

# CHRONICLE OF FORCED LABOR 2017

Issue 3: June – September



The theater in Gulistan is a traditional place for gathering employees to depart to the cotton fields. This year our monitors were not able to take pictures because the police was present. Gulistan, 2016 © UGF

The **cotton harvest season** in Uzbekistan has begun once again, as has the forced mobilization to the cotton fields.

The harvesting of cotton began on September 6 in several regions of Uzbekistan. According to preliminary data, the forced mobilization of public sector employees to the cotton fields is taking place now all over the country.

Monitors from the Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights (UGF) conducted interviews with workers in schools and hospitals. According to them, the management of state institutions requires workers to sign statements "of voluntary participation in the collection of cotton". In some cases, "decision of helping the motherland to harvest cotton" are adopted at collective meetings of the public organizations. Information about such confirmative letters of "voluntary participation" was received from the Syrdarya, Jizzak, Andijan regions and the Republic of Karakalpakstan.

In the Republic of Karakalpakstan, doctors from central hospitals in the Turtkul and El-likala districts told UGF that the hospital management recommended employees to hire pickers instead of themselves and stay at their workplace.

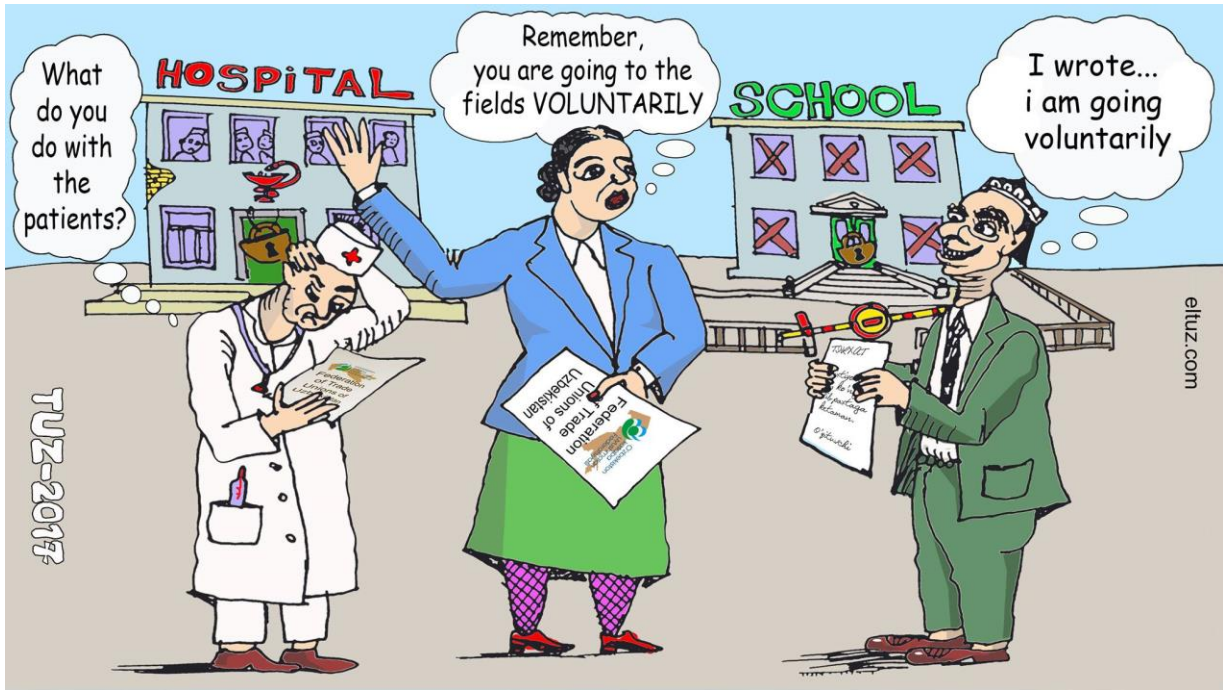
The mass departure of workers and large parts of university students is planned for September 15. Lists of traveling "volunteers" are prepared by the management of institutions and handed over to the khokimiyats (local administrations), which traditionally control the whole process of cotton harvesting.

This year, the payment for the collection of 1 kg of cotton has risen in the Jizzak region to 500 Som (about \$ 0.06), which is two times higher than in the previous year, and in the other regions to 400 Som (about \$ 0.05).

After Shavkat Mirziyev was elected the new President of Uzbekistan, the problem of employing teachers and doctors for agricultural work was raised in local media and discussed on state television. In August, the heads of the regions of Namangan, Bukhara, Kashkadarya, and Surkhandarya promised that no teacher or doctor would be involved in the cotton harvesting this year. On August 15, at a meeting with the delegation of the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Erkin Mukhitdinov, the Deputy Minister of Employment and Labor Relations, announced that the Uzbek government had banned the involvement of young people under the age of 16, as well as employees of organizations in the health and education sector in the cotton harvest in 2017.

