

A CHRONICLE OF FORCED LABOUR IN THE COTTON SECTOR IN UZBEKISTAN

Issue 7, November 6, 2014



New-borns' mothers are forced to pick cotton in Djizzakh

October 19, 2014

In Djizzakh region, authorities forcibly mobilise mothers with new-borns to harvest cotton. Djizzakh residents report that women who tried to refuse have been threatened with losing the maternity payments established by law. A woman, who wanted to stay anonymous, added that women with infants are sent to pick cotton in the districts and Djizzakh city. A mother with an 8 month-old baby reported that, despite her informing officials that she needs to breastfeed her child, they demanded she pick cotton or hire someone to replace her:

“They are taking everyone to pick cotton. I now have a small child. I cannot do it at all. My baby is breastfed. But they are still demanding that I send someone else in my place. So I had to send my brother-in-law. My baby is only 8 months old, but they said if I don't go they would stop my maternity pay. They said this to everyone who receives benefits,” said the mother of Djizzakh region.”

Djizzakh officials send guests, anyone they find to pick cotton

Residents of Djizzakh region report the authorities are forcing anyone they can to pick cotton.

A caller from the Dostlik area of the region reported his visitors from Samarkand were forced to pick cotton.

“Anyone who is out there is forced to pick cotton. Recently my brothers-in-law visited us from Samarkand. They were taken from their bus and ordered to pick 40 kilos of cotton each,” he said.

Human rights activist and Djizzakh resident Uktam Pardaev reported the prosecutor’s office, police and other law enforcement agencies are sending everyone who on the street to pick cotton:

“Not only visitors, in general, there is no difference whether they live in this district or not. Everyone is being stopped and sent off to pick cotton. They stop cars on the road, take the ID documents of the passengers, and make them pick cotton. It doesn’t matter if they are young or old. In some cases, they just hand the aprons and take them to the fields. People going about their business- they don’t care. They just stop them and send them to the fields. If a man objects, they hit him. But there is no other difference for men and women – everyone is forced to pick cotton,” said Mr. Pardaev.

“Жиззахда эмизикли оналар ҳам далага ҳайдалаяпти”, Ozodlik Radio, 19.10.2014, <http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/26644871.html>

6th-grade students forced to pick cotton in Djizzakh

October 19, 2014

Residents of Djizzakh report they observed school children sent to pick cotton. In the Dostlik district, school children from grades 6 and above are picking cotton, meaning the youngest are age 12. A resident described the situation:

“Schoolchildren of grades 6, 7, 8 and 9 of school #5 ‘Alisher Navoi and school #12 ‘Mirzo Ulugbek’ are picking cotton. All schools are participating in cotton harvest. Children go to school until noon, and after lunch they go to pick cotton. Schoolchildren are picking cotton on the Khumor farm Ravshan Namozov farm, and Rakhmat Karaev farm,” said the resident, who requested anonymity.

“Жиззахда эмизикли оналар ҳам далага ҳайдалаяпти”, Ozodlik Radio, 19.10.2014, <http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/26644871.html>

Schoolchildren sent to pick cotton in Chinoz and Chirokchi districts

October 18, 2014

Schoolchildren as young as age 14 were sent to harvest cotton in the Chinoz district of Tashkent region and Chirokchi district of Kashkadarya region. Schools in both districts sent children from the 8th and 9th grades.

Starting October 17, all Chinoz schools began sending schoolchildren of the 8th and 9th grades. The children were sent to pick cotton on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays:

“At the moment the schools are closed for higher grades. 8th and 9th grade children are in cotton fields even today. They were told that they would be back to school on Monday. But on Saturdays and Sundays they are in the fields,” reported a Chinoz resident. According to another Chinoz resident, “schools were closed. They have 5 teachers there for show. All the other teachers are picking cotton together with students. Does the ILO know about it? All the schools in Chinoz district are in the cotton fields. You can go to any school to see that it is closed,” the resident said.

An official from Chinoz district administration, who didn't introduce himself, did not deny to Radio Liberty that schoolchildren were involved in cotton harvest, but he suggested asking the national education department for a definite answer.

