

A CHRONICLE OF FORCED LABOUR OF CHILDREN AND ADULTS

Issue 9, November 25, 2013



Schoolchildren, Kashkadarya region. Were sent to pick cotton by the order of authorities, October 2013.

With this issue we conclude our Chronicle of forced labour of children and adults in Uzbekistan's cotton fields during the 2013 harvest. The cotton harvest lasted approximately two months and has now concluded, allowing for some preliminary conclusions.

- *This year the International Labour organisation conducted monitoring during the cotton harvest in Uzbekistan. Despite the presence of the international observers, the government systematically forced farmers to produce state-established quotas and children and adults to pick cotton, as in previous years.*
- *The state coercively mobilized as many people as possible from different institutions, public and private, to go out to pick cotton. Mass mobilisation of public-sector workers began on September 10.*

- *Authorities took extensive measures to cover up the labour rights violations and create the impression that people pick cotton voluntarily, in order to earn some extra income and in the name of patriotism. Throughout the country, authorities instructed children at schools and adults in their workplaces and communities to report to foreigners that they picked cotton “voluntarily” and “for the love of the motherland.” Local authorities ordered residents to ensure children picked cotton away from the main highways, and education administrators returned students from the cotton fields to schools in anticipation of visits by the ILO. As in previous years, the government silenced Uzbek human rights monitors through arrest, imprisonment and intimidation.*
- *Observers from the ILO operated under a limited scope, were accompanied by representatives of the Uzbek government, and did not meet with any independent Uzbek human rights activists.*
- *Colleges and lyceums, which are the equivalent of high schools in the US education system, sent students and teachers to pick cotton, starting around September 15. Students stayed in the cotton fields 50-55 days. School administrators forced parents and students to sign statements of consent that the children work in the fields, under threat of expulsion from school.*
- *The state-established price for cotton picked was 200-210 soums (6 cents USD) for 1 kilogram of cotton. Yet many citizens paid more than they received, because they were required to pay for transportation, accommodation, and meals.*
- *The state education system sent teachers to pick cotton in 2-week shifts; when one group returned, the next group of their colleagues went to the fields. Unlike last year, administrators required teachers to pick cotton during the weekends, even if they already had completed their shift.*
- *Many citizens paid public officials to avoid picking cotton or hired a day labourer to pick cotton in their place.*

Learn more about the 2013 cotton harvest in UGF’s latest video report:
<http://uzbekgermanforum.org/ugf-series-2/>

Media Reports:

An activist from Kashkadarya faces pressure for not letting his nephew pick cotton
 13.11.2013

Djamoliddin Ortikov, a member of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan „Ezgulik“ from Kashkadarya region, reported to the *BBC* that his family is under pressure for refusing to send his nephew to pick cotton.

Mr. Ortikov refused to allow his nephew to go to the cotton fields on September 19. His nephew, who studies in Yakkabog College of Economics, recently had surgery to remove his tonsils. After a few days, the police took Mr. Ortikov’s car and charged his other nephew Urolov Bahridin with stealing a prosecutor’s vehicle a few days prior.

Local observers think that this is all about putting pressure on Djamoliddin for standing up to the state policy of forced labour for cotton production.

"My car was taken from my own car wash, and I filed the complaint. I am the only person who drives my car. I do not know anything about a stolen prosecutor’s vehicle, even whether this really took place. But they fined my nephew Urolov, who works in the car wash, anyway, for three times the amount of minimum wage!" said the Mr. Ortikov.

The BBC asked Djamoliddin Ortikov about the details of the case.

BBC: Why are they doing this? What do you think?

Mr. Ortikov: "I didn't send my nephew to pick cotton. They came with the police to his house to take him to the cotton fields, and I resisted. I asked them to show a paper stating that cotton picking is obligatory. So my nephew didn't go to pick cotton.

