place - from the Lincoln Center to an exclusive restaurant in Manhattan. Apparently out of security reasons. The “Cipriani” is surely a fine place, however the *New York Post* reported a different reason for this abrupt change. The organizers of the Fashion week expelled her because they “were shocked about the human rights abuses in Uzbekistan”.

Karimova is the eldest daughter of Islam Karimov, the powerful President of Uzbekistan. There is hardly any democracy and political freedom in this Central Asian country, however therefore natural gas, gold, and a lot of cotton. In fact, Uzbekistan is one of the largest cotton producers in the world, but to a large extent the country is using help from children. That is why more than 60 international companies have signed a boycott against Uzbek cotton, including Puma, Adidas and Levi Strauss. “We are working closely with our suppliers of raw materials and we expect from them to give us a confirmation that they do not use Uzbek cotton deliberately”, says Frank Henke, the Adidas’ director of social and environmental affairs. He talks of “widespread child labour”, but admits that it is almost impossible to trace back the origin of the finished products. “Uzbek cotton is found in all possible products from bed covers to clothing”, says Henke.

The community boycott by the international companies is remarkable and should increase the pressure so that Uzbekistan keeps to the convention it signed three years ago, prohibiting the use of child labour on the cotton fields. According to a *Human Rights Watch* report, the former Soviet republic forces yearly hundreds of thousands of students to pick cotton for two months. Some of them are only ten years old. “Many get ill, miss school and work from the morning until late evening for little or no money”, the report says. The *Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights* quotes emails from Uzbek students, stating among other, “We need help. We are driven to the fields every morning at four o’clock and are forced to pick hundred kilograms of cotton per day. We are in bed not earlier than midnight.”

The mass deployment during the cotton harvest goes back to the Soviet tradition, where not only farmers and students, but also brigades of factory workers and scholars from cities were brought to villages in order to fulfill plans of the command economy. Now, independent Uzbekistan is the center, strict and authoritarian enough to continue the praxis into the 21st century without any scruple. Therefore, the global sports group from Herzogenrauch asked the German government to appeal against the actions of Uzbekistan. But obviously it was not to leave it at that. After the boycott, Adidas wants to increasingly obtain cotton products from India, Pakistan, Brazil, and Mali.

Meanwhile, Uzbekistan reacted calmly to the boycott. A governmental source of information in Tashkent told

the Russian newspaper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, that Russia is anyways the main purchaser and a big proportion “of cotton is sold by intermediary agents to the European and Arabic markets. So, I do not think that Uzbekistan will suffer seriously from the boycott”.

“Free Microphone” broadcasts the opinion of radio listeners, who call to the Prague office of the Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty (RFERL).

## **Children are taxed 5000 soms for iron metal.**

A teacher from Ktiob reported to Radio Liberty that this tax is paid by those schoolchildren who could not collect 20 kilos of recyclable iron metals.

“Children pay metal tax, teachers pay the book of independence fees”

A teacher, who called from Kitob district of Kashkadarya region and asked us to keep her name anonymous talked about the various fees and payments they have to pay and how it is exhausting for them.

“Well, if I tell you, there was a meeting for teachers at school. We were told that we have to collect 5000 soms from each child to pay for metal collection. Do you know how much 5000 soms will be if it is gathered across the country? Where does all the money go, I never know.”

**Radio Liberty:** Metal collection is for which grades?

- From 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, up to the 9<sup>th</sup>. It happens every year.

**Radio Liberty:** How much each child should pay or how much metal should they collect?

- 20 kilo metal or 5000 soms. They also said that there is a book published for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Uzbekistan. It costs 106 thousand soms per school and it is a must to buy it. I do not remember the name of the book. We were told that we have to buy it.

**Radio Liberty:** Is it the book of the President?

- I don't know, it was dedicated to the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence. All teachers have to buy it for 60 thousand soms each. If it was up to us, we would only subscribe to those papers we wanted to read. But they always demand from us to subscribe to Halk sozi, Ma'rifat,- says teacher from Kitob.

## **“A pot with a hole”**

A listener who called from Yakkabog district of Kashkadarya region talked about the hard conditions students of the Agriculture College are facing in the district. And he expressed his surprise over how the students don't even have a proper pot to cook food.

- There is an agriculture college in our district. The students of that college were all sent to pick cotton. We went to visit them and see how they were doing. Their accommodation is a farm ghetto. The ghetto is covered with mold. There is not even basic condition for living. The worst thing was that, we saw that their big cooking pot had a hole in it. It leaks all the way until the food is ready. The college director has four cars: Lacetti, Nexia, Matiz, four cars! Can't he buy a pot for the students?