Yuldosh Musaev, the Chinoz district head of the national education department, completely denied that the schoolchildren were sent to pick cotton:

“If I didn't send 1st- and 2nd-year college students to pick cotton, why would I send schoolchildren? This is not permitted at all. I'm not even sending teachers to pick cotton except on Sundays. On Sundays it is a big hasher across the republic. It is not just here. Teachers are going to pick cotton voluntarily on Sundays. All the teachers are going only on Sundays to help and contribute to the fulfilment of the cotton plan of the republic,” - said Mr. Musaev.

“Чиноз ва Чироқчида ҳам мактаб ўқувчилари пахтага чиқарилди”, Ozodlik Radio, 18.10.2014, <http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/26643911.html>

Children from Chiroqchi also sent to pick cotton

October 18, 2014

Schools in the Chirokchi district of Kashkadarya region sent 8th- and 9th-grade schoolchildren to pick cotton.

The pupils of the school #16 were sent to pick cotton on the Karim Djuraev farm.

“8th- and 9th-grade children are picking cotton. Since the cotton season started there were almost no classes at schools. When the teachers were away to pick cotton, children didn't have much in the way of class,” reported a Chiroqchi resident.

Another resident reported the schoolchildren of school #163 were sent to pick cotton on the Beshchashma farm. The resident said, “higher grade children went to pick cotton in the afternoon”.

Nazira Obraeva, Chirokchi district head for the national education department, hung up the phone as soon as she heard the Radio Liberty's question regarding the involvement of the children in cotton harvest.

While the government is claiming the International Labour Organisation has found there is no child labour in Uzbekistan, it has been observed that schoolchildren are involved in cotton harvesting in Uzbekistan across other places of the country.

Starting October 14, for example, 8th- and 9th-grade schoolchildren of Payarik district schools in Samarkand region were mobilised to pick cotton.

In Djizzakh as all the teachers were forced to go to pick cotton, leaving no one left to teach the children at schools. Therefore, the students were all given a holiday starting October 1. Human rights monitors from Djizzakh report that children in the higher grades are all forced to go to pick cotton. But the authorities in Djizzakh are insisting that there are only cases of children helping their parents with the cotton harvest.

“Чиноз ва Чироқчида ҳам мактаб ўқувчилари пахтага чиқарилди”, Ozodlik Radio, 18.10.2014, <http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/26643911.html>

Police Chief threatens legal sanctions against residents who fall short of daily quotas

