

COALITION

AGAINST FORCED CHILD LABOUR IN UZBEKISTAN



Newsletter

No. 1

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Welcome to the Newsletter

The Coalition against Forced Child Labour in Uzbekistan was established in order to raise awareness within the international community of the tragedy that is reflected in the name of our organization.

In the Soviet past, the government of the USSR made systematic use of forced child labour for cotton picking in Uzbekistan and other cotton-producing republics. These practices were a violation of human rights, without any question. But there were at least some limits. Typically during the Soviet period, children sent to pick cotton were no younger than 15; and they would miss no more than one month of school.

In Uzbekistan today, this practice continues—but it is practiced in a way that is without any question far worse than it ever was during Soviet times. Today children as young as 10 years old are forced to pick cotton, and their annual period of de facto slavery in place of education lasts for at least 10 weeks and frequently for three full months.

Meanwhile the work conditions of the children forced into slave labour have become much worse, with little time off for rest. And the nutrition and medical care provided to these children during their months in forced labour camps is far worse than it ever was during the Soviet period.

None of this is an accident: the utter reliance on forced child labour in the cotton industry is the cornerstone of the state's policy toward this sector.

During the cotton-picking season, many schools and some universities in rural areas are shut down soon after what would otherwise be the start of the school term in the autumn. Instead the school year starts in the cotton fields, and today the period of forced labour tends to continue through the autumn and nearly to the start of winter. For many students aged 10 and up in Uzbekistan, the real school year does not begin until early December.

Given that the policy of forced child labour is so critical to the country's economy—and also, sadly, to its educational policy—it is clear that this policy is being controlled and driven from the the highest levels of the government of Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan is not a country where decisions of such significance are taken by local authorities or ministries.

Unfortunately, perhaps because the government of Uzbekistan has had some success in repressing information about its reliance on forced child labour, the international community has paid very little attention to this shameful phenomenon. But the situation is very clear from the perspective of international law. The standard practice of forced child labour in Uzbekistan, which incidentally contradicts the national legislation of Uzbekistan itself, also stands in clear contravention of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child (1989) as well as the core labour standards of the International Labour Organization, namely ILO conventions #29, #105, #138 and #182.

Most shameful is the fact that the European Union has rewarded Uzbekistan by granting its cotton exports special status under the EU's Generalised System of Preferences (GSP), which is intended to benefit developing countries in an effort to fight poverty in the world's poorest countries. Because of its GSP status, Uzbek cotton is exempt of all EU taxes, duties and quotas as it is imported into the European Union.

The award of GSP status to Uzbekistan took place just after the massacre in Andijan in May 2005, when

Uzbek government forced opened fire on a peaceful crowd of demonstrators, killing roughly 1000 people. It is an understatement to say that EU with this decision sent the wrong message to the government of Uzbekistan and to the wider international community.

Uzbekistan may be a poor country. But as far as its cotton industry is concerned, it is clear that the economic benefits of GSP trade status not accruing to poor workers, since Uzbek cotton is being picked by unpaid child slaves. Instead it the corrupt government officials who run Uzbekistan's cotton trade who are being enriched by this policy. This embarrassing episode shows that just how poorly informed about the situation the European Union was at that time with regard to human rights as well as children's rights in Uzbekistan.

Some EU officials take the view that that child labour is common in many developing countries, and for this reason it is somehow acceptable, or at least unavoidable. Even if one were to sympathise with this view, it misses the fundamental point: In Uzbekistan—like almost nowhere else in the world, with the partial exceptions of neighbouring

Turkmenistan and Tajikistan—the policy of forced child labour has been planned by the state, is being carried out by the state, and is enforced by the law enforcement agencies of the state.

It is a moral imperative that the EU and other international institutions become better informed about the real situation inside countries like Uzbekistan to which they are awarding with GSP status and other privileges. This newsletter is intended to be filling this information gap. It represents the views and testimonies of activists of Uzbekistan's civil society, all of which is set forth on behalf of the children of Uzbekistan, and in defence of their rights.

In this and forthcoming we will bring you updates on any recent developments in our campaign, while also sharing with you press publications, witness accounts, petitions and statements.

