

## Spotlight on Turkmenistan: Widespread State-Orchestrated Forced Labor in Turkmenistan's 2014 Cotton Harvest



*Alternative Turkmenistan News (ATN) is a civil media initiative developed in 2010 with the aim to bringing news from one of the most restricted countries in the world. All facts and photographs in this report were provided by people who were subjected to forced labor for the cotton harvest in different regions of Turkmenistan. Visit our website at [www.habartm.org](http://www.habartm.org) and stay up-to-date with the latest news from the country.*

## **Executive Summary:**

The government of Turkmenistan has used a forced labor system of cotton production for decades. In 2014, the Turkmen government once again forced tens of thousands of citizens to pick cotton and farmers to deliver production quotas under threat of punishment.

The Turkmen government maintains total control of cotton production. The state owns the land, leases it to farmers in exchange for the delivery of state-established production quotas for cotton, monopolizes cotton buying and sales, and maintains artificially low procurement prices. In addition to insecure land tenancy and low procurement prices, local officials underpay farmers by as much as half of what they are owed according to state-established prices. The government maintains total secrecy over cotton procurement and sales, leaving citizens unaware of the national income generated by cotton and unable to demand higher farm-gate prices.

President Gurbanguly Berdymuhamedov gives cotton production orders to regional governors, who face dismissal if they fail to fulfill their cotton production plan. Governors assign responsibilities to district and city officials, who in turn deliver orders to school administrators, other public institutions, and businesses. Authorities force public sector workers, including teachers, doctors, nurses, and staff of government offices to pick cotton, pay a bribe, or hire a replacement worker, under threat of losing their job. Officials also force businesses to contribute labor, financially or in-kind, under threat of closing the business. The mobilization leaves institutions severely understaffed, undermining education, health care and municipal services.

Turkmenistan is the 9<sup>th</sup> largest producer and 7<sup>th</sup> largest exporter of cotton in the world.<sup>1</sup> Cotton produced by forced labor in Turkmenistan enters supply chains of global apparel brands multiple ways. Cotton traders report that they purchase cotton throughout Central Asia. The Turkmen government claims that several Western apparel companies purchase from Turkmenbashi Jeans Complex, a joint venture of the Turkmen government and Turkish investors.<sup>2</sup>

By using forced labor, the Turkmen government violates its national laws and the International Labour Organization Conventions prohibiting forced labor. The Turkmen government is also responsible for hundreds of forced disappearances; denies freedoms of association, movement, expression and religion; and refuses cooperation with United Nations human rights bodies.<sup>3</sup> Fear silences most citizens, and those documenting forced labor in the cotton sector do so anonymously to avoid harassment and reprisals.

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<sup>1</sup> International Cotton Advisory Committee, ICAC World Cotton Database, <https://www.icac.org/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.turkmen-jeans.com/products.php>

<sup>3</sup> See <http://provethyarealive.org/>, <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2015/country-chapters/turkmenistan>, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/turkmenistan/report-turkmenistan/>

Alternative Turkmenistan News urges the government of Turkmenistan to undertake fundamental reforms of the cotton sector and calls on Turkmenistan's international partners, including governments, intergovernmental organizations, international financial institutions, and multinational companies to use their influence to press the Turkmen government to end the use of forced labor.

**Key Recommendations:**

To the Government of Turkmenistan:

- 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;
- Permit citizens to report human rights concerns about the use of forced labor without fear of retaliation;
- Invite the International Labour Organization to monitor forced labor during the 2015 cotton harvest with unfettered access and the participation of the International Trade Union Confederation and International Organisation of Employers;
- 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.

To the United States and European Union:

- Urge the Turkmen government to end state-sponsored forced labor via bilateral meetings, reports and agreements.

To the World Bank and Asian Development Bank:

- Require the Turkmen government to demonstrably implement its laws prohibiting forced labor prior to consideration of any projects in the Turkmen agriculture sector.

To Multinational Companies:

- Investigate and disclose any cotton from Turkmenistan in the company's supply chain.

