

Uzbek - German Forum for Human Rights

**“Cotton is Politics,
Do Not Joke With It”**

**CHRONICLE OF FORCED CHILD
LABOUR IN UZBEKISTAN:
COTTON HARVEST 2010**



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SUMMARY

Forced Child labour is endemic and widespread in Uzbekistan's cotton industry and has been in place and almost unchanged since the Stalin era. Observers state that forced child labour is orchestrated by the Uzbek central government which, in turn, denies its responsibility for it. The Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights monitored the use child labour in the Uzbek cotton industry during the 2010 harvest season, producing 10 newsletters with reports from the field.

2010 was once again characterised by the use of forced child labour. From reliable sources in the country (including press reports and our own correspondents) we have seen the following:

- In the report 'Invisible to the World: the Dynamics of Forced Child Labour in the Cotton Sector of Uzbekistan' prepared by the School of Oriental and African Studies, based on the results of surveys in Autumn 2007 and released in 2008, we have received estimates that nearly 2.8 mln of Uzbekistan's schoolchildren from 5th through 11th grades are sent to the fields to pick cotton.¹ Our monitoring supports this estimate and suggests there has been little change in the number of children sent to the cotton harvest.
- Observations suggest that schoolchildren mostly from cotton producing regions, from towns and rural areas, are sent to the fields.
- Usually, schoolchildren are sent for two months, but may vary from year to year depending on weather conditions. In 2010, when the weather conditions were favourable for early cotton growth, the harvest began in early to mid-September.
- The first reports about the deployment of schoolchildren to the fields were from as early as the beginning of September (see the report from Kashkadarya and Surkhandarya). At that time, mostly older schoolchildren (grades 8-11), were sent.
- Large scale mobilization of schoolchildren began at the end of September, so that by the beginning of October most eligible students were already in the fields. Most of the kids were back to classes by November 10.
- From early October, younger schoolchildren, as young as fifth graders (age 10) were also sent, but mostly after classes in lieu of doing homework.
- Claims by representatives of the Government of Uzbekistan that children work to help their families, and at their parents' initiative, were not supported by our observations and press reports from the country. Rather, the mobilization of schoolchildren was on orders from above: the Prime Minister gave verbal instructions to local hokims who, in turn, verbally instructed school administrations to supply students to assigned farms on assigned dates.
- Every evening, local administrators held meetings in their offices in which school administrators were to report the number of children sent as well as on progress of meeting target quotas.
- Schoolchildren worked in the cotton fields under the supervision of their teachers, not their parents.

¹ The grade 5 corresponds to the age of 10 years old.

- To ensure meeting labor and harvest quotas, the administrations mobilized law enforcement – including police and prosecution officers. They attended the evening meetings at the local administration along with the farmers and school administrations, primarily to intimidate those who would defy or fail to meet quotas.
- Police and security agencies patrolled the cotton fields to prevent observation by journalists and human rights activists. Children and parents were forbidden to admit that they are forced to pick cotton. Human rights defender Yelena Uralyeva, who tried to conduct observations and monitoring, was detained and expelled from regions she travelled to.
- Most of parents obeyed orders to send their children to the field; those who disobeyed were threatened with penalties such as withdrawal of welfare subsidies, or shutting off their electricity or gas supply.
- Wealthier families were able to excuse their children from working in the cotton fields through bribes (reportedly around 100-200 thousand Uzbek soums, or roughly 70-150 US Dollars) to school administrations or to doctors who could issue a document with medical excuse.
- To enforce discipline among students and the fulfilment of daily quotas, teachers and school managers sometimes punished the children with beatings, humiliation, or additional work in the evenings and even at night. College students would be also expelled from their colleges for failing to meet daily quotas.
- The teachers themselves were forced to pick cotton and those who disobeyed were subject to physical abuse and humiliation by the local administrators. There was a report that the hokim of Jizzakh Region's Bahmal District Akmal Abdullayev , beat teachers and forced them to kiss the shoes of a prosecutor and a police officer.
- Unlike the Soviet times, when the practice of forced labor was also widespread but the state provided cotton pickers with food and medical care, today, children working in the cotton fields have often to bring their own food and water from home.
- In addition to school, college, and university students, the adult population is too subject to forced labor in the cotton fields. Those sent include mainly workers in the public sector. There are cases in which even nurses, doctors, stay-at-home housewives, nursing mothers, pensioners, police academy students, and soldiers were also sent. Imams were used to propagandize the cotton harvest in the mosque. Elders, accustomed to the repressive regime, advised youth to obey orders to pick cotton: 'Cotton is politics, don't mess with it.'

School Bell for the Cotton Harvest

The first bell rang in schools across Uzbekistan. "The first bell in rural schools not only means that children are back in school, but it also means that the cotton harvest season has begun for schoolchildren and their teachers " - according to Fakhridin Akhmedov (not his real name) a teacher from a Sariosiyo district school.

- Imagine that two months are counted as an entire academic term and the first term of the school year is spent picking cotton. You register students and teachers who are picking cotton as being present in class and even mark them with better grades if they pick cotton really well , - says the teacher from Sariosiyo .

This year, the cotton harvest in Uzbekistan will be done mostly by students from schools and colleges. According to a teacher from Kashkadarya province, Chiroqchi district, who asked that we not reveal his name, the director of his school instructed teachers to prepare schoolchildren to go to the fields to pick cotton.

- Today is the first day back at school. And we need to prepare the children to pick cotton. We need to take them to the fields. Poor kids wear their nice, new clothing. After two -three days they are made to pick cotton with the same clothing - says the teacher from Chiroqchi.

The teacher from Sariosiyo says that children pick cotton in fields close to the school. And teachers are sent in groups to districts that are further away:

- To date, a list of teachers is drawn up and starting September 3, an average of 15 teachers from each school will pick cotton for 15 days. We are lodged in a hut in field. We were there last year during the harvest. The food and water is no good. We lay a blanket on the concrete floor and that's where we sleep. There is no drinking water. The water is salty. You can't bathe there. The conditions are very bad. We have no choice , we go for 15 days and try to cope. Cotton picking is state policy , as you know , - says the teacher from Sariosiyo .

The teacher from Chiroqchi says that during the cotton season, nearly all classes are cancelled; the teachers don't teach – and are essentially cotton pickers for the season :

- You see, the teachers aren't ever at school. We were told to spend 10 to 15 days in the desert . We go and live there waiting for those 10 days to pass. The second group of teachers does the same. Instead of teaching, we spend that time picking cotton - says the teacher from Chiroqchi .

Source : Ozodlik , 02/09/2010
<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/2146659.html>

“We Won't Take Kids to the Cotton Fields”: The Value of the Word of the District Governor

Kimsanboy Mamasoliev the Mayor of the Ferghana region's Besharik district said on TV that he would send students from his district pick cotton this year. He said: "We have enough workers to harvest the crop , and as child labour is prohibited according to national and international standards, they should not work. "

The former Mayor of the Ferghana region Mr. Nurmatov said the same thing; nevertheless, schoolchildren were still sent to the fields to work during the cotton harvest.

Source : Independent News Agency Harakat , 06/09/2010
http://www.harakat.net/el_news.php?id=6673&from=0

College Students Mobilized

From 7 September, high school students from Syrdaryo were sent to pick cotton. Most college students in Uzbekistan are already working in the cotton fields. Apparently, officials in Tashkent have forgotten about the various international obligations they signed and ratified, which prohibit forced child labor.

As Isroil Rizaev the Chief of the department of Syrdaryo " Ezgulik " society said on Radio Liberty:

- Today schools were closed. 7th -8th -9th grade pupils are reportedly picking cotton in the fields. They left home in the morning for class , and went to pick cotton. For now , they are going to nearby fields. But it has been said that they're planning to take them overnight to work in fields further away after the Ramadan Eid. I was told that they received orders in the meeting which took place in the regional mayor 's office, says Isroil Rizaev .

Radio Liberty called colleges and found out that from 3 September most colleges had sent their students to the cotton fields. Among them are students of " Shirin "Energy College of Sirdayo , " Sherobod "Medical College of Surkhondaryo , Denov Medical Coolegem , " Khodjayli "Agricultural College of Karakalpaghstan . Students are between the ages of 14 and 16.