October 17, 2014

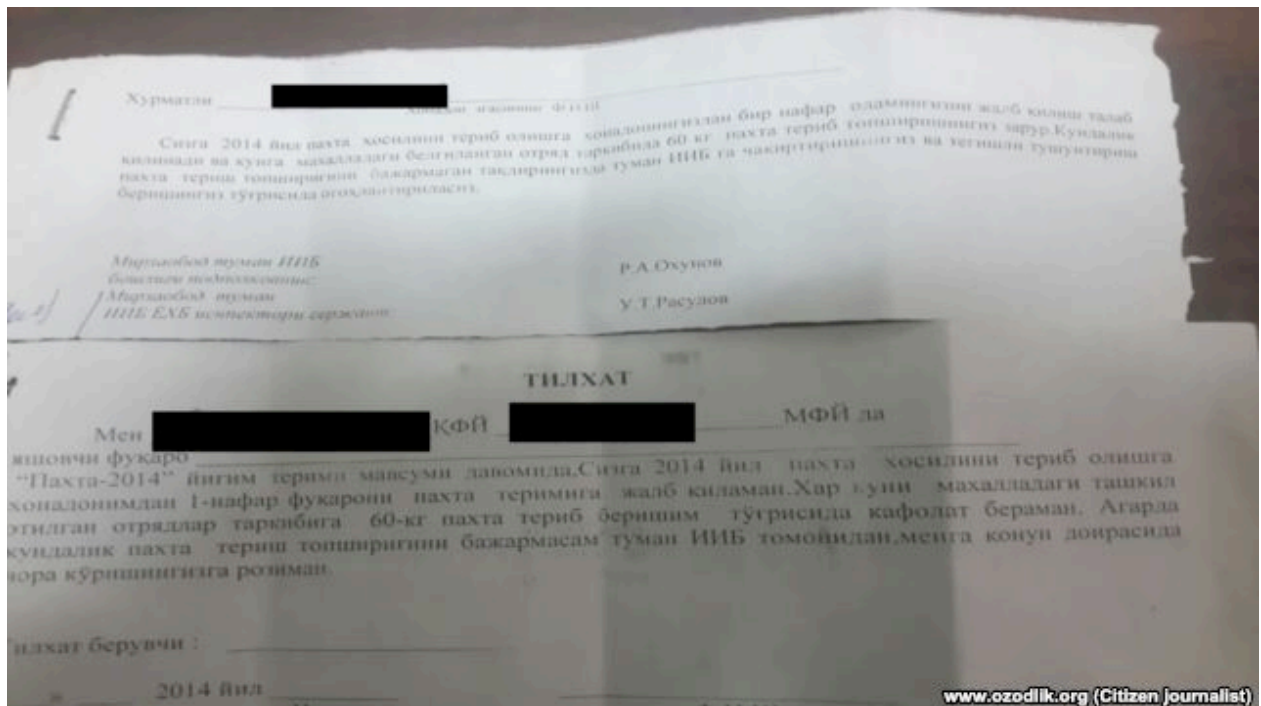
To mobilize residents of the Mirzaobod district of Sirdarya region, the district police chief issued a threats to legally sanction residents for not contributing enough to the cotton harvest. Families in the district received warning letters from the head of the police in which he demanded each family send at least one person to pick cotton.

Radio Liberty's source in the Mirzaobod district reported that residents are anxious after the pressure from the police:

“The local policemen are going to houses and delivering warning letters. Our “Yangi Hayot” (new life) neighbourhood committees are assisting the police during the visits by gathering signatures. The letter warns that if one person from the family doesn't go to pick cotton, the family would have to go to the police office and give explanation. People who don't know their rights are going to pick cotton out of fear,” said the source.

The police required residents to sign an acknowledgement letter, a copy of which was sent to Radio Liberty. It states their obligation to pick cotton and that citizens agree to be punished “within the law” if they do not pick 60 kilo cotton a day:

“I..... the citizen of KFY....will send one person from my household during the 2014 Cotton 2014 harvest season. I guarantee that this person will pick 60 kilo cotton for the groups organised by the neighbourhood. If I do not fulfil the daily target of cotton, I agree to be punished within the law by the police,” reads the acknowledgement letter.



The warning letter of the Mirzaobod police, along with the acknowledgement residents were required to sign.

Isroildjon Rizaev, human rights activist and Mirzaobod member of Ezgulik, the only human rights organization partially registered in Uzbekistan, compared the letters to the military oath taken by the soldiers sent to frontlines during the war, and they have become a customary practice in the last 2-3 years:

“Every year when the cotton season starts, neighbourhood activists and policemen go around the village houses as a group and make people sign such warning and acknowledgement. People are afraid, so when they see the name of the head of the police, they have to leave their jobs and go pick cotton,” reported Mr. Rizaev.

An official from the Mirzaobod district police, who didn’t give his name, confirmed that such warning letters with the name of the police chief were distributed among the residents. He couldn’t confirm whether such letters are legal.

We asked the lawyer Rukhiddin Komilov from Uzbekistan whether such measures would be taken for those who signed the warning letters: “Such acknowledgement letters are not legal. Forced labour can only be enforced with a court decision in emergency situations or in military service,” said Mr. Komilov.

“Сурдарёда 60 кг пахта термаганлар “қонуний чора” билан қўрқитилмоқда”, *Ozodlik Radio*, 17.10.2014, <http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/26642621.html>

“They are making us pay for the unpicked cotton”- Uzbek citizen

October 16, 2014

As the cotton season continues in Uzbekistan, private companies and government workers continue to be forced to contribute to the cotton harvest en masse. Authorities are demanding payments from anyone who cannot fulfil the daily cotton picking quota.

