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**CHRONICLE OF FORCED LABOUR IN UZBEKISTAN
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Posted on the 30th of May, 2016

In Uzbekistan the weeding of the cotton fields began at the end of April and is expected to continue until early June. The Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights is monitoring the Uzbek government's use of forced labour to complete the field work. UGF is monitoring in 6 of the 13 regions of Uzbekistan. In this Chronicle, we present findings gathered by UGF monitors and independent media reports.

State-led forced labor of public-sector workers and university students to complete weeding of the cotton fields is widespread this year, following the pattern of previous years. To clear the fields, officials have mobilized the majority of public institutions in all regions monitored. The district governors have conducted meetings in which the directors of schools, hospitals and other public institutions had to report the number of employees they sent to the cotton fields.

Clearing the cotton fields of weeds in the springtime does not require as much manpower as the autumn cotton harvest. Yet the Uzbek government has mobilized approximately 10-20% of public-sector employees, primarily from schools and hospitals, to weed the cotton fields for 5-10 day shifts. Furthermore, schools require all staff to weed the cotton fields during weekends.

The government does not compensate the people mobilized to weed the cotton fields for their field work.

School and hospital administrators have offered to sell exemptions from the field work, and most of the public employees interviewed by UGF monitors said that they would prefer to pay rather than weed the fields. The administrators ostensibly use the payments to hire day labourers to do the field work, but there is no accounting for the payments. According to preliminary data, for one employee of a large institution one season of weeding costs 10-30 dollars (depending on the number of employees and the fields they have to work on).

Public-sector workers report difficulties obtaining cash for their expenses. In order to "cash out" money from the bank card, people need to pay fees in the amount of 10-15% of the amount they want to withdraw. Several people have told that they had to borrow money in order to be able to pay for their weeding.

As UGF monitors and independent media found during this springtime weeding season, the public-sector workers and private businesses understand that they will be penalized if they do not fulfil orders to weed the cotton fields. They report dismissals and fines levied against those who refuse or fail to contribute enough. This use of coercion to mobilize people to work for agricultural production violates the International Labour Organization Convention No. 105, under which the Uzbek government committed to “not make use of any form of forced or compulsory labour as a method of mobilising and use labour for purposes of economic development” when it ratified the convention in 1997.



(<http://uzbekgermanforum.org/chronicle-of-forced-labour-in-uzbekistan/photo-1-copy/>)

Photo: A cotton field with a pumpkins planted between the vines. Authorities request a farmer to do it.

Uzbek officials forcibly mobilized teachers and school staff to weed the cotton fields

In each region monitored by UGF, Uzbek government officials have forced teachers and staff of schools to contribute to clearing weeds from the cotton fields.

In the Syrdarya region, starting April 24 the regional governor and district officials mobilized school staff and teachers in the Okoltin, Mirzaobod, Bayavut and Pakhtaobod districts. Officials mobilized staff of other public sector institutions as well. In the Bayavut district alone, at least 50 schools lost teachers and staff to the cotton fields. During weekdays, officials sent approximately 15% of each school's staff, and during weekends approximately 65%. The school administrator sent teachers on “methodology” days, when the teachers are not teaching classes. Sydarya region officials told the teachers and staff that the field work is public service and therefore not compensated. Some teachers had to pay for their transportation. All the teachers feared punishment if they did not complete the field work assigned to them, had to work on their days off, and paid for food expenses. [Source: UGF monitors in Syrdarya region.]

A middle-school teacher from the city of Gulistan in Syrdarya region reported:

“We started to participate in the cotton weeding on April 26. Every day at 6.30am, we gathered near the building of the city administration, or near the City Department of Public Education. Among us were employees from 16 city schools, nurses and kindergarten teachers. We were registered and then went to the field by bus. The travel by bus was free for us. For example, from our school about 6-7 of the 20 teachers went to the weeding for 5 days. Teachers who stayed in school did the work for the colleagues that had left. Every day we had to bring our lunch with us. We worked until 16.00. We had been told this was collective work, so we received no money for the weeding. Because of this, no one wants to work on the field. Therefore, representatives from the City District Office of Education come with us to the field and urge us to work harder, better and faster. We get a norm, a certain size of land to weed by the end of the day. We are afraid that if we cannot fulfil the quota, the school director will take action.” [Source: Interview with UGF monitors in Syrdarya region.]