Forced labor was already used throughout the **spring cotton works** in May and June of this year. In the second part of this issue, we also take a look back to spring, when forced labor was once again used to prepare the cotton fields for the summer. Hundreds of thousands of public sector employees throughout the country were once again mobilized to help local farmers in the cotton sector. We present [several interviews](#) that our local monitors made with people working on the cotton fields of Uzbekistan in the spring of 2017. UGF has conducted a survey among employees of public institutions and is working on a follow-up report about forced labor in spring cotton works.

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A distinctive feature of 2017 's cotton season is the full-scale requirement of written "confirmation of voluntary participation in the collection of cotton" from the employees of public institutions. © Tuz

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## REPORTS FROM UGF MONITORS

### Syrdarya region

From September 7, 2017, regional medical institutions have sent 30-40 percent of their employees to collect cotton. Medical workers left for the fields overnight in the Saykhunabad district, where they will stay on average for 2 weeks, after which they will be replaced by another group of workers. According to a nurse leaving for the cotton harvest, it remains unclear whether their salaries will continue to be paid while they are working in the fields.

"Last year I was sent to the harvest in the village of Shuruzak (Syrdarya region). I was told that if I did not go, I would have to quit my job. During the month, I went to the fields in shifts, but I was not paid for those days when I was at the fields. I did not go of my own accord. It was the order of our bosses".

On September 5, 2017, in Gulistan city (Syrdarya Region), the cotton harvest was announced to school teachers, pre-school teachers and medical workers. Mobilization to the fields was reported by the authorities on September 4. The order came from the city administration. By the order of the head of the City Department of Public Education, the heads of educational institutions were to dispatch their employees on the next day.

On the morning of September 5, at 6am, the staff of education and medical institutions gathered near the Syrdarya Regional Music Drama Theater and went to the fields by bus. About 30 to 40 percent of employees are involved in the cotton harvest. The transport of employees to the fields was organized by the management of the City Educational Department, school directors, as well as heads of the health department and police officers.

The first day was very difficult, when water and food problems were encountered, combined with very long working hours in the field. A dispensary nurse in Gulistan said:

"We had great hopes this year. We hoped to stay at our real workplace during the harvest. But it did not happen. Yesterday evening, the head of our department asked me to come to the theater at 5:30 am. I did not expect that and I was not ready for the field. I had to leave my children or find someone else who could go to the field instead of me. Even although I did not have time to go out into the field, I was left there all day long. They brought water to the field late, and I suffered from a sunstroke during the day. Worse, the bus to collect us arrived late, too. I didn't get home until 8pm."

A disappointed schoolteacher from Gulistan city, who had believed in the words of the Minister of Public Education promising not to mobilize teachers to the harvest, said:

"The school term for teachers began on September 5. But isn't it all a fairy tale? Is right to deceive highly educated teachers? In his speech, the minister said that 'all of the teachers are high school graduates. If they are asked to go to the fields they can refuse.' Of course, but what can we do if the director is threatening to fire us? We have to go to the field. Unfortunately, our hopes have been dashed."

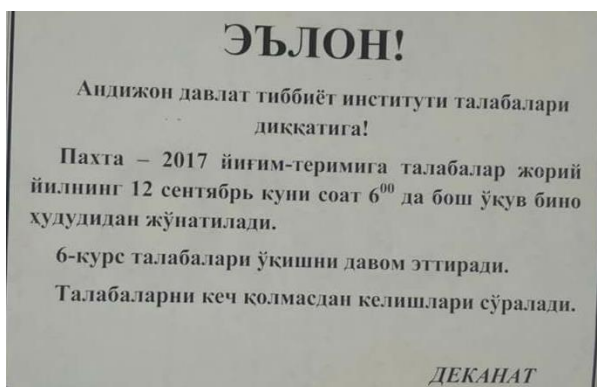
## Andijan region

This year, the mobilization of the majority of public sector employees in Andijan will begin on September 15. The list of employees who will take part in the harvesting has already been set up. The cotton headquarters have been established and all preparations for the harvest are made.

According to a source at the governor's office, almost everybody, including farmers, enterprises and organizations, is waiting for the governor's order to "kick off".

"We expect that this year's cotton-picking campaign to be different", said a man who works in one of the schools as a teacher of physics. "There must be change after so many talks. The subject I teach is very complicated, if pupils miss even one lesson, it will be difficult for them to catch up. However, there were cases when an Uzbek language teacher held classes to replace the physics and chemistry teacher. We hope that we will not be picking cotton this year, I'm not sure though, but we still hope."

According to a woman named Sh. who works as a cleaner in one of the hospitals in the region, the list of those who will be picking cotton has already been prepared. She says she is assigned to the third shift.



Notice at the Andijan Medical Institute, 2017 © UGF

"There are absolutely no reports about preventing the staff of budget-funded organizations from the cotton-picking campaign this year", said Sh. "The head of our department said: 'What you heard is nonsense. Who will pick cotton? Just prepare for the cotton-picking campaign! There were delays in paying our salaries. Now we have been told that in connection with our departure for the cotton-picking campaign the salaries will be transferred to our money cards. This is done because we will have to pay for replacement workers ourselves.'"