## **Introduction and Methodology**

Turkmenistan is one of the largest cotton exporters in the world. Currently, Turkmenistan is the 9<sup>th</sup> largest producer and 7<sup>th</sup> largest exporter of cotton worldwide.<sup>4</sup> Yet the people do not benefit and instead are deprived of their fundamental labor rights. The Turkmen government uses coercion in the cotton production and, under threat of loss of livelihoods, forces its citizens to pick cotton and farmers to fulfill production quotas.

With this report, ATN sheds light on the human rights violations in Turkmenistan's cotton sector and calls on the international community to support the people of Turkmenistan. With just over 5 million people, Turkmenistan is a country with the smallest population in Central Asia and only rarely receives global attention. Yet the tens of thousands of Turkmen people are forced to labor in the cotton fields each year by their government. The Turkmen government uses secrecy, fear and denial of economic opportunity to orchestrate and benefit from a forced labor system of cotton production. By forcing citizens to work, the Turkmen government violates International Labour Organization Convention No. 105 on the Prohibition of Forced Labour and section 8 of its national Labor Code.

Alternative Turkmenistan News researched the information for this report with a network of key informants in Turkmenistan. Turkmen government officials, farmers, rural residents, public-sector workers and businessmen provided first-hand accounts, documentary evidence and photographs to ATN.

## **Use of Forced Labor in the Cotton Sector in 2014**

The Turkmen government used widespread forced labor to reach its national cotton production target in 2014. Authorities used coercion to force farmers to fulfill production quotas and citizens to fulfill harvest quotas, all under threat of penalty.

The government uses a strict chain of command to mobilize farmers and other citizens to work in the cotton fields. The president of Turkmenistan personally orders regional governors to fulfill their respective portions of the national cotton production target. The state-owned enterprise Turkmenpagta assigns annual production quotas to each farmer in the land lease contract. Farmers Associations, the local-level government agencies responsible for overseeing agricultural production, directly manage the farmers and report to the regional governors. The regional governors also order the education, health care and other government agencies in their region their staff into teams of field workers.

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<sup>4</sup> International Cotton Advisory Committee, ICAC World Cotton Database, <https://www.icac.org/>



“Dear Residents!

The time has come to harvest cotton. To harvest the cotton and avoid wasting any, we call on you to participate in the 2014 cotton harvest!”

- Farmers Association sign in Babadayhan village, Tejen region, Akhal province

Pressure to demonstrate successful and quick completion of the cotton harvest led to falsification of reporting. President Berdymuhamedov announced the start of the cotton harvest August 20 and simultaneously ordered its completion by October 31. The governor of Lebap region Mukhammet Dzhoraev ordered the completion of its region's cotton quota by October 20, prior to the meeting of the Conference of the Council of Elders, a national advisory group to the Turkmen government with significant influence over legislation. Farmers Associations falsify reports of the quantity of cotton delivered in order to give the impression they will comply with the deadline. Typically, the Association establishes an informal agreement with the local cotton processing plant, statistical office, and district mayor on “early” execution of the plan. Then the Association reports completion of its cotton quota by the president's deadline, even if it is not actually completed. Many Associations report completion when they reach 70% of their target, then continue harvesting the remaining 30% in November and December and do not include this cotton in the daily reports.

The government uses coercion to ensure compliance with the cotton production plan. The president threatens regional governors with the loss of their positions for failure to fulfill their regional cotton target. Regional and district-level officials threaten the heads of Farmers Associations with the loss of their jobs if they do not fulfill their cotton quotas. Heads of Farmers Associations threaten farmers with the loss of their land for failure to deliver their cotton quotas. The first time a farmer falls short of the production quota, the Farmers Association is likely to penalize him with a reprimand or a fine, but the second time it is likely to result in the loss of the lease to farm the land.

### ***Forced mobilization of public-sector workers to the 2014 cotton harvest***

In 2014, authorities began systematic forced mobilization of citizens to the cotton fields for the harvest on 20 August. The government first sent rural residents, then manual workers (e.g. custodians, guards and warehouse workers), and finally the public-sector workers from the cities.

