
COTTON CAMPAIGN

END FORCED LABOR IN CENTRAL ASIA

July 29, 2016

Ms. Laura Tuck, Vice President for Sustainable Development
Mr. Cyrill Muller, Vice President for Europe and Central Asia
The World Bank
1818 H St, NW
Washington, DC 20433

Re: Uzbekistan: Raise Key Issues at ILO/Government Roundtable

Dear Ms. Tuck and Mr. Muller:

In advance of the World Bank's round-table meeting with the government of Uzbekistan and International Labour Organization in August, we write to urge the World Bank to incentivize the Uzbek government to end its use of forced labor in the agriculture sector and allow independent monitoring of World Bank project areas.

Following the 2015 cotton harvest, the ILO reported to the World Bank that its joint-monitoring mission with the Uzbek government found serious concerns.¹ The organized recruitment of adults to pick cotton was widespread. Compulsory labor was practiced in the education and health-care sectors despite policy commitments not to recruit medical staff and teachers. Education institutions for those 18 years and older did not appear to be functioning normally as these students participated in the harvest. Worrying reports were received from other sources, which reported systematic forced labor on a wider scale than captured by the joint ILO-Government monitors and harassment and threats to people documenting these practices.

Independent Uzbek monitors confirmed that throughout 2015 the Uzbek government continued to use forced labor systematically throughout the cotton industry, including in World Bank project areas.² Once again officials forced farmers to deliver production quotas and forced more than one million people to pick cotton, all under threat of penalty. Penalties exacted and threatened against farmers for failure to deliver the state-assigned production quotas included confiscation of land, crops and livestock and threats of imprisonment. Penalties against the students, teachers, nurses, doctors, employees of other public-sector institutions, and businesses included expulsion from school and job loss.

¹ International Labour Organization, "Third Party Monitoring of the Use of Child Labour and Forced Labour during the Uzbekistan 2015 Cotton Harvest," November 2015, http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---ipec/documents/publication/wcms_427620.pdf.

² Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights (UGF), "The Cover-Up, Whitewashing Uzbekistan's White Gold: Persecution of Independent Monitors to Cover Up Mass Forced Labor in the Cotton Sector," March 2016, <http://harvestreport2015.uzbekgermanforum.org/>

This spring human rights monitors reported that the Uzbek government continues systematic forced labor. Officials have threatened and penalized farmers for not fulfilling production quotas for cotton and wheat,³ including a case in which officials harvested a farmer's wheat and seized it while police held the farmer in an armored vehicle.⁴ Officials forced students and education and health-care workers to weed cotton fields.⁵ Since a presidential decree establishing a state-order system of production for horticulture, farmers and citizens have reported officials ordering them work to produce horticulture crops, raising concern about an extension of systematic and state-orchestrated coercion.⁶

The World Bank should take all reasonable measures to create an enabling environment for independent actors to monitor projects that it finances. We have not seen the bank take such measures in Uzbekistan. Further, the Uzbek government's repression of human rights monitors has made it impossible for essential mitigation measures of monitoring and grievance redress to function. Over the last year, Uzbek officials arrested, assaulted, and fabricated charges against independent monitors for documenting state-led forced labor. The government's retaliation resulted in publicly active monitors Dmitry Tikhonov going into exile,⁷ Elena Urlaeva enduring forced detention in a psychiatric hospital,⁸ and Uktam Parдав remaining under constant police surveillance.⁹ Official intimidation also led several anonymous human rights monitors with whom we work to flee the country, cease or curtail their work.

We appreciate that World Bank staff have indicated that they have raised concerns about these reprisals in meetings with the Uzbek government. However, in light of ongoing attacks, it appears that the seriousness of your message is not being conveyed to the Uzbek government. We were dismayed that when we met with your staff on July 15, they indicated that World Bank representatives did not plan to discuss retaliation against independent monitors of abuses linked to the country's agriculture sector at the upcoming roundtable. Third-party monitoring and the feedback mechanism can only be meaningful if there is an environment in which people can freely share their experiences.

We therefore urge the World Bank to, at the August roundtable meeting:

- Convey to the Uzbek government at the roundtable that attacks against independent monitors will not be tolerated and to outline consequences should the attacks continue;
- Establish concrete consequences for failures of the Uzbek government to fulfill its duty and commitments to the Bank to fully apply national and international laws prohibiting forced labor during the 2016 harvest season; and

³ UGF, *Chronicle of Forced Labour in Uzbekistan*, May 30, 2016, http://www.cottoncampaign.org/uploads/3/9/4/7/39474145/ugf_%C2%BB_chronicle_of_forced_labour_in_uzbekistan_2016_1.pdf.

⁴ "В Кашкадарьинской области дехкан временно удерживают взаперти, чтобы отобрать у них пшеницу," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty "Ozodlik"*, July 14, 2016, <http://rus.ozodlik.mobi/a/27856842.html>

⁵ UGF, May 2016, *Ibid*.

⁶ UGF, May 2016, *Ibid*.

⁷ See <http://www.cottoncampaign.org/home-of-human-rights-defender-burned-down-as-government-silences-him-with-charges.html>

⁸ See <http://www.cottoncampaign.org/human-rights-defender-elena-urlaeva-released.html>

⁹ See https://www.labourstartcampaigns.net/show_campaign.cgi?c=3033

- Obtain an enforceable commitment from the Uzbek government to allow independent journalists, organizations and individuals to have access to all World Bank project-affected areas and to monitor, document and report about forced labor without interference or fear of reprisal.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss these matters with you and look forward to the outcomes of the roundtable. Please contact Matthew Fischer-Daly, Cotton Campaign Coordinator, at cottoncampaigncoordinator@gmail.com and Jessica Evans, Human Rights Watch, at evansj@hrw.org at any time for further information or to discuss our recommendations.

Sincerely,

The Cotton Campaign

AFL-CIO

American Apparel & Footwear Association

American Federation of Teachers

Anti-Slavery International

Aquinas Associates

Australian council of Trade Unions

Bank Information Center

Bennett Freeman, Steering Committee, Cotton Campaign; former U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor

CREA: Center for Reflection, Education and Action

Child Labor Coalition

AFL-CIO

AfA
american apparel &
footwear association



Dana Investment Advisors



Dignity Health



Ethical Trading Initiative



Human Rights Watch



The Human Thread



Inditex



INKOTA-netzwerk e.V.



International Labor Rights Forum



International Partnership for Human Rights



International State Crime Initiative



International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations



Jade Marketing Group & Onyx Design Group



Korean Teachers and Education Workers Union (KTU)



National Consumers League



National Retail Federation



Northwest Coalition for Responsible Investment



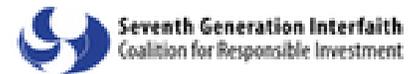
Open Society Foundations



Responsible Sourcing Network



Seventh Generation Interfaith Coalition for Responsible Investment



Social Accountability International



Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia



Solidarity Center



Stop the Traffik



Sunshine Coalition



Sukhrobjon Ismoilov - Expert Working Group of Uzbekistan



Textile Clothing & Footwear Union of Australia



Trillium Asset Management LLC

Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania



Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Western Australia



U.S. Fashion Industry Association



Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights



Walden Asset Management



Walk Free



Zevin Asset Management, LLC

