

## A CHRONICLE OF FORCED CHILD LABOUR: REPORTS FROM THE UZBEKISTAN COTTON HARVEST 2009

### Week 9

With this issue, we conclude our chronicle of forced child labour in Uzbekistan in 2010. We did not expect this series to go on for so long, as last year's cotton season returned schoolchildren from the cotton fields on November 10. But to this day, we receive dispatches indicating that children continue to work in the fields and their classrooms remain empty.



Why keep children in the fields, if, according to eyewitnesses, there remains almost nothing left to pick? They barely bring in 5-10 kilograms a day during the wane of the harvest.

The answer becomes clear if we bear in mind the soaring prices for cotton on the world market, rising from US \$56 in August to \$71 per pound in November.

It is clear that every single cent counts for the government of Uzbekistan.

The question remains: what do you get for all these dollars and cents? And who will pay the price?

We ask you, readers, to consider these questions.

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### Uzbek Children Still Labouring in Freezing Cotton Fields

Synopsis: Children are still being sent to pick cotton, despite zero degree temperatures, reports Radio Ozodlik, the Uzbek branch of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. A student who did not give his name telephoned Radio Ozodlik from Karakalpakstan and said that officials had ordered students to remain at least another 10 days in the fields.

A student from a college in Konlikul district of Karakalpakstan region who declined to give his name told Radio Ozodlik that the cotton was almost cleared from the fields. Young people were picking partially-opened bolls, then sitting by the campfire to warm themselves, and opening up the bolls. They are able to pick about six kilograms a day, sometimes less. The student said the fields were cold and there was already ice on the ground, and that at night, the electricity was shut off in the housing where they were staying.

*Source: Radio Ozodlik/11/18/09.*

*Full version: <http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/1881644.html>*

### Broken Promises: Schoolchildren break records for staying in the cotton fields, though promised they would go home in October...

Synopsis: Activists from the youth human rights movement "Veritas" visited cotton fields in

four regions of the country to observe the situation on the ground and meet with groups of students from schools, lyceums, and colleges, as well as their parents, teachers and farmers.

They found that students from many regions of the country were forced to pick cotton starting the first 10 days of September (September 10-11) i.e. from the very start of the academic year in secondary schools, academic lyceums, and colleges. However, the participation of students from schools, lyceums, and colleges, was only officially announced by district and municipal boards of education at the end of September, and in some regions of the country, in the beginning of October.

In many regions of the country, from the first days of the cotton season, mostly eighth and ninth graders (13-15 year olds) and students from colleges (youth aged 14-16) were brought to pick cotton. But after a few days, beginning October 10-12, younger children, from the third to sixth grades, were also brought to the cotton fields.

In most regions, the authorities promised to send the children back to school by October 20. That promise was not fulfilled. At a special teleconference of the Republican headquarters on cotton under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan, a new date was given for returning students to their schools and academic institutions. But even those new promises were unfulfilled. According to newly received information, students are being forced to pick cotton as late as November 22. They will return to school only in the beginning of December.

A new trend was discovered: due to continued international attention to, and criticism of Uzbekistan's practice of forced child labour, the authorities take every opportunity to absolve themselves of responsibility for the practice of forced child labour during the cotton harvest. The authorities have stopped overseeing the safe transport of children to and from the cotton fields. They no longer feed the children – children are expected to bring their own food from home. Children drink water from canals or ditches or brought from home. They eat their food beside the cotton fields, sitting on the ground. There are no medical services attending to their health needs [physicians themselves are picking cotton - *our comment*]. It is nearly impossible to obtain permission to leave the cotton fields even for reasons of illness or poor health.

*Source: Human Rights Movement "Veritas", November 21, 2009, press release issued by email.*

### **Children are the Majority of the Workforce in the Cotton Harvest**

Children now make up the majority of the workforce for picking cotton in Uzbekistan. Farmers using child labour collect an average of 40 - 45 percent of their crop by these children. At the same time, the majority of farmers, as well as the students themselves, their parents and teachers, believe that the forced child labour is detrimental to children's health and the quality of their education.