A secondary school teachers in Syrdarya region reported:

“On May 15, even though it was Sunday, all teachers from our school were told to go weed the cotton fields. We are not allowed to rest even for one day per week. All costs have to be paid at our own expenses. Although the busses to the field are free, in order to get to the collection point so early in the morning you have to get a taxi. In general, weeding for me in every respect means additional costs and extra work.” [Source: Interview with UGF monitors in Syrdarya region.]

On May 21-22, the schools and hospitals of Gulistan city in Syrdarya region sent approximately 25% of staff to weed cotton fields. Under orders from their administrators, the public-sector workers gathered at 7:00 AM near the City Department of Public Education and were bussed to the cotton fields. They worked from 7:30 AM until 5:00 PM. A secondary teacher reported,

“May 22 was supposed to be a day off. I was participating in the competition for ‘The best teacher of the year.’ I prepared all the necessary materials to submit to the Regional Department of Public Education. But the director did not allow me to participate. The quality of education does not matter to them, not the achievements of the teacher are important, is the only important thing is cotton and now to weed the fields... “

In the Ferghana region, officials extorted payments from teachers to cover the costs of labor needed to weed the cotton fields. In early May, the regional governor and district mayors ordered education and health-care staff to weed cotton, during meetings convened in several districts throughout Ferghana. The teachers met together, and after consulting the farmers in their districts proposed to their administrators that they pay instead of doing the field work. The school teachers paid 2,000 soums (≈ \$ 0,67) each, and the school administrators and district officials allocated the funds to farmers to hire local workers to weed the fields, for approximately 15,000 soums (≈ \$5) per day. [Source: UGF monitors in Ferghana region.]

In the Jizzakh region, school administrators sent staff to weed cotton fields and plant pumpkins, starting May 2. The teachers and school staff were required to work a 10-hour day in the fields with a 3-hour lunch break. Approximately 15 teachers from each school worked in the fields each day, although one middle school sent 50 teachers and staff. Administrators ordered the teachers to plant pumpkins some days, instead of weeding the cotton fields. [Source: UGF monitors in Jizzakh]

In the Muynak district of Karakalpakstan, schools and kindergartens sent staff to weed cotton fields in the Qonlikul district, starting May 10. The fields are 80 kilometers from the school district, so the schools sent staff for 10-day shifts. The teachers had to pay for their transportation to the fields. A

teacher from the No. 1 school “Lomonosov” in the Muynak district said, “Teachers always need to help farmers, whether it is weeding or picking cotton. Last year the same time we participated in weeding, and in autumn we picked cotton.” A teacher from the No. 2 nursery school said, “If a farmer is good, he prepares some food for us for lunch. Otherwise, we have to buy food. They don’t even cover travel costs, and they pay salary on a bank card. To get cash, we have to pay 13-15%.” An official from the Muynak government administration (hokimiyat) said, “It is not our own desire. This is a verbal order from the Council of Ministers. We also wish the teachers could do their job, but we must follow orders.” [Source: *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty “Ozodlik”*, 13 May 2016, <http://www.ozodlik.org/content/chopiq-pakhta/27732739.html> (<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/chopiq-pakhta/27732739.html>)]

In the city of Angren in Tashkent region, officials at each public institution mobilized some of their employees to weed cotton fields in Buka and Chinaz districts of the region. The public-sector workers did not receive payment for the field work, so many hired day laborers to do the field work for them. One worker reported, “This happens every year, but it is particularly strict this year. Everyone has to go for a shift in the fields.” An Angren resident reported, “We were told that two employees of the Ministry of Emergency Situations of Tashkent region were dismissed because they refused to participate in the weeding.” The MES office confirmed their staff was weeding the cotton fields but denied that anyone was fired. Yet an MES employee said,