Officials ordered citizens to check in at 6:00 in the morning at their municipal government office. From there, the authorities arranged buses to transport people to the cotton fields. The forced laborers picked cotton for ten hours per day, from 8:00 AM until 6:00 PM.

The daily quota for cotton picking was 20-50 kilograms per person. Administrators of public institutions enforced the quotas with threats of dismissal, shorter work hours, or docked pay. For example, several teachers reported that they had been penalized for refusing to go to the cotton fields in 2014: administrators fired some teachers and reduced the hours and salary of others. In the face of the harsh penalties, most people comply and pick cotton, fearing that they will not find another job because of high unemployment levels.<sup>5</sup>

In the Lebap region, officials sent municipal workers to harvest cotton in the Dovletli area. In the Balkan region of western Turkmenistan, officials sent municipal workers to pick cotton in the Akhal district. Most municipal workers were sent in groups to pick cotton for a month in 2014.

#### **“You don’t like it? Write your letter of resignation!”**

##### *State-Orchestrated Forced Labor Outside the Cotton Fields*

Turkmen government officials use forced labor for city maintenance and domestic work in their homes, in addition to the cotton fields. According to public-sector workers, the head of government of municipalities in Turkmenistan often provides free, forced labor to other government officials at their request.

Officials of the municipality of Cheleken regularly force city workers to perform a wide range of tasks unrelated to their jobs. In the last three years, Cheleken officials sent the city workers to plant fir trees in Ashgabat, to apply pesticides to wheat fields in Bereket, to transport garbage to the landfills of the towns of Kheles and Avaza.

The Cheleken city workers report that they are obliged to comply and pay for their own transportation costs. If they attempt to resist, they say their managers tell them, “You don’t like it? Write your letter of resignation!” The workers note that their trade union represents the government, and the head of the union is not a worker but staff of the Cheleken municipality human resources department.

<sup>5</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “The World Factbook: Turkmenistan,” <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>, reports up to 60% unemployment level

Some city mayors threatened to dismiss the head of their city Department of Education head for not providing sufficient people from the schools for the cotton harvest. Under pressure, the school administrators sent teachers and school staff to pick cotton on orders from the Education Department.

The first school staff forced to the cotton fields in 2014 were the custodians and security guards. In Lebap, teachers and staff were required to pick cotton two weekdays and each Sunday throughout the harvest. In the Dashoguz region, school administrators sent teachers to pick cotton several days a week.

Teachers of all grade levels were forced to pick cotton in the Lebap and Mary regions. Administrators forced teachers of the upper grades (7-11) to harvest cotton, in groups of approximately 15, for three-day shifts, and they forced teachers of lower grades to the cotton fields typically every other day after the school day. Some schools also sent upper-level students (age 18 and older) to pick cotton after classes each day.

Many school administrators ordered teachers to contribute financially, apparently so that the administrator could hire workers instead of sending the teachers. The administrators demanded payments of 10 – 20 manats (\$3.50 - \$7.00) per day. In some schools, especially primary schools, administrators mobilized parents to pick cotton in an apparent attempt to keep the teachers in the classrooms.

Most government agencies also forced employees to pick cotton in 2014. Administrators of state-owned banks, factories, and the government agency offices forced employees to sign a form indicating their awareness that they will “bear the responsibility” if they refuse to pick cotton. Most organizations sent workers in shifts.

Some public-sector workers avoided picking cotton by hiring another person to fulfill their harvest quota. A few government agencies did not send any employees but instead collected payments from them, purportedly to hire people to fulfill the agencies' harvest quota. Employees reported having to pay 15 – 30 manats (\$5 - \$10) per day. This practice was most common among banking, healthcare and oil and gas sectors. For example, the state-owned Dashoguz Gas Supply company collected money from its employees. The Dashoguz workers reported they had no idea how their money was used, but they were relieved to not pick cotton.

