

**STOP FORCED  
AND CHILD LABOUR  
IN THE COTTON INDUSTRY  
OF UZBEKISTAN!**

25 July, 2012

Ms. Patricia Flor  
European Union Special Representative for Central Asia  
European External Action Service  
1046 Brussels  
Belgium

Dear Ms. Flor:

On the eve of your visit to Uzbekistan, we call on you to urge the Government of Uzbekistan to invite the International Labour Organisation to conduct unfettered monitoring of the cotton harvest this autumn. Following on from President Barroso's discussions with President Karimov on this issue in January 2011, and given the focus on children's rights in the newly adopted EU global Human Rights Strategic Framework, your recent appointment as EU Special Representative to Central Asia presents a renewed opportunity to convey the message that the government of Uzbekistan needs to abide by its international commitments to end forced labour. For ILO monitoring to proceed during this year's harvest, the Uzbek government needs to expedite an official invitation to the ILO in early August, immediately following your visit.

Annually, the Uzbek government-controlled system of cotton production forces more than a million children and adults to pick cotton. In recent years, the Uzbek government has continued the systematic use of forced labour, repression of its citizens who attempt to monitor the situation, and overall denial of the problem. According to reports from non-governmental organisations working in Uzbekistan as well as academic studies, in 2011 provincial government offices (*khokimiyats*) shut down schools and mobilised children and adults -- including employees of private companies -- to meet the harvest quotas.

Further indication of the Uzbek government's lack of political will to address this issue has been its continuous and relentless crackdown on independent civil society activists who attempt to monitor the use of forced and child labour in the cotton sector -- in 2011 including Elena Urlaeva, Gulshan Karaeva, and Nodir Akhatov, who was again recently attacked for her activism. International non-governmental organisations and foreign media outlets are prevented from operating in Uzbekistan to support Uzbek civil society and report on forced labour and other egregious human rights abuses. The Uzbek government has also so far failed to follow the recommendations of the tripartite ILO supervisory system to accept a high level monitoring mission and avail itself to technical assistance from the ILO.

The minimum step the government of Uzbekistan should take is to invite the ILO to conduct unfettered monitoring of the cotton harvest, as part of the technical assistance program that the ILO has offered to provide. We understand that you have a number of important issues to consider with respect to Uzbekistan, but we firmly believe that human rights, including forced labour and forced child labour, are fundamental concerns that cannot be ignored.

Sincerely,

The Cotton Coalition

Advocates for Public Interest Law  
South Korea



Anti-Slavery International (ASI)  
United Kingdom



Association for Human Rights in Central Asia  
France



Business Social Compliance Initiative:  
An initiative of the Foreign Trade Association (FTA)  
Belgium



Calvert Investment Management Inc.  
United States of America



European Centre for Constitutional and Human Rights  
Germany



Environmental Justice Foundation  
United Kingdom



Expert Working Group  
Uzbekistan



Human Rights Watch  
United States of America



International Labor Rights Forum  
United States of America



Open Society Foundations  
Belgium



Responsible Sourcing Network  
United States of America



Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights  
Germany