Other colleges called by Radio Liberty such as Norin Agriculture College in Namangan, agro-industry and Carpentry College of Surkhondaryo , Light Industry College in Jizzakh , Besharik Agriculture College in Ferghana, Beruniy Construction College in Karakalpaghstan , said that they are preparing for the cotton harvest season. They said that they are ready and waiting for an order to go to the cotton fields.

Source : Ozodlik , 09/07/2010
<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/2151037.html>

"Everyone Goes to Pick Cotton from Monday!"

The authorities of Denov district of Surkhondaryo region announced collective trips to harvest cotton, says Abdulla from Denov :

- On Monday , we will all go to the cotton fields. Only 8th and 9th grade pupils go for now. Others might go later. Whole colleges will go. The fields are being divided. They also divided the teachers into groups . Teachers will go to other districts for 10 days each and pick cotton. It's compulsory.

According to our listener from Surkhondaryo , the cotton season this year will not even last a month.

Source : Ozodlik , 03/09/2010
<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/2147643.html>

Teachers and School Kids Celebrate International Literacy Day in Cotton Fields

On 8 September, International Literacy Day is celebrated . But the cotton season in Uzbekistan has begun to affect teachers and schoolchildren. After the first bell to the start the school term , teachers take their pupils straight to the cotton fields.

On 6 August, teachers from Sariosiyo left for 10 days to the cotton fields in a team of " Urgent brigades ." , "Teachers swapped their professions for two months for cotton harvesting , "- says Fakhridin Ahmedov (not his real name), a teacher district in Sariosiyo .

- Today is the 6th of September, all teachers of schools in district Sariosiyo left to Sherobod Muzrobod districts and in groups of twenty . They loaded their baggage on busses and left to pick cotton. If God wills it, they will teach the first term classes of the new school year in the cotton fields.

Source : Ozodlik , 06/09/2010

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/2150163.html>

Children Forbidden to Admit that They are Forced to Pick Cotton

As Elena Urlaeva, the Uzbek human rights activists reports, in order not to disclose the information about forced child labour in Uzbekistan, a team from the mayor's and prosecutor's office, as well as from the police, are guarding the cotton fields where children are working.

Elena Urlaeva told the BBC that in Upper Chirchik district, children are picking cotton and were instructed not to tell anyone that they are working in the fields. The police deleted photos she took using on her mobile phone.

"Teachers of one of the schools in Upper Chirchik district called our organisation and reported that the schoolchildren are being taken to pick cotton for several days", says Elena Urlaeva.

In order to see it herself, Urlaeva travelled to the district not too far from Tashkent city and saw that the cotton fields where children work are strictly guarded.

"Not only by policemen, but security service agents, officers from the prosecutor, and civilians in police and camouflage uniforms with transmitters in their hands. Even though it was Sunday yesterday, children and teachers picked cotton till 5pm in the afternoon. A group of law enforcement staff supervised them", says Urlaeva.

"I went behind the field and crawled towards the children. Once I got there, I got up and started taking pictures," says Urlaeva.

According to the children, they are forbidden to say that they are picking cotton; the authorities instructed them to say that they are attending school classes. In fact, they really go to school in the mornings holding their bags, but inside the bags instead of books there is piece of bread and a bottle of clean water to drink.

"Children complained to me that for four days they have been picking cotton, that their shoes are not right for working in the field, that their arms are scratched from the bushes, and that

they are not given proper bags for cotton”, says the human rights activist.

Source: BBC, 20.09.2010

http://www.bbc.co.uk/uzbek/uzbekistan/2010/09/100920_new_child_labor_season.shtml

First Victims of the Cotton Harvest 2011

Seven people were killed on September 12th in an accident on the Urgench-Khiva highway.². A "Chevrolet Captiva" jeep crashed into a tractor trolley loaded with cotton. Three cotton pickers and passengers in the jeep were killed.

This was not the first death case during the cotton harvest. Such accidents happen during the cotton harvest and are felt particularly acutely, as populations are sent to the fields against their own will, exposing themselves to such perils.

This year's weather conditions yielded a strong cotton crop in Khorezm. As cotton is picked nearly without the use of any machinery, in order to collect the harvest before winter sets in, nearly all workers from government organizations and state-controlled businesses are sent to the fields.

State companies benefit from the use of children's labor – making the costs of cotton production low, and the profits high from the sale of the harvest.

For two decades now, the authorities force millions to the cotton fields. Sometimes, schoolchildren pick cotton during the winter month of November. They don't learn, and are behind their urban counterparts in their school studies.

Rural youth from poor families are usually sent to the fields. These children in villages suffer anemia or gastrointestinal diseases, due to poor nutrition and the unhealthy environment. Failure to go to the fields could mean that a child can be accused of being unpatriotic, be humiliated, and even beaten. 2-3 teachers supervise the children's work, and police are always nearby to maintain order.

No one cares about the well-being of the cotton pickers.

Source: [Ferghana.ru](http://www.ferghana.ru), 17.09.2010.

<http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=6729>

Minors also Mobilized

Just when the cotton harvest season has begun in Uzbekistan, London's fashion week launched, showing the latest creations made of cotton.

The Environmental Justice Foundation raises the issue of forced child labor in Uzbekistan; in a statement it says, “the Uzbek government has not honoured its promise not to force children to pick billion dollars worth of cotton harvest in the fields, and the situation seems to remain the same.”

A Uzbek human rights organisation in Jizzakh reported that this year minors are brought to the fields to harvest the cotton.

Human rights activist Bakhtiyor Khamroev told the BBC that, “From the 13th of September all lyceums, colleges and two universities were closed in Jizzakh province and students are sent to pick cotton. Students from lyceums and colleges are ages 15- 17, all minors. ...”

² in the Khorezm region of Uzbekistan

Source: BBC, 17.09.2010

http://www.bbc.co.uk/uzbek/uzbekistan/2010/09/100917_cy_uzbek_cotton_ejf.shtml

The “Shadow” Economy of Forced Student Labour

Since 16 September, nearly 15,000 students from universities in Samarkand are sent to pick cotton. They will be paid 120 som (5-6 USD cents) per kg of cotton.

As in previous years, when the cotton season approaches, students try to figure out ways to get out of participating. Some purchase a doctor’s excuse for a price of USD\$200-250. Some get out of it by sending a “mardikor” – a day labourer – in their place. The cost of a day labourer runs about USD \$5 – 7 a day.

Source: Ferghana.ru, 16.09.2010

<http://www.ferghana.ru/news.php?id=15552&mode=snews>

Mainly Children of the Poor Families to Pick Cotton

Listeners call in to “Open Mic” tell about the cotton season, and the attendant abuses and violations by the authorities they are destined to suffer.

Jasurbek from Khorezm called in to report that schoolchildren were sent to pick cotton and that “mayors and school principals have no shame in financially benefiting at the expense of the children. “For example, if 100 children are supposed to go to pick cotton only 50 go. The school principal charges the other 50 for not going. Only poor children pick cotton. Rich children pay the school director 100-150 thousand som. The principal gives the money to the mayor of the district. “

Radio Liberty: How old are the children who pick cotton in Khorezm?

- Children in the 7th grade and older go. Younger children go only for the day – leaving for the fields in the morning and coming home in the evening. The older go for longer periods – living in empty quarters that have no water or gas. They’re poorly fed. The conditions are bad. They sleep in the cold. Rich families wouldn’t sent their children – wouldn’t want them living in these unhealthy conditions. But poor people don’t have 100- 200 thousand som to buy their way out of it. And their health suffers.

Source: Ozodlik, 15.09.2010

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/2158699.html>

All Schools Closed in Khoesrm: All for Cotton Harvest

On 13 September, children were told that the harvest season began, that classes were cancelled, and were sent to the fields. Children in the 5th through 9th grades come to school each day, and are taken by their teachers to pick cotton in the fields.

According to a 5th grader, there are daily contests for who can pick the most cotton; winners get praised by teachers . But schoolchildren get paid less than adults do – receiving 100 som per kg of cotton as opposed to hired workers who get 120 som per kg. Some children are joining the hired workers.

Students from colleges and lyceums (ages 14-16) were sent by bus to distant areas to work for several weeks. Farmers in these fields do not have special housing for students, and in some cases, some of the houses of local residents were turned into temporary dormitories for them. In Yangiobod district 16-17 year old college students are picking cotton and staying the night in temporary dormitories. They have quotas to pick at least 50kg of cotton daily, and those who can't meet the quota are called in for questioning in the evenings, and warned of possible expulsion. Their work day begins at 7am in until the dark, with a short break for lunch. The harvest season is expected to go on for a month.

