

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

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### Are students who can't meet the daily cotton target being whipped?

In Surkhandarya, students who couldn't meet the daily target of picked cotton are being whipped by college teachers. This was reported to Radio Liberty by a member of the public.

“There is this new practice in cotton. All college students are given a daily norm. In the beginning of the harvest season it was 60 kg, now it is 40 kg a day. If they can't pick the daily norm the teachers 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.



According to him, other colleges are also practicing the whipping of students as a punishment. In addition he said that minor schoolchildren

are picking cotton as well.

“I went to Oltinsoy district yesterday. 4<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grades are all in the cotton fields. They go in the morning and come back in the evening. Medical personnel are also sent to pick cotton”, adds Abdullo.

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”, answered Abdulloh.

An anonymous college teacher from Surkhandarya comments 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 28<sup>th</sup> of September, another radio listener reported to Radio Liberty that during the cotton harvest season authorities are carrying out abuses towards 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>

## Big promises, or is cotton harvest more important than worship in Uzbekistan?



In this year's cotton season local authorities are using various strange methods in order to get the crop harvested as soon as possible. Among those is the forced involvement of schoolchildren in the cotton harvest and the promise of TV sets and coloured carpets as an encouragement. One small town in the desert area has even started to use loud speakers 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 for cotton.

"If at least one person from each shop doesn't go to pick cotton, tax inspectors or other authoritative people 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 not to involve schoolchildren in the cotton harvest this year. However, for unknown reasons they started sending 9<sup>th</sup> graders after classes and later they closed schools all together 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. Blame yourselves if that happens," 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, as they are afraid of becoming a public enemy very quickly. 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 medics 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](http://www.bbc.co.uk/uzbek/central_asia/2010/09/100930_uzbek_cotton_fooc.shtml)

## **Cotton 2010 – Prosecutor, cadet and a worker**

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 Djizzakh 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. Fifth graders in the Tashkent region pick cotton after school**

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of September 2010, the authorities of the Tashkent region in Uzbekistan sent fifth grade students to the cotton fields. Older children started working in the fields as early as mid September.

Ferghana.Ru correspondent personally witnessed a group of fifth-graders going to collect cotton immediately after school. Children 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 of the governor (head of administration) of the district that all 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 submit 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). For 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 times.

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 the collection of "white gold".

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

## **Military duty in Uzbekistan - picking cotton!**

Uzbek soldiers are pulled into manual harvesting of cotton. 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 drill", said one of the soldiers who picks cotton.

None of them wants this sentence, 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](http://www.uznews.net/news_single.php?lng=ru&sub=hot&cid=2&nid=15021)

## **Children in Cotton: the Curious have to Flee.**

As in previous years, children in Uzbekistan instead of going to school 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 October 4<sup>th</sup>, the leader of the Human Rights Alliance of Uzbekistan, Yelena Uralyeva, along with her colleague visited the cotton fields in Yukori-Chirchik district of Tashkent region, but as she herself puts it, it hardly took her legs.

"Oral complaints from local residents led me to this area, more precisely near the village of Yangibazar," says Uralyeva. "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 to the first lesson at 8:30. However, in the students' school bags there is no textbook with a notebook, but a water bottle and food. Having come to school with

a grand entrance, the children immediately leave it from the other side, and are sent to work in the fields.

"We've been in the cotton fields near a construction college", told 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 tells 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 the defender could not figure out the true purpose of the wall. On the field already familiar to Urlaeva, the director of school number 34, was blowing a police whistle and calling up reinforcements. Urlaeva fled with her colleague to the road, where to her luck they quickly caught 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", wondered the woman.

"Expenditure 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 is an economic puzzle. "

Source: 06.10.2010

[http://www.uznews.net/news\\_single.php?lng=ru&sub=hot&cid=2&nid=15034](http://www.uznews.net/news_single.php?lng=ru&sub=hot&cid=2&nid=15034)

## **Tashkent is preparing for the cotton fair again.**

The international cotton fair, which has become a yearly tradition will be held in Tashkent while the harvest season is in peak time in the country. It is a very good opportunity for Uzbek authorities to introduce the samples of Uzbek cotton to foreign textile companies and sign new contracts to sell them.

This year the representatives from Russia, India, China, South Korea, Iran, Turkey, Bangladesh, and Pakistan will also participate in the fair. Up to 300 representatives of various textile companies in more than 30 countries are expected to attend the event.

Every year Uzbekistan sells 800 thousand tons of cotton abroad. The main clients of Uzbek cotton are China, Bangladesh, Turkey, Pakistan, and Iran.

According to the representative of the European Human Rights Centre in Berlin Yvonne Veite, despite the calls to stop child labour in Uzbekistan, some of the companies in Europe still continue to buy the cotton from this country.

"Several companies in Europe still continue buying cotton from Uzbekistan. We call on such companies not to buy cotton from this country until they stop using forced child labour. We think this is the only way to eliminate the child labour", says Yvonne Veite.

While Tashkent prepares for this traditional fair, Uzbek human rights activist Elena Urlaeva observed that schoolchildren stopped their classes and work hard in cotton fields.

"Schoolchildren of all provinces in Uzbekistan are in the fields since the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> of September. Classes have been stopped. Mainly 7<sup>th</sup> -9<sup>th</sup> graders and college students are involved in harvesting. I saw it myself and took photos", says Elena Urlaeva the head of the Human Rights Alliance of Uzbekistan.

The Uzbek authorities deny that child labour has been used in harvest season.

Source: Ozodlik, 07.201.2010  
<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/2183806.html>

## **Cotton - 2010**

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 mosques give special prayers for prosperous cotton harvest, it is a new custom. 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 Djizzakh.”

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. What is this? 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. Mainly the medics and teachers were taken in the first place, then the military. All the budget workers have been sent to pick cotton”, says Gulshan Koraeva

### **First pick cotton, and then drive a car**

The traffic on the main roads of Djizakh has been stopped since the morning and the drivers are forced to pick cotton. Ma'murjon Azimov from Djizakh 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. Higher grade school children are all in the fields. In the mornings no vehicles are allowed, they stop the drivers and make them pick cotton. They ask them to pick 5-10 kg cotton. Mardikors (hired 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 5<sup>th</sup> grader. My teacher keeps pulling my ears in the field to make me pick cotton. 25 kg 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>

## **Uzbekistan: markets were closed for the cotton harvest season**

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 Djizakh were closed", says the local human rights activist Bakhtiyor Khamroev.

"There are two big markets in Djizakh. 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 Djizakh.

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 involvement, 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>

## **Djizakh: Want to get married - gather 10 kg of cotton!**

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

According to the decision of the hokimiyat in the Djizakh 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 Djizakh 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", adds 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](http://www.uznews.net/news_single.php?lng=ru&sub=usual&cid=2&nid=15000)

## **Free Microphone. If you can't pick cotton, take good care of your ear.**

Our Listener Rajab Matkarimov, who called from Gurlan district of Khorezm province, told us that his 12 year old grandson was punished hard for not picking cotton, the teacher pulled his ears. .

Rajab Matkarimov: My grandson is in the 5<sup>th</sup> 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.

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 and return?

“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>

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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/>*