**Radio Liberty:** You said that their accommodation place was covered with mold. Where do children sleep, on the floor or do they have beds?

- They sleep on the floor. There is no condition at all,- says the listener who called from Yakkabog district of Kashkadarya region.

## **The cruelty during the cotton season has never reached this level before!**

This was told by those who were appointed by hokims to be responsible to watch over the course of the cotton harvest.

Even in Soviet period there wasn't such cruelty...

A listener who called from Mingbuloq district of Namangan region asked to keep his name anonymous and

told us about the violent acts by local authorities during the cotton harvesting campaign.

- The authorities obliged those who work in government jobs with making them team leaders in cotton fields or with similar responsibilities. Teachers, doctors, neighbourhood committee chiefs, such people are obliged to do responsible tasks. So these team leaders are summoned to the district office for a meeting. Before it used to be called selectors' meeting, but now it no more exists, instead now the meeting takes place in mayor's office. For example, they made us responsible for cotton growers, helpers in the neighbourhoods and gave us graphic timetables. If they can't fulfill their timetables or do not pick cotton well, they are punished, fined or sometimes even they can abuse them. Now I cannot repeat those abusive words here. Sometimes they even beat them.

**Radio Liberty:** For example, have you got beaten up yourself?

- No I have not, but I see such people who were beaten up all the time. The district mayors even beat the team leaders. What I want to say is that the Soviet system used to be called a totalitarian system, but even in this system people were not ridiculed or abused this much. Honestly it is exhausting to attend meetings till very late 1-2 o'clock at night and during the day to go to the fields and supervise the harvest. It makes us not want to work in government jobs anymore. Many people are already quitting and trying to escape such treatment, says our listener from Mingbulok.

Source: OZODLIK, 23.09.2011

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/24338092.html>

## Revenues from sales of 'white gold' are disappearing

Workers in cotton processing plants have not been paid for several months and questions are being raised about where the revenues from last year's cotton harvest have gone.

"When they stop our pay the bosses claim it's because our business has no money left," says one worker at the cotton plant in Yangibazar, Tashkent region. He says he and his colleagues don't believe the plant has no money, and say that anyone involved in processing cotton, which is sold abroad for foreign currency, ought to be rich.

At the Uzpakhtamash open joint stock company, which supplies cotton processing machinery and spare parts, the situation with regard to workers' salaries is similar.

"They gave us an advance of 40,000 sums each in May (around US\$16, at unofficial rates) and since then, all payment has stopped," say workers at this company.

Many workers who are losing hope of receiving their wages have written to their bosses warning of a mass walk-out.

Specialists at the Uzpakhtamash factory say that it supplies machinery to cotton plants on time and working at full capacity, therefore it should be able to pay its workers not only their salaries but a bonus on top.

"Cotton factories usually make some sort of advance payment for our machinery, but they then 'forget' to pay the balance," says one engineer at Uzpakhtamash.

He says that, by law, after three months the business can claim their full payment, but the cotton factories don't respond. Around 30 days later, the factory can apply to the courts in Tashkent for their money. The courts tend to back their businesses but then court enforcers write to them to tell them they've been unable to extract the funds.

"In September this year we received two letters from the court clerks in Namagansk and Jizak regions, postponing payment of our salaries for an unlimited period," say administrative workers at Uzpakhtamash.

These workers claim that court authorities in Namangansk region, where Uzpakhtamash lost 400 million sums (US\$160,000) in seven cotton factories, wrote two letters saying that it was impossible to get a hold of the money because the cotton factories themselves owed the government between 5 billion and 8 billion sums.

"It seems likely that the Ministry of External Economic Affairs, Investment and Trade (MVESIT) did not pay the industry for the cotton processed last year, although I happen to know that that harvest was all sold, right

down to the last kilogram,” claims one experienced Uzpakhtamash employee.

The Uzpakhtasanoat association declined to answer our enquiries about whether they were paid last year by the MVESIT or not.

“Cotton is a mysterious subject,” said one employee of Uzpakhtasanoat, who asked not to be named. He said that MVESIT only supplies to cotton factories abroad, in order to earn foreign currency, which then finds its way to the banks via the Cabinet of Ministers. And what happens to the money after that, no one knows.