Source: Our own correspondents

Who Benefits from the Rise of the Price of Cotton? Just Asking

Bobomurod Razzokov, a farmer from Bukhara, says that Uzbek farmers won't benefit from the rise in the price of cotton on the world market, because in Uzbekistan, the government sets the price at which they buy cotton from farmers. The difference between the cost of cotton production and the government-fixed price is small; farmers turn a profit of no more than 10-15%.

- If the harvest is good and we meet our targets, the profit will be 10%. If we spend 100 million som on our expenses, then our profit will be 10 million. Expenditures are up to 85-90%, says Bobomurod Razzokov.

Kubay Ortikov, a farmer from Karakalpakstan, says that the government profits most.

- Government buys premium cotton for 640 thousand soms from us and the secondary quality for 600 thousand soms. Farmers get only 50% of the real price of cotton. The rest goes to the authorities,- says Kubay Ortikov. Farmers don't benefit from growing cotton, when they harvest the crop in autumn, the profit and expenditure is almost equal.

- The price of mineral fertilizers is in average 300 thousand soms per tonne. 1 liter of diesel oil is 1200 som. A tractor costs 27 million soms. You can calculate the cost of amortization. The state taxes are heavy – with 16 different taxes for farmers. We pay 450 per 1000 som that we take for wages.

According to Bobomurod Razzokov from Bukhara, so long as the Uzbek farmer is not independent from the state, no matter how much the cotton price rises in the world market, the farmer won't benefit.

- Every farmer is controlled by internal affairs, by the prosecutor's office, and by all of structures of state control. There is only one thing- you have to meet the planned targets,- says Bobomurod Razzokov, the farmer from Bukhara.

Source: Ozodlik, 24.09.2010

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/2166436.html>

Karimov Declared 2010 the Year of Healthy Generation. But in Kokand, Mothers with Young Children Are Sent to Pick Cotton

On September 22, 2010 the staff of Kokand State Pedagogical Institute announced that everyone will be sent to pick cotton, even women with young children, according to residents of Kokand, speaking to "Fergana.Ru".

"We are outraged once again", said one woman from Kokand, "that we pick cotton and don't get paid, that we have become accustomed to it and that this is the norm. Now a mother with small children has to pick cotton! And who will watch our children when we're picking cotton? What can be spoken about the health of future generations when mothers with young children are being driven to the cotton fields?"

A doctor (name withheld), from one of the medical institutions in Kokand, said, "I do not understand what the local authorities are thinking. How can they do it – when these mothers are still breastfeeding; who will feed the children?"

The dormitories at the cotton fields don't have decent living conditions; there's no sanitation. Where will mother's hang their children's clothes? Will they put cradles and cribs in the dormitories?

According to the doctor, farmers can easily find unemployed residents of the Ferghana Valley who are ready to pick cotton for pennies. The same doctor recently saw a farmer announce that he would pay cash for cotton pickers and that he needed 50 people. Over 150 people came from local villages. When the farmer said that he didn't need so many people, the villagers suggested that he pay for 50 people and the 150 would split the proceeds among themselves. "We are many," they said, "it will go faster. "

This raises the question: why would the authorities force mothers of young children to pick cotton, when thousands of unemployed people are willing to pick cotton for so cheap.

Source: Ferghana.ru, 22.09.2010

<http://www.ferghana.ru/news.php?id=15595&mode=snews>

Student Expelled from University for Failing to Meet Cotton Quota

Javlon Togaev, a student at the Guliston University in Syrdaryo province, was expelled from university for not picking cotton; Togaev was held up as an example to warn other students.

To confirm this report, BBC contacted Bakhtiyor Khamroev, a human rights activist from Jizzakh.:

"This has been proven, but the university administration cannot say the reason was cotton, they expelled the student for some other reason".

BBC: So he was exempted while he was picking cotton?

Bakhtiyor Khamroev: "It looks like that. The demands of meeting the daily target of harvesting the crop are rising for students. Because the crop is really good this year and no matter what, they want to collect it as quickly as possible".

BBC: What is the amount of the daily target?

Bakhtiyor Khamroev: "Depends on their age: 30-40 kg for schoolchildren, 70-80 kg for college students and 100 kg for university students. The pay is 120 som per kg. As usual, children bring their own food. The drinking water is a big problem. I recently have been in desert areas. In Pakhtakor, Dostlik, Zafarobod, Mirzachol districts, 80% of the area is not provided with drinking water. Children drink water directly from sewages, or concrete pools."

Source: BBC, 23.09.2010

http://www.bbc.co.uk/uzbek/uzbekistan/2010/09/100917_cy_cotton_student.shtml

In Kokand, Four Thousand Residents are Sent to Pick Cotton

In Kokand city 4,000 workers are mobilized for the harvesting.

Independent news agency Kharakat reports:

Four thousand workers and companies staff were sent to pick cotton in various provinces of the country. About 1500 people were sent to Sirdarya and Jizzakh provinces.

We would like to note that the distance between Kokand, Sirdarya and Jizzakh is around 500 kilometers.

Over 2000 men and women were taken to cotton fields close to the Kokand city on a daily basis.

The same situation is happening in Fergana city. According to CA- News, workers and staff of all companies in Fergana city were sent to pick cotton for 10 days and that includes school and kindergarten teachers.

Source: [Ca-News.org](http://www.ca-news.org), 23.09.2010
<http://www.ca-news.org/news/490151>

Bekabad Schoolchildren are Also in the Fields

As it was reported by the newspaper *Harakat*, on 15 September Shodibek Khamraev, the head of the administration in Bekabad district, ordered that children of the schools No. 6, 7, 11, 13 and 55 be sent to the cotton fields.

According to reports, there is a daily quota for schoolchildren, of 70 kg a day. Khamroev is checking the fields and demanding that teachers provide daily reports on children's attendance and the quantity of the harvested cotton. The mayor of the district insults and threatens schoolteachers who are unable to organise the full presence of children in the fields.

Police complaints from Bekobod residents about violation of the law on child labor remain unanswered.

Source: *Harakat*, 22.09.2010
http://www.harakat.net/el_news.php?id=6790

Even Football Club Sent to Pick Cotton

In Kashkadarya everyone is picking cotton: students, schoolchildren, workers and even soldiers are contributing to the harvest of the "white gold."

On 24 September, the Kashkadarya newspaper reported that the famous football team "Nasaf" is also in the field.

"Nasaf" players will work hard this season to test their abilities not only on the football field, but also in cotton fields- says the news report.

In this “match” which was held in Kasbi district on the “Kenja bobo Egamberdiev” farm, the footballers were lead into the fields by their coach Anatoliy Demyanenko.

Source: Uzbek Human rights Society, 24.09.2010

Country Turning into a Labour Camp

As the cotton harvest got well under way in mid-September, the authorities are coercing growing numbers of schoolchildren as well as students and public sector workers to work in the cotton fields, by using a number of tactics in an effort to keep up the pretence that the extra labour is entirely voluntary.

Even though, in the face of an international boycott of its cotton, the Uzbek government reinforced legal prohibitions on the use of child labour, the practice continues.

“Schools and colleges are closed, and year-one children stay at home while teachers and other schoolchildren work in the fields,” Yelena Urlaeva, head of the Tashkent-based Human Rights Alliance said. She also mentioned that the security presence in the fields increased.

Due to good weather conditions, this year’s harvest will be a good one and the authorities have set a target of over 3.5 million tons of raw cotton. To achieve this they will need to recruit more “volunteers” than ever.

In the central region of Jizzakh, human rights activist Rasuljon Tajibaev reports that all the markets in Pakhtakor district are closed. “Everyone is picking cotton,” he explained.

Coercion is overlaid with propaganda, as the government appeals to the nation’s sense of patriotism. On September 15, Khorezmskaya Pravda, a state newspaper in northern Uzbekistan, published an appeal headlined “Cotton is Our Pride, Our National Wealth”. “Every one of us should be working in the fields today,” the statement said.

Muslim clerics in the eastern Andijan region have been drafted in to support the campaign. An article in a local newspaper said “picking every gram of cotton is a sacred duty for every Muslim”.

An observer in Khorezm region argues that the authorities are “using this rhetoric to conceal their interest in cheap labour from coerced workers”. And some people are so used to the annual cotton campaign that they see nothing wrong with it. An education sector employee in a Tashkent suburb insisted there was no question of coercion. “We’ve been picking cotton for 20 years,” he said. “And our children will gather it.”