Abdurazzoq Sodikov, a resident of Tashkent, spoke with the BBC and explained his wife, a doctor, was taken from Tashkent to Djizzakh to pick cotton. Mr. Sodikov visited her there and reported that the conditions are very difficult for the citizens sent to pick cotton. He also noted that they are forced to pay for the cotton they couldn't pick, even if it didn't exist.

Furthermore, while the payment for each kilogram of picked cotton this year is 217 soms, people are charged 350 soms per kg for cotton they did not pick, to meet their daily quota.

“I went to see my wife, who was sent from her workplace to pick cotton on the farm No. 27 in Dostlik district, Djizzakh region. We reached the farm by sunset in a taxi. On the way I saw hundreds of people returning from the fields. I shared the taxi with three medical staff heading home from the fields. They said there were 6 kilometres from the field to the place where they stayed, and they had to walk it everyday. In the mornings, they were taken on a bus to the fields. I asked them their daily target. They were sent to the fields where the cotton had already been harvested three times! They could barely pick 20- 30 kilos and had to pay for the rest of the target, 350 soms per kilo.”

BBC: Who do they pay this money to?

“They pay it when they deliver their cotton to the weighing station. This money goes to the pockets of the authorities. They always send helpers to pick cotton in the same fields in order to not send back the helpers. And if they don't send back the helpers, it is a ready, illegal income for them. They collect all the money helpers have and write off the missing cotton.”

BBC: Do you have any proof of write off?

“They record on paper how much cotton is being picked before the harvest. They all have 60 kilo target.”

BBC: Why do they take medical staff to the fields where there is no cotton?

“Because that's when they pick less cotton, they can't fulfil the norm, and they have to pay for that. They do it to collect cash.”

BBC: Do they get paid for the cotton they pick?

“If they exceed the daily norm, they might get paid. These people came from the cities. They are medics, not real cotton pickers. The cotton bushes are knee high, they are working in the fields where there is no cotton. They are not allowed to pick the cotton across the road.”

BBC: So you went to see your wife, how are the conditions there?

“They sleep in a school sports hall. These places do not comply with hygiene standards. My wife is 46 years old.”

BBC: What happens if she refuses to go to pick cotton?

“They will fire her. Will put her under pressure. They will call her the enemy of the state. They will tell her, look everyone is picking, why won't you.”

BBC: What happens if she doesn't pay for the missing cotton?

“She will be told off by the head doctor and her administration. They will call them lazy workers. They will call them ‘people with poor mentality’ everyone is afraid.”

BBC: Did you get in touch with authorities?

“I called the city prosecutor's office. They were very scared and said that this is not in their responsibility. Even the police is very scared of cotton matters.”

BBC: How long has your wife been in at the cotton harvest, and when will she return?

“She left on the 2nd of October. She was supposed to return tomorrow (17th of October). They are forced to work from 7 in the morning till very late. As if they've been sentenced to death, that's how they treat them. Even in prison they wouldn't make the convicts work more than 8 hours.”

*Ўзбекистонлик ҳашарчи: "Терилмаган пахта учун ҳақ олишмоқда", BBC Uzbek Service, 16.10.2014,
http://www.bbc.co.uk/uzbek/uzbekistan/2014/10/141016_uzbek_cotton_conditions*

In Samarkand schoolchildren are sent to pick cotton

October 16, 2014

While the government of Uzbekistan is claiming there is no child labour in Uzbekistan and suggesting the International Labour Organisation affirms its conclusion, citizens observe that the schoolchildren are sent to pick cotton.

Radio Liberty sent correspondents to Samarkand, and they reported and sent photos of schoolchildren picking cotton instead of attending school in the Payarik district. Children of the 8th and 9th grades (generally ages 14-15) of Payarik schools were fully mobilised to pick cotton starting October 14. These photos (www.ozodlik.org/content/article/26640716.html) illustrate the schoolchildren picking cotton.