Sincerely,

Shahida Tulaganova
Director, Uzbekistan Initiative London
On behalf of the Coalition



BASIC FACTS ABOUT UZBEKISTAN

The population of Uzbekistan is approximately 27 million, of whom 38% are children aged 14 or younger. The birth rate has been estimated at 22.6 per year per thousand total population, with annual population growth of 1.44%. Uzbekistan has an authoritarian system of government, with a very strong presidency and executive branch dominating a weak legislature and judiciary. There are elections, but they are thoroughly uncompetitive. Uzbekistan is now the world's fifth-largest producer of cotton, and the second-largest exporter. Cotton exports are a major source of export earnings for the state.

Media on forced child labour in Uzbekistan

The following are a selection of articles and news which provides some background on the issue of forced child labour in the cotton fields of various regions of Uzbekistan.

“Jizzakh students are sent to the cotton fields”

Source: Uznews.net, 21 September 2007

The cotton campaign in Jizzakh region started on September 20, 2007 when university and college students as well as school pupils began to be taken to the cotton fields. Local human rights defenders report that before their departure, the students were forced to write statements saying that they did not object to leaving school in order to pick cotton, and that they were doing it voluntarily in order to help their motherland. By forcing these statements, the authorities are trying to dismiss responsibility for health and security of students in the cotton fields.

Full article (in Russian):

http://www.uznews.net/news_single.php?lng=ru&cid=8&nid=861

“Karakalpak students start picking cotton”

Source: Uznews.com, 15 September 2007

Students of the Nukus Pedagogic Institute have been the first in Karakalpakstan to go to pick cotton for its government on 12 September. Early in the morning, students of the Nukus Pedagogic Institute, the first out of the country's five universities, lined up outside their institute with their luggage and after loading it onto buses they left for cotton fields, having no idea when they will come back.

Before they set off, a student called Ajiniyaz said that they had only been told that they would pick cotton in the country's Amudarya and Shumanay Districts. She said that no-one knew when they would come back. “We were ordered to take bedding and food for three days, after which we will be fed at our own expense, paying for the food from money we will be paid for picking cotton,” another student said.

Full article:

http://www.uznews.net/news_single.php?lng=en&cid=8&nid=795

“Uzbek cotton: Wealth collected by the hands of hungry children”

Source: Ferghana.ru, 11 October 2007

Letter to the Editor of the online news agency Ferghana.ru from a reader in Nukus, Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan

Dear Editor,

I would like to ask you to write an article about lawlessness taking place in the cotton fields of Karakalpakstan at the present time. As you know, it was after one of your publications that the rubbish was cleared in the 23rd micro-district of the city of Nukus. Perhaps a new article of yours can help to return hundreds of children to their homes and help protect their health. It may be that authorities in Tashkent don't know about the use of forced child labour in this far-off province?

Despite the fact that Karakalpakstan has fulfilled its cotton quota ahead of plan, thousands of underage children are still in the cotton fields being kept under harsh conditions. Under threat of expulsion from school, of being failed in their exams, and at times simply with the harsh words

of teachers and the education department heads of the local administrations, hundreds of school-age children are being held in fear. These children have the same cotton picking quota as adults.

There are cases when sick children with low levels of hemoglobin in their bloodstream are being forced to pick cotton under inhuman conditions. Their food is far from ideal: the daily food ration for children consists of one roll of low-quality bread for each two children, and noodle soup without meat. There are no vegetables in the rations of these little cotton-pickers.

Those children who have left the cotton fields are bombarded with phone calls threatening them with expulsion. Some children walk free—those whose parents have managed to buy their way out—but those who cannot afford to pay have to vegetate in the cotton fields, and nobody knows for what benefit. As the weather conditions change, many children are beginning to get sick. In response to their requests and pleadings to be sent home, they hear curse words and abuse from those whose job it is to educate them, and to instill in them love for their native land. The children as a result have only hate and disgust in their eyes.

Despite international law that prohibits child labour, the authorities of Karakalpakstan continue to use underage children to pick cotton. They are able to do this because the law is not functioning at all in Uzbekistan. During the past few years, sending children to work in the cotton fields has become the norm. This year, the price to get out of cotton picking was 100 USD. It's not a secret that this is a huge price for an ordinary Uzbek family.