Source: IWPR, 25.09.2010
<http://iwpr.net/ru/node/48546>

27 September: Fergana Already Mobilized for Cotton Harvest

University students, state employees, and public servants of Fergana city were deployed to the cotton harvest.

According to a source, last week, all university students were sent to pick cotton even though city authorities declared earlier this year that university students would not be involved in the harvest.

According to the source, regional authorities said that the decision was made due to expected changes in the weather from 5 October. Businesses throughout the region were ordered to send their workers to the fields, even to neighbouring provinces. Those refusing to go are threatened with dismissal, regardless of their reasons, be it newborn children or other family circumstances.

Source: our correspondents

Students as Slaves: Those Who Fail to Meet Daily Quota Physically Abused

In Surkhandarya, students who couldn't meet the daily quotas set for picking cotton are getting whipped by college instructors, according to a caller to Radio Liberty.

"There is this new practice. College students are given a daily quota. In the beginning of the harvest season it was 60 kg, now it is 40 kg a day. If they can't pick their share, the instructors whip them in the evening. There is no cotton left in the fields. Now the college students have gone to Mizrobod and Sherobod districts to pick cotton," says a Radio Liberty listener who introduced himself as Abdulloh.

We asked him if we could get in touch with those students who have been whipped and who escaped from the fields.

"I can't put you in touch. They are afraid of speaking out", answered Abdulloh.

An anonymous college instructor from Surkhandarya commented on the reports of whipping the students:

"This is a lie, no one can beat students. I've been working as a teacher for 43 years and such a thing never happened," he says.

It wasn't possible to get any feedback from the regional prosecutor's office and the department of internal affairs regarding this issue.

On the 28th of September, another radio listener reported to Radio Liberty that during the cotton harvest season authorities are abusing the workers. According to him, in the Kizirik district, farmers of the "Kunchikish" farmers' Union have been beaten by the district prosecutor Dilshod Fayziev for not fulfilling the cotton plan.

Source: Ozodlik, 02.10.2010

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/2174516.html>

"Cotton is Politics, Do Not Joke With It"

In this year's cotton season local authorities are using various methods to get the crop harvested quickly. Among those is the forced use of schoolchildren in the cotton harvest and the promise of TV sets and carpets as an incentive. One small town in the desert area has even started to use loudspeakers from mosques to call people to pick cotton. Here is a letter sent to us from Uzbekistan:

After the morning prayers the loudspeakers on the roof of the mosques begin working again at 7a.m. This time, the calls are not for prayers, they call people for a far more important thing than praying: to pick cotton.

“Dear friends, people of our town, we call on all of you to contribute to the harvest of our national wealth, cotton. 120 soms per kg in cash are paid. If you pick cotton today, you can get your cash tomorrow”, says the speaker through the squeaky loudspeaker.

All day, all the shops and restaurants are also closed .

“If at least one person from each shop doesn’t go to pick cotton, tax inspectors or other officers come and give them a hard time. Look, we have a list of all 45 business points, shops and even the mills. They should go to pick cotton,” says one of the local leaders of the town.

In this town, it has also been planned to not involve schoolchildren in the cotton harvest this year. However, for unknown reasons they started sending 9th graders after classes and later they closed schools altogether and sent everyone to the fields. At the moment, even the 7-8th graders are being sent to pick cotton. The only college in town has been helping farmers since they first planted cotton seeds.

“Don’t waste your time in the streets, go and pick cotton or else we will announce the names of those who are not going to pick cotton publicly over the loudspeaker,” threatens the voice coming from the mosque loudspeaker.

“If they called for prayer in this way and instead of reading pieces of Karimov’s books, they would call people for honesty and consciousness, there would be less theft, lies and perverseness,” says one of the worshipers.

The situation in the town during harvest season can be partly compared to a public emergency situation or life behind the front during World War II.

You never hear such calls as: the duty of schoolchildren is to study, firemen’s is to stop the fire, and therefore, farmers also should deal with cotton as they wish. Those who are not happy with these measures keep silent, fearing becoming proclaimed a public enemy.

Therefore, even those who avoid going to pick cotton prefer to mind their own business and avoid confrontation.

While the mosque’s loudspeakers call people to go pick cotton, policemen and street guards walk around the neighborhoods and make sure that people go to pick cotton. During these times the streets of the town are deserted pretty quickly.

Everyone has been involved in the harvest. Even the doctors are in the fields, picking cotton. In some districts there is military, in others policemen and fire brigades.

“Cotton is politics, do not joke with it,” elders tell the youngsters who do not want to go pick cotton.

“It is not that difficult to organize the harvest without panic. They have enough means for that. If they pay good money for the labour, there won’t be any need to bother school teachers or military. If the payment is good, even those who are in Russia will come back and pick their cotton,” says the elderly pensioner who watches all the cotton hassles in the street.

Source: BBC, 30.09.2010

http://www.bbc.co.uk/uzbek/central_asia/2010/09/100930_uzbek_cotton_fooc.shtml

Prosecutors Supervise Discipline in Cotton Field

In the Kizirik district farmers have been beaten by the prosecutor for not meeting the cotton quota. Cadets of the Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs are paying for hired workers to pick cotton for them. The workers of the Fergana oil plant have been sent to the cotton harvest.

These are some features from Uzbekistan about the current cotton harvest season.

Fistful prosecutor

“Kizirik district farmers of “Kunchikish” (Sunrise) in Surkhandarya Province have been beaten almost everyday by the district prosecutor Dilshod Fayziev for not meeting the targeted quota”, an anonymous person from Kizirik tells Radio Liberty.

“There are farmers who couldn’t harvest the targeted amount. For example, he beats the head of the “Karim” farm Karim Mengliboev, he also beats the farmer of “Khodjayor” farm. Generally he beats any farmer who couldn’t fulfill the quota. This “Kunchiqish” farm is a union of 5-6 smaller farms and the prosecutor was appointed responsible to fulfill the quota from higher level authorities”, says the farmer.

“Where and how does the prosecutor beat you?” we asked the farmer.

“At the cotton reception point. He summons the farmers at 9:00 in the evening. For example, he asks, ‘How many tones of cotton will you bring tomorrow? How much can you promise?’, the farmers say ‘4 tones’. But they can’t bring 4 tones, because it is not there. There is nothing left in the fields. And then he says: ‘Where is your promise?’ and then the prosecutor slaps on the face and kicks on the butt from behind. If you attempt to protect yourself, he calls the police, and orders to arrest. He says: ‘Did you sign the agreement? Why are you not fulfilling it?’, he never thinks about the subjective or objective sides of the matter, does not even take those into account. What else can you expect if the prosecutor beats? Whom can you complain to protect your rights?”

“There are reasons why they can’t make the quota. When needed, they didn’t give us fertilizers or diesel oil. When we had to work we were called to meetings all the time, and the work hadn’t been done. We had to work in the field. They could come to the field and hold the meeting there, and have whatever discussions they had right here. Instead, on hot days they gathered us in one hall and even then those authorities insulted and shouted at everyone. As a result look what happened. Farmers should be working in the field not in the meeting rooms”, says heatedly the farmer from Kizirik.

Radio Liberty connected with the district prosecutor Dilshod Faysiev and asked him to comment on the complaints of the farmer.

“They have no basis to say so”, the prosecutor Dilshod Fayziyev cuts it short.

Police Academy “cotton growers” are working “hard”

If the prosecutors are beating up farmers in Surkhandarya, in Jizzakh there are reports that cadets of the Police Academy of Uzbekistan who pick cotton in Arnasoy district hire people to work instead of them. Oyazimhon Hidirova, a farmer from Arnasoy, told us about this.

“450 cadets came. They don’t pick cotton. Women from Samarkand, Dostlik, Pakhtakor pick it for them from this and other farms. Cadets pay 150 soms per kg. They sit and relax in the

shade. At lunch time they give the food made for cadets to women”, says the farmer Oyazimhon Khidirova.

One day staff, one day a cotton grower

The cotton season in Uzbekistan is getting more and more critical. Schoolchildren, students of colleges and universities have been involved in the harvest. Even the textile company workers are one by one sent to pick cotton. In Fergana the workers of an oil plant have been sent to the fields, says Ismoiljon Mallaboev from Fergana.