According to official statements, children work in the fields voluntarily after their classes at school. But preliminary interviews with children and their parents show that in many rural areas of Uzbekistan, students from schools, lyceums, and colleges are picking cotton from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm on average, and are not attending classes. And they are not given weekends off. Many teachers on condition of anonymity said that at the instructions of the local authorities, they continued to fill their attendance books and other school forms to create the appearance on record that school is in session as usual, with classes taking place.

Students and teachers also confirmed that children's participation in the cotton harvest takes a toll on their education. After the cotton season, teachers try to cram missed material into their lessons, teaching two to three topics in one session. This negatively impacts on students' ability to master their lessons, and generally reduces the quality of their education.

*Source: Human Rights Movement "Veritas", November 21, 2009, press release issued by email.*

## **Inspiring patriotic feelings: "arguments" and "methods" of persuasion**

Observations from human rights movement "Veritas" show that mostly college students and students from higher education institutions have overnight stays away from home during the cotton harvest. They primarily live in local schools and colleges where the sports facilities are set up to serve as barracks. Students sleep on mattresses on concrete floors. Some bring folding beds from home. There is no heating.

For breakfast, they are usually given bread and tea without sugar. At lunch and dinner, they are given soup with noodles, rice and cabbage, without meat. There are no medical services for them.

These students complained to "Veritas" of cruel and degrading treatment by their teachers. They reported incidences of beatings, insults, and humiliation from their teachers if they could not fulfil daily quotas of cotton they are expected to pick.

A roll-call takes place during which students who do not meet the daily quota are publically humiliated. Such meetings are held in the evenings at gatherings in the outdoors, often late at night, around 21:00 - 22:00. Children are forced to stand at attention until the end of these meetings.

*Source: Human Rights Movement "Veritas," November 21, 2009, press release issued by email.*

## **Ashgabat does not lag behind in Tashkent in "fostering" patriotic feelings among citizens - Chronicles of Turkmenistan**

Synopsis: On July 1 [2009] Turkmenistan adopted a new Labour Code, designed, according to the authorities, to protect the rights of workers. Yet, from September 1, tens of thousands of employees of various organizations and agencies, including doctors, teachers, engineers, technicians, librarians, against their will, were sent to pick cotton.

For example, over 100,000 residents of Mary and Lebap provinces were forced to pick the autumn cotton harvest. None of them dared refuse to participate, as they were threatened with dismissal from work. Managers warned their employees that no excuse, including illness, would be considered valid for exemption from participation in the cotton harvest.

But just to show up to the cotton fields is not enough, as daily quotas were established, with the expectation that everyone should collect at least 30 kilograms of cotton on a daily basis. Failure to produce the designated amount would result in a dock in pay – and employees risk having their salaries cut by half.

Among the workers, many suffer from hypertension, allergies, and other ailments; others are elderly and simply do not have the strength to meet the daily quotas. But nonetheless, if they fail to deliver, they are punished with salary cuts.

According to those forced to work in the fields, almost the entire cotton harvest is handpicked.

Even postal workers are forced to pick cotton. And as a result, in the autumn, the mail is only delivered once a week. The yards of neighbourhoods in Mary and Turkmenabat have garbage piling up as they are untended, since janitors, along with postal workers, must perform their "patriotic duties."

