



For Immediate Release

## Anti-Slavery Day:

*Cotton Campaign Calls on President Obama and Mr. Romney to Speak Out Against Slavery-*

(New York, October 18, 2012): President Obama and Mr. Romney, during the 2012 US Presidential election campaign the world is listening, and the children, women and men exploited in modern-forms of slavery await your leadership. On this [Anti-Slavery Day](#), the [Cotton Campaign](#) calls on you to speak out against the modern day slavery used to produce the clothes we wear.

We acknowledge the efforts of the US government to combat modern forms of slavery, including the [Trafficking Victims Protection Act](#) and [Global Trafficking in Persons Report](#). There remains [work to be done](#). Significantly, President Obama recently issued an [Executive Order](#) to build on these efforts by requiring contractors to the US government to assess risks of trafficking in persons in their supply chain and report on actions to ensure against complicity in forced labor and other forms of modern slavery. In addition to the Executive Order, President Obama's highlighted programs to coalesce stakeholders around ending human trafficking, such as the *Made in a Free World Initiative* and *Global Business Coalition Against Trafficking*.

**Ending state-sponsored forced labor of children and adults in the cotton sector of Uzbekistan should be a high priority within these anti-trafficking efforts**, because this continuous and systematic violation of national law and international standards is detrimental to long-term development in this Central Asian country. The need for international leadership was highlighted in the latest assessment by the US Department of Labor, which stated, "In 2011, Uzbekistan made no advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor."<sup>1</sup>

In fact, every year the government of Uzbekistan forcibly mobilizes hundreds of thousands of children, teachers, public servants and private sector employees for the manual harvesting of cotton. The Uzbek government requires farmers to grow cotton, and regional governors (*hokims*) forcibly mobilize adults and children to harvest cotton and meet assigned quotas. The Uzbek government enforces these orders with threats and administrative pressure; detains and harasses Uzbek activists seeking to monitor the situation; denies access to international press; and continues to refuse to allow the International Labour Organisation to monitor the harvest. Employers, workers and government representatives to the ILO<sup>2</sup> have repeatedly called on the Uzbek government to accept tripartite ILO monitoring, and the Uzbek government continues to [refuse](#). The UN Human Rights Committee<sup>3</sup> and the UN Committee on the

---

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of International Labor Affairs, *2011 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor*, pages 657-661, <<http://www.dol.gov/ilab/programs/ocft/2011TDA.pdf>>.

<sup>2</sup> ILO Conference Committee on the Application of Standards, 100<sup>th</sup> Session, Geneva, June 2011, <[http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms\\_157818.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_157818.pdf)>.

<sup>3</sup> Concluding Observations of the UN Human Rights Committee (CCPR/C/UZB/CO/3), Geneva, 7 April 2010, paragraph 23, p7

Elimination of Discrimination Against Women<sup>4</sup> have echoed the call on the Uzbek government to comply with its commitments to protect citizens of Uzbekistan against forced labor.

Right now the people of Uzbekistan are finishing the 2012 cotton harvest, for the sole benefit of their government, which refuses to transparently disclose allocations of the estimated \$1billion in [annual cotton income](#). Once again this year, the Uzbek government's refusal of independent monitoring has impeded human rights assessments during the cotton harvest, thereby undermining its own [claims](#) that child labor would not be used. Thus far, indications are that during the 2012 harvest the government has intensified the use of [forced adult labor](#). According to Uzbek observers, estimated 20% of all government employees – teachers, doctors, nurses, health care workers, bank staff, non-ranking military, staff of ministries - and all university students have been ordered to pick cotton, under threat of losing their job, pay, benefits or expulsion from school.

In all likelihood, we have all worn Uzbek cotton picked under such modern-day slavery conditions. Uzbekistan is the 5<sup>th</sup> largest exporter of cotton. Uzbek cotton enters into the supply chains of global apparel companies through suppliers based in Bangladesh, China and other concentrations of apparel production. In addition to the government contractors highlighted by President Obama in his recent statement, all businesses have a [responsibility](#) to conduct due diligence that ensures human rights are respected in their supply chains, even if they have not contributed directly to the rights violation. Since slavery-like practices are used in Uzbekistan's cotton fields, [businesses must avoid using Uzbek cotton](#) in their supply chains until the use of forced labor of children and adults in the Uzbekistan cotton sector is ended.

On Monday, 22 October, President Obama and Mr. Romney will command the attention of tens of millions of people around the world as they debate foreign policy issues. We call on President Obama and Mr. Romney to use the power of their podiums to publicly condemn modern forms of slavery and prioritize efforts to end forced labor of children and adults in the cotton sector of Uzbekistan, one of the most extensive systems of state-sponsored forced labor in the world. Millions of Uzbek citizens will benefit from bringing this egregious practice to an end.

*The Cotton Campaign is a global coalition of human rights NGOs, investors, trade unions and business associations coalesced to build political will in the government of Uzbekistan to end forced labor of adults and children in its cotton sector. For more information, [www.cottoncampaign.org](http://www.cottoncampaign.org), or contact Matthew Fischer-Daly, Cotton Campaign Coordinator, [CottonCampaignCoordinator@gmail.com](mailto:CottonCampaignCoordinator@gmail.com), +1(347) 266-1351.*

---

<sup>4</sup> Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW/C/UZB/CO/4), Geneva, 26 January 2010, paragraphs 30-31.