On September 22, two traffic police officers came to my car wash and took my car. They saw the car keys and told my nephew Urolov to drive to see his brother, but instead took him to the police office. There, they wrote a ticket and placed Urolov under arrest. We still don't know why he was arrested. There is no evidence or fact," he added.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/uzbek/uzbekistan/2013/11/131113_cy_uzbekistan_human_rights_ortiqov.shtm.

A student who was forced to pick cotton had a miscarriage in the cotton fields

13.11.2013

Ziyoda Allamberganova, a second-year student of Karakalpak State University, had a miscarriage while picking cotton. The tragedy took place in the end of September, but the news only reached *Radio Liberty* in mid November. According to her peers, Ms. Allamberganova gave a letter to the university administration from a physician stating that she was pregnant, but the school ignored the risk and, forced her to pick cotton with everyone else.

Ms. Allamberganova was picking cotton in Tortkul district when she had the miscarriage. One of her peers, who spoke anonymously to *Radio Liberty* reported that the incident happened in the last days of September:

„Ziyoda complained that she had a stomach ache while picking cotton, then one day when she went to the toilet, she had a miscarriage. After that, she was taken to hospital. And she didn't return to pick cotton," said the student. „ This year they are strict about the cotton harvest. Even those who had medical certificates were taken to pick cotton. Ziyoda was sent too, even though she was pregnant," the student added.

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/25166996.html>

Djizzakh authorities sent college students and teachers back to the cotton fields

1.11.2013

Through the school system in Djizzak, authorities mobilized another wave of children and adults to finish the cotton harvest. After having returned home and thinking the harvest was over, many second- and third-year college students (ages 16-18) were sent back to the cotton fields. School administrators also sent school teachers, who were scheduled to have an one-week holiday, to the cotton fields, starting November 1.

Teachers from the Djizzak education system reported that the new mass mobilization was region-wide.

„They had all already returned. Now they were all sent back all over again. They said it would be only for three days, but who knows how long it will be? The administration gives these orders. Who else would send everyone back to the fields? Officially, everyone fulfilled the (cotton production) plan, but there is still some cotton. The weather improved, that's why they decided to make schoolchildren pick cotton now as well," said one Radio Liberty source.

A teacher in the Djizzak system reported that schoolchildren, who had already been sent to pick cotton earlier in the harvest, were also sent back to the cotton fields on November 1.

„Schools were given a quota. They are saying that everyone should go. In some schools only men are going and women are staying. It is term holiday November 2-10. So that is an excuse...Colleges and universities also sent the students and teachers back.“

Officials of the Education Ministry of Uzbekistan stated that they have no information regarding the mass return of college students who are under 18 years old and therefore children under the international and national laws.

Official and semi official media channels inside the country are also confirming that children under the age of 18 in Uzbekistan are still picking cotton.

“Despite the cotton harvest season coming to its end and helpers returning home, college students of Uychi collective farm are still picking 60- 70 kilos of cotton a day in an experimental field,” reported the Uzinform on November 1.

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/25155160.html>

Guliston University students sent to pick more cotton

5.11.2013

Guliston State university students and teachers picked cotton for forty days, from early September until October 25. One week later, authorities sent them back to the fields. With almost no cotton left, the students and teachers cannot pick more than 5-10 kilograms in a day.

Guliston State University sent over 3,000 students and nearly 300 teachers back to pick more cotton on Saturday. Buses left the university at 8:00 AM for the cotton fields in neighbouring districts.

Akbar, a university student, noted that they only came back from forty consecutive days of picking cotton five days earlier:

„We were just happy that the cotton harvest was over. Our mates who live in other regions could at least go home to change their field clothes, but we were out there for 40 days in a row. Then on Saturday they kicked us back out there again,” said the student.

A university teacher reported that they are being sent to pick cotton despite the little cotton left in the fields:

„If a person works very hard, he can only gather 10 kilos in a day. We teachers can pick 5 kilos. Now if we calculate this, it doesn't even cover the fuel expenses of the busses used to transport us. Meanwhile, all classes are postponed. I think they falsely reported that they fulfilled the quota and now have to cover the missing gap by all means,” said the teacher.

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/25159017.html>