

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

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Djizzakh: Now it is mourners' turn to pick cotton...

As Djizzakh human rights defenders report, those who are going to weddings or funerals are forcefully taken to the fields to pick cotton.

As Saida Kurbanova, who was a farmer in the past but now works as a human rights activist says to the BBC, according to the oral order given by the local authorities, the free movement in the district currently has been limited.

“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 Saida Kurbonova.

She adds that there have been few occasions where even those newly weds who went out were taken to the fields.

“Yesterday I talked with the best men of the grooms. They said that they weren’t allowed to enter Djizzakh city and were told to come back after 5 pm and that all the roads were closed and people were in the fields”, says the human rights activist.

Saida Kurbonova also said that as the roads, which go to the districts, the taxis and public transports have to take longer routes around the areas and as a result the transportation fee has been doubled lately.

In these days, the first round of harvest has been finished.

This year in order to help Djizzakh cotton growers, it’s been reported that the students of some of the higher educational institutions 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](#), 08.10.2010

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

"If you pick cotton- do it at night!" Or cotton stories in Angor.

In Surkhondarya's Angor district the 4th grade schoolchildren were taken to pick cotton and the people of Angor are forced to work under the lights of tractors. Women on maternity and pensioners are not given their pensions and maternity pays unless they pick 10 kg of cotton each.

Although authorities of Surkhondaryo denied that such things are taking place in the region, 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 medics can pick cotton at night in the lights of that tractor", says the shocked elderly gentleman.

"Till 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, medics, everyone is put in the buses; they have to pick cotton at night with the bus and tractor's lights on. Prosecutor, the head of the local police station and the mayor supervise the work themselves in the fields", says elderly man.

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 each.

"You know they give oil and flour with queue, it is the same with getting pensions and maternity pay. So a woman who comes to get her pay is told either to pick 10 kg of cotton or pay 1000 soms. Once they get 1000-1500 soms, they are allowed to get their kitchen oil and flour, otherwise they have to pick 10kg of cotton if they refuse to pay that amount of money. If they don't pick the cotton or pay the price, then they are not allowed to get neither their grocery, nor the maternity pay", says the fellow from Angor district.

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??

- 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](http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/2188520.html), 12.10.2010

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

The cotton exhibition has begun in Tashkent and activists called for boycott.

The next cotton exhibition has begun in Tashkent and the Uzbek human rights defenders called foreign

attendants of the exhibition to reject Uzbek cotton.

Human rights defenders made a statement with an open letter to the participants of the Uzbek cotton exhibition. Particularly, this open letter mentions that even now minors, schoolchildren, college and university students are picking cotton in the district and provincial cotton fields of the country for very insignificant wages.

It can be observed that this year cotton harvest campaign has been much more active and intense than previous years. At the same time, according to reports the BBC received from Andijan city, Boz District, students of the Institute of Economics and Engineering, who were involved in the cotton harvest, have been beaten up. The reason for the beating was that the students were unable to pick enough cotton to meet the daily target of the harvest.

Authorities in Andijan demanded that each school pick 3 tons of cotton a day and made it the daily quota. In the province, schoolchildren above the 5th grade, are all involved in the harvest,- says Jahongir Kosimov, a local human rights activist.

The Deputy Head of the Institute of Economics and Engineering, Alisher Rahimov ,confirmed to the BBC that the students of this Institute have been picking cotton in the Boz District. But he denied the allegations that students, who could not pick enough cotton to meet their daily targets, were beaten.

Source [BBC](#), 13.10.2010

http://www.bbc.co.uk/uzbek/uzbekistan/2010/10/101013_uzbekistan_cotton.shtml

Human Rights Defender held 10 minutes picket.

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 exhibition is taking place. Elena Urlaeva demanded with her picket to stop 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 posters, which demand the abolishment of forced child labour in cotton production, to some of the exhibition participants.”

But soon after that securities 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 those, who were invited are let in and so they didn’t permit 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 only 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 the 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 photo, audio and video materials, which can prove that”.

“Forced child labour should be eliminated as soon as possible. We are against many foreign companies of other countries signing contracts with Uzbekistan during this cotton exhibition. We call them to stop using cotton picked by vulnerable children who were forced to work in their textile production”, says Elena Urlaeva, the head of the Uzbekistan Human Rights Defenders’ Alliance.