### ***Forced Mobilization of the Private Sector to the 2014 Cotton Harvest***

For the 2014 cotton harvest, the Turkmen government also forced small, medium and large businesses to contribute labor to the cotton harvest, in addition to the public-sector workers.

“Now everybody should be in the fields,” said the police in Tejen, Ahal region, talking to the traders in the city’s market. Starting September 21, the Tejen municipal government limited the business hours of the markets and grocery stores to evening hours only. The municipal government was responding to President Berdymuhamedov, who denounced the slow pace of the cotton harvest in Ahal region earlier in September. Authorities of Galkynysh district of Lebap region also closed the markets, and in some areas the authorities also closed pharmacies.

Authorities forced the owners of small businesses- market vendors, retail stores, cafés, beauty salons, shoe and clock repair shops- and others to close their businesses and pick cotton. Upon request from the city officials, the business owners had to provide a form signed by the farmer as proof of their work in the cotton fields.

The Turkmenabat region Deputy Governor ordered medium and large businesses to send employees to pick cotton during the first week of September. The business owners reported being threatened with “audit, finance department, tax inspection, fire inspection and with other similar agencies” if they refused to comply. One business owner reported he negotiated with the government officials to send 8 instead of 15 employees to the Jeyhun farm in Serdarabat region. “Over the past three years we have been ‘kindly’ asked to repair the curbs 4 times, to change the lights 3 times, and to lay asphalt 5 times,” said the business owner.

The Turkmen government also forced private bus owners to contribute, by transporting forced laborers to the cotton fields. The private bus drivers supplemented the use of public buses, which were diverted from their usual routes to take people to the fields throughout the harvest. The police pulled over and took away the licenses of any drivers who refused to comply. Furthermore, disputes regularly broke out between farmers and bus drivers, who demanded payment for transporting the cotton pickers, between 50 - 100 manats (\$17 - \$35). The farmers often refused to pay, because they did not ask for people to pick the cotton. The drivers complained that city officials demanded they transport people without paying for the service, leaving the drivers to cover the costs.

### ***Conditions in Turkmenistan's Cotton Fields in 2014***

The conditions endured by people forced to pick cotton in Turkmenistan in 2014 varied. Most reported receiving the state-assigned payment of 20 tenge (7 cents USD) per kilogram of cotton, and paying more than what they received for food. Several forced laborers reported that farmers provided warm meals and drinking water, a significant improvement from previous years, when both were lacking. Some people brought radios and danced in the evenings.

Yet a few incidents marked the acute risks associated with the forced mobilization to the cotton harvest. In September, temperatures reach 40 degrees Celsius in Turkmenistan's cotton growing regions, and ATN received 5 reports of people who suffered severe heat stroke. In Turkmenabat, a teacher repeatedly took male students of grades 7-11 to the cotton fields and sexually assaulted them. The students informed their parents, and police investigated the teacher.

### **Tainted T-Shirts: Forced Labor Cotton from Turkmenistan in Global Supply Chains**

There are two ways forced labor cotton from Turkmenistan enters global apparel supply chains. First, commodity trading companies purchase cotton from the state-owned Turkmenpagta through the Turkmen commodity exchange. The cotton is exported to major apparel sourcing centers, such as Bangladesh and China, and eventually ends up in consumer products sold on retail shelves around the world. Second, 70% of Turkmen cotton fiber was processed domestically in 2014, and state-owned companies report that they sell cotton apparel to global companies.

Textile exports account for 7-9% of Turkmenistan's national income. Companies from Turkey, South Korea and Japan are the main private investors in the Turkmen textile sector. According to the Ministry of Textiles, 32 textile companies produced 200,000 tons of yarn, 190 million square meters of cotton fabric, 11,000 tons of knitted fabric, 8,000 tons of woven fabric, and 80 million units of garments in 2013. Furthermore, by 2020 the Turkmen government plans to invest in a processing plant in each cotton growing district, double yarn production, and increase fabric production four times.