“Cotton harvest is like a military situation at the moment. You get surprised seeing how they are sending the workers from the oil plant. They are sent for 12 days with sleepover. They are all going with their blankets and mattresses. In Kirgili, there is a cinema “Drujba” (Friendship) where the workers from the nitrogen plant are gathered and being sent to the fields. They even stop mini buses on the roads and empty them from commuters and force the drivers to take the cotton growers to the fields”, says Ismoil Mallaboev

Source: Ozodlik, 28.09.2010

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/2170750.html>

Instead of Homework: the Fifth Graders Pick Cotton After School

On the 27 September 2010, the authorities of the Tashkent region in Uzbekistan sent fifth graders to the cotton fields. Older children started working in the fields as early as mid-September.

The Ferghana.Ru correspondent personally witnessed a group of fifth-graders going to collect cotton immediately after school. They were accompanied by teachers and school administrators. To get to the fields especially selected for them, children had to walk for about two kilometers. According to parents, school administrators did not interfere with sending students to the cotton fields. “At the meetings we had an announcement about an order by the governor of the district that everyone will work in the fields. By the order of the governor, principals must find their own farmers to negotiate with about the harvesting by schoolchildren, as well as take on transportation costs,” say the parents.

According to teachers, local farmers are not particularly interested in child labor. “At the field where students will gather cotton for one or even two days, five adult farmers would be removed for several hours. This is a waste of time, the children are taken away from school, they have to fumble in the dust and dirt, exhausted from the whole day in order to gather no more than ten kilograms. They cannot gather more,” complained the teachers.

If the director finds farmers, a hokim immediately removes him from his post.

“If the farm is located far from the school, then we have yet to hire transport. One bus for 40 people costs of up to 50.000 soums per day (\$23)”, a school teacher tells us.

Children are promised to be paid 100 soums per kilo of harvested seed cotton (\$0.045). By comparison, the world price for cotton fiber is now an average of \$2.2 per kilogram. From one kilogram of raw cotton, about 300 grams of purified fibers are produced. It is easy to calculate that the difference between the child’s wages and the cost of the finished product is more than 16 fold.

Turning to the public, teachers in the Yangiyul district of Tashkent region are asked to once again review the management's decision in terms of bringing children to pick "white gold".

Source: Ferghana.ru, 28.09.2010
<http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=6743>

Military Conscription... to Pick Cotton

Uzbek soldiers are pulled into manual cotton harvesting. As with the real defenders of the fatherland, much is asked of them - 100 kg per day or punishment in the army – and they are strict.

Soldiers of the military unit number 36691, located in Surkhandarya, directed work in the cotton fields in the Sayhunobodsko district in the Syr-Darya region.

"If the soldier cannot collect the daily established norm he awaits a severe discipline", said one of the soldiers who picks cotton.

None of them wants discipline, so the soldiers who are hardly coping with the harvest buy the missing pounds of cotton from local builders and farmers.

Source: Uznews.net, 05.10.2010
http://www.uznews.net/news_single.php?lng=ru&sub=hot&cid=2&nid=15021

Human Rights Defender Expelled From Cotton Field

As in previous years, instead of going to school, children in Uzbekistan are sent to pick cotton. But this fact is carefully concealed by security guards in camouflage, concrete walls and alert school principals with police whistles.

On 4 October, the leader of the Human Rights Alliance of Uzbekistan, Yelena Urlaeva, along with her colleague visited the cotton fields in Yukori-Chirchik district of Tashkent region.

"Complaints from local residents led me to this area, more precisely near the village of Yangibazar," says Urlaeva. "They said that their children are again being forced to pick cotton."

To hide the presence of children in the cotton fields, local authorities resort to all sorts of tricks.

Children are sent to school for the first lesson at 8:30. But students don't carry textbooks and notebooks, but water bottles and food. They come to school through the main entrance, and leave shortly after to work in the fields.

"We've been in the cotton fields near a construction college", says Urlaeva. "College Students pick cotton in the distant fields and the fields near the college, we saw young people 13-14 years of age. "

The human rights activist says that along the fields there are long concrete walls which seem to fence off the cotton fields from the sight of prying eyes from the road. But Urlaeva could not figure out the true purpose of the wall. On the field, the director of school No 34, was blowing a police whistle and calling up reinforcements. Urlaeva fled with her colleague to the road, where she quickly hailed a car to Tashkent.

"I am surprised why the government stubbornly continues to use child labor in cotton fields. Because cotton is now grown by farmers, it is easier to pay their employees for the cotton harvest than to mess with children", she mused.

"Expenditures on the fields and construction of concrete walls, in my opinion, is much more than the income from the use of cheap child labor. For me, this doesn't make financial sense."

Source: Uznews.net, 06.10.2010

http://www.uznews.net/news_single.php?lng=ru&sub=hot&cid=2&nid=15034

Imams Mobilized for Cotton Agitprop

In Namangan mosques, imams give special prayers for cotton. In Surkhandarya students who cannot fulfil the daily target are being whipped. This year's cotton season is full of events.

Since the cotton season started, the imams in Namangan's mosques give special prayers for a prosperous cotton harvest. Muhiddin from Namangan reported about this to Radio Liberty.

"If you go to mosque, there is only one discussion - cotton. Imams preach about cotton. They give prayers during the afternoon prayer. In all mosques they talk about cotton, even after the Friday prayers. If we ask why, they say that its bread and butter for the nation, that it is also clothing for people and even when they die they are buried wrapped in a piece of cotton fabric. When I go out, I see the cotton campaign everywhere. If it goes on like this, I'm worried that next year they might even arrest people who refuse to go to pick cotton", says Muhiddin.

Cotton grower - cops in Surkhandarya

For already two years policemen in Surkhandarya change their truncheons to sacks and contribute their labour to the collective cotton harvest. Akbar from Termiz city of Surkhandarya, who reported to Radio Liberty about this, says that he was shocked to see this.

"4500 policemen from Surkhondarya were sent to Jizzakh."

Radio Liberty: Do they also have a daily target?

"It is 40 kg per day in the first round of harvest."

Radio Liberty: What is the punishment for those policemen who can't meet the target?

"I think they meet the target. Schoolchildren are sent, workers are sent. Perhaps the doctors also will be sent soon. No one questions it", says Akbar from Surkhandarya.

"Nasaf" football players are "playing football" in the cotton fields

For several days now the "Nasaf" football team players in Karshi are "kicking the ball" in the cotton field. Gulshan Koraeva from Karshi told Radio Liberty about those cotton grower-footballers.

"The cotton propaganda is very strong now. Even the football team "Nasaf" is in the cotton fields. The Kashkadarya paper wrote about this too. Everyone is in the fields. At first, the doctors and teachers were taken, then the military. All the state employees have been sent to pick cotton", says Gulshan Koraeva

First pick cotton, and then drive a car

The traffic on the main roads of DJizzakhh has been stopped since the morning and the drivers are forced to pick cotton. Ma'murjon Azimov from DJizzakhh reported to the Radio and according to him, the cotton campaign is getting all the way serious.

“All shops are closed. Even the traffic has been stopped, the traffic police blocked the roads. Upper school children are all in the fields. In the mornings no vehicles are allowed, they stop the drivers and make them pick cotton. They tell them to pick 5-10 kg cotton. Mardikors (day labourers) are being taken on buses from labour markets”, says Ma'murjon Azimov.

In Khorezm province, the schoolchildren who can't meet the daily target are punished by having their ears pulled.

12 year old Djamshid from Gurlan district says that he couldn't pick 25 kg of cotton, which was the daily target, so his teacher pulled his ears as a punishment and he escaped from the field after that and returned home.

“I am a 5th grader. My teacher keeps pulling my ears in the field to make me pick cotton. 25kg a day. They take us to an empty field everyday. I ran away because he kept pulling my ears”, says Djamshid.

Source: Ozodlik, 05.10.2010

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/2177351.html>

“Close Your Bazaar and Go to Pick Cotton!”

As soon as the cotton harvest season started in Uzbekistan some markets in the districts were closed and as a result of this prices went up. But according to observers, closing down the markets couldn't force traders to go pick cotton.

“On the 30th of September markets in DJizzakhh were closed”, says the local human rights activist Bakhtiyor Khamroev.

“There are two big markets in DJizzakhh. Both of them were closed when I went there. People are trading in the streets around the market. After 6 p.m in the afternoon they are opened again”, says the human rights activist from DJizzakhh.

