



May 25, 2016

President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov
Government of Turkmenistan

Dear President Berdimuhamedov:

We, the undersigned companies, investors, business associations, trade unions and human rights organizations write to convey our concern about reports of forced labor in the cotton sector of Turkmenistan and to urge you to address them.

Brand reputation is a vital part of success in the competitive textile and apparel industry. Not only does this include quality, style, and value, but it also includes social and environmental impacts of production. Companies have an interest in ensuring the garments we sell are manufactured under lawful and humane conditions throughout the supply chain, from raw materials to retail shelves. Many companies also have regulatory reporting requirements that require stating our activities to avoid all materials or products produced with forced labor, slavery, or trafficking. Companies simply cannot use materials or purchase products produced with forced labor.

It has been widely reported that every year the Government of Turkmenistan forcibly mobilizes tens of thousands of public-sector workers and farmers to cultivate and harvest cotton.¹ 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 fact, the ILO this year reports “*deep concern*” the widespread use of forced labour in cotton production which affects farmers, businesses and private and

¹ International Labour Organization, CEACR, “Direct Request (CEACR) - adopted 2011, published 103rd ILC session (2012) Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105) - Turkmenistan (Ratification: 1997) available at http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:13100:0::NO:13100:P13100_COMMENT_ID:2699323; International Labour Organization, CEACR, “Direct Request (CEACR) - adopted 2013, published 103rd ILC session (2014) Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105) - Turkmenistan (Ratification: 1997) available at http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:13100:0::NO:13100:P13100_COMMENT_ID:3146802; Alternative Turkmenistan News (ATN), “Monitoring of Forced Labor during Cotton Harvest Campaign in Turkmenistan,” 2013; ATN, “Spotlight on Turkmenistan: Widespread State-Orchestrated Forced Labor in Turkmenistan’s 2014 Cotton Harvest, June 2015; ATN, State-Led Forced Labor during the Long 2015 Cotton Harvest, January 2016.

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].²

Furthermore, we are deeply disturbed by reports of reprisals against people who attempt to document and report on human rights concerns, including the imprisonment of the journalist Saparmamed Nepeskuliev, which the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (UN WGAD) concluded was arbitrary and in retaliation for exercising his right to freedom of expression, and expressed concern over a pattern of incommunicado detention, closed trials, lack of legal defence, torture and ill-treatment in detention facilities.³ We engage stakeholders, including human rights defenders and journalists, to assess conditions throughout global supply chains.

We urge you to take urgent action to end forced labor in the cotton sector of Turkmenistan, including the following steps:

1. Enforce national laws that prohibit 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 any officials that do;
2. Permit citizens to report human rights concerns about the use of forced labor without fear of retaliation;
3. Allow the Cotton Campaign through its designated representatives to monitor forced labor during the 2016 cotton harvest with unfettered access; and
4. Reform the cotton sector, including by ending mandatory cotton production and harvest quotas while ceasing in the meantime to penalize farmers and citizens who do not fulfill assigned quotas, ensuring financial transparency of cotton expenditures and revenues, and raising and eventually freeing cotton procurement prices.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and welcome the opportunity to engage in dialogue with the Government of Turkmenistan.

Sincerely,
The Cotton Campaign:

² International Labour Organization Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, Individual Observation concerning the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No.105), Turkmenistan, Published 2016.

³ United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, “Opinion No. 40/2015 concerning Saparmamed Nepeskuliev (Turkmenistan),” A/HRC/WGAD/2015, available at <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Detention/Pages/Opinionsadoptedin2015.aspx>

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Advocates for Public Interest Law



Alternative Turkmenistan News



AFL-CIO



Anti-Slavery International



Boston Common Asset Management



BOSTON COMMON ASSET MANAGEMENT, LLC

Buy Responsibly Foundation



California Catholic Congregations for Responsible Investing

Child Labor Coalition



CREA: Center for Reflection, Education and Action



Congregation of St. Joseph



Dana Investment Advisors



Daughters of Charity, Province of St. Louise



David Jones



Dignity Health



Dominican Sisters of Mission San Jose



Dominican Sisters of San Rafael



Eileen Fisher



Espirit



Ethical Trading Initiative



The Eurasian Transition Group, e.V.



Friends Fiduciary Corporation



Friends of the Earth Slovakia - CEPA



GES



H&M



Human Trafficking Working Group, Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility

India Committee of the Netherlands



Inditex

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International Labor Rights Forum



International Partnerships for Human Rights



International State Crime Initiative



International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations



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Portfolio Advisory Board of the Adrian Dominican Sisters



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Region VI Coalition for Responsible Investment



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Seventh Generation Interfaith Coalition for Responsible Investment

Sisters of Charity Health System



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STOP THE TRAFFIK
PEOPLE SHOULDN'T BE BOUGHT & SOLD



Sunshine Coalition



Tesco



Trillium Asset Management



US Fashion Industry Association



Zevin Asset Management



Walden Asset Management



Walk Free



CC: Mr. Tachmamed Gurbanmamedov, Minister of Textile Industry, Government of Turkmenistan