Among Turkmenistan's textile factories is the joint venture "Turkmenbashy Textile Complex," owned by the Turkish company "Chalik Holding" and Turkmen government. The textile complex reports annual sales of \$76 million of yarn, fabric and ready-made garments, 90% of which is exported. On its website, the company lists the following companies as its clients: Levi, Lee, Wrangler, Cherokee, Foot Locker, Nautica, Wal-Mart, Target, VF Corporation, Marc Ecko (USA); H&M, Lindex, Gekås Ullared (Sweden); Tesco, Debenhams (United Kingdom); Celio, La Redoute (France); Mango, Bershka, Lefties (Spain); C&A (the Netherlands); X-Side (Poland); LC Waikiki (Turkey).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.turkmen-jeans.com/index.php?lang=en>.

## **Turkmenistan's Agriculture system**

The government of Turkmenistan maintains total control over the cotton sector. It owns the land<sup>7</sup> and the state-owned bank “Dayhanbank” manages all financial transactions in the cotton sector. Reporting to President Berdymuhamedov, the regional governors oversee the Farmers Associations, which manage farmers, and the local-level officials, which mobilize other citizens to harvest cotton. The state-owned company Turkmenpagta has a monopoly over cotton purchasing from farmers and cotton sales. The government does not report total sales, income or allocations of income from cotton. At every level, the system exploits farmers and the general population for the benefit of the central government.

Turkmenistan has approximately 19,000 square kilometers of arable land, just under 4% of its total area. The government leases land to farmers for 1-5 years, depending on the region, and farms average 2.5 hectares.

Under the legislation on private farmers and enterprises,<sup>8</sup> the government dictates use of the land through Farmers Associations.<sup>9</sup> Farmers Associations may take away a farmer's right to use the land for “irrational and inappropriate use,” under the law.<sup>10</sup> In practice, the Turkmen government orders cotton and wheat production on three quarters of the arable land, and Farmers Associations take away land from farmers for many reasons, including local officials personal views on a farmer concerned. Since 2009 the state has set a fixed production quota of 2 tons of cotton per hectare.

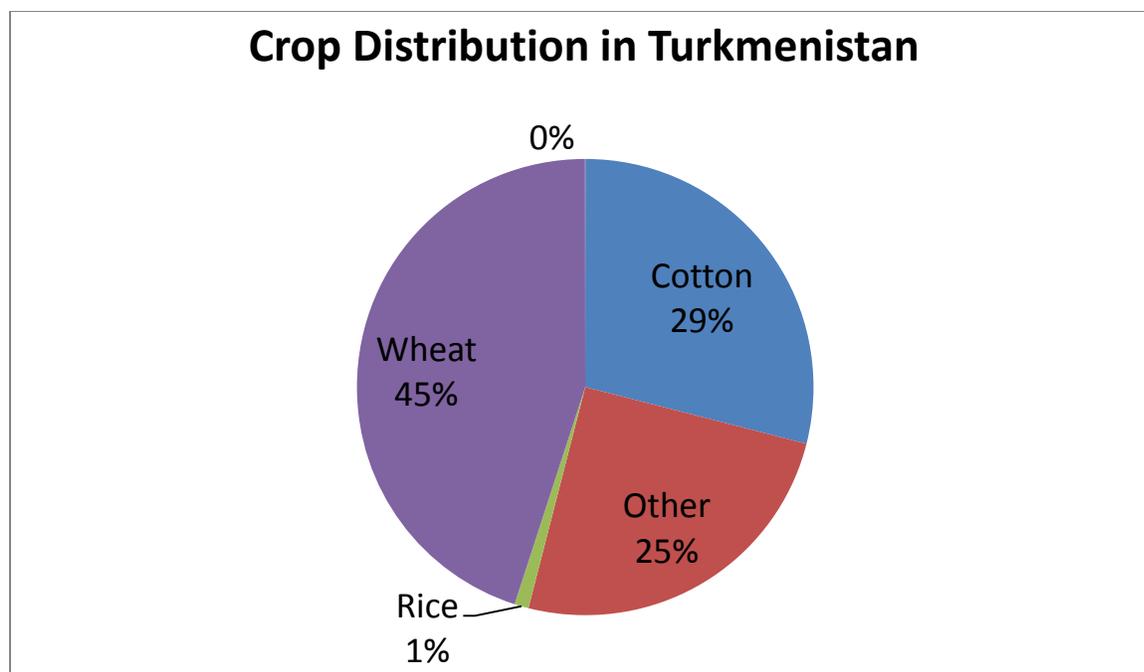
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<sup>7</sup> From 1995 - 2005, the Turkmen government transferred plots of 3-4 hectares to private individual ownership. Yet only as much as 750 hectares were transferred; only 15 people received land ownership; and the Turkmen government stopped transfers to private ownership in 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Justice of Turkmenistan, [http://minjust.gov.tm/ru/mmerkezi/doc\\_view.php?doc\\_id=649](http://minjust.gov.tm/ru/mmerkezi/doc_view.php?doc_id=649) (Accessed April 3, 2015)