“15 people work in our department. We were sent to work in the fields in Chinaz district. Every day, 8 – 9 people go on weeding. We are all liable for military service, so there is a special control. 100% of all workers should participate in weeding. These two employees did not take part, but hired mardikors (seasonal workers) instead. The boss found out about it and requested them to write a letter of resignation. But finally, they had not been fired, but I am not aware about the reason. They continue to work, but everyone was warned to work in the fields personally, and not to hire seasonal workers; otherwise we will be fired.” [Source: *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty “Ozodlik”*, 11 May 2016, <http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/27728428.html> (<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/27728428.html>)]

A nurse at the Drug Dependence Clinic of Angren reported its administration ordered staff to pay for replacement workers, so that the clinic could operate normally. The nurse said,

“We paid 130,000 soums (≈ \$43,50) for five days of weeding. They said that would be enough to hire a seasonal worker. Yet each of us in the clinic must pay and continue our work. Our salary is transferred to a bank card, and we have to pay cash for the weeding. Where can we get cash? Many borrow money to pay for the weeding.” [Source: *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty “Ozodlik”*, 11 May 2016, <http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/27728428.html> (<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/27728428.html>)]

Officials forcibly mobilized students to weed cotton fields and to clean roads

Jizzakh Pedagogical Institute sent approximately 150 students to weed cotton fields on May 20. The school administration required teachers to pay for the bus that transported the students to the fields. [Source: UGF monitors in Jizzakh]

Nukus University sent students to clean the roads connecting Nukus and Akshalak village in Karakalpakstan, to prepare for a visit by President Islam Karimov to a new gas plant UzKorGazChemical on the Ustyurt plateau. A student reported, "Since May 2 we almost do not have lessons. The president will come for the opening of the plant in Akshalak. Therefore, we are busy with cleaning the roads from Nukus to the plant. Our teachers said this is community work and will continue another week." According to another resident, the students had to pay for their travel and food expenses to complete the assigned road work. [Source: *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty "Ozodlik"*, 12 May 2016, <http://www.ozodlik.org/content/karimov-nukus-uzkorgazchemical-talaba-majburiy-mehnat/27730749.html> (<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/karimov-nukus-uzkorgazchemical-talaba-majburiy-mehnat/27730749.html>)]

Officials obliged hospital directors to manage cotton field preparation

Officials in the Jizzakh and Syrdarya regions ordered administrators of schools, hospitals and health-care clinics to manage weeding and preparation of cotton fields. Under the officials' orders, the administrators had to ensure farms assigned to them would be cleared of weeds and irrigated and record the farms' expected yields. As a result, the administrators had to mobilize their staff of teachers, doctors and nurses to weed the fields, or force them to contribute money to use to hire field workers. [Source: UGF monitors in Jizzakh and Syrdarya]

Officials continue coercing farmers to produce state agricultural orders

According to farmers in the Jizzakh region, officials have threatened them with penalties if they plant too much of their farm with non-cotton crops. The farmers reported that the price they receive for cotton does not cover their costs to produce it, leaving them in debt, so they planted higher-value crops to earn income for their families. Yet local officials harassed them during this spring season for planting vegetables on even 10% of their farms. [Source: UGF monitors in Jizzakh region]

The mayor of the Alat district in Bukhara region, Sherali Salomov, assaulted and then arrested a farmer during a cotton production planning meeting in May, according to the chairman of the neighborhood committee (Makhalla) who witnessed the event. After castigating the farmer, Bahodir Sharipov, for chewing gum, Mayor Salomov hit him and cursed him before ordering the police to arrest him. The police then detained the farmer in jail for eight days. The committee chairman added,

"The mayor has a weird temper. If he is in a bad mood he finds reason to insult or beat anyone who catches his eye. Both the prosecutor and the chief of the police see it, but they ignore it. We keep silence too; otherwise he would have us arrested." [Source: *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty "Ozodlik"*, 18 May 2016, <http://www.ozodlik.org/content/kaltakladi-urdi-zuravon/27740574.html> (<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/kaltakladi-urdi-zuravon/27740574.html>)]

