UGF local monitors from Tashkent report, massive departure of people who work in government jobs to pick cotton, has started. Every company and organisation should send certain amount of staff members to pick cotton for 14-20 days period and once they return, the second group of people would have to replace them.

Along with this all, preparations for sending college students to cotton fields also have started. In the last few days in Kashkadarya region teachers have been visiting students' homes and getting letters of confirmation from the parents, which say that their children will attend the cotton harvest. Those parents, who do not wish their children to go to pick cotton have to write a letter of refusal, which would say that their children would not attend the harvest. They are threatened though that next time the visits will be from the police.

In colleges meetings are organised with the students who attended the cotton harvest in previous years, and they have to make a speech that being in the cotton fields is good and fun, that everyone should go and see that.

Bozomurod Razzogov, a farmer from Jondor district of Bukhara and activist of NGO „Ezgulik“ says that eight farmers are about to be accused with administrative charges for not attending the meeting.
called by local authority members. „In fact, this article 198 (disobedience to the legitimate requests of government authorities) used against is far from what really happened“.

According to Ezgulik representative, police officers came and said that under the complaints of local government authorities, they opened a case on administrative charges against them.

In Uzbekistan it is not obligatory for farmers to attend government meetings, but farmers claim that in this country abiding by laws are not always the case of reality.

In these meetings, usually local government authorities tell farmers how to work and what to do. „Our relationship with the government is only based on the taxes we pay“— says the activist and farmer Bobomurod Razzokov. „But now the government wants to control even the financial credits we take and how we spend that money“.

In Uzbekistan farmers are strictly under control and many of them are unable to grow in their farms what they want. Government forces them to grow mainly strategic plants like cotton and grain. Furthermore, they should sell the harvest they crop for a very low price to the government on the cost the authorities appoint.

They say how neighbour Kazakh farmers are gaining wealth through the land they own to farm. But many Uzbek farmers on the other hand, barely afford their bread and butter for the profit they get from cotton farming throughout the year.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/uzbek/uzbekistan/2012/08/120829_CY_uzbek_farmers_bukhara.shtml

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**Slaves are dumb or cotton at gunpoint**

31.08.12.

In this year, the authorities of Uzbekistan are taking unprecedented measures in mobilizing granted labour to harvest the crop of raw cotton.

The mechanism of forcing people into cotton harvest is relatively simple. The authorities give instructions to industrial companies and government institutions to allocate certain number of people to go to fields. As a rule, these instructions are given in the meetings organised by the heads of administration in the districts, where all the heads and managers of large companies and government institutions are „invited. They, after receiving the instructions „which cannot be refused“ have to put pressure on their personnel in order to force the staff members to go to pick cotton.

But if in previous years some of the people tried to avoid the slave obedience by using the corruption mechanisms, this year it became impossible with the involvement of Ministry of Internal Affairs and the special forces. In August 2012, before the start of the cotton harvest season. District heads of administration demanded from the heads of companies, institutions and organisations to submit a list of personnel who are available to go to pick cotton with their passport details and home addresses in advance.

Massive departure will start from the first working day of autumn – 3 September, straight after the National Independence Day of Uzbekistan. Slaves from Tashkent will be mainly sent to the fields in Sirdarya and Djizzakhr regions, which geographically belong to the Hungry Steppe. The meeting point for the massive departure is the South train station of Tashkent city. District administrations warned people that before the departure there will be an attendance call and after that, the police would be sent to those people’s house who didn’t turn up for the harvest. It is not excluded that the passports of people who go to cotton might be collected and kept during the harvest period.

