

# **Cotton Harvest Chronicle 2018**

Issue 1, September 2018



In Uzbekistan, preparations for the 2018 cotton harvest have begun. Due to unfavourable climatic conditions, it is expected that the harvest will begin later than usual. It was reported at a video-conference, chaired by President Mirziyoyev on July 4, 2018<sup>1</sup>, that „cotton growth is 10 to 15 days behind, and in some places by 20-25 days.

For the last six years, Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights (UGF) has been monitoring child and forced labor during the cotton harvest in Uzbekistan. The monitoring results of the last harvest in 2017 showed that, just as in previous years, the state forcibly mobilized hundreds of thousands of employees of state organizations to pick cotton.

Throughout 2018, President Mirziyoyev repeatedly stated that forced labor would be eliminated. On May 29, in an address to the Prime Minister, Mirziyoyev said:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://podrobno.uz/cat/politic/prezident-rasskazal-o-problemakh-s-ur/>

*„Public organizations will never touch cotton, even if they get close to the cotton field, they will not touch it. Who needs cotton? Private enterprise. Let their people go and pick it. Abdulla Nematovich, you have a month. We punish ourselves with child labor. What is more important, 2-3 billion or our political reputation? We do not need child and forced labor. There are many enterprises - let them pick cotton.”<sup>2</sup>*

Payments to cotton pickers this year have been increased. As announced, the draft government decree proposes 700 soum (approximately \$0,09 US) per kilo of cotton at the first stage of the harvest and thereafter 800 soum (approximately \$0,10 US) during the second stage, when there is usually less cotton left to pick.<sup>3</sup>

UGF interviewed several seasonal cotton pickers who said that the increase will attract additional pickers at the very beginning of the season, which may help to reduce the harvest time for picking cotton to mid-October.

However, despite the president’s promises to abandon forced mobilization for cotton harvesting, the information coming from UGF monitors and press reports, raises concerns that the state is trying to compensate for the absence of compulsory workers by coercing other groups of citizens and extorting private entrepreneurs.

Independent media reported on the extortion of money from entrepreneurs in the country’s largest marketplaces to supply funds for cotton pickers.

### **Requirement for entrepreneurs in the Tashkent region to hand over money for cotton pickers**

Radio Ozodlik spoke to several entrepreneurs working in a large timber market in the Tashkent region, who said that the administration of the market requires each entrepreneur to hand over 1.5 million soum (approximately \$190 US). They said that their money is used to hire cotton pickers. A person responsible for one of the marketplaces confirmed that an order had been received from the local hokimiyat to mobilize people for cotton picking, but he rejected claims about the collection of money.

*„Last Tuesday, there was a meeting. An inspector named Jamil said that those who did not hand over money would only have themselves to blame. He said he would not allow them to sell their products at the market. There are 250 stalls at the*

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<sup>2</sup> <https://kun.uz/news/2018/05/31/dalada-pahta-enib-ketsa-am-tekkizdirmajman-mirzieev-mazburij-menatni-tilga-oldi>

<sup>3</sup> <https://en.sputniknews-uz.com/society/20180711/8827122/Sborschikam-khlopka-predlagayut-uvelichit-platu-za-ruchnoy-trud.html>

*market. All together this is 50 thousand dollars. How many cotton pickers will be hired for this money? How much will they pick? We do not know. The president said that this year clusters will be created, that no one will be asked for money and there will be no forced labor this harvest. But nothing has changed. We collected money during Karimov's time, and we are still collecting," said the owner of a market stall in a telephone interview with Ozodlik.*

Market Inspector Jamil Yunusov admitted on the phone that picking cotton or giving money for hiring workers is compulsory for market traders.

*„Entrepreneurs should go out to pick cotton. Only teachers and doctors are exempt from picking cotton, but this does not apply to employees of organizations and entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs still do not work on the field. They only drink vodka, so we suggest sending an employee instead. Every year, during the cotton harvest, markets send people to harvest cotton. We have to recruit 160 people. We suggest that entrepreneurs themselves find pickers, but we do not collect money. We are just dealing with organizational issues," said Jamil Yunusov, the inspector of the Chigatai Oktepa market, located in the Zangiata district of the Tashkent region.<sup>4</sup>*

### **Entrepreneurs of the largest Tashkent market Bek Baraka also give money for the cotton harvest**

On August 29, Radio Ozodlik received a letter from the traders of the Tashkent shopping center, „Bek Baraka“. The letter says:

*„For the past three years, each trader has had to hand over 1 million soum to the administration the Bek Baraka shopping center, under the pretext of recruiting cotton pickers. If you do not hand the money over, they send tax inspectors to put pressure on you or turn off the electricity. This year, the administration distributed an „Obligation“ to hand over 1,200,000 soum. At a time when the leadership of the country is declaring a change in the cotton policy, cotton picking rent is imposed on entrepreneurs who have nothing to do with agriculture. How does this relate to the laws?“.*

Ozodlik published a leaked contract entitled „On the organization of cotton pickers for assistance in the harvest of cotton“, from which it follows that it is expected to conclude an agreement on assistance in the harvest between the Bek Baraka market and farmers.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ozodlik.org/a/paxta-majburiy-mehnat/29445519.html>



2.1. Rights of the „Customer“: To demand the qualitative collection and timely delivery of the cotton stipulated in the contract.

