

Translation of a "voluntary participation" request of the flour-mill department employee of the enterprise "Buhorodonmakhsulotlari": *"I request that you allow me to participate in the collection of cotton in 2018 of my own free will."*

Large enterprises have received quotas for sending a certain number of workers to pick cotton in the Jizzak and Syrdarya regions. For example, according to a UGF monitor, the oil and fat combine in Fergana and the cotton gin plant in Beruni in Karakalpakstan sent cotton pickers to the Jizzak region. According to an employee of the plant, the authorities said: "If you want to continue working here, go to the Jizzak region and pick cotton."

About fifteen employees of various branches of banks in three regions of the country interviewed by UGF monitors said that banks have to send staff to harvest cotton, and mid-level employees have to hire a replacement worker. Hiring a cotton picker costs between 15 and 25 thousand *soum* (approx. 1.88 and 3.13 USD respectively) a day, depending on the region.

An employee of Promstroibank in the city of Nukus said that a 60-year-old mother went to pick cotton for five days in her place. "Now I'm looking for a hired worker to send him to the field and bring the mother back," she said in a conversation with a UGF monitor on September 25.

The Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs sent their students to harvest cotton in the Arnasay district Jizzak region. A quota established for students is 100 kg of cotton per day. According to the student, forced to collect cotton out of the fear of expulsion, those who did not meet the quota buy cotton from local people for 1200 *soum* (approx. 0.15 USD) per 1 kg.

Local media reported on the challenges of the prosecutor's office to deal with claims of extortion and coercion to pick cotton. While the prosecutors' acknowledgment of allegations of forced labor is in itself a positive development, their responses and investigations have remained half-hearted. In both cases, where the prosecutor's office found and stopped cases of extortion, only low-ranking officials who were obviously only following the instructions of their leadership were punished.

In this chronicle, we present publications from the press, social networks, and messages received via UGF's Telegram account.

An employee of the *hokimiyat* demanded that farmers in the horticulture sector provide cotton pickers.

According to the Prosecutor General's Office, the Chief Specialist of the Agriculture Department, S. Shukurullayev, of the Uchkuprik *hokimiyat* of the Fergana region, "without any reference to orders from the region's leadership", demanded that farmers provide one picker for each hectare of land. An investigation by the prosecutor's office began after the farmer's employee filed a complaint because of the unreasonable demand to provide cotton pickers. This resulted in Shukurullayev receiving an official "reprimand" from his superiors:

<https://kun.uz/news/2018/09/16/fargonada-sabzavot-etistiruvci-fermerlarni-pahta-terimiga-mazburij-zalb-etisning-olindi>, September 16, 2018

In the Tashkent region, the extortion of people receiving social benefits has been revealed.

A pensioner in the Yangiyul district reported on Telegram (@ pahta2018_bot) that pension payments were being withheld to pay for cotton pickers. The prosecutor's office of the Tashkent region investigated the allegations and reported that it did not find any evidence of extortion from pensioners in any of the fifteen *mahallas* of Yangiyul. However, in the course of the investigation, it was found that the chairman of the Yangibog *mahalla* collected 25,000 *soum* (approx. 3.13 USD) from 71 residents of the *mahalla* receiving social benefits to pay for accommodation for pickers who had arrived from the Ferghana region. "33 of the 71 residents confirmed that they had personally given money".

In addition, it transpired that the chairman of the Municipal Fund "Mahalla" had "ordered each of the 15 *mahallas* to collect one million *soum* - 15 million *soum* (approx. 125 - 1875 USD) in total - to pay for collectors who had arrived from the Oltiariq district of the Fergana region. This money was to be collected from the residents of the *mahalla* who did not go out to pick cotton, as well as from other members of the community.

The report states that the prosecutor's office is still investigating this case:

<https://kun.uz/news/2018/09/15/pahta-2018-pahta-terimi-ucun-nafakahurlardan-pul-jigib-olingani-aniklandi>, September 15, 2018

In Andijan, state organizations must provide up to 50% of their employees to collect cotton.