While investigating the initial cases reported, Radio Liberty asked whether other schoolchildren in Payarik district were sent to pick cotton as well. A parent of the Halkobod village of Payarik district reported that the 8th- and 9th-grade children of school #72 were also sent to pick cotton for the last three days:

“Sine October 14, the higher grade schoolchildren have been sent to pick cotton instead of attending classes. My son studies in the 9th grade. For the last three days he has been going to pick cotton instead of his classes. I tell him not to go, but he is afraid of being told off by his teachers,” said the source.

Radio Liberty also interviewed a student, age 15, and he said that he just returned from the field and there were also students from the 6th and 7th grades picking cotton in the fields:

Student: I just now came back from the field. I picked 20 kilo cotton today.

Radio Liberty: Since when are you and your peers picking cotton?

Student: For two days, today was the third day.

Radio Liberty: are there no classes?

Student: No, we are not studying. Everyone is picking cotton.

Radio Liberty: which grades?

Student: 8th and 9th grades, and today 6th and 7th grades also came.

Radio Liberty: is picking cotton good or classes?

Student: Oh, of course studying is good.

According to Radio Liberty's sources, schoolchildren of the other schools in the district were also mobilised to pick cotton. The Payarik district head of the national education department, Uktam Narimonov, carefully listened to our question regarding the mobilisation of schoolchildren in cotton harvest. Then he pretended that he couldn't hear us well, repeated "hello", "hello," and switched off his phone.

Our attempts to reconnect with the education department didn't yield any results. The 18th of October is a regional holiday, "Samarkand city day." Local residents report the mayors of the districts ordered school directors to send the children to pick cotton that day, in order to fulfil the regional quota.

At the same time the state controlled media in Uzbekistan published the reports of Navid Khasan Nakvi, the executive representative of the World Bank in Uzbekistan. The report claims that Mr. Nakvi concluded that child labour wasn't observed in the cotton fields of the country this year. It says that the representatives of the World Bank monitored the cotton harvest in Ferghana valley, Samarkand and Bukhara regions during September and October:

"Our representatives monitored the same situation as the results registered in the 2013 report by the ILO. The farms they went to see had the work contracts and the copies of their workers' passports. The youngest picker was 19 years old. The government did a lot of work on this issue and the results were seen. Besides this, the World Bank representatives didn't get any evidence that schoolchildren are systematically involved in the harvest," says the statement attributed to the World Bank in the national press.

„Самарқандда мактаб ўқувчилари оммавий тарзда пахтага чиқарилмоқда”, Ozodlik Radio, 16.10.2014, <http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/26640716.html>

Schoolchildren used as stage props while in place of college students sent to pick cotton

October 13, 2014



1st and 2nd year college students in Uzbekistan, typically ages 16-17, were forced to pick cotton this year, and schoolchildren of the higher grades were placed in the colleges in place of the students sent to pick cotton. The schoolchildren were also instructed to introduce themselves as college students. Apparently, local authorities are trying to hide the fact that they sent children to pick cotton.

This scheme was used in the Chinoz district of Tashkent region, where 1st- and 2nd-year students of all colleges were forced to pick cotton. According to one of the college teachers, the district mayor Makhmud Eshonov ordered the mobilization of the younger college students of the colleges to the cotton fields.

The 1st- and 2nd-year students of medical and pedagogical colleges in Shakhrisabz city of Kashkadarya were sent to pick cotton starting October 9.

“Only the 1st- and 2nd-year students of medical and pedagogical colleges in Shakhrisabz are sent to pick cotton for a whole day. The situation is slightly different in other colleges. 1st- and 2nd-year students are barely studying. Only five or six children from one group attend the classes. The rest are going to pick cotton in place of their parents,” reported a Radio Liberty listener from Kashkadarya.

Another source reported that the situation is the same in Toylok district of Samarkand:

“Everyday they take 1st-year students to pick cotton. We heard that the regional governor decreed that ‘children under 18 should not be taken to pick cotton.’ But the district mayors ordered everyone to the fields,” said the Toylok resident.