Full article (in Russian):

<http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=5395&print=1&PHPSESSID=128f913d6f955047de89f4f578bdc21e>

BBC *Newsnight* reports on forced child labour in Uzbekistan

Source: BBC

In October 2007, BBC's programme *Newsnight* broadcast an investigation which demonstrated clearly that some products being sold on the British high street are produced from Uzbek cotton which is being picked by unpaid school children for free at the expense of their education. A BBC reporter traveled to the Khorezm region of Uzbekistan where he witnessed children working in cotton fields. In the programme, one boy was interviewed who said that he had sent there to pick cotton and that he wouldn't return home and to school until

November, when the cotton harvest was finished. Another child, a nine-year-old girl who said she must work from 8:00am until sunset, said: "They have closed the school - that's why I'm picking cotton." As a result of the programme, several big British retailers including Tesco, Marks and

Spencer and Debenhams have refused to buy products produced from Uzbek cotton.

Full article:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/newsnight/7068096.stm>

Survey research findings

In autumn 2007, a group of human rights defenders in Uzbekistan conducted a survey on forced child labour in Uzbekistan and the orchestrating role of the state in this practice. Unfortunately, due to the sensitivities of these findings and potential pressure from the authorities, we cannot name the organization behind this research. The fieldwork was conducted in two regions of Uzbekistan, Kashkadarya and Sirdarya. In this and following editions of the newsletter, we will present a summary of the survey results.

The scale of the problem

The surveys conducted in the Kashkadarya and Sirdarya regions demonstrate that a large majority of the schools in these regions were involved in the 2007 cotton harvesting campaign.

- Kashkadarya: Out of 1099 schools in Kashkadarya region, 911 participated in the cotton campaign. Approximately 199,000 students between the 5th and 9th grades, out of a total of roughly 270,000 in the region, were sent to pick cotton from September 10th until November 15th 2007, which is a total of 67 days.
- Sirdarya: Here 296 schools out of a total of 303 participated in the cotton campaign, meaning that nearly about 60,000 of a total student population of 61,000 in the region, again between the 5th and 9th grades, were sent to work in the cotton fields. Their period of forced labour was somewhat shorter, lasting from September 15th until November 10th 2007, a total of 57 days.

One teacher from a school in the Mirishkor district of Kashkadarya region related the following information:

Every year our school closes on the eve of September 10th, i.e, ten days after the start of a new academic year. This time is chosen because it is hot and cotton ripens quickly. However, the end of cotton season is of course

related to the performance of our district, region and the state on the cotton quota. For example, if our district and region fulfil their quota earlier, say in the beginning of October, then further participation in cotton picking is voluntary. Meaning, after quota is achieved, pupils pick cotton to get money. If a quota is not achieved then even if it is already December and it's getting cold, children cannot leave cotton fields. Nobody can object to such an order. Therefore, it is impossible to say how long a cotton campaign will last and when it will finish. For example, this year, the cotton campaign lasted from September 10 till November 10, 2007.

Here is a similar account:

The last lesson in our school was on September 11, 2007. After that, the headmaster gathered a school meeting and declared that on occasion of the beginning of the cotton season, classes for pupils of 7th grade and further will be interrupted. Pupils of the 5-6th grades will be taken to cotton fields every day after classes. She told us that pupils of those grades will go home for lunch after school and then have to gather at a school yard to go to the field. Teachers say that the reason this year the cotton campaign was short because of good weather. Last year children were working up until November 15, 2006.

-From an interview with a 6th grade pupil of the secondary school named after Alisher Navoi, in Saihunabad district, October 15, 2007

This research shows that the cotton picking season can be extended up to three months if certain districts have not fulfilled the quotas established by the government.

On top of picking cotton, pupils are also forced to weed the beds of the cotton fields during the spring. One medical student from college №2 in Guzar district says:

Every year, our medical college closes for five months: three months in the autumn, one month in the winter (due to the absence of heating), and one month in the spring. What kind of education and knowledge can pupils and

students achieve if they spend half of their academic year in the fields?

The situation with forced child labour has become much worse since the end of the Soviet era. One of the elders of a residential assembly in Mirzachul district told the researchers that during Soviet times, only student and high school pupils were taken to pick cotton. He continued to say, “Now I see that pupils of secondary schools are taken to cotton fields too.” One student in the 9th grade of Nishan district school № 19 named after Mukimi confirms that “participation in the cotton campaign is compulsory for pupils starting from 5th grade.”