Source [Ozodlik](#), 13.10.2010

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

Cotton-picking campaign gains momentum in Andijan Region

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 the breast-feeding mothers. What is odd and different to previous years is that it is unknown what the total quota is that needs to be met by the region. 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 compared to 2008. Whereas the number of cotton-picking brigades has been increased to 1,125, or over 203,000 people, from 497 brigades four years ago.

In addition, authorities have tightened 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 was an old age pensioner and cannot endure that long in the cotton field for health grounds, the chief doctor told me that I would have to submit my resignation.”

The doctor warned her that hundreds of young women were leaving medical colleges each year eager to fill her position.

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

Source [Uznews.net](#), 13.10.10

http://www.uznews.net/news_single.php?lng=en&sub=hot&cid=2&nid=15178

Tashkent found other methods of raising the Uzbek cotton price.

On the 13th of October, officials of Tashkent announced the new five-year plan to reduce the export of Uzbek cotton abroad. According to the Prime Minister of Uzbekistan, by 2015 almost half of the cotton produced in Uzbekistan will be manufactured in the textile plants inside the country.

“By the end of 2010, remanufactured cotton in Uzbekistan will consist of 350 thousand tons and in 2011 it will exceed 400 thousand tons”, said the official from Tashkent during his opening speech during the International Exhibition of Uzbek Cotton.

On the world market, the price of cotton per ton is up to 2,494 USD; and this streak of luck for the official from Tashkent, is indeed expected to go on for quite a long time.

In such situation, even though Uzbek cotton has been boycotted in the world arena, the value of Uzbek cotton is rising and the government is trying to profit from this current situation.

According to an official from a former company, Namangantextile, which is now owned by South Korea and has become “Hain Tex”, the Uzbek government’s plan to reduce the exportation of Uzbek cotton will be beneficial not only for textile companies in the country, but also for the Uzbek people.

“First of all, the job employment will increase. Secondly, if we get to keep the cotton, then the production will increase too. In 2013, we plan to produce not only cotton fiber, but also the textile fabric for canvases. At the moment the biggest companies of the world are signing contracts for millions and millions of US Dollars and lining up to get to our cotton fibre. Europe is buying, Germany, Spain, the USA are buying”, says the representative of the “Hain Tex” company, which currently employs more than 1100 workers in Namangan.

According to Don Kan, the head of the company called “Kabool Textile”, which works in Uzbekistan, “The

government in official Tashkent does not have enough financial resources to develop the textile industry in the country. In order to develop it, they have to get new technologies, which can mill the cotton and turn it into high quality fabric. And it can't be done without the help of foreign investors", says Don Kan.

"And the foreign investor is afraid of investing in Uzbekistan", continues this businessman: "Foreign investors are intimidated by the Uzbek government and its mind blowing nontransparent policy. The Uzbek government's attitude towards businessmen can easily be changed overnight. Therefore, if you pay attention, you rarely come across western private investors in Uzbekistan. Nowadays, mainly the companies from China, Bangladesh, India and Egypt, which are signing contracts with Uzbekistan in this cotton exhibition, either directly belong to the government or work based on trust in government", says Don Kan the company head of the "Kabool Textile".

Source [Ozodlik](#), 14.10.2010

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/2190688.html>

Uzbek cotton trades briskly at Tashkent fair

On October 13th, the 6th International Cotton Fair opened its doors in Tashkent. Despite protests by human rights activists and the heavily criticized use of forced child labour in Uzbekistan's cotton harvest, this year's fair attracted more cotton traders than ever before.

In 2005 the fair was attended by 170 cotton traders and textile companies from 30 countries around the globe. This figure has now nearly tripled, where about 300 companies and 500 cotton traders are expected to attend this year.

For 2010, Uzbekistan will harvest a total of 3.4 million tones of cotton of which 600,000 tonnes will be sold at the fair for an estimated amount of \$500 million.

The country aims to boost domestic textile production, creating competitive products for the global market. Thus major Uzbek textile companies, which process about 400,000 tonnes of the total cotton fibre yearly, and foreign firms operating in Uzbekistan, are taking part in the fair for the first time.

Overall, trade of Uzbek cotton seems to be going well despite of the fact that the Uzbek cotton industry is associated with gross violations of human rights and forced child labour. The Uzbek parliament amended the Code of Administrative Offences to define responsibility for the use of child labour in unfavourable conditions; nevertheless, child labour is the foundation of Uzbek cotton. Adult pickers may be paid, but earn no more than 120 sums (around \$0.04-0.05) per kilo of cotton picked, a fraction of the fibres real market value. However, they are forced to accept these low wages, since police and prosecutors control the harvest and oblige all people to work.