Radio Liberty also received reports that the 1st- and 2nd-year students of Djomboj transport college in Samarkand, College of economics in Gallaorol district of Djizzakh region, construction and transportation vocational college of Koshkopir district in Khorezm, Bukhara medical college, Namangan Textile College, and the agricultural college of Chimboy district of Karakalpakistan were forced to pick cotton. According to Radio Liberty's sources, the authorities are attempting to hide the mobilization of children to pick cotton by various means.

Several districts placed schoolchildren in the seats of college students sent to pick cotton. Independently of the report from Chinoz, Tashkent region, Radio Liberty received a report from a resident of Chelak, Payarik district, Samarkand region. The resident wrote that his 8th-grade daughter is attending a college to cover the students who were sent to pick cotton:

“My daughter studies in the 8th grade of school #80 in Chelak town. She now goes to Payarik Hospitality College. The 1st- and 2nd-year students of this college were forced to pick cotton. That's why now the 8th- and 9th-grade schoolchildren are forced to study in the colleges,” reported the father from Samarkand.

According to staff of the Samarkand regional office of the national education department, the fact that schoolchildren are studying in colleges instead of the college students has a different interpretation:

“The introduction to colleges for graduating schoolchildren is registered in the law. Now the 8th and 9th grade children go to college, and we call embracing the next stage of their education. Schoolchildren go to the local colleges next to their homes,” said the education department representative.

Пахтага чиққан коллеж талабалари ўрнига мактаб ўқувчилари ўқияпти, Ozodlik Radio, 13.10.2014, <http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/26635015.html>

Teacher from Rishton says cotton is a public celebration

October 13, 2014

The international cotton and textile fair is open in Tashkent. While the Uzbek government signs multi- million cotton contracts in Tashkent, tens of thousands of students and schoolchildren remain in the cotton fields under forced labour.

Freelance journalist Bakhodir Elboev from Ferghana published photos illustrating the lyceum (similar to a vocational high school) students picking cotton on his facebook page. He reported that the academic lyceum students were taken to pick cotton for the first time this year.

Mr. Elboev, an English teacher at the lyceum, was also in cotton field. He told the BBC that the students and schoolchildren are not only paid for the labour, but also they are not provided with food or water.

According to Mr. Elboev, teachers, students and their parents are all unhappy with the cotton harvest, but they cannot complain to anybody.

„Риштонлик ўқитувчи: 'Пахта-кўпга келган тўй'“, BBC Uzbek Service, 13.10.2014, http://www.bbc.co.uk/uzbek/uzbekistan/2014/10/141013_cy_coton_eliboyev

Mayor of Boyovut ordered the punishment of entrepreneurs who didn't go to pick cotton

October 10, 2014

On orders from the mayor of Boyovut district, Sirdaryo region, the local businessmen who didn't close their shops during the harvest were placed on video surveillance during the harvest, publicly humiliated and threatened with extraordinary tax investigations.

The businessmen punished included those who hired day labourers to pick cotton in their places. The mayor still demanded they close their shops and also go to pick cotton. Otherwise, the mayor is threatened, they would be subjected to a new tax inspection.

One of the businessmen reported to Radio Liberty the system set up by Mayor Botirov to videotape the businessmen who kept their shops open during the cotton harvest season and to punish them:

“Yesterday the mayor gathered all the businessmen and held a meeting. Two days earlier the merchants who opened their shops were videotaped. He showed these records in the meeting and shouted why these restaurants and shops are open during the day instead of going to pick cotton. A couple of us businessmen said that we sent hired labourers to cover our place, and we had permission from the tax office. But he yelled at us to close our shops and go to pick cotton,” said the businessman.

He added that the mayor ordered the head of the tax office to enforce the order:

“The mayor told the head of the tax office to establish a commission, and that he would lead that commission. ‘If any of them are not going to pick cotton, you will write a letter, penalize them, and close their shops,’ he said. We were so surprised. We all hired labourers to replace us and paid 200,000 soms for each of them to go and pick cotton for us, but this is not enough for the mayor,” said the businessman.

According to the businessman, cotton policy has turned Boyovut district centre into a war zone:

“The towns are empty. There is a heavy silence. We keep our shops closed from inside. People can be seen in the streets only after 5pm in the evening. Traffic police is sending away any car which comes to the city centre,” reported the businessman from Boyovut.