The purpose of closing markets in districts of the country is to influence people, by using propaganda, to go pick cotton in this harvest season”, says the activist.

But he thinks that this method will not attract the traders to the fields. The traders will hire mardikors (hired laborers) in their place and they keep doing their business in the streets.

Bakhtiyor Khamroev thinks that the prices might go up as a result of closing down the markets.

A former farmer from Bukhara, Ismoil Soliev, says that closing down the market during the harvest season helps to increase the number of cotton growers:

“Cotton is like the frontline! Since it is a front, there is no time for the market. Everyone should be in the fields. We should help with harvesting the national wealth. We have a lot of cotton, but not enough people to pick it. Because the payment for work is very little, that is why there are not enough helpers. That is why they keep tight control over the harvest,

otherwise no one will pick cotton. The salesmen also sent a couple of people to the cotton fields,” says Ismoil Soliev from Bukhara.

Source: Ozodlik, 01.10.2010

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/2173714.html>

Jizzakh: Pick Cotton Even if it is Your Wedding Day

Autumn in Uzbekistan is not only the time for harvesting, but it's also the time for weddings. The authorities in the Jizzakh region came up with a way to combine these two events.

According to the decision of the hokimiyat in the Jizzakh region, on the wedding day or shortly before it, the newlyweds and their guests from both sides need to each collect 10 kg of cotton and hand it over to the next item procurement point.

Where, apparently they can get help with regards to the implementation of their debt to the homeland.

Another recent measure in the pursuit of raising the cotton crop-2010 is a ban, starting September 30th, in the Jizzakh region to work in all the markets until 6pm.

According to the head of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan, Abdujalil Boymatov, authorities are using even more disgraceful actions in the fight for cotton money.

"I am ashamed to know to what measures the Uzbek authorities have resorted to in order to force citizens to earn their cotton money”, says Boimatov.

"If the couple did not find the strength to refuse an order to pick cotton on their wedding day, they will end up being chased to the field on the day of the birth of their first child,” added the human rights activist.

Source: Uznews.net, 04.2010.2010

http://www.uznews.net/news_single.php?lng=ru&sub=usual&cid=2&nid=15000

Failed to Meet Daily Quota? Take Good Care of Your Ear

Our Listener Rajab Matkarimov, who called from Gurlan district in Khorezm, told us that his 12 year old grandson was punished for not picking cotton.

Rajab Matkarimov: My grandson is in the 5th grade. His teacher pulled his ears in the cotton field. He came back home crying. He said “I won’t go to pick cotton today”, and stayed home.

Radio Liberty interviewed Djamshid:

“I already have big ears, they keep pulling them”.

Radio Liberty: Who pulls them?

“My teacher does.”

Radio Liberty: Why does he pull them?

“To make me pick cotton.”

Radio Liberty: What is the daily target for you?

“25 kg per day. They take us to a place where there is no cotton. Everyday we go to the same place.”

Radio Liberty: Does your teacher pull only your ear or all children’s?

“He pulls those who can’t pick cotton well.”

Radio Liberty: For how long have you been picking cotton?

“For 10 days.”

Radio Liberty: When do you go out to the fields and return home?

“We go in the morning and return in the evening.”

Radio Liberty: Is it far where you go?

“It’s a bit far, they take us on a tractor and we return on foot.”

Radio Liberty: Do they take you on the trailer of the tractor?

“Yes. We return on foot though.”

Radio Liberty: Do you eat food in the field?

“No, they don’t give us any food. They only give us boiled water.”

Radio Liberty: Do you bring your own food with you then?

“Yes.”

Radio Liberty: Do other children run away too. Or was it only you?

“Others run away too.”

Radio Liberty: Do they take you to pick cotton every year?

“Yes.”

Radio Liberty: Will you go back to pick cotton again?

“No, I won’t go anymore”, says Djamshid.

Source: Ozodlik, 24.09.2010

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/2167427.html>

Mourners? Doesn’t Matter, Go to Pick Cotton

As Jizzakh human rights defenders report that those going to weddings or funerals are forcefully taken to the fields to pick cotton.

According to Saida Kurbanova, who was a farmer in the past but now works as a human rights activist, a local authorities have made a verbal order to limit freedom of movement in the district.

“They are taking those who are going to weddings or funerals in the cars to Arnasoy or Gagarin district cotton fields. I have witnessed such occasions myself”, says Kurbonova. “Yesterday I talked with the best men of the grooms. They said that they weren’t allowed to enter Jizzakh city and were told to come back after 5 pm and that all the roads were closed and people were in the fields.”

Kurbonova also said that as the roads, which go to the districts, were closed, taxis and public transportation have to take longer routes and have doubled their fares.

This year in order to help Jizzakh cotton growers, it’s been reported that the students from some universities in Tashkent, including the Tashkent Institute of Textile, were brought to the province to help with the harvest.

Observers say that even though there is this large-scale involvement of cotton growers in the harvest campaign, the cotton crop is not that rich in the fields this year.

Source: BBC Uzbek Service, 08.10.2010

http://www.bbc.co.uk/uzbek/uzbekistan/2010/10/100929_cy_uzbek_cotton.shtml

Picking Cotton at Night: Punishment for Failing to Pick Daily Quota

In Surkhondarya’s Angor district, 4th graders were taken to pick cotton at night with adults and work under the lights of tractor headlights. Women on maternity leave and pensioners are not given their pensions and maternity payments unless they pick 10 kg of cotton daily.

Although authorities of Surkhondaryo denied it, an elderly man from the Angor district called Radio Liberty and said that farmers, who couldn’t fulfill the daily target, are forced to pick cotton even at night.

“A tractor is brought to the field and its lights are left on so teams of teachers and doctors can pick cotton at night in the lights of that tractor,” according to the caller “Until 12 at night they get scrutinized in the cotton plant. Everyone is gathered there: farmers, school directors, and chiefs of neighborhood committees and others who have any kind of relation to cotton. Those who can’t pick the daily norm are taken back to the fields on a bus at night and forced to pick cotton. All the teachers, doctors, everyone is put in the buses; Prosecutor, the head of the local police station and the mayor supervise the work themselves in the fields”, says the caller.

According to a radio listener from Angor, women with young children and pensioners are not given their pension and maternity pay unless they pick 10 kg of cotton daily. We contacted the Angor district mayor’s office and spoke over the phone with an official who is responsible for economic queries:

Radio Liberty: We received reports that if people do not pick 10 kg of cotton, they can’t get their pensions. Is it true, do you have any comments on that?

Official: Look, don’t ask me such questions over the phone. Do you understand? We have strict regulations in this mayor’s office. If someone couldn’t get their money, we tackle this issue according to those regulations. If someone told you that they didn’t get their pensions,

that is possibly because they haven't been assigned with a pension yet, - says the official from the Angor district mayor's office.

At the same time as the Angor district is falling behind schedule with their quota, the primary schoolchildren of the 4th and 5th grade were taken to pick cotton to the fields. One of the callers from Angor said that 4th grade schoolchildren are picking raw cotton in the fields and are taking it to the plant. According to an anonymous informer, who works in the area of education, the schoolchildren will not return to studies anytime soon until the planned quota of the Angor district is fulfilled.

Source Ozodlik, 12.10.2010

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/2188520.html>

Human Rights Defenders Picketing in Protest Against Forced Labour

The head of the Uzbekistan Human Rights Defenders Alliance, Elena Urlaeva, held a 10 minute picket in front of the "Uzekspormarkaz" building where the international cotton fair is taking place. Elena Urlaeva protested the use of forced child labour during cotton production in Uzbekistan.

"I did the picket all by myself. If I would have called the members of our organization, the police would have found out and would keep us all under house arrest. I stayed there for 10 minutes and was actually able to show my placards, demanding the abolition of forced child labour in cotton production, to some of the exhibition participants."

But soon after that security officer of the "Uzekspormarkaz" building called the police; the human rights activist managed to escape before they arrested her. According to the activist, she was not allowed to enter the cotton exhibition.

"They told me that it was a closed event and only invitees are let in and so they didn't allow me to go in", says the human rights activist in an interview with Radio Liberty.

The Uzbekistan Human Rights Defenders' Alliance is one of the few organizations in the country, which acts as an independent observer and has been monitoring forced child labour in Uzbekistan's cotton fields for the last two years. The head of the organization reported that young children were all taken to pick cotton in Andijan, Ferghana and Tashkent regions in this harvest season.