“It’s a complete mystery – the money that is owed to the cotton processing factories is spirited away by all our high-ranking civil servants, and they get an enormous salary for doing it,” speculates one expert in Tashkent who also asked us not to give his name.

He claimed that one day’s interest on money held with the bank can generate a profit of 1% - 1.7% of the total amount. No surprise, then, that in 2009, Uzpakhtamash held back salaries for two months, then for three months last year and five months this year.

Source: UzNews, 24.09.11

[http://www.uznews.net/news\\_single.php?lng=en&sub=hot&cid=3&mid=17980](http://www.uznews.net/news_single.php?lng=en&sub=hot&cid=3&mid=17980)

## **Residents of Tashkent drafted to harvest cotton**

For the first time since Uzbekistan gained its independence, public and private organisations and companies in the capital, Tashkent, received a notification ‘from above’ on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September that they were to send personnel out into the fields to harvest cotton.

“My wife works as a nanny in a nursery, and last week the manager told her she had to go and harvest cotton, but I wouldn’t let her. I’d rather she resigned,” said Erkin, who lives in Tashkent.

Workers at one Tashkent machinery plant told Uznews.net that they heard last Thursday that they would be sent to harvest cotton. “Our director told us the district authority had issued the demand and then a list went up with 50 names on it of people to be sent out on Sunday”.

Responsible for calling up labour from different organisations are the various ministries whose remit they fall under.

“On Friday, 30 people went, and another 20 were due to go into the fields on Monday”, says Nargis, a doctor at the Institute of Obstetrics and Gynecology. She has heard that the ministry of public health decreed that each district had to send out 1,000 people for a period of 10 days, and thinks that the ministry has “finally lost all sense of reality”. “Who is going to attend births if we’re not here?” she asks.

Higher education students in the capital, who in Soviet times would certainly have been drafted in to make up any shortfall in the agricultural workforce, have curiously been exempted from this latest call for cotton labourers.

“They sent a group of the administrative staff and teachers out to the fields, so now it’s older people who have to hold down a job together with this extra work,” said one teacher from the University of Economics. He assumes the reason that students aren’t affected is that the majority of them are now studying on a contractual basis – the parents of these students would be more likely to protest if they found out that their children were being sent out to damage their health in the cotton plantations.

“I don’t give the college a huge sum of money ever year so that, instead of studying, my son can be forced into an unhealthy cotton field,” says Nodira Muminova, the mother of a student at Technical University.

Wealthier residents of Tashkent who find themselves on ‘the list’ of labourers at least have the opportunity of using the cotton harvest to take an additional holiday.

“I don’t want to harvest cotton and I’ll pay whomever I have to and go on holiday for a month,” says Shukhrat, a worker at a private company in Chilanzar whose company received an order from the local administration committee to send people out for cotton.

For Tashkent residents, who have almost never been forced to go and harvest cotton since Uzbekistan has been independent, having to toil in such a way is a new development, but in the more rural regions of

Uzbekistan this practice is entirely normal.

In the village of Dustabad in Urtachirchick district, there is no work, and people exist on occasional work and are prepared to pick cotton to earn a living.

On the plantations where we harvest cotton, the pay isn't bad in comparison with other farms. If there are lots of volunteers, then you get 150 sums per kilogram, but if there aren't many volunteers you get 200 sums, says 35-year-old Marina Dustabada. She says that in order to harvest 50 kilograms of cotton she has to get up at 6am and stay out until 7pm. Marina says that if someone from Tashkent gave her 300,000 sums then she would still go out and pick cotton every day.

Source: UzNews, 27.09.2011

[http://www.uznews.net/news\\_single.php?lng=en&sub=hot&cid=2&nid=18001](http://www.uznews.net/news_single.php?lng=en&sub=hot&cid=2&nid=18001)

## **Uzbek people are picking cotton in Kirgizstan**

People from Uzbekistan are being hired to pick cotton in Jalolobod region of Kirgizstan.

Uzbeks cannot cross the border to go to Jalalabad to pick cotton as easy as it was in previous years. Because of the events that happened in Kirgizstan in 2010, Uzbekistan closed its borders and never re-opened them since then.

Uzbek farmers who reside in Jalolobod usually help their relatives in Uzbekistan to cross the border at night through hidden roads and after they finish picking cotton, they take them back again through the same way to Uzbekistan.

Some of the Uzbeks go to Kirgizstan during cotton harvest season and stay there until the end of the season.