A Boyovut district administration official, who didn't introduce himself, admitted that the cotton policy is very strict this year:

“Businessmen were tasked to send labourers. But now the mayor ordered everyone to pick cotton and the closure of all shops and restaraunts until 5 pm. This is not only our

mayor's initiative; the regional mayor also ordered this. Even the roads are closed until after 4:30 pm," said the administration representative.

Боёвут ҳокими пахтага чиқмаган тадбиркорларни жазолашни буюрди, Ozodlik Radio, 10.10.2014, <http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/26630815.html>

The government cut the salaries of medical staff who were forced to go to pick cotton

October 10, 2014

In Uzbekistan this year medical staff forced to pick cotton also had their salaries cut. Emergency medical technicians (EMTs) contacted Radio Liberty and reported the workers who were sent to pick cotton didn't receive their salaries for September.

One of the doctors of the Namangan emergency centre expressed his concern to Radio Liberty:

"We the staff members of emergency centre are sent to pick cotton this harvest season, and we don't get our pay. At the moment 600 of us are in the fields, including doctors, nurses, cleaners, technical support staff and drivers. All of us will not get paid for this cotton period. We were told that we'll get paid for picking cotton, so we won't receive our salaries," said the doctor from Namangan.

A nurse from Namangan also said that it is unfair to deduct the salaries of those who are sent to pick cotton:

"It is not like we are going to pick cotton because we want to. We spend so much money on this cotton harvesting. What we get for the cotton we pick barely covers our food. On top of that, they are saying that we won't get paid salary for the days we pick cotton. What kind of injustice is this?" said the nurse from Namangan.

The staff members of emergency centre in Namangan reported that their salaries have been cut each cotton harvest since 2011.

According to one of the accountants of this centre, during cotton season the salaries are paid only to those staff who aren't sent to pick cotton and stay in hospital:

"There is no pay for those who go to pick cotton. They are paid for the cotton they pick. It is the same across all Namangan region. Public work is not paid. We pay them for caring for the ill. If they go to pick cotton, it means they don't work. They are paid for their cotton. The salary is not written for them," said the centre's accountant.

Radio Liberty contacted other medical institutions in other regions across Uzbekistan. The accountant of Sirdaryo region central hospital also reported that they don't pay salaries to those who are sent to pick cotton.

“The salary is paid to those who come to work. If they pick cotton, they don’t come to work here. They get paid for the cotton they pick,” said the accountant of the Sirdaryo central hospital.

Medics who are forced to pick cotton expressed their disagreement with the salary cuts:

“We pay for the transportation to the cotton fields. We pay for our own food; they don’t feed us. We only get 300,000 soms, and they want to take it away too. It is not like we want to go pick cotton. If we refuse to go, they threaten us with dismissal. What we have to go through!” said a nurse from the Namangan hospital of infectious diseases.

Officials of Health Ministry of Uzbekistan told Radio Liberty that they cannot comment on the salary cuts of medics during cotton season.

Пахтага мажбуран чиқарилган шифокорларнинг ойлиги ҳам қирқилмоқда, Ozodlik Radio, 10.10.2014, <http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/26630636.html>

Mayor of Chirokchi shut down a couple’s wedding to enforce cotton policy

October 9, 2014

Chirokchi district Mayor Ravshan Komilov shut down the wedding, anniversary and circumcision celebration ceremony of the family of Moyli Khodjanov, a 60-year old grandfather in the Postin village of Chirokchi.

Guests attending the wedding dropped the food they were eating and ran away when they saw the mayor enter accompanied with police officers. The mayor came to punish those who disobeyed his order not to celebrate weddings during the cotton harvest.

The wedding was underway on October 7. Mr. Khodjanov was hosting a feast to celebrate his 60 years of marriage, his son’s wedding, and his grandsons’ circumcision ceremony. A guest reported that around 11 o’clock Mayor Komilov arrived at the wedding house accompanied by the police officers:

“Suddenly everyone started running away saying that the mayor came. The mayor himself was kicking out everyone, yelling ‘don’t you know my order that no wedding is held until October 16!’ Even the cooks in the kitchen left. He ruined the poor man’s wedding celebrations,” said the wedding guest.