This year, Master’s students, medics, pedagogues of primary schools, school teachers, and lecturers of lyceums, colleges and universities, workers of government institutions will be forced to pick cotton. And of course workers and staff members of large industrial companies will get involved and very often it will be regardless the ownership of such companies.
It is necessary to note that, those who will go to pick cotton keep receiving their average salary from their main jobs, however, these expenses will be on the company, which send its workers, it is noted on the Tax Code of Uzbekistan. Instructions on sending people to pick cotton is given by authorities only verbally to the companies, institutions and organisations therefore, they also in their turn do not issue any written orders to their employees. Because according to the Labour Code of Uzbekistan, when changing the working conditions, even if it s a temporary transfer to another form of work and place, it is needed to get written agreement from an employee. Sending to cotton fields specifically fall into thes actions, but authorities do not want to add problems for themselves in case someone wants to use his legally guaranteed rights and complain.

Besides, labour code prohibits forced labour and administrative code sets sanctions for administrative pressure to forced labour for those imposed on the responsible officials. This way it is obvious that authorities of Uzbekistan are deliberately violating their own legislation.

Cotton harvest in Uzbekistan is a forced labour under the fear of losing their main jobs, under the close watch of the police and now, even at the gunpoint of special forces. Involving law enforcement in taking people to the fields is not because authorities are afraid of demonstrations, but it is the showcase of audacity and absolute impunity of governing bodies. People from the cities are luckier than those who live in the regions, they are taken to pick cotton by the police without any discussions. They do not have permanent jobs and no one will keep their salaries for them. They are now true slaves.

However, many companies, which buy Uzbek cotton do not know anything about it or do not want to know at all. Cotton picked with the hands of slaves is also cotton and it is no different in colour, or smell and the length of fibre. The suffering does not leave any marks on objects. As for slaves- slaves are dumb.

http://www.fergananews.com/article.php?id=7468

"Cotton Campaign" organisation is asking to pressure Tashkent
4.09.2012

Organisation called Cotton Campaign in Washington addressed Uzbek British Trade and Industry Council (UBTIC) and asked to pressure Uzbek government on eliminating child labour in Uzbekistan and let the International Labour Organisation experts to visit the country in this cotton season.

It is expected to have the 19th session of Uzbek-British Trade and Industry Council in Tashkent. And next month it is expected to open VIII international cotton fair under the sponsorship of UBTIC.

“We found out that the Uzbek-British Trade and Industry Council is sponsoring the VIII international cotton fair which will open in Tashkent. This council should reduce encouraging cotton industry in Uzbekistan and call the government to take concrete measures to eliminate the child labour from the roots and to achieve respecting human rights “, - says the open letter addressed to Piter Lilly the chief of the Uzbek-British Trade and Industry Council.

In these days, workers of company and government jobs, university and college students are involved in cotton harvest.

At the moment, there is no report if schoolchildren in Uzbekistan are also sent to pick cotton.

Uzbek government gave instructions to the Ministry of National Education not to involve children in this year’s harvest season.

However, there were such instructions in previous years too and it didn’t effect the problem of sending school children to the fields to pick cotton.
Angren preparing students for cotton picking
04.09.12

The administrations of Angren’s colleges and lyceums have started preparations for sending their students to the forthcoming cotton-harvesting campaign.

On 26 August, the automation and service college in Angren, a town 100 km away from Tashkent, held a meeting involving teachers and parents to discuss the mandatory involvement of students in the cotton-harvesting campaign.

According to parents, participation in the cotton-picking campaign was presented as an act of patriotism and love for homeland for 15-17-year-old young people.

The college administration explained that results of the cotton-harvesting campaign, as well as the wellbeing of the whole country, depended on every child’s participation.

Cotton is the basis of economic stability in Uzbekistan and guarantees its independence. Disagreement with this opinion would be considered as a sign of lack of consciousness.

Other colleges and lyceums also held similar meetings last week.

Those parents who refused to send their children to cotton fields were asked to come for an interview with the director of college.

No marriage, no pregnancy, but cotton-picking

Preparations of the youth for the forthcoming cotton-harvesting campaign started as early as June. Before receiving applications, a specialised economic college in Angren compelled would-be students and their parents to undertake cotton obligations.

A special sheet of paper read that a college applicant should attend classes, clubs and workshops, wear proper uniform, take part in neighbourhood clean-up works and should not leave abroad to work.