### Translation:

ANNOUNCEMENT!

Information for students of the Andijan Medical Institute!

Departure for the students to the cotton harvest will be on September 12, 2017 at 6.00am on the territory of the main educational building.

6<sup>th</sup>-year-students will continue their studies.

The students are requested not to be late.

OFFICE OF THE DEAN

A college teacher in Andijan told a UGF monitor:

“We will go to the cotton fields on September 15, which is late this year. But everything is set up: the list of our workers going to the fields was sent to the khokimiyat (local administration). The government promised not to involve public sector employees in the cotton harvest anymore. But the organizations have already received orders from the khokimiyat to send people. Moreover, meetings are organized where workers decide to voluntarily participate in the harvesting of cotton. Supposedly, it is the workers' own initiative. In fact, everything is still organized by local authorities.”



**Нияра Канарова** 😡 вне себя от злости.

4 ч.

Кто там говорил хлопка не будет? В данный момент у нас собрание по поводу "Кто на какой поток поедет?" Подумаешь, что там говорят и отменяют, у нас все по своему.

Translation:

Who said there will be no [mobilization to pick] cotton? At the moment, we are having a meeting about "Who will go to what stream?" It doesn't matter what they say or forbid, we'll do it [pick cotton] anyway.

Facebook Post by a teacher, School № 16 of Samarkand city, 2017

About 6,000 students from the Andijan Medical Institute have already come to the Ulugnor fields of the Andijan region. According to an interlocutor responsible for the placement of students, the students were allocated premises in the district schools, as well as tents for spending the night. In total, around 38 places of residence were prepared for students coming from Andijan city.

A UGF monitor spoke to a khokimiyat employee in one of the districts of the Andijan region (the district has not been named to protect the identity of our monitor). According to the official, it was known from the very beginning that the promises not to send teachers and doctors to the harvest would remain on paper.

Furthermore, school and kindergarten teachers recently received an order to provide ten parents from each of their classes to go to the harvest.

### **Tashkent region**

Journalist Malohat Eshonkulova, who was dismissed from a state TV channel in 2010 for criticizing corruption in the leadership of television, published an [audio recording](#) from a meeting that took place on September 4, 2017, in the administration of the Parkent district of the Tashkent region. It follows from the audio recording that the head of the district, Nematjon Abdullayev, requires the directors of district institutions to provide lists of employees who have been mobilized to pick cotton.

In the conversation with the journalist, Zulhumor Yorova, the head of kindergarten No. 17 in the Parkent district, confirmed that her kindergarten was supposed to provide 13

pickers and that she had already handed over the list of her employees to the head of the district education department, Elmurad Akhmadaliev.

### **Karakalpakstan**

Since September 8, various employees of educational and medical institutions of the city of Turtkul have been sent to collect cotton. A nurse at one of the polyclinics of Turtkul told a UGF monitor that employees had signed a statement about "voluntary participation in the collection of cotton."

Technical staff of educational and medical institutions in the city of Nukus have been participating in the cotton harvest since September 7. According to an employee of the Nukus State University, it is expected that students and university workers will go to pick cotton from September 15.

### **Fergana Region**

According to an employee of the khokimiyat (local administration) of the city of Fergana, who was interviewed by a UGF monitor, "this year in August they (officials in Tashkent) said that doctors and teachers would not be sent to the harvest, but it became obvious that without this basic workforce it is impossible to harvest cotton under the usual terms".

The official of the khokimiyat said that the heads of state institutions received orders to prepare places of residence and lists of workers to send to the cotton harvest from September 11.

According to the head of the economic division of the Health Department of one of the districts of the Fergana region, (name withheld at the request of the interviewee) a meeting was held in the regional khokimiyat in late August, where it was said that educational and medical institutions might not be sent to pick cotton. "However, on September 7, a meeting was held in the khokimiyat, where we received an order to send 200 health workers from our district to pick cotton in remote areas of the Fergana region including an overnight stay. As a steward I will have to deliver food and 50 loaves of bread every other day for 200 workers. Breakfast and dinner will be at the expense of the state, and the collectors will pay for lunch themselves", said an official from the District Health Department in the Fergana region to UGF monitor.