"We have a lot of information. I just came back from the Andijan region where I have been to the Markhamat and Pakhtaobod districts. I saw that schoolchildren are working in very bad conditions in the fields. We have a lot of photos, audio and video materials, which can prove that".

"Forced child labour should be eliminated as soon as possible. We are against many foreign companies signing contracts with Uzbekistan during this cotton exhibition. We call them to stop using cotton picked by vulnerable children", says Urlaeva.

Source: Ozodlik, 13.10.2010

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/2189590.html>

Andijan: Nurses Pick Cotton

In the Andijan Region, the 10-day call-up of people to pick cotton has begun. No one is spared, not even the sick nor mothers who are breast-feeding. What is odd and different this year they have not announced the amount of the region's total quota. Some claim the farmers have signed a contract with the government to supply 305,000 tonnes of cotton. Specialists say that this year, the cotton target has been reduced by 10,000 tonnes in comparison with 2008. Whereas the number of cotton-picking brigades has been increased to 1,125 or over 203,000 people compared with 497 brigades four years ago.

In addition, the authorities have tightened the rules for exempting people from picking cotton. Not even the sick or the old are spared. Some university students are paying up to \$300 in bribes to avoid the cotton campaign and continue studying.

"I was told yesterday that I have to go to pick cotton for 10 days," a middle-aged nurse said. "When I said that I cannot be very long in the cotton fields because of my health, the chief doctor told me that I would have to submit my resignation."

The cotton campaign is at its height and it is unsure when it will end due to favorable weather conditions.

Source [Uznews.net](http://www.uznews.net), 13.10.10
http://www.uznews.net/news_single.php?lng=en&sub=hot&cid=2&nid=15178

Cotton Quota Accomplished. Farmers Have Been Praised, Children Have Not

The cotton quota has been fulfilled in Uzbekistan for this year. As the government news agency UzA reports, this year 3,400,000 tons of cotton have been harvested from the fields. The average yield was increased by 4% compared to the last year and amounted to 26, 3 tons per hectare. Approximately 90% of the harvested crop was the high quality first grade cotton, reports the Uzbek news agency.

US\$150 million contracts have been signed in the international cotton exhibition, which ended on 14th of October. This year, the price they required for a ton of cotton was up to US\$2750. Until the end of 2010, China's Tianjin Cotton Exchange Market (TCM) and Uzbek company "Uzmarkazimpeks" will create a joint venture, which will be selling 100 thousand tons of Uzbek cotton in China.

In 2008, four of the largest retail organizations in Europe and America announced a boycott of products made of Uzbek cotton and demanded from the President of Uzbekistan to stop using forced child labour in the cotton fields. In 2008 the National Retail Federation (NRF), the Retail Industry Leaders association (RILA), American Apparel and Footwear Association (AAFA) and the Association of importers of Textiles and Clothing (AITA) addressed the government with this issue. Earlier that year, retail chains such as Tesco, Marks and Spenser, Target, and Gap appealed to President Karimov to end the practice of child labour.

In November 2007, the largest Finnish company Marimekko stopped purchasing textiles manufactured by Estonian Textile Company "Kreenholm" assuming the manufacturer uses textiles made with cotton picked by children in Uzbekistan.

Source [Ferghana](http://www.ferghana.ru), [15.10.2010](http://www.ferghana.ru/news.php?id=15757&mode=snews)
<http://www.ferghana.ru/news.php?id=15757&mode=snews>

Torturing teachers – Jizzakh Region Governor

“Teachers from the Jizzakh Region’s Bahmal District say that the head of their district, Akmal Abdullayev, has beaten up teachers and forced them to kiss the shoes of a prosecutor and a police officer. The regional administration has denied the allegation.“

According to witnesses, Abdullayev showered teachers with abuses and beat several school principals. In addition, he knocked teachers over and kicked them. The abuse culminated in Abdullayev demanding a teacher kiss the shoes of a prosecutor and a police officer. The teacher refused to follow through.

Further testimonies say that Abdullayev forced farmers in Saroy village to send 10-20 people to pick cotton. When the farmers refused, the head of district cut the power supply to the village. He did the same to several other villages in the Bahmal District when they failed to meet their cotton targets.

The Jizzakh Region authorities denied reports about Abdullayev’s use of force.

Uznews.net tried to get Akmal Abdullayev to comment on the allegations of his use of force. His secretary said that he was picking cotton in neighbouring Mirzachul District and would not come back to his office until 1 November.

Source [Uznews.net](http://www.uznews.net), 18.10.10

http://www.uznews.net/news_single.php?lng=en&sub=hot&cid=3&nid=15248

No Thanks to Cotton Pickers

On 15 October, President of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, congratulated the “cotton growers and workers” for fulfilling the annual cotton quota. But the President never mentioned the students, schoolchildren, and public servants who worked hard in the cotton fields.

“Today is a happy day for our people. Cotton growers of our country have harvested 3 million 400 thousand tons of cotton and achieved a great victory,” began the congratulation speech of Islam Karimov.

According to Bakhtiyor Khamroev, a human rights activist from Jizzakh, Karimov never acknowledges the fact that young children are involved in the cotton harvest.

Islam Karimov also mentioned that this year the profit from the cotton industry is expected to be over 2 trillion soms, and it would exceed the amount from last year by 35 per cent.

Jakhongir Rakhmatov, a farmer from Navoi, does not think that farmers are becoming any wealthier from growing cotton:

“What wealth? It is good enough if they can cover their expenses. The land belongs to the government. It is rented to farmers. Before, the lease was for 25- 50 years, now even that has been reduced. Secondly, the cotton also belongs to the government. They make contracts with cotton manufacturing factories. The factories belong to the government. They make contracts to sell the cotton for a certain amount; around 300-500 soms,” says the farmer who used to grow cotton in the past.

Bakhtiyor Khamroev also talks about the profit the students and public service personnel made from picking cotton: “The wages students and schoolchildren received for the cotton they picked was barely enough to pay for their food. Many students even owe the government for the food they provided during the cotton harvest season.”

According to Khamroev, those sent to pick cotton still haven't returned from the fields. He says that it will continue for another 10-15 days before they return; until then the students will still be picking cotton.

Source: Ozodlik, 16.10.2010

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/2192306.html>

Four Kids Coming Back from Cotton Heavily Injured In a Car Incident

In the Jizzakh district, an RAF minibus carrying schoolchildren back from the fields crashed with another car and as a result Marhabo Sodikova, a 34 years old schoolteacher, died on impact.

Four heavily injured schoolchildren were taken to the emergency room in Jizzakh.

The tragedy took place on 20 October, around 17:00, in the territory of Khamid Olimjon farm in Dzizzakh district.

According to Mamir Azimov, a human rights activist in Dzizzakh, a VAZ car crashed against the minibus which was carrying 15 schoolchildren from School #12 .

As a result, the schoolteacher Markhabo Sodikova died on the scene of the accident. Mamir Azimov also notes that teachers and schoolchildren are seen as a source of cheap labour by the local authorities, and that during the cotton season, they don't provide their safety.

"In the morning when all the schoolchildren gather, usually there is a traffic policeman and school authorities supervising the departure of children to the fields. They stop large trucks on the road and send children on the trucks. Farmers who can afford to, help with the transportation of the children. Children who worked for farmers who cannot help with the transportation had to return on foot after a day of hard work", says Mamir Azimov.

Source(s): BBC and Ozodlik, 21.10.2010

http://www.bbc.co.uk/uzbek/uzbekistan/2010/10/101021_cy_jizzakh_cotton_incident.shtml

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/2197340.html>

High Cotton Prices Enrich Overlords, not the Farmers

Mamurjon Azimov and his family have worked as cotton farmers for years in Uzbekistan's Jizzakh region. But last year, because of his heavy debts, Azimov was kicked off the land he was renting from the state.

Now unemployed and trying to feed his family of five, Azimov blames an almost feudal agricultural system in Uzbekistan that enriches only a handful of the political elite with ties to President Islam Karimov. It is a system that effectively turns farmers into slaves who are trapped into working for little pay in order to repay their debts.

"The price of cotton is determined at the beginning of the year [by the state]. The wages paid for picking cotton are set [by the state] just before the harvest begins. That's it," Azimov says. "What happens on the international market doesn't matter to farmers. No one will pay [the farmers] extra if the price of cotton goes up. If the international market price rises, [it is the officials who] reap all the benefits."

