August 23, 2017

Mr. James Quincey
President and CEO
Coca-Cola Company

Dear Mr. Quincey,

We write to you as members of the Cotton Campaign, a coalition of companies, investors, business associations, trade unions, and human rights organizations dedicated to ending forced labor in global cotton production. We ask you to use your status as an Official Supporter of the 5th Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games to urge the Government of Turkmenistan to end state-sponsored forced and child labor in its annual cotton harvest.

Every year the Government of Turkmenistan forcibly mobilizes tens of thousands of public sector workers and farmers to cultivate and harvest cotton. The use of forced labor violates international laws ratified by the government of Turkmenistan, including International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions No. 29 on Forced Labour and No. 105 on the Abolition of Forced Labour. In its 2016 annual report, the ILO Committee of Experts made a specific observation on Turkmenistan, noting “with deep concern the widespread use of forced labour in cotton production which affects farmers, businesses and private and public sector workers, including teachers, doctors and nurses, under threat of losing their jobs, salary cuts, loss of land and extraordinary investigations” [emphasis in original].

We are also deeply disturbed by reports of government reprisals against journalists and other members of civil society who attempt to document and report on forced labor and other human rights issues.

On October 4, 2016, Mr. Gaspar Matalaev, a Turkmen citizen and human rights monitor, was arrested, two days after he published a report on the extensive use of forced labor and child labor in the 2016 cotton harvest. He has reportedly been subjected to torture by electric current to force him to confess to false charges of minor fraud and bribery attempt. Repeated promises by the authorities to release Mr. Matalaev have been broken. Although the charges against him are minor he is still imprisoned, despite other convicts charged with the same offenses having been released or pardoned.

Mr. Matalaev’s incarceration has drawn widespread international condemnation, including in the 2017 United States Trafficking in Persons Report, which highlighted the case as evidence for its decision to keep Turkmenistan in Tier 3, the lowest possible ranking a country can receive. Furthermore, during its recent review of Turkmenistan, the United Nations Human Rights Committee noted: “The Committee remains concerned about laws and practices severely restricting freedom of opinion and expression, including…continuous use of harassment, intimidation, torture and arbitrary arrests, detention and convictions on reportedly politically motivated charges as a retaliation tool against journalists, human rights activists, dissidents, members of religious groups and ethnic minorities, and members of nongovernmental

---

5 The 2017 United States Trafficking in Persons report on Turkmenistan: https://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/countries/2017/271304.htm
organizations... and those seeking to document forced labour in the cotton harvest such as Gaspar Matalaev.4

Unfortunately, Mr. Matalaev’s case is not unique. Turkmen authorities have a long history of persecuting independent journalists. In 2015, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (UNWGAD) expressed concern over the widespread use of incommunicado detention, closed trials, lack of legal defense, torture and ill-treatment in detention facilities, including the imprisonment of the journalist Mr. Saparmamed Nepeskuliev, which UNWGAD concluded was arbitrary and in retaliation for exercising his right to freedom of expression.5 In 2016 and 2017, a Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Turkmenistan correspondent Ms. Soltan Achilova, was questioned by police and assaulted by unknown assailants as an attempt to silence her critical journalistic work.6

As an Official Supporter of the 5th Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games in Turkmenistan, we urge you to deliver a strong message to the Government of Turkmenistan that it must take immediate steps to end endemic forced labor in its cotton sector, free Mr. Matalaev and Mr. Nepeskuliev and allow Ms. Achilova to document and report on labor and human rights concerns without risk of reprisals.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and welcome the opportunity to engage in further dialogue.

Sincerely,

Alternative Turkmenistan News

American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations

Anti-Slavery International

Advocates for Public Interest Law

Adrian Dominican Sisters

---


www.cottoncampaign.org
Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (ACAT Germany and the Czech Republic)

Alternative Asean Network on Burma

Child Labor Coalition

Coalition on Corporate Accountability

Congregation of St. Joseph

Dignity Health

Dana Investment Advisors

Daughters of Charity, Province of St. Louise
Freedom United

Fair Labor Association

Human Rights Alliance of Uzbekistan

International Labor Rights Forum

International State Crime Initiative

International Rights Advocates (IRAdvocates)

International Partnership for Human Rights

www.cottoncampaign.org
Intercommunity Peace and Justice Center

Jade Marketing Group

Korean Teachers and Education Workers Union

Mercy Investment Services

Mercy Health

National Consumers League

Responsible Sourcing Network
Solidarity Center

Stop the Traffik

Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, Uniting Church in Australia

Zevin Asset Management