### **Jizzak Region**

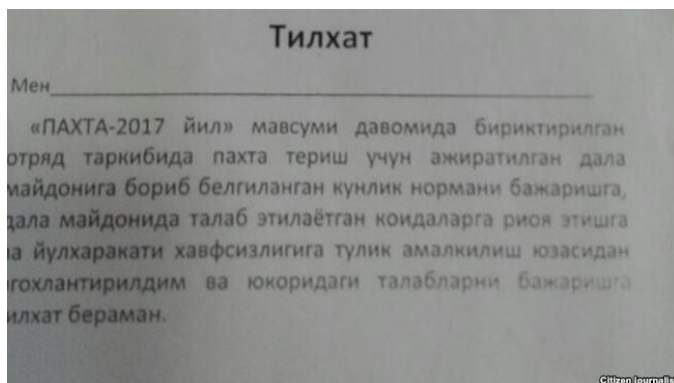
On September 8, teachers from the Buston college and school (Jizzak region) were sent to harvest cotton. Teachers were warned that if someone asked them, they should respond that picking cotton was on their own initiative. "Under no circumstances can we say that we are teachers. If someone says that they are a teacher and they are forced to come to collect cotton, if you say this, you will be out of work. With these parting words we were sent to the cotton fields," said the teacher of the college in the Buston district in the Jizzak region.

## Entrepreneurs from Tashkent region forced to sign statements of agreement to participate in the cotton harvest

September 5, 2017 | Tashkent region

School and kindergarten employees have been told to find workers who will pick cotton in their place.

According to a businessman of Bekabad city, who asked us not to state his name, officials of the khokimiyat (local administration) are forcing businessmen, construction workers and market traders to sign statements in which they undertake to participate in the collection of cotton. A copy of the statement has been published by [Radio Ozodlik](#).



### Translation:

I \_\_\_\_\_ am forewarned and I confirm that I will participate in the cotton harvest of 2017 as part of the assigned deployment. I undertake to comply with a stipulated daily rate, comply with the rules in the field and fully comply with regulations for road safety.

Statement of Agreement, 2017 © Radio Ozodlik

As Radio Ozodlik reported, one of the entrepreneurs who has a store at the Bekabad market and has signed such a statement now has to participate in the collection of cotton or hire others to do it instead of him.

"It is like this every year. I hire somebody instead of myself. This year, the price of mardiors (replacement workers) has increased. For one month, they ask us to pay at least 800,000 Som (\$ 100). If we do not send someone, we will have problems with the administration of the market", said the entrepreneur.

An unidentified official of the khokimiyat of the Bekabad region confirmed by telephone to the Radio Ozodlik correspondent that deployments for the cotton harvesting had been prepared. But he denied that they were obtaining "statements of agreement" from entrepreneurs: "The units consist of voluntary collectors. We attract unemployed people from cities and villages. No signed agreements were taken from people", said an official of the district khokimiyat. When the Radio Ozodlik reporter told him about the copy of the agreement that they had collected and asked the official to comment on this, he hung up.

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## **Schools and kindergartens again must collect cotton for the government**

September 5, 2017 | Tashkent region

A teacher from one of Angren's schools told a correspondent from Radio Ozodlik that by the order of the khokim (local governor), education employees should be ready to leave for the cotton harvesting on September 10.

"Today the director of our school said that from the September 10, September 15 at the latest, everyone would go to pick cotton. According to my sister who works as a nurse in the hospital the chief physician told them to be ready or to pay 875,000 Som. My sister's salary is not more than 400,000 Som. Where will she get this money from?", the teacher said in a telephone conversation with Radio Ozodlik.

Original source: [www.ozodlik.org/a/paxta-terish-uchun-tadbirkordan-tilxat-olinyapti/28718088.html](http://www.ozodlik.org/a/paxta-terish-uchun-tadbirkordan-tilxat-olinyapti/28718088.html)

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## SPRING COTTON WORKS 2017 – VOICES FROM THE FIELDS

### Interview 1: Mirziyoyev and his love of unpaid public work

June 1, 2017 | Andijan district | college teacher

The president of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, is apparently a great fan of cleanliness, something not uncommon in authoritarian states. Be it Turkmenistan or North Korea, any place which can expect a visit from the head of state is cleaned so thoroughly that it shines.

Mirziyoyev has made a habit of visiting different regions of the country every seven to ten days. If the place of his visit is known beforehand, much cleaning and tree-planting is done.

Before the president's visit, everyone is involved in the preparations: teachers, schoolchildren, the staff of state-funded organizations and entrepreneurs all take part.

This is no small issue, as there are numerous examples of serious punishment of those who refuse. At the beginning of May of this year, the Uzbek president visited the polyclinic in Tashkent and then decided to fire the chief doctor because the courtyard of the polyclinic was overgrown with weeds.

On June 2 Mirziyoyev also visited the Andijan Region. There are reports that more and more people are getting tired of preparations for these visits.

People are busy cleaning the streets and planting trees for days and weeks, as reported by a teacher who works in one of Andijan's colleges.



Farming. On the board is written: "Cotton: 27 hectar wheat – 25 hectar". Pakhtakor district, Jizzak region, 26 May, 2017 © UGF

"I have been working as a teacher for 24 years. I'm also a farmer. This has been the case since I started my teaching career. I teach my classes and I work on the fields. With the

arrival of autumn, I spend 20 days and nights in the cotton fields picking cotton. As soon as spring arrives, I do cleaning and tree-planting, go to the cotton fields and cultivate cotton plants...