<sup>9</sup> In 1995, the Turkmen government replaced Soviet-established collective farms with Farmers Associations and tenant farmers. Since, individual farmers lease land from the government, and the Farmers Associations enforce state-assigned cotton, wheat and rice quotas.

<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Justice of Turkmenistan, [http://minjust.gov.tm/ru/mmerkezi/doc\\_view.php?doc\\_id=8375](http://minjust.gov.tm/ru/mmerkezi/doc_view.php?doc_id=8375) and [http://minjust.gov.tm/ru/mmerkezi/doc\\_view.php?doc\\_id=14663](http://minjust.gov.tm/ru/mmerkezi/doc_view.php?doc_id=14663) (Accessed April 3, 2015)



The state-owned Turkmenpagta manages procurement and sales of cotton, and the state-owned Dayhanbank manages financial flows in the cotton sector. The bank's chairman is appointed by President Berdymuhamedov. Annually, Dayhanbank manages credit lines on behalf of Turkmenpagta and in the names of farmers. The farmers purchases inputs for cotton cultivation with checks under their respective credit lines at Dayhanbank. Yet often Farmers Associations physically hold the checkbooks and in fact charge farmers' accounts for tractors, inputs or other services never provided, resulting in payments to themselves or peers.

During the cotton harvest, Dayhanbank pays into farmers' accounts for cotton delivered daily, and after the harvest the bank settles each farmers' account, in December and January. However, most farmers never see the contract stipulating the procurement price and other terms. The Farmers Associations hold the cotton procurement contracts, leaving the farmers in the dark when settling their accounts.

Since 2007, the state-established cotton procurement price has remained 1,040 manats per ton of Upland cotton (95% of cotton grown in Turkmenistan) and 1,500 manats per ton of Pima or long-fiber cotton, despite substantial depreciation of the manat.<sup>11</sup> Between January and May 2015, the depreciation of the manat has devalued these prices 20%, so a ton of Upland cotton that was \$365 in 2014 is now only \$297.

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<sup>11</sup> Until the end of 2014 the rate of a Turkmen manat to a U.S. dollar was at 2.85 manats to 1 USD. Since January 2015 the manat has devalued and now 1 USD equals to 3.5 manats.

Farmers report much more explicit exploitation throughout the annual cotton production process. State owned companies maintain monopolies over inputs. Obahyzmat is the only source for agricultural equipment, and farmers report it regularly charges for services never provided. Turkmendokun is the only source for fertilizers, and farmers report it charges farmers for more fertilizer than it delivers and cuts fertilizers with fillers. The state owned gins are responsible for transporting cotton from farms to gins and for weighing, grading and recording cotton delivered by the farmers. Farmers report the gin managers fail to transport the cotton yet still charge farmers for the service and then record less volume and a lower grade cotton than what the farmer delivers. A farmer in Mary Region explained,

“The gin staff never under-records the amount delivered by farmers whose relatives are prosecutors, security officers, or high-ranking government officials. For ordinary farmers, it is useless to argue, even though we know we are being cheated. The gin staff under-record the cotton delivered and then sell the excess cotton to farmers who do not fulfill their quotas. Farmers are cheated everywhere, not only at the gins. In the final payment, officials charge 3% extra for local taxes and deducts for all kinds of things, even magazine subscriptions. Then they tell us, ‘Don’t spoil relations with us. We contribute to your success, and you don’t lose much for this small amount.’”