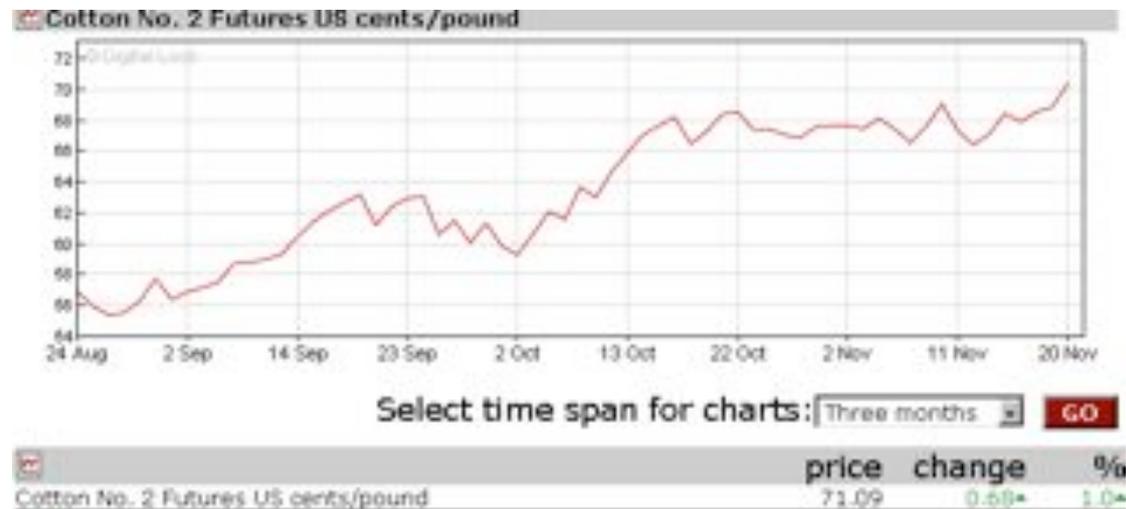
Meanwhile, the adoption of the new Labour Code was widely touted by the Turkmen government as the achievement of the "era of great revival" and a demonstration of the

concern of the authorities for the well-being of workers. Three months later, the true value of this law has become clear.

*Chronicles of Turkmenistan, 23/11/09*

Full version: <http://www.chrono-tm.org/?id=2284>

### Favourable market conditions in the cotton market - November 23, 2009



Source: *BBC*, 23/11/09,  
[http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/fds/hi/business/market\\_data/commodities/11706/three\\_month.stm](http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/fds/hi/business/market_data/commodities/11706/three_month.stm)

#### In conclusion, two tests:

##### **Test 1: Find 10 differences between the pictures**

- 1) Stalin's forced labor camps (1930-1950)
- 2) Cotton picking in Uzbekistan (2009)

##### **Test 2: Tick the laws Uzbekistan violates by forcing school children, college and university students, and civil servants to pick cotton**

- The ILO Forced Labour Convention, No. 29 (1930)
- The ILO Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, No. 105 (1957)
- The ILO Minimum Age Convention, No. 138 (1973)
- The ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, No. 182 (1999)
- The UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989)
- The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On guarantees of child's rights" (2008) (bans the use of child labour)
- The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Foundations of State Youth Policy in the Republic of Uzbekistan" (1991) (bans the use of child labour)
- The Labour Code of the of the Republic of Uzbekistan (1996) (bans the use of child labour)

The preparation of the Cotton Chronicles was contributed by **Josh Machleder; Catherine Fitzpatrick; and the Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights.**

The photos courtesy of **the Association for Human Rights in Central Asia, and local activists** whose names are not disclosed due to safety reason.

The published reports from the following human rights groups and media outlets were used:

*Society 'Ezgulik'; Human Rights Movement "Veritas"; The Human Rights Alliance of Uzbekistan; Association for Human Rights in Central Asia; The Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan; Eurasianet.org; Cottoncampaign.org; Uzbekistan News Briefs; Ferghana.ru; Uznews.net; Ozodlik Radio; BBC Uzbek service; CA-News.org; Human Rights Chronicles of Turkmenistan; Regnum.Ru; Women's World Daily; Gazeta.uz; Uza.Uz; UzReport.com.*

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**To read more reports forced child labor visit [www.cottoncampaign.org](http://www.cottoncampaign.org)**

**More reading:**

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

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

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