Radio Ozodlik reported that on September 12 they spoke with the employees of "Andijan Electrical Networks" and "Uzbektelecom", who reported that their enterprises had to provide half of their employees for cotton harvesting. The mobilization was confirmed by an official of the city *hokimiyat*, but claimed that the workers participate voluntarily for the "benefit of the Motherland".

Speaking to Radio Ozodlik, an employee of "Uzbektelecom" in the Ulugnor district of the Andijan region, said: "Everything remains as before - we were told to write a statement on voluntary participation in the harvesting of cotton and prepare a list of pickers. Living conditions are very poor there and they need to make repairs. The workers will live in a derelict room at school # 17 in the Ulugnor district and the repairs will be carried out at the expense of workers."

During a conference call on September 5, Prime Minister Abdullah Aripov issued an order that cotton pickers would no longer have to live in school rooms.

An employee of Uzbektelecom said that a place, which was formerly an outhouse for firewood, is now equipped to accommodate cotton pickers.

An employee of the human resources department of Uzbektelecom, who did not want to give his name, confirmed that on September 12 the majority of employees left to repair the building for the pickers staying overnight. "The other day, we went to pick cotton. It's not just us, all the organizations and enterprises of the Andijan region are picking cotton," he said, but did not answer the question of who ordered Uzbektelekom workers to be sent to the cotton harvest.

In an interview with Ozodlik, an employee of the "Andijan Electric Networks" company said that the order for mobilization comes from the regional *hokimiyat*.

"According to the order of the *hokim* of the Andijan region, employees of utilities which supply gas, electricity, and water, as well as Uzbektelecom, are involved in cotton harvesting. 300 out of 800 workers from the Uzbektelecom enterprise are involved in cotton harvesting. It was declared that half of the workers from the Andijan electricity grids would go to the cotton fields. It is clear that the regional organizations will undoubtedly carry out the order of the *hokim*. After all, the *hokim* himself decides who to appoint to the post of leader and whom to dismiss. They are free *mardikors* (voluntary workers) for the *hokim*. The president said that from now on, cotton will be picked only by interested organizations, but what do communal services have to do with cotton?", said an employee of Andijan Electric Networks in an interview with Ozodlik.

The official of the Department of Water and Agriculture in the *hokimiyat* of the Andijan region denied that the mobilization of employees of enterprises is forced. "No one forces anyone; there was no such task. All enterprises took these decisions to help farmers on their own initiative. They will continue to carry out their work successfully", the official said in a telephone conversation with Ozodlik.

Members of the "Union of Youth" are ordered to find workers or pay for replacement workers

"Tomorrow (20.09) at 7.00 am I ask you to send one person to the building of the district branch of the "Union of Youth" for the harvesting of cotton. If you do not find anyone, you must pay 100,000 *soum* (approx. 12.5 USD) for each week. An employee who fails to fulfill the above task must immediately vacate his position. There is no place for unnecessary conversations. No discussions. This is the order of the district *hokim*. "

Chairman of the Board of the Kurgantepa regional branch of the "Union of Youth" of Uzbekistan, Mirzakobulov Nazarbek.

On September 19, the following message was sent to 59 representatives of the Union of Youth at schools of the Kurgantepa district of the Andijan region (Fig. 2).