While official statements often claim that farmers earn substantial income, in fact Turkmen farmers receive less than a dollar per day, as demonstrated by the example below.

According to a presidential decree, farmers who exceed cotton quotas are eligible to receive a premium rate 30% above the regular state procurement price and allowed to sell the excess cotton through the national commodity exchange to either domestic or international buyers.<sup>12</sup> Yet farmers must register with the State Commodity Exchange and pay duties to trade on the exchange, and most farmers are not even aware of these options, let alone informed adequately to participate.

Turkmenpagta manages all 36 state-owned cotton gins in Turkmenistan. Turkmenpagta does not report the volume of cotton it receives. Similarly, the commodity exchange does not report on total cotton sales, and the Central Bank does not report on income from cotton sales. Therefore, the farmers and general population have no idea much income they generate laboring in the cotton fields, much less how the government spends cotton income.

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<sup>12</sup> Decree "On ensuring cultivation of high cotton yields in Turkmenistan, and economic stimulation of cotton producers" in force since January 20, 2012

**Sample income statement of a Turkmen farmer:**

<b>FARMER'S INCOME STATEMENT</b>					
<b>Revenues:</b>		<b>In Turkmen Manats</b>		<b>In USD</b>	
<i>Yield, ton/ha</i>				1.8	
<i>Procurement price, USD/ton</i>	<i>TMM</i>	1,040.25	\$	365.00	
<b>Revenues:</b>	<i>TMM</i>	1,872.45	\$	657.00	
<b>Expenses:</b>					
<i>Mechanical services</i>	<i>TMM</i>	273.60	\$	96.00	(50% state subsidy)
<i>Irrigation</i>	<i>TMM</i>	34.20	\$	12.00	
<i>Seeds</i>	<i>TMM</i>	96.90	\$	34.00	(50% state subsidy)
<i>Fertilizers</i>	<i>TMM</i>	353.40	\$	124.00	(50% state subsidy)
<i>Defoliation</i>	<i>TMM</i>	59.85	\$	21.00	
<i>Plant protection (chemical, biological)</i>	<i>TMM</i>	119.70	\$	42.00	(50% state subsidy)
<i>Cotton transportation</i>	<i>TMM</i>	71.25	\$	25.00	
<i>Overhead administration</i>	<i>TMM</i>	131.10	\$	46.00	
<i>Social insurance</i>	<i>TMM</i>	105.45	\$	37.00	
<i>Newspaper subscription</i>	<i>TMM</i>	19.95	\$	7.00	
<i>Red Crescent Society Fund</i>	<i>TMM</i>	5.70	\$	2.00	
<i>Water Rescue Society Fund</i>	<i>TMM</i>	5.70	\$	2.00	
<i>Nature Protection Fund</i>	<i>TMM</i>	5.70	\$	2.00	
<i>Tips to drivers and cotton quality laboratory</i>	<i>TMM</i>	57.00	\$	20.00	
<i>Bank fees</i>	<i>TMM</i>	34.20	\$	12.00	
<b>Total expenses</b>	<i>TMM</i>	1,373.70	\$	482.00	
Expenses covered by state	<i>TMM</i>	421.80	\$	148.00	
Farmer's expenses	<i>TMM</i>	951.90	\$	334.00	
<b>Total income</b>	<b><i>TMM</i></b>	<b>920.55</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>323.00</b>	