At the same time, students often do not attend classes since there is no supervision, and then we have to visit their families. God forbid if something bad happened at college - they would not care who had ordered you to go to the cotton fields or do cleaning work or plant trees. You would be punished for sure. If you try to utter a word, they say: "why have you not visited the family and talked to the parents". You know very well that this kind of thing happens among youngsters.

This year we spent more time than ever before in the cotton fields, doing public cleaning work and tree-planting. Moreover, we had to work without a break when the president visited the Fergana Valley. We spent almost one month on the preparations. Thousands of teachers and doctors cleaned the sides of the roads along which Mirziyoyev would travel and planted decorative flowers, especially in the Bogishamol area. These flowers



Medical point in the Navruz village. Jizzak, Do'stlik region, 26 May, 2017 © UGF

were the most expensive flowers in the market. The governor's office or our directorate ordered us to choose "this particular flower" or "red or yellow flowers". Every such damned flower costs at least between 6,000 and 12,000 Som. We buy them from the market from our own money. For example, our college had to buy 100 - 150 of these flowers three times, and every teacher had to contribute 50,000 Som each. That's not including travel expenses, lunch and other expenses.

A return trip to Bogishamol from the place where I live costs me 6,000 Som every day. If we are not in Bogishamol at 7 o'clock in the morning, they deduct 30 per cent from our monthly salaries. I cannot afford this because I have to pay for my son's studies. This is why I do whatever they order in silence. In general, everyone has reasons for doing silently what they are ordered to do. No one speaks out, but teachers left their hard work and tears in Bogishamol.

It seems to me that everybody cursed Mirziyoyev. It was even worse than during Karimov's times. Then we only used to work 2 or 3 days. What kind of miracle has he performed that makes us slaves? Is he paying our wages from his pocket or what?

We were told that he would arrive last Thursday. Now it turns out that he will arrive tomorrow. Look, as you can see, like every day we will go home today at 7 o'clock in the evening, tired as dogs. We have our lunch in some corner of the Bogishamol recreation center, if there is a space of course, if not, we have it by the roadside. There are canteens and cafes, but we do not have enough money to eat there. We bring our own food from home.

We might buy water and bread. We spend a total of around 10,000 Som on travel, bread and water. There are no days off. We go there every day. No classes are being held. All the staff from our college are involved in this. 10 people are responsible for cleaning and planting flowers around the college and the other 70 are doing cleaning and tree-planting. The heads of all the schools and colleges across Andijan are repeatedly being told that 'Mirziyoyev will visit your particular establishment'.

We are cleaning everywhere, planting flowers, painting walls and buildings, cleaning windows and taking care of plants in our plots of land. However, we are not doing our main job. We have no idea whether students are attending classes or not and whether anyone is supervising what they are doing in the college, since no classes are being held.

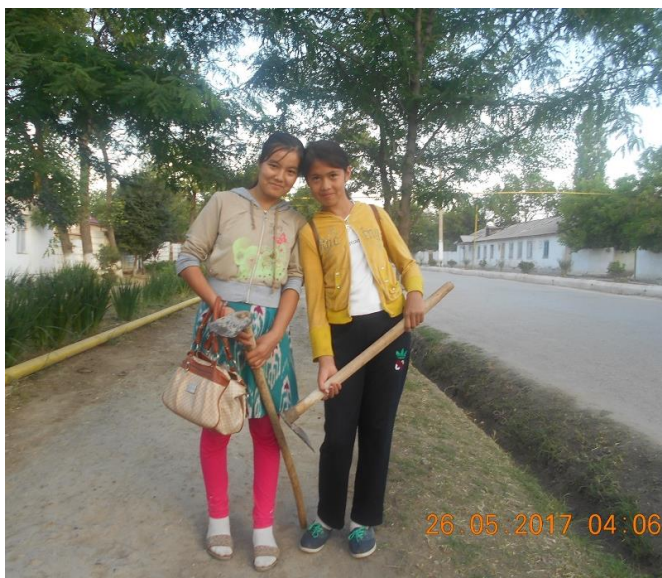
I have a satellite dish at home. Occasionally I watch news on the Russian channels. When they show the places where the president of Russia has visited, I pay particular attention to the sides of the roads thinking whether they are clean and have they planted flowers there. No, no one bothers about that. It seems that no one tries to lick Putin's boots and no one cleans the roads that he passes.

What about in our case?! Is he a king or what? My daughter-in-law's father is a doctor. My daughter-in-law with her baby are staying with her parents now, because I do not even have the time to take care of my grandchild. There are more people in their family so his younger daughter is looking after my grandchild so that my daughter-in-law can attend her classes at the university.

Her father tells me that since spring, the staff of the hospital where he works had to pay 120,000 Som each. Out of this, 80,000 Som were spent on buying flowers to plant along roadsides and 40,000 Som to pay for the lunch, water and bread of those working on cotton cultivation.