Farmers also reported concerns about state-assigned quotas for wheat production. In an interview with *Radio Ozodlik*, a farmer said "No farmer will violate the terms of the contract of his own will, yet they are not interested in objective reasons. The other day, when we were irrigating wheat fields, strong wind started, and 15 – 20 % of the grain was eliminated. This means there will be less crop. We invited representatives from the Department of Agriculture. They say we do not care, we will not reduce the

plan, not by a single quintal.” While the Uzbek government has controlled all purchasing and pricing of cotton and wheat for years, the farmers report that the government has extended the state-order system to fruits and vegetables this year. [Source: Official media

<http://podrobno.uz/cat/obchestvo/v-uzbekistane-budut-silnee-shtrafovat-fermerov-za-nevypolnenie-obyazatelstv-/> (<http://podrobno.uz/cat/obchestvo/v-uzbekistane-budut-silnee-shtrafovat-fermerov-za-nevypolnenie-obyazatelstv-/>) and *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty “Ozodlik”*, 12 May 2016, <http://www.ozodlik.org/content/uzbekistan-fermer-plan-jarima/27730644.html> (<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/uzbekistan-fermer-plan-jarima/27730644.html>)]



(<http://uzbekgermanforum.org/chronicle-of-forced-labour-in-uzbekistan/pumpkin-next-to-cotton/>)
Photo: A cotton field with a pumpkin planted on the side. Authorities request farmers to do it.

In early May the Uzbek government began mobilizing farmers and public-sector workers to plant horticulture crops in a similar manner to the mobilization for cotton production. According to articles published by the official media [Source: Official media http://uza.uz/ru/business/eksport-plodoovoshchnoy-produktsii-vozhraetaet-12-05-2016?ELEMENT_CODE=eksport-plodoovoshchnoy-produktsii-vozhraetaet-12-05-2016&SECTION_CODE=business&print=Y (http://uza.uz/ru/business/eksport-plodoovoshchnoy-produktsii-vozhraetaet-12-05-2016?ELEMENT_CODE=eksport-plodoovoshchnoy-produktsii-vozhraetaet-12-05-2016&SECTION_CODE=business&print=Y), 12 May 2016], the government began a reduction in cotton planting and increase in planting of fruits and vegetables. According to residents, in Andijan region officials ordered farmers to plant pumpkins along roadsides and in cotton fields, and mobilized employees of state-owned factories region to help as field workers. A farmer in the Asaka district of Andijan reported to UGF’s monitor that a governmental delegation arrived from Tashkent, toured his grape vineyard, and ordered him to plant pumpkins between the vines. Notably, the diversification of

crops is a goal of World Bank-funded projects in Uzbekistan, for which the Uzbek government committed to respect and enforce laws prohibiting forced and child labor. Yet the mobilization of farmers and public-sector workers by officials to plant pumpkins this spring raises a concern that the government may be expanding its forced-labor system throughout the agricultural sector.

Officials coerce private businesses to contribute to agricultural production

This spring, Uzbek officials continued to punish business owners who did not contribute enough to the 2015 cotton harvest, and coerced businesses to support production of pumpkins.

Assia Schatilova, the owner of a small shop in the city of Chirchik, claimed that her business was ruined because of her refusal to pay 750 thousand som (\$120) during the cotton harvest in the autumn of 2015. Here is her account [Source: *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty "Ozodlik"*, 30 April 2016, <http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/27708613.html> (<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/27708613.html>)]:

"I have owned a small shop since 2009. I paid all taxes, the rental costs and purchased the license for entrepreneurial activity. I conducted my business as required by law. Last year, when the cotton harvest started, I was told to pay over 750 thousand som for cotton. I refused. I am a single mother with two children, I have to feed and clothe them, I pay taxes, why should I have to pay for cotton?"