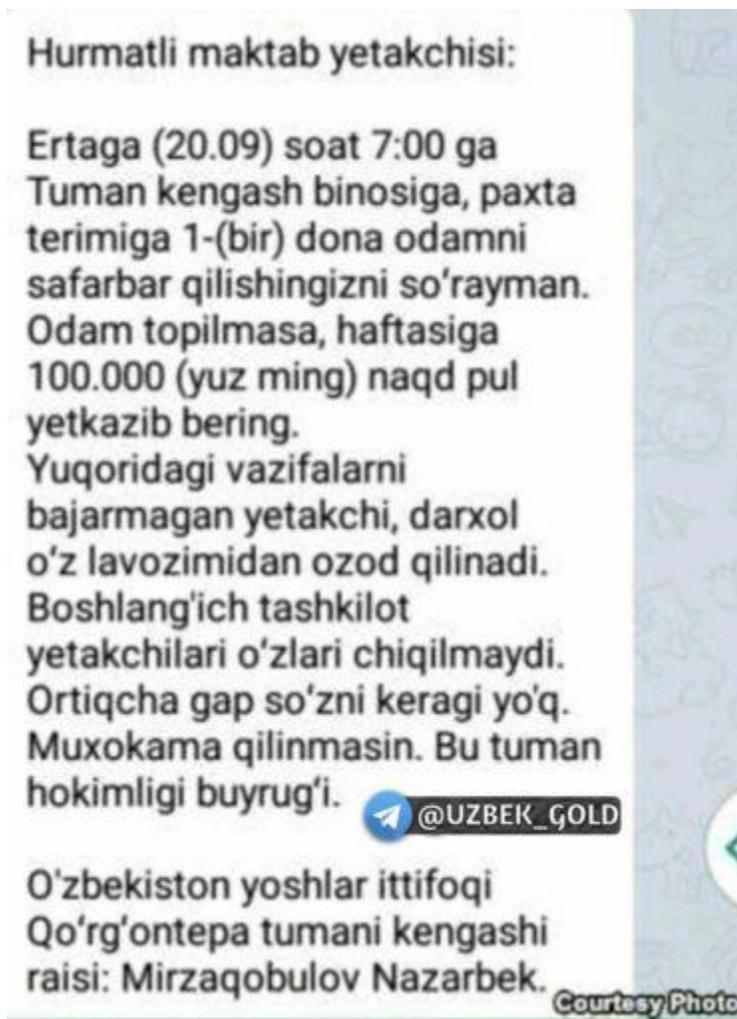


Figure 2. Message from the Chairman of the Board of the Kurgantepa regional branch of the “Union of Youth” of Uzbekistan to schools

Radio Ozodlik phoned Mirzakobulov Nazarbek, who admitted that there are 59 leading members of the Youth Union in the area and that he sends them assignments via Telegram. However, he categorically denied the order to send people to pick cotton or pay others to do so and noted that, on his own initiative, he goes from house to house with his assistants and recruits unemployed residents to go out to pick cotton. He also claimed that he did not receive an order to send his employees to the cotton harvest from the district *hokimiyat* or the central leadership of the “Union of Youth”.

After the publication of this news on Ozodlik’s website on September 20, the *hokim* of the Kurgantepa district held an urgent meeting on the morning of September 21 in the building of the regional school No. 5. An Ozodlik source who was present said that the meeting was attended by the *hokim*, his deputies, the head of the district education department, the chairman of the district council of the Union of Youth, as well as 59 representatives of the Youth Union at the schools of the Kurgantepa district.

The main topic of the meeting was the discussion of who passed information to Ozodlik.

"Who wrote to Ozodlik? Confess, who is it? Don't you know that cotton is our national wealth? Did I ask for money for myself? Which of you went to Ozodlik?", shouted Nazarbek.

A suggestion was made that if the informant confessed within one day, then he would receive no punishment. At the meeting, it was clear that the order to hire employees or pay 100,000 *soum* (approx. 12.5 USD) a week came from the *hokim* of the Kurgantepa district. In the end, each participant had to sign a statement on the non-disclosure of information. A photograph of the statement was made available to Ozodlik.

When this article was being prepared for publication, Ozodlik received a photo of another message sent by the chairman of the Council of the Union of Youth in the Koson district of the Kashkadarya region (Fig. 3).



Figure 3. Message from the chairman of the Council of the Union of Youth in the Koson district of the Kashkadarya region

The message addressed to the district representatives of the Union of Youth speaks of the need to attract four young people to the labor unit of the "Youth Initiative". "If you need your work, then ensure that the task is fulfilled," said the head of the regional "Union of Youth", Laziza Allayorova:

<https://www.ozodlik.org/a/paxta-2018-maktab-majburiy-mehnat/29500482.html>,
September 20, 2018

<https://www.ozodlik.org/a/paxta-majburiy-mehnat-yoshlar-ittifoqi/29502443.html>,
September, 21, 2018

Entrepreneurs subjected to "Cotton Tax" to create "groups of voluntary pickers."