My daughter-in-law is a final year student. It seems that they are also involved in unpaid public work every day. Once, my daughter-in-law's fellow students gathered and told the dean: 'We will not do public work. If there is a presidential decree on doing public work, then we would do it. We have not come here to do public work, so tell them to hold our classes'. I heard that they have not bothered them since then. The rest are cleaning roads and planting trees every day. They do this work of course in their university uniforms...

Soon, in the middle of this month, we are supposed to go on vacation. However, I know that this will not happen. Last year we also spent our annual holiday working in the cotton fields. It seems that this year it will be the same. I'm becoming worried now. I have not



Often relatives and children go to the fields to replace employees. Pakhtakor district, Jizzak region, near the district hospital, May 26, 2017 © UGF

seen my grandchild for more than a month now. We have not had a single day off. After work, I go home, cook for my husband and two sons, do the laundry and clean the house. The next day at dawn, I have to go and do public work again.

No classes are being held for students at the college. Those who come, spend the day chatting in the classroom till noon and then go back home. This is it: 'They are receiving education'. Who needs this sort of window-dressing? Soon we will have to make sure that the registers are in good order, that we have held classes for one month, which we basically haven't. The director orders us to do that. He is also afraid of losing his post. Please report about this, but please do not report about me..."

Original source: [www.eltuz.com](http://www.eltuz.com)

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## Interview 2: "Once the director gives the orders, everybody has to obey"

May 30, 2017 | Syrdarya Region | high school teacher

"I have been working in the education system for almost ten years now. First I worked in a college, now I work in a school. I'm 34 years old.

This year's cotton cultivation campaign started for us from the end of April till mid-May. It continued for one month and I took part in it for ten days.

Over 30 per cent of the school staff were sent all at once to dig up the roots of cotton plants. During days off, everybody had to join the field work. Of course, when we went to the cotton fields, we did not hold our classes. Other teachers would replace us instead. When they go to the cotton fields, we replace them.

If you refuse to work in the cotton fields, it is almost as if you are a traitor. Once the director gives the orders at a meeting, everybody has to obey. The reason is that the director always tells us that if anyone disobeys his order, he will dismiss that person. This is why we do whatever he tells us without uttering a word against it. Once you are on the list of those who should go to the cotton fields, just try not to be there, because the director will do his best to basically spoil your mood. He will start threatening that if you do not come to work you will be dismissed and so on.



Local school staff on the way to weed cotton fields. Jizzak region, May 25, 2017 © UGF

I have never seen an official document that states we are taking part in a cotton cultivation campaign. I think it is mainly during the cotton harvest. The process of digging up the roots of cotton plants does not take long. Maybe for this reason they do not report it.

Even if we go to the cotton fields, sit somewhere and do not fulfill the required daily work, a representative of the district education directorate will report to our director immediately. He would tell us that he will file a complaint against the director of the school. This means that the director will be punished by the education directorate for the behavior of others. He might be reprimanded.

In general, teachers are involved in everything. The teachers have taken on all sorts of duties: farming, construction, they visit families and collect money for public utility services, clean the surrounding areas of apartment blocks, do unpaid work - they are a free labor force. Teachers have no reputation in the neighborhoods. Everybody looks at us with pity. Even schoolchildren make fun of us when they see us going to the cotton fields carrying our tools. In reality, the teachers' place should be in schools and colleges. However, we are becoming more and more associated with field work. We should have held a number of final exams at the end of May. However, our director forced us to go to the fields. It turns out that cotton cultivation is more important than checking the knowledge of schoolchildren and holding state exams!



People weed the land by hand using the chopper. Karakalpakstan, May 20, 2017 © UGF

Directors of schools decide who should go to the fields to dig up the roots of cotton plants and when. Teachers go because they are ordered to. In turn, directors receive orders from the head of the education directorate. The director of our school held a meeting at the end of April and announced that the cotton cultivation campaign had started and read out the list of teachers who would join the campaign first.

Some of the teachers cannot go to the fields due to their family circumstances or because of health issues or other reasons. Some of them have babies or perhaps they are pregnant. Under such circumstances they have to give the director 15,000 Som a day. The main burden falls on the shoulders of other staff because we have to work for those who had bribed the director as well. The process of rotation is very quick. Nobody dares express his dissatisfaction because it will be difficult for the teacher if he speaks his mind.

The spring season is very hot and it makes you feel inert. If you spend a long time in the heat, you can get sunstroke and get sick. This is why they scheduled the work for a cooler period of the day. We arrive at the fields before 7 o'clock and go back home at 2-3 o'clock in the afternoon. A bus usually takes us to and from the fields. It is a free bus service. Farmers might have sent them, if I'm not mistaken.

