

A CHRONICLE OF FORCED CHILD LABOUR: REPORTS FROM THE UZBEKISTAN COTTON HARVEST 2010

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Aggregated statistics of reports on forced child labor, cotton harvest 2010

Reports from the following regions in Uzbekistan suggest that school and college students have already been sent to pick cotton:

- 1) Syrdarya
- 3) Bukhara
- 5) Karakalpakstan
- 6) Namangan
- 7) Djizak
- 8) Ferghana
- 9) Surkhandarya

There are 13 regions in Uzbekistan in total.

First bell for the cotton harvest

The first bell rang in schools in 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 teachers”- says Fakhridin Akhmedov (not his real name) a teacher from one of the Sariosiyo district schools.

“Imagine that two months are counted as the entire academic term and the first term of the school year is spent picking cotton. And teachers register pupils 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.

Apparently, also this year the cotton harvest in Uzbekistan will mostly be done by students from schools and colleges. According to a teacher from Kashkadarya province, Chirioqchi district, who asked to keep

his name confidential, the director of the school instructed teachers to prepare schoolchildren for cotton picking:

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

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

“Up to now, the only news is that the list of teachers is made and starting from September 3, an average of 15 teachers from each school will pick cotton for 15 days. We are lodged in a hut in the farm field, a useless place. We were there last year during the harvest. The food and water is no good. We put a blanket on concrete and sleep there. There is no drinking water. The water is salty. It is uncomfortable to bathe there. The conditions are very bad. There is no choice, we go for 15 days and tolerate it. Cotton picking is state policy, as you know” - says the teacher from Sariosiyo.

The teacher from Chiroqchi also says that during the cotton season classes at school are almost canceled and the teachers have to change their profession to become cotton pickers for couple of months:

“You see, half of the teachers do not work in 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. For a teacher both the classes and the cotton is the same” - says the teacher from Chiroqchi.

Source: Ozodlik, 02.09.2010

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/2146659.html>

Uzbekistan is not ready to eliminate forced child labour – Expert Working Group.

Tashkent based Expert Working Group made a statement which says that Uzbekistan is not ready to eliminate forced child labour during the cotton harvest.

Local experts state that also this year Uzbekistan will continue violating the national and international legislative norms which prohibit forced child labour. The observations show that all segments of the population including schoolchildren starting at the age of 10, who study in colleges as well as the university students (except the ones in Tashkent city), will be involved in this year’s harvest.

Most probably, the government will try to pin the responsibility for those children who are forced to take part in picking cotton on to their parents. For instance, parents will have to write letters in which they agree to take responsibility for their children who take part in the cotton harvest. The statement also notes the possibility of corruption among local authorities who are responsible for the cotton campaign, as those who do not want to participate in the harvest will have to pay bribes to get excused.

Source: HR-Uzbekistan@ yahoo.com , 04.09.2010

Mayor of Besharik district “will not let” pupils to go to pick cotton.

Kimsanboy Mamasoliev the Mayor of the Besharik district said on Ferghana Region Television that he would not allow that students in his district pick cotton this year. He said: “We have enough workers to crop the harvest, as child labour is prohibited according to national and international standards, they should not work.”

We would like to note that Sh. Nurmatov the former Mayor of the Ferghana Region said the same, but that the pupils were still involved in the harvest.

Source: Independent News Agency Harakat, 06.09.2010

http://www.harakat.net/el_news.php?id=6673&from=0

Uzbekistan did not keep its promise.

From 7 September the upper class schoolchildren of Sirdaryo 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 international obligations they signed and ratified, which prohibit forced child labour.

As Isroil Rizaev the Chief of the Sirdaryo department of “Ezgulik” civil society said on Radio Liberty:

“Today the schools were closed. 7th-8th-9th grade pupils are reportedly picking cotton in the fields. They left home in the morning for class, and then they came back in their school uniforms 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 Sirdaryo, “Sherobod” Medical College of Surkhondaryo, Denov Medical College, “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 Djizzakh, 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, 07.09.2010

<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 one month.

Source: Ozodlik, 03.09.2010

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/2147643.html>

“Teachers and school kids celebrate International Literacy Day on 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 in Sariosiyo district.

- Today is the 6th of September, teachers of all schools in Sariosiyo district left to Sherobod and Muzrobod districts in groups of tens and twenties. They loaded their baggage on busses and left to pick cotton. If God wills, 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>

Feel free to disseminate these reports further and post them on your websites.

More reading:

FAQ: <http://www.cottoncampaign.org/frequently-asked-questions/>

Academic view of the subject:

<http://www.soas.ac.uk/ccac/events/cotton-sector-in-central-asia-2005/file49842.pdf>

Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights, 2010, <http://www.uzbekgermanforum.org/>