Radio Ozodlik received an audio file in which a conversation was recorded between a tax inspector of a district of the Tashkent region and an entrepreneur. The tax inspector is heard asking the businessman to pay 1.2 million *soum* (approx. 150 USD). The inspector does not threaten, but rather persuades the entrepreneur and explains to him that if he pays the money, he will not have to close his store to pick cotton.

The entrepreneur, in turn, asks him to release him from the "cotton tax", explaining that trade has fallen, that he pays for his two children to study at university and that such an amount is a heavy burden for him.

The tax inspector explains that he did not come up with this tax himself and that entrepreneurs should hire cotton pickers if they want their stores to continue functioning.

A response of the Tax Inspectorate

Ozodlik contacted the information service of the State Tax Inspectorate. They advised the businessman to lodge a complaint using the "hotline" of the Tax Committee or the prosecutor's office and denied collecting money for cotton.

Ozodlik contacted the tax inspector of the Tashkent region personally, to find out who had asked the entrepreneur to hand over money for cotton. This employee of the tax inspectorate agreed to answer Ozodlik's questions but asked not to be named for fear of punishment by his superiors. He explained, "There is a decree by the Prime Minister, the regional *hokim* and the district *hokim* to create detachments of pickers for the timely collection of cotton. In our district there are 4 sectors; the *hokim*, the prosecutor, the police and the tax inspection are responsible for each sector. Sectors are entrusted to create detachments of pickers totaling 4,000 people. The tax inspection was given the task of finding 1,000 collectors. Each detachment must have 150 pickers. I was appointed the commander of the detachment. On the one hand, the authorities say, do not force anyone, on the other hand, they said: "find 150 pickers where you can, otherwise, quit". Where will I find so many voluntary pickers? As before, I cannot now tell businessmen to close their shops and go and pick cotton. If the store closes, then there will be no

trade, there will be no tax revenue. After all, my main job is to collect legitimate taxes for the state budget. Therefore, I beg the businessmen to hand over the money, to do it for the sake of the country, for the sake of the Motherland, so that they are left alone. "

The tax inspector explained why he asked the businessmen to hand over exactly 1.2 million *soum* (approx. 150 USD).

"This amount was determined by the people themselves. If you go to the "mardikor market" (an unofficial labor market) for hiring workers, they cost at least 40,000 *soum* (approx. 5 USD) a day for agricultural work. If you multiply this amount by 30, you get 1.2 million *soum* (approx. 150 USD). I do not even take this money into my hands. We urge entrepreneurs to come to the tax inspectorate. There are women who come from the Fergana Valley. They recruit women every year in their districts and bring them to the Tashkent region to pick cotton. Entrepreneurs conclude an agreement with these women. It is written in the contract that, "as an entrepreneur and in order to make a contribution to the development of my country, I hire a cotton picker and pay him the specified amount." It is necessary to indicate that he does it of his own free will. Payment is made in cash and is transferred to the woman. After that, the picker is accepted into my detachment and I must provide her with shelter and food", said the tax inspector from the Tashkent region who asked to remain anonymous.

What are "detachments"?

At a conference call on September 5, Prime Minister Abdullah Aripov announced that 2,639,000 collectors would be involved in the collection of cotton this year, which would consist of more than 26,000 "detachments of voluntary pickers".

Based on numerous reports received from Ozodlik listeners, it is not possible to find such numbers of voluntary collectors.

"This year we had the burden of recruiting "voluntary detachments of pickers", said the tax inspector from the Kasansay district of the Namangan region. "The prosecutor's office says, if you cannot recruit a detachment, then quit your job, otherwise I'll take care of you myself. He says, don't let the teachers go out, but they should give money to hire a replacement. You turn on the TV, and the prosecutor's office speaks about the inadmissibility of forced labor. If we force people, they will complain to us. And if we do not force them, how do we find the pickers? What should we do?"