It is true that drinking water is a problem most of the time. We do not receive it in the field on time. Everybody brings their own food and water. We bring our own tools. There is a representative of the education directorate who makes sure that we do not have a rest. Doing field work in the heat is a very hard job for women. If we sit for a while to have a rest, they bother us. There is a supervisor who comes immediately and humiliates us. He is very rude. The majority of the teachers are women and this is why he humiliates them by saying: “You are all prostitutes. I have been sent to the field with 100 prostitutes”. He does not allow us to have a rest.



Children are going to the cotton weeding.  
Turtkul, Karakalpakstan, May 22, 2017 © UGF

How about payment?! Remember, I have already told you that teachers are involved in this work because they are a free workforce. During the cotton harvest they pay a little, but during the cotton cultivation, it is us who pay. They do not pay us for the field work. We pay for our food and transportation ourselves. Buses usually take us punctually to the fields early in the morning. However, when it comes to returning back home, in most of cases we have to wait for a long time in the heat. If we are not far away from the main traffic, we go and take a taxi ourselves.

There is a poster at the entrance to our school. It is about conditions of forced labor and cases of violations of the law. However, it is hard to believe in this. Although there are telephone numbers on these posters, no one has called them. I have not tried myself either, because I do not believe that there will be any outcome. The voice of one man is the voice of no one.

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### **Interview 3: “Once the big bosses have given us the order, we cannot say anything against it”**

May 18, 2017 | Fergana region | school director

“We have been working for three farms (the names of the farms have been withheld). We take care of the cultivation of the fields of these farms and during the wheat harvest we allocate workers to dig up the roots of cotton plants and last year we even bred silk worms. But this year we didn’t. We even do the pruning of the cotton plants and pick cotton. This year we also planted pumpkin and maize seeds around the fields of these farms.



This year UGF monitors observe more children helping out with agriculture work than in the last years.

Pakhtakor district, Jizzak region, May 26, 2017 © UGF

We receive orders at meetings, sometimes from the governor, sometimes from the head of the education department. Based on these orders we send teachers to the fields. Orders are issued verbally. Once the big bosses have given us the order, we cannot say anything against it. If you disobey the order a couple of times, they will find some sort of shortcoming and dismiss you from your job.

Moreover, I usually send technical staff to do the work. Sometimes teachers who do not have classes also join them.

This type of work does not affect schoolchildren's education negatively, since not all of them are involved in public work.

Public work is compulsory. Those school directors and heads of kindergartens who fail to send staff to do such work are reprimanded by governors, heads of the education department and even by the deputy heads of governors - seriously. We do not receive additional payment for such work.

However, when teachers go to the fields, schoolchildren continue their classes. Not all teachers go at once. Those teachers who have classes on Saturdays hold their classes. Others join the field work.

Besides schools, all organizations join in public work, including hospitals, kindergartens, banks and colleges.

This type of work is not our duty.”

UGF: *If that's the case, why do you join them and do it then?*

Silence...

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#### **Interview 4: “Who else would want this type of job done?”**

May 2, 2017 | Syrdarya region | manager of a private firm

“I'm the manager of a private firm which specializes in construction, employing about 30 people. If I'm not mistaken, I received a phone call from the city administration's architecture department on 17th May. I was asked to visit them in connection with an urgent issue.

I was there on time. The head of the department received and welcomed me. He then went straight to the point and told me that work had begun on the cotton fields and that they needed five people to dig up the roots of cotton plants. During the conversation, he

did not forget to hint that it was a civic duty. I had to agree, because, although we are a private organization, we are still under state control.



Pakhtakor district, Jizzak region, 22 May, 2017 © UGF

Although they told me that this scheme would last 10-15 days, it took longer than that. I provided them with people for almost 20 days to dig up the roots of cotton plants.

It was during a peak period of construction work. We had an order to build showroom apartments. I did not recruit my people to dig up the roots of cotton plants. If I had sent them to the cotton fields, they would not have been pleased, since there is no mention of that kind of work in their contracts. Everyone has his/her own responsibilities. This is why I decided not to bother the employees and instead hired casual laborers for 10 days. I brought them to a representative of the city administration and they started working in the cotton fields from 21st of May. It was not only the five people hired by me; workers of other entrepreneurs worked in the cotton fields, too.

I could have refused to hire and send these people to that job, but after speaking to business people who are more experienced than me, I understood that I'd better do what had been ordered. They told me that my state-related issues would be solved more easily if I obeyed the rules. So I followed their advice.

There were no official documents relating to the cotton field work. Everything was done on the basis of a verbal agreement.

We have deadlines and agreements. For example, we are supposed to finish the construction of one house in 6-8 months and hand it over to the owner. Beforehand we conclude an agreement between the owner of the house, a bank and ourselves. If we fail to finish the construction work as set out in the agreement, this means violation of the contract and we may suffer losses. This is why I decided not to bother my employees and

hire casual workers and pay them myself. I thought that this option would be better than suffering losses in the future.

The idea of involving business people in the cotton cultivation process is certainly that of the governor. Based on his order, we were asked to provide people to dig up the roots of cotton plants. Who else would want this type of job done?

