



13 September 2012

Rt.Hon. Peter Lilley MP  
Co-Chairman of Uzbek-British Trade & Industry Council  
House of Commons  
London SW1A 0AA

Dear Mr. Lilley,

Ahead of the 19th session of Uzbek-British Trade and Industry Council, the Cotton Campaign calls on the UBTIC to end its support for the state-sponsored forced labour of children and adults in the cotton sector of Uzbekistan, a system that is a serious and systematic human rights violation and as such presents a specific responsibility to companies that source cotton or are directly invested in this high-risk environment to take action to ensure that they are not complicit.

Every year the government of Uzbekistan forcibly mobilizes over a million children, teachers, public servants and private sector employees for the manual harvesting of cotton under threat. The Uzbek government requires farmers to grow cotton, and local provincial government offices (khokimiyats) forcibly mobilize adults and children to harvest cotton and meet assigned quotas. The Uzbek government enforces these orders with threats and administrative pressure; detains and harasses Uzbek activists seeking to monitor the situation; denies access to international press; and continues to refuse to allow the International Labour Organisation to monitor the harvest. Employers, workers and government representatives to the ILO have repeatedly called on the Uzbek government to accept tripartite ILO monitoring, and the Uzbek government continues to refuse.

Companies have a responsibility to conduct due diligence that ensures human rights are respected in their supply chains, even if they have not directly committed the rights violation. Since slavery-like practices continue to be used extensively in Uzbekistan's cotton sector, companies have a responsibility to avoid using Uzbek cotton in their products until the use of forced labour in the Uzbekistan cotton sector is ended. In recent years, an increasing number of private sector employees, including General Motors workers in 2011, were forced to pick cotton. This demonstrates that indeed any company invested in any sector in Uzbekistan also has a responsibility to take preventive measures to avoid complicity in the forced labour system and to ensure that the human rights of their employees and their children are respected. Preventive measures should include independent risk assessments and monitoring led by Uzbek civil society.

We call on the UBTIC to cease promoting the Uzbek Cotton and Textile Fair, to urge the government of Uzbekistan to end forced labour of children and adults in its cotton sector, and to urge companies to assume their responsibilities to avoid complicity in the state-sponsored forced labour system and to safeguard the human rights of their employees.

There is no better time to take action. The harvest will be nearing its conclusion when the UBTIC visits Tashkent, and, as in all previous seasons, the use of forced labour of children and adults is expected in order to ensure that the government meets its harvest quotas. We welcome the opportunity to engage in dialogue with UBTIC and affiliated companies about measures they take to safeguard human rights in Uzbekistan, and we would be pleased to meet with you to discuss these issues further.

Sincerely,  
The Cotton Campaign:

Advocates for Public Interest Law



American Federation of Teachers



Anti-Slavery International



C&A



Catholic Healthcare East



The Child Labor Coalition



Christian Brothers Investment Services



Environmental Justice Foundation



Ethical Trading Initiative



Eurasian Transition Group



International Labor Rights Forum



Korean Teachers and Education Workers Union



National Consumers League



National Union of Teachers



Next Retail Ltd



Northwest Coalition for Responsible Investment



Open Society Foundations



Sisters of Charity



Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia



Tesco



Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania



William Lamb