<https://www.ozodlik.org/a/paxta-2018-bosh-vazir-majburoy-mehnat-terim-otryadi/29507101.html>, September 24, 2018

Have the *hokims* found new forms of coercion to pick cotton?

The Uzbek service of the BBC interviewed several people involved in the harvesting of cotton, who said that in the current cotton season, coercion to pick cotton has taken on new forms.

According to reports from Andijan, at meetings of the *hokimiyat* this year there were no open demands to send people to pick cotton. Nevertheless, employees of different organizations go out to the harvest "on their own initiative". A BBC source working in one state institution of the city of Andijan said that according to the new method, employees take leave during the harvesting of cotton. If the period of leave has already been used up, then he takes leave at his own expense to pick cotton. Nonetheless, he receives his salary. If someone asks what he is doing on the field, then the employee must answer that he is on vacation. "Today, employees of the Internal Affairs Department of the Andijan region, gas supply enterprises and road transport enterprises have been sent to pick cotton", said the BBC source. According to him, some of the employees go to the harvest voluntarily to escape from complex daily work. But employees who find it difficult to leave work, hire pickers at a cost of 250,000 *soum* (approx. 31.25 USD) for 10 days.

<https://www.bbc.com/uzbek/uzbekistan-45647389>, September 25, 2018

Radio Ozodlik launches PahtaGram, publishing dozens of messages from its readers relating to the cotton harvest

Radio Ozodlik has the largest citizen journalist network in Uzbekistan and receives thousands of messages and reports from around the country every day.

Traffic police force minibus (Damas) drivers to transport cotton pickers free of charge.

I am writing from the Kamashi district of the Kashkadarya region. On September 24th we returned home with my brother in his Damas. Suddenly we were stopped by traffic police who checked our documents. Everything was OK. We had a license for the right to transport passengers. However, they took vehicle documents from my brother and he was sent to transport cotton pickers from the fields. I waited for my brother for one hour. During this time, the traffic police stopped about ten other Damas and sent them to transport cotton pickers. We asked the traffic police to leave the Damas drivers alone.

<https://www.ozodlik.org/a/paxtagram-damas-qamashi/29509054.html>, September 25, 2018

Samarkand: Employees of the Employment Center have to find 50 pickers

I am writing from the Samarkand Employment Center. I work here. This year, picking cotton is very difficult. We were given an order to attract at least five residents from low-income families to pick cotton from each *mahalla*. If we take into account that ten *mahallas* are attached to each

employee, one worker has to find 50 pickers. I go from house to house, but no one wants to go. They say, let the farmers pick it themselves. Still, we must take written statements of confirmation from them that they go to the cotton fields of their own free will. What should I do?

<https://www.ozodlik.org/a/paxtagram-bandlik-markazi/29509043.html>, September 25, 2018

Angor: *Mahalla* deprives residents who refused to pick cotton of gas bottles

We write from the Angor district of Surkhandarya region, *mahalla* Ahunboboev. The chairman of our *mahalla* uses illegal methods to force people to pick cotton. The houses of those residents who do not go to pick cotton, are deprived of gas bottles. Only those who pick cotton can refuel them. The *mahalla* made a list of residents refusing to pick cotton and sent it to the prosecutor's office. The chairman of the *mahalla* intends to stop residents from doing their usual work and send them to pick cotton.

<https://www.ozodlik.org/a/paxtagram-mahalla/29513047.html>, September 27, 2018

Jizzak: Chairman of *mahalla* threatens to punish opponents of the "cotton policy"

We write from the city of Jizzak, *mahalla* Kimyogar. The chairman of the *mahalla* demands from us entrepreneurs 30,000 *soum* (approx. 3.75 USD) per day. We suggested that we hire a worker in our place, but he says "no, I will buy cotton myself and I will fulfill the daily rate". In response to our indignation, he is threatening us with tax inspections. Why doesn't the farmer pick his own cotton? Why is it time on our shoulders?