Perhaps, instead of hiring five people and, in order to remove this burden from my firm, I could have put 200-300,000 Som in the pocket of the head of the architecture department. I heard that there are some people who do that. The holy month of Ramadan is approaching and I do not want to do something as disagreeable as bribing someone.

A number of female daytime workers just left because the work in the cotton fields is so hard. When I spoke to them, they said that it was too hot and that they weren't able to meet the daily requirement. I had to find other people. On top of that, I had to spend extra money on food for those working in the fields. In the past, they used to cook in the field for those who were helping. It seems that this tradition no longer exists now. It seems that the farmers cannot afford it. Every person has to bring his/her own food. I had to cover this extra cost as well.

Thank God, there is no cost for transportation. I think some organizations have been ordered to provide the laborers with a bus too.

It is considered public work to dig up the roots of cotton plants. This is unpaid public work. Otherwise they would not have bothered us. If it was paid, those who live near the fields would have done this job themselves. We had to cover the costs since we hired the people. They asked to provide people for 10 days, but it took longer than that and we had to send people to the fields for 17 days. This has inflicted losses on entrepreneurs like us, who have just begun their businesses with modest amounts of income. During this period I spent over 1,500,000 Som. I paid five people 75,000 Som per day and another 25,000 Som for their food. It cost me 100,000 Som a day. I lost 1,700,000 Som in 17 days.

I'm not aware of any laws. It does not make any difference even if I did know. Nothing will change anyway. The order comes from those who are at the top of the state administration.”

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## **Interview 5: “The order comes from the top”**

June 10, 2017 | Syrdarya region | bank employee

“I work in the credit department of a bank. This year, I took part in digging up the roots of cotton plants for the last 10 days of May.

I spent a total of 12 days in the cotton field. About 40 per cent of the staff in the bank were all sent simultaneously to the fields. However, many of the staff hired other people instead of themselves. This meant they were able to do their job in the bank as someone else was working for them in the field.

If you refuse to work in the field, you have to write an explanatory letter to the head of the bank to explain why you cannot work. No matter whether you are ill or if there are other reasons, you have to hire someone to do the work for you. The order comes from the top. All state organizations regularly take part in the process of cultivation and harvesting cotton - always. This is why the staff are afraid of directly refusing to work in the cotton fields. This is directly related to state policy.



Staff leaving to the cotton fields. Pakhtakor District Central hospital, Jizzak region, May 26, 2017 © UGF

If the head of a bank is unable to involve his staff in the field work, this would mean that he would not be fit for a leadership post. That's why governors do not like such bosses and will try to get rid of them. They will look for ways of firing them. Although they would not say that they were dismissed for not taking part in field work specifically, they will try to find shortcomings in their work.

The cotton cultivation process negatively affects the bank's activities and delays the business of its customers. A lot of people come to the bank with different issues every day. Due to the shortage of staff there are long queues and even quarrels. There are urgent financial issues which can't be delayed. Generally speaking, there is much to tell. How nice it would be if everyone could do his/her own job. Farmers should do their own job and so should the bank staff.

Based on the order of the head of the district administration, the chief of the bank declared that staff should take part in this process one day before the start of the cotton cultivation season. We were told that everybody should go to the cotton fields every day by replacing each other every week. He read out the list of people who would go to the field first.

At the same time he said that for those members of staff who did not want to take part in field work, he had found a number of hired people who would work for them. The only thing is, that they should pay them from their own pockets, he said. Many welcomed this

option. Almost 90 per cent of people declared that they did not want to work in the cotton fields and agreed to hire people instead of themselves. So the staff of the bank resolved this issue by paying 80,000 Som per week. During the first several days I went to the field myself. However, when I did the calculation, it turned out that I was spending a lot of money on field work. This is why I also paid the above-mentioned amount of money for the next few days. The rest is up to the conscience of the head of the bank. If he wishes, he can either hire people or put the money into his own pocket. The important thing for me is that he should no longer bother me with the issue of digging up the roots of cotton plants. I heard that other banks were ordered to send 30 per cent of their staff to do field work, but our bank is sending more. The role of the head of the bank is important in this issue. This is about the issue of bribery. He tells us that 40 per cent of the staff have to go to the cotton fields, but in practice he sends 30 per cent of the staff. And he simply appropriates the money collected from the remaining 10 per cent of the bank staff.

Working conditions in the field are very tough. It is very hard for us since we do not do this kind of work often. The best option is to involve people who live near the fields, but this is linked to the issue of payment. The staff of banks do the job for free or pay those who are hired instead of them.

Transportation services are free for those working in the cotton fields. The farmer pays for petrol and the bus is sent by a private firm.

The bank staff have never been paid for work in the cotton fields. This means they work for free. But they also pay. Every member of staff pays 80,000 Som per week to hire a person.

I have no idea about laws which ban forced labor.”

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employees back from weeding cotton fields, waiting for a car to bring them home, May 25, 2017 © UGF