

# A CHRONICLE OF FORCED LABOUR: REPORTS FROM THE UZBEKISTAN COTTON HARVEST 2012

Issue 1, August 27, 2012



(Apologies for cross-posting if any. Please let us know if you do not wish to continue to receive these reports).

*Context: Every Autumn the Uzbek government mobilizes millions of schoolchildren and students to handpick cotton. The use of forced labour in the cotton production sector is widespread. It is organized by local authorities under the orders of the highest level authorities of the country.*

*Despite the existence of laws banning child labour, as well as international obligations, Uzbekistan has not fulfilled its promises to end the systematic practice of forced child labour. Monitoring and field surveys our organization has conducted over the last three years, demonstrate that the Uzbek government uses forced child labour in order to quickly harvest cotton and reduce the costs of cotton production.*

*According to experts' opinion, political will of the government is the only necessary condition to stop the forced labour without further delays. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to change the price-check policy in the cotton industry raising buying prices of cotton, which would enable farmers to have free and affordable means to pay for cotton pickers.*

*During this harvest season we will inform you on developments on the cotton fields in order to once again examine how and if Uzbekistan honours its international commitments and its own laws that prohibit the use of child labour. This chronicle of events includes articles of various media on the situation in the cotton fields of Uzbekistan, as well as witness reports prepared by our correspondents from the fields.*

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**Uzbekistan wants to harvest 3.35 million tons of cotton.**

12.06.2012

The Uzbek government is forecasting to harvest 3.35 million tons of cotton in this year's harvest season. Islam Karimov, the head of the country approved the raw cotton production plans for this year.

According to CA-News internet media publishing, this year it is expected to harvest 417 thousand tons in Kashkadarya region, 342 thousand in Bukhara region and 335 tons in Surkhandarya region.

The government planned to buy 50 per cent of the cotton for its own necessities. Last year the cotton harvest exceeded three and a half million tons. And the profit from the cotton sale brought in one billion 365 million US dollars.

This profit is 25 per cent more than the previous year. Uzbekistan plans to increase the remanufacturing the cotton fibre inside the country by 70 per cent towards 2015.

Even though the cotton production scale in Uzbekistan is not as it used to be in Soviet period, it still remains the most important farming in the country.

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/24612063.html>

### **Preparations for cotton campaign begin.**

According to reports by local monitors, higher educational institutions and government budgeted offices in Tashkent city received orders to send students and staff members to the fields to pick cotton starting from around 6th of September.

According to a teacher at the National University, it has been ordered to send students of the Master's degree and teachers from the University to pick cotton in groups for ten days starting between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 10<sup>th</sup> of September,

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September, harvest will start for the residents of Tashkent city. The majority of these workers will be working in the fields in Syrdarya and Jizzakh regions of the country. The first to be mobilized to pick cotton will be doctors, teachers, and educators of kindergartens. Each of them must bring food for at least three days, a cot and bedding.

### **Activists: Cotton cannot be harvested without children's labour, who does government want to deceive?**

16.08.2012

Uzbekistan is preparing for cotton harvest. According to reports, the government will increase the number of helpers and students participation in the cotton harvest. At the moment the commission sent from the central government to the regions across the country is checking the conditions created for helpers and students in the fields.

As in previous seasons, schoolchildren are expected to be the main labourers. However the Prime Minister Shavkat Mirziyoyev ordered National Education departments to ban child labour and reminded them that it is against law. Activists who are observing the situation view it as a deceptive disguise.

For already several years the Uzbek government accepts decrees, which ban child labour in cotton harvest just before the start of the harvest season. But some time after the season kicks off, this very same government orders to take children in large groups to pick cotton in the fields.

Gulshan Qoraeva, an activist of Uzbek human rights society in Kashkadarya region says:

“Perhaps government wants to get rid of cotton boycott, but it is very difficult to imagine picking all the cotton without child labour. Besides, the conditions are very bad. Some families might want to send their children themselves. Even if they don't want to send their children, it is impossible. Some farmers want to harvest all the cotton themselves, but authorities do not permit them. Some of the cotton growers admit that it is impossible to harvest the cotton without help”.

Critics say that Uzbekistan has one of the leading positions in the world in cotton production, but the profit from this product never reaches the farmers and harvesters.

<http://www.amerikaovozi.com/content/uzbek-cotton-child-labor/1485859.htm>

## **This year children of Uzbekistan will not pick cotton**

16.08.2012

The Prime Minister of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev has instructed the National Education ministry to not involve children in the 2012 cotton harvest season. However, these kinds of instructions were given in previous cotton seasons and they did not change the problem of children being taken to the fields to pick cotton.

The order has been sent to all the regional and Karakalpak autonomic republic's national education departments. The order of the Prime Minister says that this year children should not attend the cotton harvest even in their free times after school.

Leading supervisor of department of schools and specialized schools in Uzbek National Education Ministry Vafoql Hotamov said the Radio Liberty, that this year school children will not attend the cotton harvest and all classes will take place one hundred per cent:

- The decree has been approved. During this year's harvest season we even ordered schools to assign additional classes for children. If a child is in the class, he will not say he wants to go to pick cotton. This year no child will go to pick cotton. Everyone will be at school,- says Vafoql Hotamov, an expert at the National education Ministry.

The Parliament of Uzbekistan issued a decree on 12<sup>th</sup> September, 2008 on not to involve schoolchildren in cotton harvest in Uzbekistan. But not even 10 days later, children were all sent to the cotton fields to pick cotton.

Holikhnazar Ganiev a retired teacher who lives in Djomboy district of Samarqand says that he does not believe in such government decrees.

- On 12<sup>th</sup> September, 2008 the Parliament of Uzbekistan issued a decree about not to involve schoolchildren in cotton harvest. This decree was announced everywhere. Even 3-4 days didn't pass after the announcement and all the children were sent to cotton fields. I took a copy of the decree and went to the head of the national education department. I asked him how it was possible to send children after this decree was issued. He said he didn't know anything, that he received verbal orders about sending children to pick cotton. It is very hard to believe that the same thing will not happen this year as well. Because the schools are already preparing from now for the harvest season,- says Holikhnazar ~Ganiev.

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/24676496.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>