<https://www.ozodlik.org/a/paxtagram-mahalla-jizzax/29510877.html>, September 26, 2018

Andijan: Uzgazoil workers sent to cotton harvest

We have a request. Allow Uzgazoil (Uzbekneftgaz) employees to go back to work. We are tired of forced labor. We are sent after our shifts to clean the streets, then forced to clean the farm tank in Andijan. Now they are sending workers to pick cotton. In our shift, six people work at the gas service station. Now there are only two people left to replace them. We hardly have time to have lunch. If one goes to lunch or dinner, there is only one person for two columns (to refuel gasoline). Drivers do not pay attention; they can drive off when the gasoline is being pumped and the hose can tear. Now the cotton harvest has started and the workers are leaving for overnight stays. Now we have to work with no days off. We are not robots. We are paid for 180 hours of work a month, but we actually work for 240 hours. We do not mind picking cotton, but we want these working hours to be taken into account and paid for.

Uzbekneftegaz (formerly Uzgazoil, a network of petrol stations), September 22, 2018

UGF received a copy of a document (Fig. 4) issued by Uzbekenergo, a state-owned joint-stock company which operates the state electric networks of the Surkhandarya region.

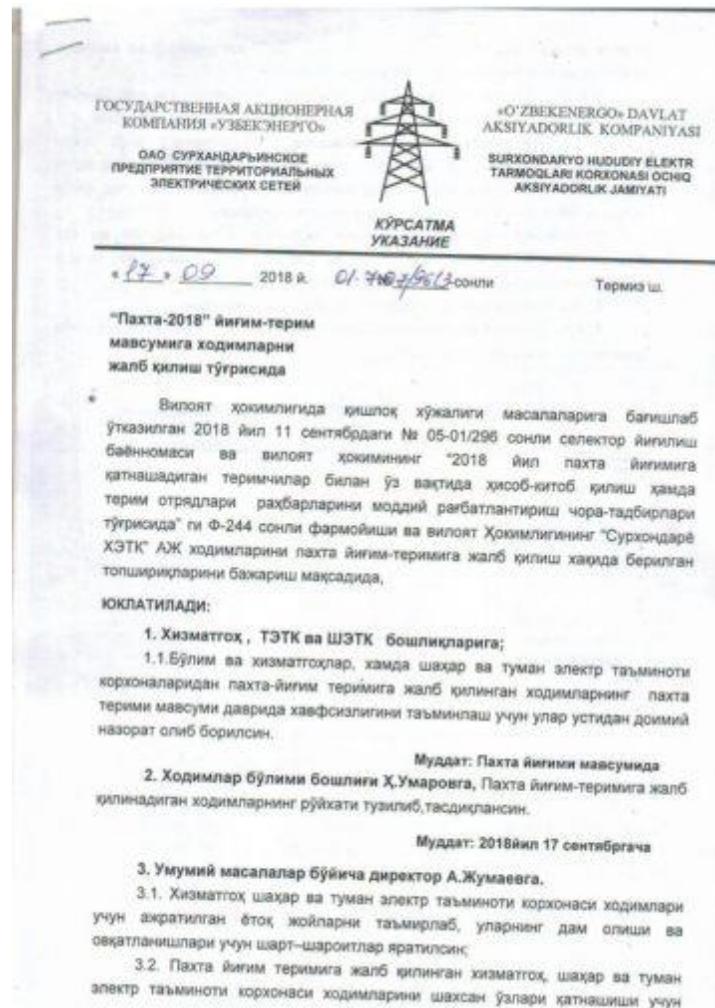


Figure 4. A decree by Uzbekenergo, September 17, 2018, No. 01.7.07/9613 Termez

Translation: Regarding the involvement of employees in the collection of cotton "COTTON-2018"

To solve the tasks outlined in the protocol of the meeting of the regional *hokimiyat* No. 05-01/296 regarding the problems of agriculture, as well as the decision of the regional *hokim* № F-244 "On measures for timely payment of labor to the collectors, for material incentives for the heads of the pickers' teams participating in the harvesting of cotton" and fulfillment of instructions of the regional *hokimiyat* on recruiting employees of the "Surkhandarya TPS" (Thermal Power Station).