One question asked by the researchers was: What proportion of Uzbek cotton has been picked by forced child labour? They were able to make some estimates for the two regions where they conducted their survey, taking into account the survey data. It is assumed here that each student on average is gathering 20kg of cotton per day, which is less than their obligatory quota of 40 to 50 kg per day.

Mechanism of compulsion

In a majority of cases, pupils and their parents who are not enthusiastic about the cotton campaign are being subjected to administrative pressure. Some of the methods include threats of expulsion from school. One student in the 9th grade of the school named after Berdi Kerboboeva in Mirishkor district said:

We are very afraid to be expelled from school. Every year on September 2, the headmaster warns us that if we won't go to cotton fields, then we shouldn't come back to school.

Nobody is asking permission for this from students or their parents:

I have been picking cotton for four consecutive years. When we are taken to the cotton fields, nobody shows us a governmental decree or any other official document about our participation. We are working according only to an oral decree or order of the headmaster, or the head of district educational department of the Ministry of Education. High school students are housed in barracks, whereas secondary school pupils are taken to the fields in tractors or trucks. We must pay for our own lunch. We normally sit on the edge of the field and eat whatever we bring from home. Teachers pay us for our work once every in ten or fifteen days, but to pay us anything at all they must

go an argue to get money from the owners the collective or private farms.

-Statement of 9th-grade pupil of the school named after Mirzo Ulugbek, in Nishan district of Kashkadarya region, September 30, 2007.

The orders and actions of these school administrations are supported by law enforcement agents:

I have been working in a school for the last 25 years. Naturally, all of these years we were taking pupils to the cotton fields. During the last few years, the headmaster started saying that the forced labour of the children in the cotton fields will be supervised by the prosecutors. This means that children who miss the cotton campaign are severely punished. However, we still have pupils who present fake medical documents and get out of cotton picking. However, not every doctor is able to give a note that allows a student to miss the cotton season. In my experience, there have been cases when pupils were expelled from school for refusing to pick cotton.

-Statement of a teacher at school № 8, Kashkadarya region, September 12, 2007.

Nobody is taking into consideration the state of children's health. Often, sick children are forced to go to the fields.

I have been picking cotton for four years now. We have gotten used to the idea that we will help our parents by buying our school uniforms with the money earned for our work. Last year, I became sick with jaundice after the cotton season. The doctors said that I had become infected because I drank unpurified water. Last year, there was one day when tractor which was bringing drinking water for us broke down and we had no choice but to drink water from a canal for the whole day—at that time the area around the canal was being sprayed with pesticides. Many children were poisoned, and some like me got very sick. None of us were given urgent medical care, nor did we receive any medication. When the farm manager, district governor or local policemen appears on the cotton fields to check out the situation, they throw stones at children who are sick and cannot pick cotton, and sometimes they even beat up these sick children. Some students, fearing them, run from one field to another.

Statement of a 10th grade student of school № 14 in Mirzachul district.

Parents often try to find excuses not to let their children go to the cotton fields. However, there tricks do not work most of the time:

I deliberately didn't let my youngest daughter go to the cotton fields. The teacher of her class in school № 20, Olim Kushakov, sent me an official letter saying that if I did not send my daughter Gulnora Kalandarova to pick cotton, she would be expelled from the school. This letter was signed and stamped by a deputy headmaster. I tore this letter up in anger. The next day, the class manager rushed to our house and demanded this letter back. I told him that I had torn it apart. He asked me where the pieces of this letter were, and I showed him the rubbish bin. He picked up every single piece. I don't understand why he did so.

Statement of a parent of a student № 20, in Shakarbulak village, November 2, 2007.

Along with compulsion, other methods such as brainwashing the people about their so-called “patriotic duties” are widely applied:

Every year, before the start of the cotton season, our headmaster gathers all the students of the school and tells us that cotton is our national treasure, and that it is our duty is to collect it. But the majority of pupils take part in cotton campaign simply because it is compulsory. There are those students who avoid picking cotton, but they are few. We are not aware that we have the rights which you have mentioned, and that we are free from the requirement to do this work. We have classes in our school about the law but so far our teacher has not told us about our rights, and our textbooks don't say that rights of children are guaranteed.

Statement of a 9th grade pupil of the school named after Lobar Kainarova, Saihunabad district, October 15, 2007.