According to an Uzbek woman who is picking cotton in Kirgizstan, her farmer relatives provide her with accommodation and food and they pay her for cotton she picks 7- 10 soms per kilo (400- 500 Uzbek soms, edited). She says that she gets paid fairly and it justifies her labour:

“We are picking the cotton. 114- 120 kilo per day. They pay us well. It is about 7-8 soms, up to 10 soms for the second and third harvest. We are eleven people here and we have been working 15 days already”, said the woman from Uzbekistan.

As a comparison, we can say that 1 US dollar is equal to 45 Kirgiz som.

## **The kindergartens and schools in Tashkent were assigned to fulfil cotton normative targets.**

Tashkent city and district mayor offices burdened a number of schools and kindergartens with sending 3-5 staff members daily to pick cotton. Those who cannot commit to pick cotton everyday are paying 25 thousand soms to hire labourers, who pick it for them.

This practice is observed every year during the cotton season. But every year private enterprises were left out of such massive departures in cotton harvest season.

“A few days ago our Hokim gave such an order. Apparently now we have to send five staff members every day to pick cotton. I only have about four staff members. If I send them to pick cotton, who will be working in the kindergarten,” says an executive of one of the private kindergartens in Tashkent city.

Few other private kindergarten administrations in Yunusabad and Sergeli districts of Taskent city also confirmed that they have been demanded such a request by the city mayor's office.

According to the reports received from one of the secondary school directors in Sergeli district of Tashkent city, the schools have also received such order few days earlier.

“We received this order from the district department of national education. They told us in the evening and the next morning two of my teachers left to the fields. Now in these days we are sending two teachers at a time turn by turn,” said the head of a school in Sergeli district of Tashkent city.

According to him, the burden of sending one or two staff members of schools to pick cotton happened previous years as well and hiring labourers to pick cotton for staff members in secondary schools and other

educational institutions has already become a widespread practice.

We asked the heads of several educational institutions in Tashkent city about what they thought of such assignment. The director of a private kindergarten in Mirzo-Ulugbek district of the city said that, it is "forcing people to steal".

"If you can't go yourself, then hire a labourer" they say. Now what does government force us to steal?! If it is 25 thousand soms per one staff," says the kindergarten director.

However, kindergartens, other pre-school educational institutions and public communities in Tashkent city are openly admitting that they have no choice but fulfill this burden no matter what it takes and they do not even have other options or refuse to do so. According to the latest reports, the representatives of the UNICEF were invited by official Tashkent to investigate the allegations of child labour in the country.

Earlier this year it was discovered through Wikileaks, that UNICEF tried to down write the scale of the problem related to the use of forced child labour in Uzbekistan.

"It seems the organisation took these steps in order to maintain a good relationship with the Uzbek government", wrote Eurasianet media, which reported this story.

Source: Ozodlik, 27.09.2011

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/24341319.html>

## **UNICEF It has been decided to conduct an observation of children's involvement in cotton harvest in Uzbekistan.**

United Nation's UNICEF Children's Fund reported that, based on the credentials it possesses, Uzbek authorities have been notified of observations to be conducted on the usage of child labor during cotton harvest.

According to the International Fund, Uzbek authorities will be provided with the results of the observation.

In the statement of the Organization it says: "Due to the fact that the harvest has been just started, we have not come to any conclusion yet"

The organization told BBC that observation groups have already been sent to various regions of the country. According to the UNICEF representative, this is a short-term observation: serious and independent questioning within the norms of the International Labor Organization will not be considered as an observation.

The officials in Uzbekistan continuously reject the fact of forced child labor usage in cotton fields. However, they say that there are cases of children volunteering to help their parents in the fields.

### **Mobilization is going on.**

According to statements of the Tashabbus Group of independent rights activists in Uzbekistan, school children of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade in Kashkadarya region are involved in the cotton harvest from the morning till the evening.

Tashabbus Group of independent rights activists has studied the situations in Fargona, Tashkent and Kashkadarya Regions of Uzbekistan.

According to the leader of the Tashabbus Group Sur;at Ikromov, this year, school children's labor has not been utilized yet in Fargona Region.

In Tashkent Region school children older than 7<sup>th</sup> grade are picking cotton, whereas in Kashkadarya Region even 5<sup>th</sup> graders are deployed.

According to the rights activist, district school children in Kashkadarya Region are sent to the cotton field at 8 o'clock in the morning and are obliged to fulfill the quota by sunset. Daily quota for a school child is 70 kg;

however, school children of lower grades are allowed to pick less.