In addition, before finishing their three-year-long programme, female students should not get pregnant, get married and must take part in cotton harvesting.

As for cotton, the college director, Furkat Isroilov, gave the following explanation: it is mandatory for students to pick cotton, if they do not want to, parents can hire a cotton picker to replace them.

Last year, a substitute cotton picker charged 200,000 to 400,000 sums a month and extra money to cover food and transport costs.

Teachers will pick cotton now instead of children
4.09.2012

The Uzbek government is stating that this year children will not be mobilised for cotton harvest. At the same time it is using the staff members of government funded jobs to its maximum extent.

“Let children study, we will pick the cotton”
According to a staff member of School # 163 in Tashkent city, who wanted to stay anonymous, in this year staff members of government funded jobs are being sent to pick cotton in order to avoid sending children to the fields in rural areas.

- There was a meeting yesterday at the Head’s office of „Rayono“ (district department of national education). In previous days also they called meetings on urgent matters related to cotton harvest. How shall I out it, we were given the idea that our children should study. And we should also help so our other children in rural schools also have the chance to study. All children of Uzbekistan should study. If a child goes to pick cotton in the field, how can he attend the school? Therefore, in order to avoid the fall of education level of our youth, we are willing to go and pick cotton in the fields for the,- says the staff member of a school.

Cotton helpers who were sent from Tashkent city, Chilonzor and Khamza districts were placed in a school #30 in collective farm named Sohil in Sirdarya district of Sirdarya region.

According to one of the helpers from Chilonzor district, who wanted to stay anonymous, at the moment the conditions are satisfactory.

- Conditions are good. We are on the ground floor of the school. Helpers from Khamza district are located on the first floor. We arrived yesterday, and today we started picking cotton. Our daily norm is 50 kilo. Until now, farmers promised us to payd 150 Som per kilo of cotton we pick,- says the helper we talked.

An anonymous staff member of Sirdarya region National education department confirmed that cotton helpers, who arrived from capital were placed in some schools of the region.

According to what he says, schools converted into accommodation for helpers are not disturbing the classes for children who attend those schools.

„We planned it al. School classes are organised in two shifts. Children are studying. The classes were not disrupted.“ – said the staff of Sirdarya region National education department, who talked with the Radio Liberty off the record.

According to reports made to the Radio Liberty, in Sirdarya region groups of cotton helpers were organised in all schools and were mobilised to pick cotton.

13 teachers of school # 169 in Tashkent city will leave for picking cotton in a farm named „Manas“ on 5 September.

The Prime Minister of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoev gave instructions to the Ministry of National Education on not to involve school children in 2012 cotton harvest season.

http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/24697665.html

**Science Academy of Uzbekistan was also taken to fields**

05.09.2012

150 members of research institutions in the system of Science Academy of Uzbekistan left science and went to pick cotton in the fields. A special train allocated by the organisers of cotton campaign took them to Sirdarya region farms.

– Academy was supposed to send 150 people to pick cotton. We have 38 science research institutes and each of them allocated 7-7 members of staff. We gathered enough people as requested. The main group left for Sirdarya on a train,- says a member of the academy, who didn’t want to tell his name.

According to the staff members of Academy, who spoke with the Radio Liberty, it is noticeable that this year the cotton campaign is much stronger than it was in previous years.

– Last year also people went to pick cotton from the academy. But they didn’t ask for that many
people. They said, no matter what, people should be in the fields right after the holiday,- says the staff of the academy.

First round of cotton helpers were requested to stay for about twenty days. After this time, their colleagues will take their place in the second round.

Mainly the young members of the science and research academy were involved in the cotton harvest.

– Our older masters cannot pick cotton, that’s why young members like us have to get the stick. We have older teachers here with us, but they came to supervise us,- a researcher of a language and literature institute comments on the situation.

The helpers should cover all their expenses for food and other daily needs.