So-called “unpatriotic” parents face blackmail, threats to cut their social benefits, etc. Here is what a resident of the Gulshan neighbourhood in Boyovut district says:

I have six children. My husband went to Russia with my oldest son for seasonal work. I married off two of my daughters. My other two sons study in school № 23, which is located in a centre of a the district. One of my sons is in the 7th grade and another in 9th grade. This years, my son in the 7th grade

was forced to pick cotton, although his health is very weak. Two years ago he had jaundice. There is a big yard of about 1200 square meters attached to our house. We plant vegetables and fruits there and thus provide some sort of living. This year, the director of the farm “Oybek” insisted that I, along with my children and my daughter-in-law go to work in the cotton fields. How I can do that? (She cries.) My daughter-in-law is pregnant. The chairman said that if we don't go, I'd need to pay 100,000 soms (about USD 100). When I told him that I don't have this money he started to threaten me with the cutoff of the social benefits which my family receives from the local community.

Our surveyors also spoke to representatives of the authorities. One secretary of a residence hall in Saihunabad district admits that he uses threats of withdrawing payment of social benefits as a mechanism to put pressure on families that refuse to pick cotton:

Question: Are you stressed out?

Answer: One can go crazy. I am telling her to go to pick cotton, and she doesn't. I am not asking them to work on my private garden! Lately I had an argument with a young woman who has a two-month-old baby. She applied to the local community for child benefits. I explained to her that there is no money, but she doesn't understand and is continuing to harass me. I told her to leave her child with her mother-in-law and come to pick cotton. Then her father-in-law came to see me in the evening. I got very angry and threw the documents for child benefit in his face. They won't receive any benefit for a year. She might get it next year if she starts picking cotton. That's right, cash can only be received during cotton campaign.

Question: What is the size of benefit?

Answer: 10,000 soms per month (USD 10).

Question: So it means that even in the neighborhood, receiving benefits is tied up with the cotton campaign?

Answer: There is no other way to get people to pick cotton. They don't recognise any authority anymore. There is no other way.

-Statement, November 5, 2007.

Sometimes the situation can get very serious, with parents who don't allow their children to work in the fields facing criminal prosecution. Here is the story of one resident of Boyovut district:

Don't ask about this, I won't answer your question. I have lived in this village for the last 35 years. My life and my wife's life were spent in the fields. We have three children who study in the school named after Navoi. My eldest son studies in 8th grade. On September 5, his teacher announced that they were going to cotton fields. My son and another 4 or 5 children objected to their teacher, saying that they would not go to pick cotton. The teacher released all the other students from class, leaving only these who had refused to participate, who were severely beaten. My son came home in the evening, in tears, with bruises under his eyes. The next morning I went to the school and saw the administrator responsible for academics. He didn't even listen to me and started to call me an enemy of the nation. I told him: "I spent all my life on a cotton field. Enough. My son won't repeat my life. Let him study, become an educated person and get a decent job." This administrator, Shodmon aka, started banging his desk with fist and threatened to call the police, and said that I wouldn't teach him how to live. He kicked me out, shouted at me and insulted me. Despite the fact that we didn't have any other food, I gave my son the last food we had to take to the cotton field. What else could I do? There they are only fed potatoes, cabbage and noodles. Last year, five

or six pupils of the school where my son studies attempted to steal some food from nearby houses. They were caught and it took their parents a long time to get them back from the police. Those were my thoughts when I left school.

-Statement, October 23, 2007.

Situation with child labour has not changed at all with the transition from collective farms to private farms. First of all, like the collective farms, the private farms are also subject to administrative controls. Secondly, whether or not private farmers want to use children to pick their cotton, they are forced to use child labour. Here is what one farmer in Saihunabad district says:

Every year we are given an order saying that one farm will take students from such and such college, another from such and such college. It's a real headache to provide accommodation for the students. Some parents start to argue, some children get sick. The authorities should give us cash advances on time, and allow us to choose those who will be trusted with picking cotton, We don't need students and pupils.

* * *

In our next edition we will give an account about the conditions under which children are working in the cotton fields, and about the payment they can receive for their work.

Table 1. Approximate estimation of volumes of cotton picked by children.