A Human Rights activist states that although the estimated price of 1kg picked cotton is 150 Sums, school children are paid only 100 sums per kg due to a number of deductions.

It is also stated that school children are taken to the fields in a truck, and in the evening, they have to come back home on their own.

### **Classes are going on according to the syllabus.**

A representative from Department of National Education of Kashkadarya, Shodiyor Muminov, who introduced himself as an assistant of the Department's manager, commented that none of the school children in the region have been involved in harvest and all the classes in schools were going on according to the syllabus.

"In the region, none of the school children are being involved in the cotton harvest. Classes are following the state curriculum. Classes start at 8 o'clock and are going on according to the course syllabus. Even after the classes they are not sent to the field. Usage of under 18 child labor is absolutely prohibited," says Shodiyor Muminov.

In Jizzak Region, in districts that specialize in cotton, schools are closed for 8th and 9th graders as they are involved in the cotton harvest.

"8th and 9th-graders are going to the field, but school children of lower grades are not. College students are sent too. Surprisingly, this year lower grade school children were not sent to the field," says one of our listeners.

In the mountain areas of Jizzak Region, masses of school children are involved in the cotton harvest. It is reported that 8th and 9th graders in Gallarod, Forish and Bahmad Districts were deployed to fields located in desert areas.

Although school and college students are forced to go to the field, it is reported that there are ways to escape this forced deployment. "If you are at school you give 100 thousand sums and if you are in college than 200 thousand sums. Or you can send somebody instead of yourself as a replacement," says Bahrom from mountain area.

Source: OZODLIK, 28.09.2011

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/24341715.html>

## **Uzbekistan: UNICEF Looking For Signs of Forced Child Labour**

After taking a PR battering recently about its ongoing use of children to harvest cotton, Uzbekistan is now contending with intensifying international scrutiny of its forced labour practices.

The cotton harvest is in full swing in Uzbekistan. That means officials are pressing legions of school-age children into service to pick bolls, rather than allowing them to hone reading, writing and math skills, rights activists contend. For activists, the use of child labour is old news. But they are cheered by the fact that international awareness of the issue is higher than ever. And increased attention is translating into pressure on Tashkent to end the practice.

Uzbekistan is a signatory to international conventions banning the use of child labour. However, President Islam Karimov's administration has long resisted allowing International Labour Organization (ILO) monitors to undertake a monitoring mission in Uzbekistan.

This year, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is attempting to observe the cotton harvest. UNICEF is stressing, however, that the UN agency's efforts cannot serve as an adequate substitute for an ILO mission report.

"UNICEF will inform the authorities about the findings," the agency said in a statement emailed to EurasiaNet.org. "The [harvest] season has started recently and no conclusions can be extracted yet. UNICEF, at the time of writing, has sent observation teams in different regions. These observations are snapshots that cannot replace a substantive and independent monitoring survey under the auspices of the ILO."

UNICEF continues to advocate for Tashkent to allow ILO inspectors into the country, the statement emphasized.

Critics contend that Tashkent's assent to UN and ILO conventions are mere window dressing that is designed to appease Western concerns while preserving the status quo on the ground. This year, as in past years, there have been credible reports of the mass mobilization of children for the cotton harvest. Rights groups have already documented children harvesting cotton, and an eyewitness told EurasiaNet.org of seeing a bus full of schoolchildren heading for cotton fields outside Tashkent on September 21.

A turning point in efforts by rights groups to end the use of Uzbek child labour perhaps occurred earlier in September in New York, where human rights protesters and The New York Post ganged up on Gulnara Karimova, the daughter of the Uzbek president, to derail a planned fashion show. "So long, torture victims. Hello, fashion victims!" quipped one New York Post story.

Amid a blitz of scathing media coverage, organizers of New York Fashion Week cancelled Karimova's show, tactfully citing security concerns. Image concerns must also have played a role, as protesters highlighted the irony of Karimova unveiling her luxury Guli Collection at the same time children were being bussed into the cotton fields in Uzbekistan. Karimova subsequently held her show at a private venue in New York's Midtown as protestors gathered outside to denounce forced child labour.

The episode also fuelled interest in a campaign to boycott Uzbek cotton. Rights campaigners say that over 60 multinational retailing firms have now signed a pledge to avoid knowingly using Uzbek cotton in apparel that they sell. "We commit to not knowingly source Uzbek cotton for the manufacturing of any of our products until the Government of Uzbekistan ends the practice of forced child labour in its cotton sector," the pledge states.

