June 30, 2016

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Secretary of State
United States Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

We write to commend the U.S. Department of State’s decisions to downgrade the governments of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan to Tier 3 in the 2016 Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP), decisions we believe accurately reflect the facts on the ground we witnessed while monitoring last fall’s cotton harvest in the two countries. We urge the U.S. government to use the Report to press the Uzbek and Turkmen governments to take meaningful steps to end the use of state-sponsored forced labor.

We thank the Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy and Human Rights, the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, the Bureaus of Human Rights and South and Central Asian Affairs, Ambassador Spratlen and her team at the U.S. embassy in Tashkent and Ambassador Mustard and his team at the embassy in Ashgabat for their ongoing efforts to persuade the governments of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan to end forced labor. We applaud the U.S. government’s decision to downgrade the two countries to Tier 3 as an important step in furthering those efforts.

We believe that as a next step the United States should immediately communicate to the authorities in Tashkent and Ashgabat that if they wish to avoid sanctions available under the TVPA for Tier 3 Countries, they need to take concrete steps to address the problem of state-organized forced labor prior to the start of this fall’s cotton harvest. Such efforts could include: enforcing laws prohibiting forced labor, including by instructing officials at all levels of government to refrain from using coercion to mobilize citizens to work in the cotton fields and prosecuting all officials who do; ending mandatory quotas and penalties against farmers who do not fulfill them; raising and eventually freeing cotton procurement prices; permitting citizens to report human rights violations in the cotton sector without fear of retaliation; and ending the harassment of activists monitoring labor practices during the harvest.

In the case of Uzbekistan, we urge the United States to continue to use its voice and vote at the IMF, the World Bank Group and the Asian Development Bank to block any new loans in the agriculture or education sectors until the government demonstrates meaningful progress to end forced labor. The United States should also press the World Bank and ADB to suspend projects when forced labor occurs in the project areas, ensure fully independent third-party monitoring of compliance with core labor conventions, establish confidential and accessible grievance mechanisms that produce effective remedies for forced-
labor victims, and engage the Uzbek government to reform the root causes of forced labor in the agriculture sector.

In light of increased information about risks of corruption in Uzbekistan, we also urge the United States to stress to American companies operating in Uzbekistan the importance of fulfilling their human rights due diligence responsibilities, including by declining to contribute to the cotton harvest. In light of increased evidence of companies becoming entangled in the Turkmen forced-labor system,¹ we urge the U.S. to enforce the Tariff Act for cotton goods from Turkmenistan and to stress to American companies operating in Turkmenistan and the apparel industry the importance of fulfilling their due diligence requirements with respect to human rights.

Again, thank you for making the decision to downgrade Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan to Tier 3 in the 2016 Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP). We look forward to working with you towards our common goal of ending the use of government-orchestrated forced labor in the two countries’ cotton fields.

For our part, the trade unions, companies, human rights NGOs, industry associations and investors that form the Cotton Campaign will continue efforts to raise corporate, public, governmental and international awareness of the problem and press the Uzbek and Turkmen authorities to implement their human rights commitments.

Sincerely,

The Cotton Campaign

Advocates for Public Interest Law

Alliance to End Slavery & Trafficking

Alternative Turkmenistan News

AFL-CIO

American Apparel & Footwear Association

American Federation of Teachers

Anti-Slavery International

Association for Human Rights in Central Asia

Australian Council of Trade Unions

Bennett Freeman, Cotton Campaign Steering Committee and former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Democracy, Human Rights and Labor

Boston Common Asset Management

Child Labor Coalition

CREA: Center for Reflection, Education and Action

Dana Investment Advisors

Daughters of Charity, Province of St Louise

Dignity Health

Dominican Sisters of Mission San Jose
Dominican Sisters of San Rafael

Environmental Justice Foundation

Ethical Trading Initiative

The Eurasian Transition Group, e.V.

Friends Fiduciary Corporation

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

Kids Organic Clothing Company

Korean Teachers and Education Workers Union (KTU)
Mercy Health

Mercy Investment Services

National Consumers League

No Slavery Australia

Northwest Coalition for Responsible Investment

Open Society Foundations

Portfolio Advisory Board, Adrian Dominican Sisters

Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, Western American Province

Responsible Sourcing Network

Retail Council of Canada

Seventh Generation Interfaith Coalition for Responsible Investment

Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange

Solidarity Center
Sonen Capital

St. Joseph Health

Stop the Traffik

Sunshine Coalition

Tashabbus

Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania

United States Council for International Business

U.S. Fashion Industry Association

Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights

Walden Asset Management

Walk Free

CC: Pamela Spratlen, United States Ambassador to Uzbekistan
Allan Mustard, United States Ambassador to Turkmenistan
Thomas E. Perez, Secretary of Labor
Sarah Sewall, Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights, Department of State
Nisha Desai Biswal, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, Department of State
Daniel N. Rosenblum, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Central Asia, South and Central Asia Bureau (SCA), Department of State
Sarah Fox, Special Representative for International Labour Affairs, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, Department of State
Sara Aviel, United States Executive Director, World Bank
Susan Coppedge, Ambassador-at-Large, Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, Department of State
Mr. R. Gil Kerlikowske, Commissioner, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, U.S. Department of Homeland Security