	Kashkadarya region	Syradrya region
Number of pupils, involved in cotton campaign	199,000	60,000
Number of days spent in cotton fields	67	57
Average estimated of volumes of cotton collected by children (per day) *)	20 kg	20 kg
Estimated total volume of cotton picked by pupils in the region	266,000 tonnes	68,400 tonnes
Total collected in the region	467,000 tonnes	238,000 tonnes
Percentage gathered by child labour	57%	29%

Human rights group complaints to authorities

This letter was sent by 'Ezgulik' Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan to to the General Prosecutor of the Republic of Uzbekistan

**To: Mr. Kadyrov Rashitjon
The General Prosecutor
Of the Republic of Uzbekistan,
Justice advisor of the 1 category**

08.01.2008

Dear Rashitjon Khamidovitch,

The Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan «Ezgulik» is conducting monitoring of human rights in accordance with its charter. The majority of our work is related to forced child labour in our country. This practice is happening despite the fact that Uzbekistan has signed the International Convention on the Rights of a Child, a Convention which was ratified by the parliament of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Moreover, various decrees of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan regarding issues of youth policy establish childrens' rights as a main policy priority. These decrees forbid the use of the labour of underage children.

Activists of the Jizzakh regional branch of our Society have discovered that the Director of the College in Gallaralsk district of Jizzakh region, Mr. I. Ravshanov, wrote an official letter to the head of the district executive authority, Mr. A. Khushbokov as well as to the district prosecutor, Mr. U. Rajabov. This letter requesting these senior officials to punish certain pupils who had refused to participate in cotton picking campaign of 2007. A copy of this letter is attached. The letter states the names of several students who refused to participate in cotton picking, and who therefore must be punished: S. Ibragimov, Kh.

Tursunova, B.Mamatov, S. Abdurakhmanova, A.Berdimurodov, U. Khaitboev, B. Tangrikulov, B. Mirzakekova and S. Narzullaeva.

As we see from this letter, students of this college were taken away from their studies under duress and recruited for cotton picking. Unfortunately, the situation described in this letter is happening in all regions of Uzbekistan. Pupils of school are forced into cotton picking and other collective work.

Every year, representatives of the General Prosecutor's office, the Ministry of Justice, and the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Uzbekistan take part in the conferences on human rights which are organised by such influential organisations as the United Nations and the OSCE, and in these conference they try to hide this problem. Turning a blind eye to the evidence and the real facts, they are deceiving the international community.

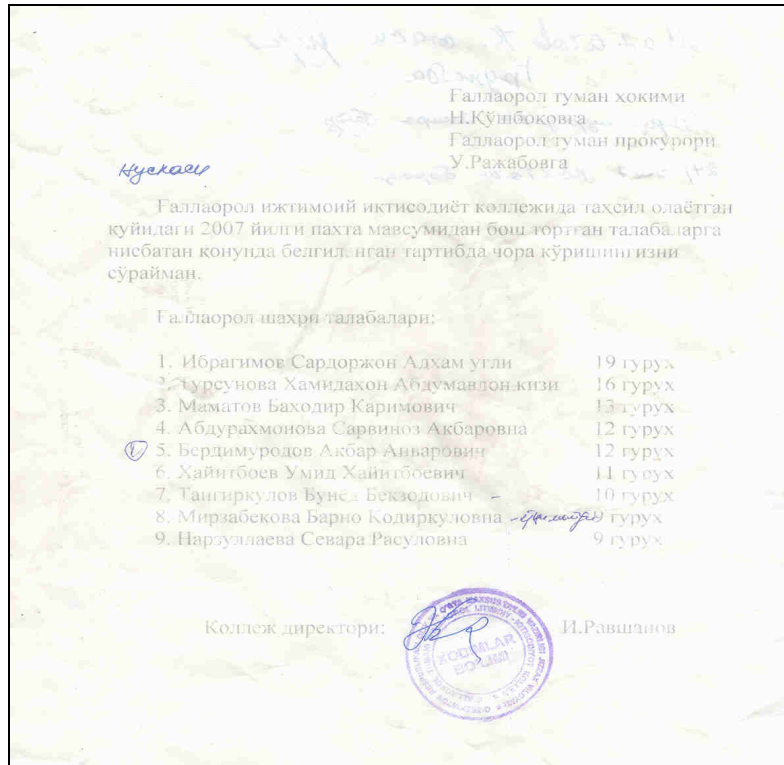
Dear Mr. General Prosecutor, our Society has sent you several letters and appeals related to this problem, as well as to various accidents which took place to forced child labourers. However, our appeals have remained unanswered. In particular, our appeals about the accidents which took place in Jandarsk district of Bukhara region, Jambay district of Samarqand region, Bayavut district of Sirdarya region were not given any legal analysis. Copies of these appeals are attached. These accidents were neither investigated nor punished.