There were about 200 people gathered at the celebration. “Grandpa Moyli was begging the mayor, saying that he didn’t know, and asking him to let him finish the wedding. After that we left too,” said guest, who called Radio Liberty.

Another wedding guest of the wedding reported that the mayor went from room to room and chased off all the women too:

“There are five farms in our Beshchashma collective farmers’ Union. They fulfilled the cotton plan in a week’s time. But the mayor didn’t care about it. He went in the

house of the wedding host and chased off all the relatives; he yelled at everyone to go away and pick cotton,” said the second wedding guest who called Radio Liberty.

According to the caller, the spirit of the wedding disappeared after this.

Mayor Komilov insisted to Radio Liberty that the cotton policy is in force and denied that he ruined grandpa Moyli’s wedding celebrations:

“I didn’t ruin anyone’s wedding. But it is the policy. Everyone is picking cotton. Everyone goes to the cotton harvest. There is no wedding anywhere!” said the mayor.

And with that, the mayor cut the conversation short and hung up the phone. In most of the districts in Uzbekistan, holding weddings and other ceremonies during the cotton harvest is forbidden by verbal orders of local authorities.

Чироқчи ҳокими пахта сиёсати иддаоси билан камбағалнинг тўйини бузди, Ozodlik Radio, 09.10.2014, <http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/26628973.html>

Schoolchildren sent to pick cotton in Djizzakh region

October 7, 2014

Multiple districts in Djizzakh region sent schoolchildren starting October 1. The Dostlik and Djizzakh districts sent children of 5th grade, generally age 11, and higher grades on unplanned holidays, to pick cotton.

Human rights activist Uktam Parдаev, a Djizzakh resident, is monitoring the cotton season and reported on the practice to Radio Liberty:

“There is an area called Uchtepa in Djizzakh region. All the schools in Uchtepa are left without teachers at the moment. Schools #32 Al Khorazmiy, #13, and #4 Sharof Rashidov are only holding classes 1st- through 4th-grade students. Children above 4th grade are not attending school. It has been a week since they have were dismissed. The teachers are picking cotton in the fields. Only children from the 1st to 4th grade are being taught. The teachers of the 5th grade and above are picking cotton in the fields. That’s why children are at home,” said Mr. Parдаev.

Another local human rights activist sent his observations from the Koshbarmok village of Djizzakh to Radio Liberty:

“In Koshbarmok village, school #31 Abdulla Kodiriy sent schoolchildren above the 4th grade on holiday. As the teachers are in cotton fields, there is no one to teach the children. That is why starting October 7 the children of 5th grade and higher were sent off on holiday,” said the local activist.

Mr. Parдаev reported that some of the children sent on holidays were sent to pick cotton:

“School #17 in the Uzbekistan village of Djizzakh district sent the teachers and the children above the 6th grade to pick cotton. They are taking them discretely and

making them to pick cotton. In Manas village of Dostlik district, schools are also sending schoolchildren and college students to pick cotton,” he said.

Another activist who is monitoring the cotton harvest process in Dostlik district of Djizzakh reported to Radio Liberty that schoolchildren of some of the schools in that district were sent to pick cotton:

“7th-, 8th- and 9th-grade children were sent to pick cotton from schools #5 Alisher Navoi and #17 Mirzo Ulugbek.. The 1st- and 2nd-year students of college No. 27 in Dostlik district were also sent to pick cotton,” said the local activist.

According to a Djizzakh district school teacher, it is obligatory for teachers to pick cotton, but the children are asked to go voluntarily:

“It is not obligatory for schoolchildren to pick cotton. Only those who want to go are permitted to go. The director asked schoolchildren to go to pick cotton if they want to. That is why the higher grade children are also going to pick cotton,” said the teacher.

Жиззахда юқори синф ўқувчилари пахтага чиқди, Ozodlik Radio, 07.10.2014,
<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/26624739.html>