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Joanna Ewart-James
Supply Chain Programme Co-ordinator
Anti-Slavery International
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Dear Ms Ewart-James,

Thank you for your letter of 11 April to the President of the European Commission Mr Barroso in which you raise concerns with practices in relation to child labour in Uzbekistan, provide evidence from monitoring bodies' reports and ask the European Commission to open an investigation under Article 17 of the Council Regulation (EC) No 732/2008. The President has asked me to reply on his behalf.

I share your concerns about child labour practices in Uzbekistan. In this context the Commission monitors Uzbekistan's compliance with its obligations in the field of child labour under International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions and the relevant United Nations (UN) human rights Conventions. The ILO monitoring bodies have recognized that in recent years Uzbekistan has made several steps to address child labour problem by ratifying two ILO conventions concerning child labour (ILO convention No 138 on minimum age of employment in 2009 and ILO convention No 182 on elimination

of the worst forms of child labour in 2008) and by establishing a national legislative framework against forced labour and child labour. However, the use of child labour in Uzbekistan is still an issue of grave concern in practice. Therefore this issue remains high on the Commission's agenda in its discussions with Uzbekistan, since it is not only the ratification but the actual implementation of the conventions that matters.

Over the years the Commission has raised child labour issue repeatedly with the Uzbek authorities at a high political level and continuously followed in the political and human rights dialogue with Uzbekistan. Also, in June 2011, at the 100th session of the International Labour Conference in Geneva, the EU reiterated its serious concern in this regard, and urged the Uzbek Government to grant an ILO tripartite monitoring mission unrestricted access to the 2011 cotton harvest.

However, it needs to be stressed that the main aim of the EU action is to gradually eliminate child labour in Uzbekistan while maintaining the relationship with the country and communication channels with the authorities in Tashkent. As for the GSP scheme, it was created as an incentive-based tool to support development purposes. The Commission would only take recourse to a sanction-based approach as a last resort. Cooperation, transparency and dialogue are favoured tools to achieve our objectives.

In a wider context the Commission attaches great importance to supporting agricultural reforms in Uzbekistan, in particular the restructuring of the Uzbek cotton sector and the introduction of mechanical cotton harvest, in order to support the implementation of labour standards.

Let me assure you that the Commission will continue to monitor Uzbekistan's compliance with its obligations in the field of child labour under ILO Conventions and the relevant UN human rights Conventions. In this respect, the Commission will continue to encourage the Uzbek government to respond in a constructive manner to the conclusions of the ILO Committees by inviting the ILO high level tripartite observer mission to monitor the 2011 cotton harvest.

If the conclusions of the ILO would clearly prove that violations of principles laid down in the relevant ILO conventions have been serious and systematic the Commission will act accordingly.

Yours sincerely,



Andra Koke

c.c.: Lorenz Berzau (Business Social Compliance Initiative), Peter McAllister (Ethical Trading Initiative), Umida Niyazova (Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights), Denis Noharet (Children Worldwide Fashion)
J. Aguiar-Machado, Trade Directors, C. Lobillo Borrero, C. Kiener, L.Ehring, H. Standertskjold-Nordenstam, F. Pérez-Cañado, I. Idzikowska, D. Ermsone, A.Oram, M.Szito (DG Trade)