I would like to ask you to take some practical steps with regard to the facts mentioned in this letter. Otherwise, the Society will consider you to have personally violated the law on «Appeals of citizens», which is described in article 144 of the Criminal Code of Uzbekistan, and we will have no choice but to appeal to the court system.

Sincerely,

*Vasila Inoyatova
Chairwoman
Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan 'Ezgulik'*

Document: College Director Demands Punishment for His Students



Translation (letter of the Director of Gallaorol Social –Economic College, Mr. I. Ravshanov):

To: Mr. N. Kuibokov
The Governor of Gallaorol district
CC: Mr. U. Rajabov,
Prosecutor of Gallaorol District

I am asking you to introduce punishment envisaged in the law for the following students of Gallaorol Social-Economic College, who refused to participate in cotton campaign 2007:

Students of Gallaorol city:

1. Ibragimov Sardorjon, 19th group
2. Tursunova Khamidahon, 16th group
3. Mamatov Bakhodir, 13th group
4. Abdurakhmonova Sarvinoz, 12th group
5. Berdimurosov Akbar, 12th group
6. Khaitboev Umid, 11th group
7. Tangrikulov Bunyo, 10th group
8. Mirzabekova Barno, 9th group
9. Narzullaeva Sevara , 9th group

I. Ravshanov
Director of college

European retailers boycott the Uzbek cotton

Four leading European retailers have refused to buy products containing cotton that has been harvested in Uzbekistan, due to its policy of using forced child labour to pick this cotton.

- [Marimekko Corporation](#), the leading Finnish textile and clothing design company, has terminated its contract with the Estonian supplier Krenholm which it suspects of using the products of the labour of Uzbek children. Marimekko designs, manufactures and markets high-quality clothing, textiles for interior decoration, and bags and other accessories under the Marimekko brand, both in Finland and abroad. According to the newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat*, Marimekko's research led them to believe that Krenholm, which is owned by the Swedish textile producer Borås Wäfveri, was using Uzbek cotton.
- The next companies to join the boycott were the British retailing giants [Marks and Spencer](#) and [Tesco](#). Marks and Spencer said, "We have banned the use of Uzbek cotton in all our clothing. This will be our position until such time that there is clear evidence of a change in the Uzbek cotton industry. This is due to child labour concerns."

Terry Green, CEO Tesco Clothing and Hardlines, has told suppliers in a letter that "the use of organised and forced child labour is completely unacceptable and leads us to conclude that whilst these practices persist in Uzbekistan we cannot support the use of cotton from Uzbekistan in our textiles."

Commenting on Tesco's decision to join the boycott, Steve Trent, Executive Director of the Environmental Justice Foundation, said the following: "The Uzbek regime's abusive cotton industry operates within a framework of totalitarian control – a system that discounts fair elections; prohibits free media; and condones torture. We are urging all retailers to follow Tesco's move to send a message to the government of Uzbekistan that its flagrant human-rights abuses cannot continue. Tesco has proven that the sourcing of cotton fibre and the tracking of supply chains are entirely possible and there is no excuse for all other retailers of cotton goods not to pledge a commitment to do the same."

- [Debenhams](#), another British retailer, has also contacted its suppliers to inform them of the company's ban on sourcing components and raw materials from Uzbekistan. In his letter to suppliers, Debenhams' CEO Rob Templeman said that the company's concern was "due to the widespread labour abuses, including the use of forced child labour, used during the harvesting of the cotton crop. Also of concern is the continuing environmental disaster unfolding in Aral sea region."

About the Coalition

The Coalition Against Forced Child Labour in Uzbekistan was established in order to raise awareness within the international community about the scope and the scale of forced child labour in Uzbekistan's cotton industry.

The Coalition has been initiated by three Europe-based non-governmental organizations: Uzbekistan Initiative London (UK), the Association "Human Rights in Central Asia" (France) and the International Working Group for Peace-building (Germany). Apart from these three NGOs, the Coalition consists of 140 Uzbek activists and additional NGOs who signed the most recent petitions in support of a boycott of Uzbek cotton. The Coalition is open to new members and welcomes those who want to join.



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