"Because of my refusal, on December 29, most of my property was seized. The deputy governor of the city of Chirchik, the chief of the city police and someone from the tax office came to my shop. They simply took a product from the shop in the value of approximately 85-90 million som (\$15000). They took away my property for nothing, without a reason, without showing an order of confiscation. When they entered the store, I asked them who they were. In response, the police chief shoved me, I hit and damaged my finger straining a tendon and I am still being treated for it."

"On March 28, officers from the Tashkent regional tax office came back to check the financial documents of my store. They brought some paper, an unsigned photocopy, a document ostensibly to conduct a tax audit. They seized the remaining items in the store worth about 7.5 million som (\$1300). Now I have to close my shop."

"Me and my two children were left without a livelihood. My children cried and asked why it happened. They kept asking, when there were so many people who traded without any permits, why would they go against me? My only fault is that I refused to pay the contribution for cotton."

Managers and employees of the JSC Cereal Products company in Asaka reported that the Uzbek Prime Minister ordered their company to plant pumpkins and assigned them a field to use. Following the orders, 100 staff members a day planted pumpkins on a 40-acre farm in Ulugnor district in Andijan region for two weeks. "Every day 100 people go to the field and squat, planting mumpkin. I do not understand why there is so much attention to the pumpkin this year," said an employee. [Source: *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty "Ozodlik"*, 4 May 2016, <http://www.ozodlik.org/content/uzbekistan-meva-sabzavot/27715476.html> (<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/uzbekistan-meva-sabzavot/27715476.html>)]

The company JSC Uzdonmahsulot in Andijan also received orders to plant pumpkins, reported its employees. "Our company hired 5 – 6 agronomists, and we go to the fields and plant there pumpkins. This work is mandatory. They said, if we will not take part, we'll be fired. 40 people from our mill are

working in Asaka district. The administration says that we have to plant pumpkin on a 2-kilometer bed.” An official from the Andijan regional administration office confirmed the practice,

“This is an order from the government throughout the country. You know that our president has recently visited Russia and signed contracts. So now, they say every day at the meetings, that every organization has to get the piece of land and plant there pumpkin.” [Source: *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty* “Ozodlik”, 4 May 2016, <http://www.ozodlik.org/content/uzbekistan-meva-sabzavot/27715476.html> (<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/uzbekistan-meva-sabzavot/27715476.html>)]

The company JSC Uzdonmahsulot has not paid its employees since February and also ordered them to plant pumpkins in early May. Additionally, the company required the employees to manufacture pesticide spraying devices for farmers. The deputy chairman of the company Boburzhon confirmed part of the employees’ reports, saying, “On Prime Minister’s order, our employees went for two days to plant pumpkin. But we do not engage them in other work. We pay salary in time.” [Source: *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty* “Ozodlik”, 7 May 2016, <http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/27721363.html> (<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/27721363.html>)]

These days, in all regions of the country, directors of public organizations have been instructed by the local authorities to send “helpers” to the cotton fields. Despite the decrease of cultivated cotton fields, the government expects that in 2016 3.3 million tonnes of cotton will be produced.

In an interview with radio Ozodlik, a middle school teacher from the Jalakuduk district in the Andijan region said that school staff these days had to go to the fields to clean them from weeds. In case they refuse, they are threatened with dismissal.

“The school director held a meeting and ordered everyone to participate in the weeding. We came to work in white shirts and ties, and now we are told to “go to the fields.” Even if you have a University degree, it does not matter, they say: If you do not go to the weeding, empty your place, other employees will come. So we are frightened. We are forced to go to the field, to prevent us from losing our jobs. In fact, we are just free labourers. “

Currently, there are no reports of school and college students involved in the field work.

Officials from the Department of Education of the Andijan region do not hide the fact that teachers participated in the weeding.

“Farmers themselves cannot cope with the load. To help them, teachers voluntarily go to the fields. Only students are not allowed to work”, said an official from the Department of Education of the Jalakuduk district in the Andijan region. .”

[Source: *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty* “Ozodlik”, 27 May 2016

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/ozbekiston-chopiq-majburiy-mehnat/27761067.html>

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