– They wouldn’t give us an accommodation in a hotel. So we had to stay in a school. The daily norm is 50 kilo and the payment for 1 kilo of cotton is 150 soms. We somehow managed on the first day. Because it is the first harvest and the cotton is plenty. I am not so sure if can meet the daily norm after few days though,- says a junior research staff of a big institution.

http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/24698515.html

College students were sent to fields
07.09.2012

Apart from Tashkent city, all the other city and district college students across the country were taken to pick cotton from 6th of September.

Three hundred students of Djizzakh Textile college were sent to the Dustlik district of the region.

College director Ilkhom Bakiev told Radio Liberty that students started picking cotton from the 7th of September.

- First, we took more than 300 students. Now we are on our way and taking more students because it will be very hot in the next few days. We created all the necessary conditions. Brought food supplies..., said Ilkhom Baiev.

Students in the Djizzakh region didn’t study even for one day in the new school term. On the first day of the term almost all the colleges in the region dismissed students to go and prepare to leave for the cotton fields.

Unlike Djizzakh students, students of Bukhara College of Culture had a chance to attend classes for four days until the 7th of September when they started preparing for the cotton fields.

According to a teacher, who didn’t introduce himself, students were sent to pick cotton on 8 September.

- We will know tomorrow how many people we have to send. We are going to Djondor district Oydin village. Students will stay at school where the Children’s Art and Craft Centre is. They will be placed in that centre., says the college teacher.

Karshi College of Culture students will leave on 10 September to the 37 farms of Koson district.

It has been said that the departure of students to pick cotton include only regional colleges at the moment. Tashkent city college students are continuing their studies.

Cotton helpers are accommodated in village schools, where will the village children study?

People we spoke to from colleges in Bukhara, Djizzakh, Sirdarya, Kashkadarya and Surkhandarya
regions say that students are mainly accommodated in village school buildings.

Anonymous staff members of Sirdarya region National Education Department confirmed that cotton helpers, who came from the capital, were placed in some of the schools of the region.

According to him, turning the schools into dormitories for cotton helpers is not disturbing the classes for schoolchildren.

“We planned it all well. Study classes are organised in two shifts. Children are attending the lessons. The classes were not stopped“, says the staff member of the National education department of Sirdarya region, who spoke with the Radio Liberty off the record.

http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/24701308.html

**Cotton harvesting leaves Uzbek banks without cash**

08.09.2012

With the beginning of the cotton harvesting campaign banks in Uzbekistan has been forced to send all their cash to pay cotton pickers.

Depositors of a number of commercial banks in Uzbekistan cannot withdraw their own money while public and private workers are not being paid their salaries. There is cash only to pay out pensions and social payments.

Banks are promising to issue cash to fixed-term deposit holders whose turn has come to withdraw deposits and interests in October at best.

Until then, depositor’s money will be sent to on-demand accounts. So far, they are giving only one answer to any withdrawal request: “all cash is sent for cotton”.

At the same time, bank staff members are referring to the Uzbek Central Bank’s unofficial order to send cash resources to regional bank branches to pay to cotton pickers.

“We have been offered to choose between receiving payment on our plastic cards and waiting for the end of cotton harvesting when the bank will have cash,” says an employee of a firm that is served by the In-Fin Bank.

Similar proposals were made to the managers and accountants of organisations holding accounts in other banks, including the country’s biggest bank, Uzbekistan’s National Bank for Foreign Economic Activity.

The shortage of cash, which is normal for Uzbekistan during cotton harvesting period, is creating a lot of inconveniences and even problems.

A resident of Tashkent, who wished to remain anonymous, has said that her family needs cash urgently in order to buy a flat.

“If we get cash only in October, then the flat we want to buy will have been sold until we exchange our cash into dollars,” she said.

The Central Bank’s press service has refused to comment on the situation, but said that cash were being issued to depositors at their first request and banks had enough cash to pay to cotton pickers.

http://www.uznews.net/news_single.php?lng=en&sub=hot&cid=2&nid=20732

*Feel free to disseminate these reports further and post them on your websites. More reading:

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