Other cotton farmers in Uzbekistan interviewed by RFE/RL agree that they will not see any benefit from international cotton prices that soared this week to more than \$1.20 per pound - the highest level ever on the global market.

By law, Uzbekistan's farmers must then sell their cotton to the state-controlled company that operates all of Uzbekistan's cotton gins - Uzkhlopkoprom - at a price set by the government.

Officially, the price offered is about one-third of the international market price. In practice, many farmers receive even less - as little as one-tenth the global price - because their high-grade cotton often is judged as "low grade" when it is collected by Uzkhlopkoprom.

Uzbekistan's government owns 51 percent of Uzkhlopkoprom. Information has never been released publicly about who owns the remaining 49 percent of the state cotton monopoly. But investigative reports by journalists and human rights groups suggest the privately held shares are controlled by Karimov's political allies and their relatives.

"The problem is that Uzbekistan still has a Soviet-style command economy," says Juliet Williams, director of Environmental Justice Foundation, a British-based nongovernmental organization. "Because farmers have no choice in what they are producing, they are part of an economy that is benefitting President Karimov and a small elite. Because it is such an opaque trade, anyone at the top of that elite is able to benefit."

Indeed, high international market prices for cotton are helping Karimov's regime consolidate its control over Uzbekistan's population. Instead of helping farmers who grow the crop, the record prices enrich powerful elites with ties to President Karimov's regime - a regime that bankrolls itself through totalitarian control over cotton production.

Source: RFERL, 27.10.2010

http://www.rferl.org/content/For_Exploited_Uzbek_Farmers_High_Cotton_Prices_Only_Enrich_Overlords/2202878.html

Season Quota Fulfilled but Children are Still in the Fields

Two weeks have passed since Uzbekistan met its the annual cotton quota. However, schoolchildren are compelled, by threats and lies, to remain in the fields.

One of our call-ins said that his daughter was called to school for classes, but instead was sent to pick cotton.

"I didn't give permission for her to go to the fields, but they called today saying that classes were resuming. When she got to school - they sent her to pick cotton. So she came back home, changed her clothes, and went to pick cotton," said the father of a 9th grader.

All callers say that there is no cotton left in the fields and that the weather has cooled.

Mamurjon Azimov, who worked for years as a farmer, says that if the farmers had the freedom to sell the cotton that they grow at a rate of their choice, they could easily harvest the cotton without the use of child labor.

"If the farmers paid 200 soms instead of 100 per kilo, everyone would go and pick cotton. But the farmers cannot afford to do that since the government sets the price," he says.

In order to earn one dollar at the rate of the black market, an Uzbek schoolchild has to pick 22kg of cotton.

Source: BBC Uzbek Service, 29.10.2010

http://www.bbc.co.uk/uzbek/uzbekistan/2010/10/101029_cy_cotton_child_labor.shtml

No Cotton in the Fields? Find Where You Want!

The director of school number 42 in the Khiva district of Khorezm, challenged 4th graders to pick a kilo of cotton per day and for older schoolchildren to pick 5 kilos a day. A father of one of the 4th graders told Radio Liberty's "Open Mic" programme that, "The cotton season has ended for 4th graders. But still the school authorities are demanding a kilo per day from each child. Children are wandering around the fields trying to find cotton that is not there. They cry and say that they don't want to go to school, because the teachers make them find more cotton."

A 4th grader, Mahbuba told Radio Liberty that her teachers told her either to bring cotton herself, or they would send her to pick it in the field.

Radio Liberty: Where did they tell you to bring the cotton from?

- From the field.

Radio Liberty: Is there cotton in the field?

- No, but they told us to go there during class time

Radio Liberty: Do you then bring the cotton to school?

- Yes, says the 4th grader Mahbuba.

Extra Quota after Fulfilling Quota

In the Denov district of Surkhandarya, the cotton season officially ended on 1 November. However, after this date, it restarted unofficially for the schoolchildren of the district. According to a resident from Denov:

"The school was opened today. The teachers shouted at the children, asking why they came in their new uniforms, as they should wear their old clothing so they could go pick cotton in the fields. The teachers all have to find 500 kilo of cotton or else pay 50 thousand soms. If they don't do that, they will all be sacked."

He believes that the cotton quota has only been fulfilled on paper and now the local authorities are trying to fill the gap.

"Denov district's quota was 41 tons of cotton. They filled it, and then they were asked to get an extra 10 tons. They got that too. I think it has all only been done on paper and now they want them to do it for real."

"Now neither teachers nor children will be able to rest during the day or at night until they finish the season", says Abdulla from Denov.

Source: Own correspondents

Decorating Cotton Fields: to Make Our President Happy

Last year during the cotton harvest season, when Islom Karimov visited Ferghana, the local authorities ordered teachers and students to put already picked cotton back into their hull in the fields, to give an impression of fields full of cotton for the President.

In Sirdarya there were rumors that the president would come to visit. Local authorities found an original way to improve the optics of the cotton fields. Abdurakhmon from Guliston reported to Radio Liberty:

“There is a territory called Jdanov in Guliston where they are building new houses. The President will come to see the new construction. So the children were made to pick extra leaves from the cotton bushes so that the fields would look very white and full of cotton to give the impression of a rich cotton crop in the fields.”

Source: [Ozodlik](http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/2209714.html), 3.11.2010.

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/2209714.html>

Soldier Died, not in Battle, but in Cotton Field

Even soldiers are brought in to pick cotton in this year's cotton harvest.

On 2 October in the Chinoz district, a soldier from the 1903 battalion who didn't meet his daily cotton quota, received a severe beating from his commander, and according to an eyewitness, died from it. The commander hung the soldier from a nearby tree, to make it look like a suicide.

This happened in Boyevut district, Surkhandarya province. Activists from the human rights society “Ezgulik” were not given access to the findings of the medical investigation, nor able to study the case.

Source: Press release of “Ezgulik” Uzbek human rights society, 01.11.2010

www.ezgulik.org

When Children Will Go Back to Classes? Don't Ask Stupid Questions

Due to the cold weather in Karshi, some colleges have brought back their students from the cotton fields. But schoolchildren from the village schools remain in the fields to pick cotton.

In the Denov village there is only one school: # 26. The children of this school are still working in the fields and it is unknown when they will return.

According to the people in the village, there is still a lot of cotton in the fields and children will only be brought back when all the cotton has been harvested and the rainy season begins.

Source: Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan, 30.10.2010

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/HR-Uzbekistan/messages>

“They Forced Me to Spray Defoliants”

Nasrullo Shodiev, head of the Vohid Khudoyberdiev farm in Bukhara province said that he could not meet his cotton quotas because of the local authorities' interference.

- They asked us to defoliate the cotton plants before they are ready. I later told him that as a result of the defoliation, the cotton was burnt and I can't meet the target. If cotton is defoliated before its time, it won't produce fibre, seeds, or oil – so I lose crop. I complained to the local administration about the early defoliation, but instead, they insulted me. I wrote a complaint letter to the President, but it didn't reach him.

Source: Ozodlik, 19.1.2010

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/2224900.html>

Where is our Doctor? Out Picking Cotton, and You Can Treat Yourself Home

Hundreds of thousands of public-sector workers who have been involved in the cotton harvest campaign in 2010 marked the Holiday of Cotton without a holiday spirit on the last Sunday of November in Uzbekistan. Along with schoolchildren, servicemen, students, doctors, teachers and other state employees partake in Uzbekistan's cotton harvest.

In order to avoid going to the fields, people bribe their superiors or hire day-labourers, who make up almost half of all cotton pickers. However, few public-sector workers have the money to do this.

A doctor said that in prior years, doctors from Tashkent were sent to pick cotton for only one day, whereas this year they were sent for 10 days. Those who refused to pick cotton faced threats of dismissal. Moreover, the authorities did not care about patients when doctors picked cotton.

The doctor said that about 500 employees of his clinic were dumped at the dilapidated building of the former Yangiyul cultural facility in Tashkent Region without any water or sewage systems. "We shared that dirty place with cockroaches, mice and rats," the doctor told Uznews.net. "We better not discuss the quality of food we were given."

Doctors slept on the floor, as there were no beds, he said. The doctor questioned the logic in sending doctors on a humiliating stint to pick cotton when there was no cotton to pick in October.

Source: Uznews, 29.11.2010

http://www.uznews.net/news_single.php?lng=en&sub=hot&cid=4&nid=15772