Signatories include some big names like H&M, Levi Strauss, Yves Saint Laurent, Stella McCartney, Alexander McQueen and The Walt Disney Company.

The initiative is spearheaded by the Responsible Sourcing Network (RSN), a watchdog group whose director, Patricia Jurewicz, lauded participating companies for "sending a message about sourcing all aspects of their products ethically."

Source: EURASIANET.org, 27. 09.2011  
<http://www.eurasianet.org/node/64231>

### **A student cotton-picker pays a fare. Labour tourism during cotton harvest. Little ones will pick up the "left overs". If not enough, then buy.**

In Zarbdor district of Jizzak region, a fare is deducted from the payment of student cotton-pickers who are forced to go to the field. In Pahtakor district of the above-mentioned region, teachers from Tashkent who come freely to assist to harvest pay twice as much of the payment to local residents to pick cotton.

In Surhandaryo region even primary school students have been "driven to" the field. In the same region, organizations involved in the harvest buy cotton from cotton receiving centers to fulfill the quota.

These are the 2011- Cotton Harvest sketch scenes.

In Zarbdor district of Jizzak region, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders in school # 1 named after Sharof Rashidof every day commute 10-15 km to get to the cotton field. According to a school teacher Ziyadulla Razzakov, 400 sums is being deducted from the daily payment of the students

"For instance, our 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders have been deployed to the field. Every day, students gather in a school yard at 7 am. Each class has its own leader who carries responsibilities for that group. Then, they load the students to buses. If a bus is big enough like "LAZ" brand, then up to 100 students are loaded. And in the cases when buses are small, 40-50 students are loaded," says Ziyadulla Razzakov.

The teacher further states that students are not provided even with boiled water. Children are having lunch which consist of cold water and a piece of bread they bring from home.

"Children bring from home few pieces of bread and a bottle of water. If parents cook them lunch to take, then they eat that, just like we do. We do not receive any attention as well. Early in the morning, we go out from our homes carrying a piece of bread and a bottle of water," says the teacher.

## **HURRAY to HELPERS!**

Teachers of the College of Banking and the College of Information in Tashkent city and a brigade of fire fighters of the country are currently picking cotton in Pahtakor District. Jahohgir, a young man from Pahtakor says that due to “helpers” district residents will be able to improve their financial situation.

“There are teachers who have come from the city. They absolutely do not know how to pick cotton. They can stay holding cotton in their hands just like this. For instance, the other day, one of the female teachers picked only one and half kilo of cotton. Now an appointed daily quota for them is 30 kg. 250 sums is deducted for meal. To fulfill a daily quota they ask us to replace them. Price for the job was 200 sum, but due to a heavy rain it raised to 250 sums per kg. Fire fighters are giving us 150 sums. They come from Khorazm, Bukhara and many other places. It is very good for us that they have come. Otherwise, farmers were paying us only 120 sums whereas teachers pay us 250 sums,” says Jahongir.

## **Primary school children are also sent to field.**

Primary school children in Jarqurgan District of Surhandarya region are sent to cotton field. Brother Oral told Radio Liberty that despite the fact that adults refuse to go to the field since no more cotton left to pick, small school children are being deployed to the fields to pick leftover cotton in order to fulfill regional cotton quota.

“Students of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades are forced to go to the field. There is no more cotton, no cotton left. There is no study, nor cotton. They just fool all of us. They threaten farmers with detainment and force them to buy cotton.” Says brother oral from Jarqurgan.

## **If there is no cotton, then buy it!**

According to a source of Radio Liberty from a state enterprise, at the present moment cotton harvest, in Surhandarya Region particularly, is going on under strong supervision. Cotton harvest is deemed compulsory on each and every state and private enterprise. Our interlocutor who desired not to be identified, states that organizations are buying cotton to fulfill the quota.

“Now organizations do have a quota. They are obliged to fulfill it. Where are they supposed to get cotton from, if nothing is left in the fields? Obviously, from cotton receiving centers. The price of 1 kg of cotton in the center is 300 sums.”

“Any one who is involved in cotton harvest is commanded to do so. This is the way it is. The matter of the fact is on the 7<sup>th</sup> of the current month a competition on wrestling (kurash) is supposed to be held in Khorezm. The president is attending it; thus, local khokim is aiming for credits from the president. The process of ascribing false indicators is going on now. Actually, there is no cotton in field. Only cotton-stalk can be found.”

Source: OZODLIK, 29.09.2011

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/24343927.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>