Assigned:

1. Heads of branches of RES (district power grid) and HPP (hydroelectric power station).

1.1. Ensure the safety of employees of urban and regional electric grids involved in cotton harvesting and maintain constant control over them.

Term: During the cotton season.

2. Head of the Human Resources Department, H. Umarov.

2.1. Draft and approve the list of employees involved in cotton harvesting.

Deadline: By September 17, 2018.

3. Director of General Affairs A. Zhumayev.

3.1. To repair the allocated places of the city for employees of regional organizations of electric networks to spend the night and create conditions for their rest and nutrition.

Letter of warning (Fig. 5)

Dear reservist of the mobilized call-up reserve (MPR) _____(name withheld)

At present, you have outstanding payments owed to MPR to the amount of 3,294,800 UZS (approx. 411.85 USD).

If you do not pay this amount before September 14, 2018, you will be required to take part in the harvest of cotton in the Jizzak region from September 17, 2018. During the cotton harvest, you must pick at least 70 kg of cotton per day. The money for the cotton collected will be transferred to the special account of the MPR by the Ministry of Defense. Our goal is to collect the white gold that our farmers have grown without any loss.

You should bring with you: bedding, hygiene items, utensils for food, food for one day.

Head of the Department of Defense Affairs of the Gurlan District (Khorezm Region)

S. Niyazov

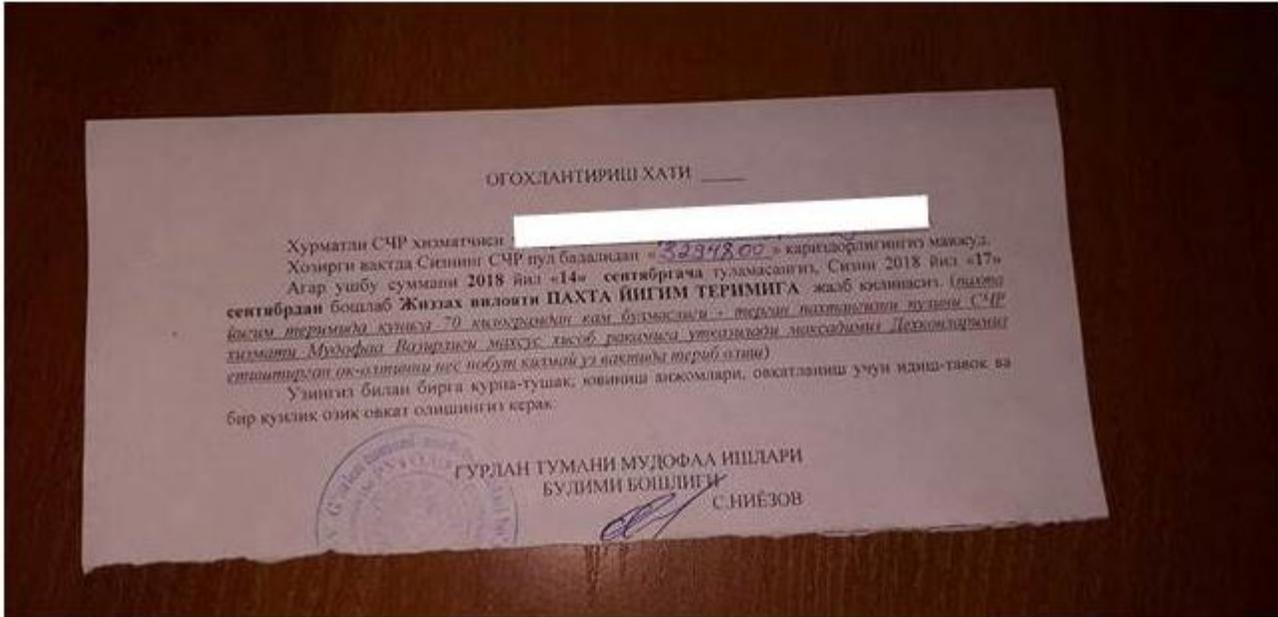


Figure 5. Letter of warning