2.2. The main obligations of the „Customer“:

- a) Designate the cotton field for the „contractor“;
- b) To accept the collected cotton;
- c) Pay for the collected cotton on time (every day, no later than 5 days);

2.3. Rights of the „Contractor“: to demand timely receipt and payment for the collected cotton.

2.4. The main obligations of the „Contractor“:

- a) Ensure the collection and delivery of cotton in quantity, quality and timing according to the contract
- b) Follow the instructions of the „customer“ as stipulated in the contract.

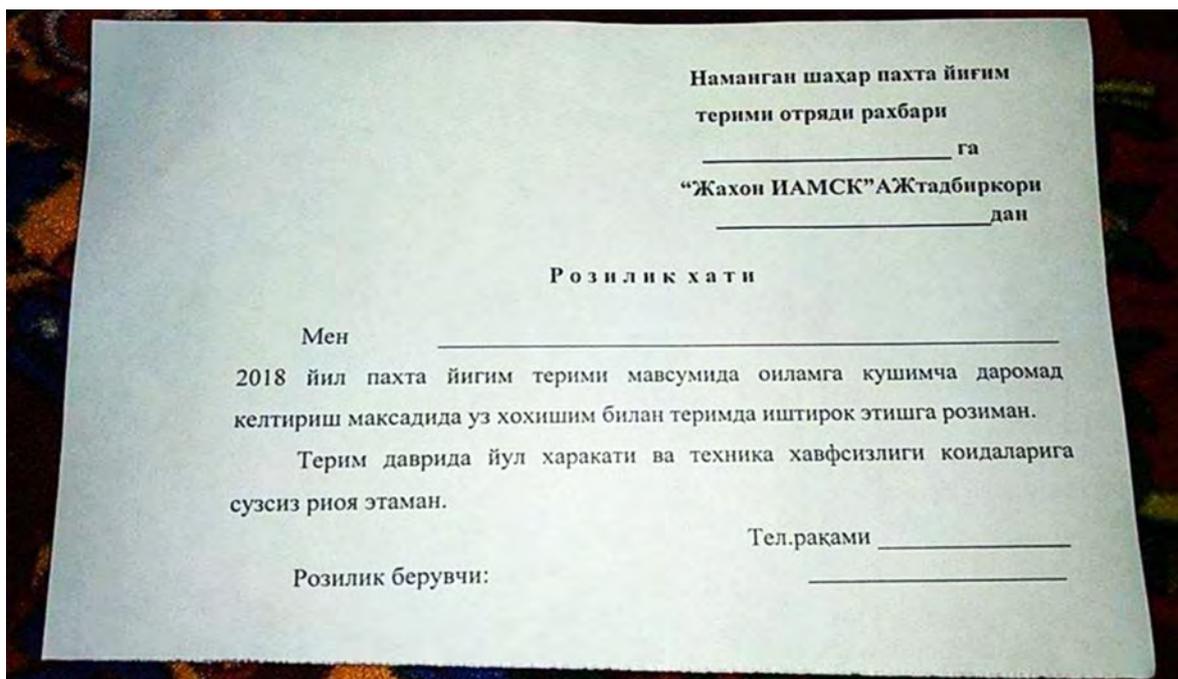


### **Traders at Jahon shopping mall in Namangan will also go to pick cotton**

On August 25, UGF received a form distributed among the traders of the Jahon market in the city of Namangan. The text of the form was addressed to the chief of a cotton unit and states:

“I (name) agree to participate in the cotton harvest 2018 in order to earn additional money for my family. At the time of the harvest, I undertake to observe safety rules and rules of the road.“

Signature of the entrepreneur of the market



### **120 kg of cotton a day is the norm for prisoners**

On August 30, Radio Ozodlik published a letter from prisoners of prison colony<sup>5</sup> No. 64/75 in the Pskent district of the Tashkent region which described difficult work conditions.

Along with the problems associated with overpopulation, lack of hygiene and corruption, prisoners complained that they received too high a daily quota during the cotton harvest. In a telephone interview with Ozodlik, a prisoner who asked not to be named, said:

*„Every year prisoners of prison colonies go out to pick cotton. This is real penal servitude. The quota for collection is 120 kg per day. If you do not fulfil the quota, they insult and humiliate you. It's okay, but if they reprimand you, they can send you back to prison. That's why we call these two months hell. Preparations for the cotton harvest have now begun. The laws on forced labor, which were adopted by our state, do not apply to prisoners in my opinion,“ said the inmate.*

Ozodlik asked the prosecutor's office, which oversees the prisons, to comment. The employee who answered the call did not want to give his name but wrote down the journalist's questions and promised to call back. The prosecutor's office has not yet contacted Ozodlik.<sup>6</sup>

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The Uzbek-German Forum will continue to monitor the situation of forced labor during the cotton harvest of 2018.

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<sup>5</sup> A colony with a freer regime where prisoners who have served their basic sentence live and work

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ozodlik.org/a/manzil-koloniya-sharoit-ogir/29426352.html>