



June 27, 2015

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 express our disappointment that the State Department upgraded Uzbekistan to the Tier 2 Watch List in the 2015 Trafficking in Persons Report. We believe the decision to upgrade Uzbekistan decreases pressure on the authorities in Tashkent to address the problem.

We agree that limited changes have taken place in Uzbekistan, but we do not see how the State Department could conclude that Uzbekistan has made significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with the minimum standards of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act while the country's government mobilized more than a million of its own citizens to harvest cotton in 2014¹ and began this year by mobilizing thousands more to prepare the fields for the upcoming harvest.²

The 2015 TIP Report states that the government issued a decree reiterating its pre-existing law prohibiting child labor, fined college directors and farms for use of child labor, and signed an agreement with the ILO. However, the report also states college directors and other government officials mobilized child labor "under pressure to fulfill government-decreed cotton quotas." As the report notes, forced labor in Uzbekistan is different from forced labor in most countries in that it is "government-compelled." While a highly-ramified system of state-organized forced labor remains in place, we do not believe that Uzbek government's commitments and selective actions on child labor can be said to represent substantial efforts to comply with the TVPA minimum standards.

Having made the unfortunate decision to upgrade Uzbekistan to Tier 2 Watch List, we believe it is more incumbent than ever on the U.S. government to increase pressure on Tashkent to eliminate forced labor from the cotton sector. In particular, the United States should immediately insist that Tashkent, at a minimum, instruct officials at all levels of government to refrain from using coercion to mobilize citizens to work in the cotton fields and prosecute all officials who do; commit to an action plan to eradicate forced labor with the International Labour Organization; and permit citizens to report human rights violations in the cotton sector without fear of retaliation.

¹ Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights, "The Government's Riches, the People's Burden: Human Rights Violations in Uzbekistan's 2014 Cotton Harvest," April 2015, http://uzbekgermanforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/cotton_harvest_Online.pdf

² See: <http://uzbekgermanforum.org/uzbek-government-continues-forced-labor-system-to-weed-cotton-fields/>

We urge the U.S. to use its voice and vote at the World Bank to block any new loans in the agricultural or education sectors of Uzbekistan until the Uzbek government demonstrates meaningful progress to end forced labor. The U.S. should also press the World Bank to conduct credible, open and inclusive monitoring for labor rights violations in its project areas, using input from Uzbek civil society, and provide effective remedies to any person who is subjected to forced labor in its project areas.

In light of increased participation of the private sector in the state-sponsored forced labor system in recent years, we also urge U.S. officials 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.

For our part, the unions, industry associations, investors, trade unions and NGOs that form the Cotton Campaign will continue efforts to raise corporate, public, governmental and international awareness of the problem and press the Uzbek authorities to move beyond their current phase of public denial and end their annual mass mobilization of forced labor for the cotton harvest.

Sincerely,

The Cotton Campaign

Advocates for Public Interest Law



American Apparel & Footwear Association



AFL-CIO



American Federation of Teachers



Anti-Slavery International



Association for Human Rights in Central Asia



Australian Council of Trade Unions



Bennett Freeman, former U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor

Boston Common Asset Management



Calvert Investments



CEE Bankwatch Network



Child Labor Coalition



Daughters of Charity, Province of St. Louise



Dignity Health



The Eurasian Transition Group, e.V.



Gonggam Human Rights Law Foundation



International Labor Rights Forum



International Partnership for Human Rights



Korean Teachers and Education Workers Union



JEON GYOJO

Mercy Health



Mercy Investment Services



National Consumers League



Northwest Coalition for Responsible Investment



No Slavery Australia



Open Society Foundations



Portfolio Advisory Board, Adrian Dominican Sisters



Responsible Sourcing Network



Retail Industry Leaders Association



St. Joseph Health



Solidarity Center



Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia



Stop the Traffik



The Sunshine Coalition



Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, Uniting Church in Australia



Textile Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia



U.S. Fashion Industry Association



Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights



Walden Asset Management



Walk Free



cc: Pamela Spratlen, United States Ambassador to Uzbekistan

Thomas E. Perez, Secretary of Labor

Nisha Desai Biswal, Assistant Secretary of State, South and Central Asian Affairs Bureau

Tom Malinowski, Assistant Secretary of State, Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Bureau

Patricia A. Butenis, Acting Director, Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons

Sara Aviel, United States Executive Director, World Bank