**Human Rights Context in Turkmenistan**

State-orchestrated forced labor in Turkmenistan occurs in the context of an appalling human rights situation in Turkmenistan. The United Nations Committee Against Torture reported it “is deeply concerned over the numerous and consistent allegations about the widespread practice of torture and ill-treatment of detainees...persons deprived of their liberty are tortured, ill-treated and threatened by public officers, especially at the moment of apprehension and during pretrial

detention, to extract confessions and as an additional punishment after the confession.”<sup>13</sup> The UN Committee on Civil and Political Rights reported the Turkmen government “systematically does not respect the right to freedom of expression” and “expresses concern at reports of the harassment and intimidation of journalists and human rights defenders.”<sup>14</sup> The UN Committee Economic, Social and Cultural Rights reported it “is concerned that that the National Trade Union Centre is the only trade union in the State party, that it is controlled by the Government of Turkmenistan, and that the absence of independent trade unions may lead to various violations of workers’ rights.”<sup>15</sup> Leading human rights organizations, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, also report the Turkmen government is responsible for hundreds of forced disappearances; denies freedoms of association, movement, expression and religion; and refuses cooperation with United Nations human rights bodies.<sup>16</sup>

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The government of Turkmenistan violates international and national laws by forcing farmers and other citizens to work in the cotton sector. In 2014, officials forced tens of thousands of public- and private-sector workers to pick cotton under threats of losing their jobs or salary.

Out of fear of reprisals, Turkmen people do not resist orders to participate in the cotton production. The fear is reinforced by the general climate of oppression and human rights violation, where the state denies civic and political rights, freedom of association and expression, and holds citizens in incommunicado detention merely for raising concerns. High unemployment levels strengthen the impact of the authorities’ threats of dismissal for non-participation in the harvest or docked pay.

Alternative Turkmenistan News urges the Turkmen government to end its use of forced labor and calls on the international community to use its influence to press the Turkmen government to reform.

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<sup>13</sup> United Nations Committee Against Torture, “Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 19 of the Convention: Concluding observations of the Committee against Torture- Turkmenistan,” CAT/C/TKM/CO/1, 15 June 2011,

[http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CAT/C/TKM/CO/1&Lang=En](http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CAT/C/TKM/CO/1&Lang=En)

<sup>14</sup> United Nations Human Rights Committee, “Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 40 of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: Concluding observations of the Human Rights Committee- Turkmenistan,” CCPR/C/TKM/CO/1, 19 April 2012,

[http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR/C/TKM/CO/1&Lang=En](http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR/C/TKM/CO/1&Lang=En)

<sup>15</sup> United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, “Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant- Turkmenistan,” E/C.12/TKM/CO/1, 13 December 2011,

[http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E/C.12/TKM/CO/1&Lang=En](http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E/C.12/TKM/CO/1&Lang=En)

<sup>16</sup> See <http://provetheyalive.org/>, <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2015/country-chapters/turkmenistan>, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/turkmenistan/report-turkmenistan/>

***Recommendations:***

To the Government of Turkmenistan:

- 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;
- Permit citizens to report human rights concerns about the use of forced labor without fear of retaliation;
- Invite the International Labour Organization to monitor forced labor during the 2015 cotton harvest with unfettered access and the participation of the International Trade Union Confederation and International Organisation of Employers;
- 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.

To the United States and European Union:

- Urge the Turkmen government to end state-sponsored forced labor in bilateral meetings and reports;
- Place Turkmenistan in Tier 3 of the US Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report;
- Require the Turkmen government to demonstrate concrete progress towards the elimination of forced labor prior to signing Partnership Cooperation Agreement with the European Union; and
- Exercise 'voice and vote' at the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development to prevent any investment that would benefit the Turkmen government's forced-labor system for cotton production.

To the World Bank and Asian Development Bank:

- Require the Turkmen government to demonstrably implement its laws prohibiting forced labor prior to consideration of any projects in the Turkmen agriculture sector.

To Multinational Companies:

- Investigate and disclose any cotton from Turkmenistan in the company's supply chain; and
- Prepare to replace cotton from Turkmenistan if the Turkmen government continues the forced labor system of cotton production.