Leading up to the cotton fair, human rights activists distributed an appeal among fair participants:

"The cotton-harvesting campaign has turned into terrible sufferings for ordinary people, especially for schoolchildren of Uzbekistan," activists wrote in the appeal. "It is no secret that Uzbekistan is one of the worst places in the world in terms of corruption, and cotton exports are a means of replenishing the wallets of insatiable Uzbek corrupt officials."

By buying Uzbek cotton fair participants become involuntary accomplices of those who have turned Uzbek children into cotton slaves and make their contributions to corruption in Uzbekistan.

Source [Uznews.net](#), 14.10.10

http://www.uznews.net/news_single.php?lng=en&sub=hot&cid=2&nid=15201

As Uzbekistan's Annual Cotton Fair Opens, Human Rights Groups Call for Boycott

Uzbekistan's cotton fair opened yesterday in Tashkent. 300 companies from 34 countries are expecting to participate. Uzbekistan's Prime Minister Shavkat Mirziyayev issued a statement that 600,000 tons of cotton had been put up for sale, and earnings of around \$500 million are expected to be made at the fair. Meanwhile local and international human rights groups continue to protest that forced child labour is once again the source of a great portion of this year's harvest.

The world market price is at an all time high this year, reaching up to \$1 a pound. Floods and cold weather in other cotton producing regions have led to a poor harvest thus pushing the price for cotton up. Main participants of the Tashkent fair are buyers from Russia, India, China, South Korea, Iran, Turkey, Bangladesh and Pakistan. Western companies have increasingly joined the boycott of Uzbek cotton, but still a few companies still remain.

In 2009, Uzbekistan signed several conventions of the International Labour Organization and passed a legislation banning the use of child labour nevertheless, witnesses and human rights activists have confirmed the child labour continues to be a widespread problem this season.

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

Urlaeva says that new measures have been taken and security guards in camouflage are placed by the fields as well as concrete walls have been put up to block the view of children picking cotton.

In addition mosques have been pressed to assist to turn people to pick cotton. After the morning prayer has been called, the imams, using the same loudspeakers, urge people to help in the harvest and that 120 soms per kilogram are paid in return. Marketplaces and restaurants are closed during the day as people head to the fields.

While some districts have indeed to some extent stopped using elementary children to pick cotton, they are now sending 14-15 year olds into the fields. In other districts the use of even the youngest children remains unchanged. However waiving the use of children during harvest is not necessarily a consequence of the newly signed conventions. Unlike in passed years, this year, local administrators have told school principals and parents to make their own transportation arrangements with farmers. Therefore some farmers are not interested in child labour since they now face the transportation costs to bus in students.

Source [EURASIANET.org](http://eurasianet.org), 14.10.10

<http://www.eurasianet.org/node/62146>

Uzbekistan: the cotton quota has been 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 for 4% compared to the last year and amounted to 26, 3 tons per hectare. Approximately 90% of the harvested crop was the high quality 1st grade cotton, reports the Uzbek news agency.

\$150 million contracts have been signed in the international cotton exhibition, which ended on the 14th of October. This year the price they required for a ton of cotton was up to \$2750.

Until the end of 2010, China's Tianjin Cotton Exchange Market (TCEM) and Uzbek company "Uzmarkazimpeks" will create a joint venture, which will be selling 100 thousand tons of Uzbek cotton in China.

We remind that in 2008, four of the largest organizations of leaders of retail 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, with the demands of stopping forced child labour the biggest retail chains such as Tesco, Marks and Spenser, Target and Gap appealed to President Karimov.

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

It is possible that this has contributed to the reduction of participants during the Cotton Exhibition: if in 2007 there were 450 company buyers, in 2009 this number has been reduced to 276. In turn, Uzbekistan has announced the plans of reducing the cotton export, and explained it as an intention of enriching the internal market with the "white gold" and of developing the national textile industry.

Source [Ferghana](#), 15.10.2010

<http://www.ferghana.ru/news.php?id=15757&mode=snews>

Official uses force against cotton-picking teachers in Jizak Region

„Teachers from the Jizak 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 directors. In addition he used physical force by pushing teachers over and kicking them. The abuse culminated in Abdullayev demanding a teacher kiss the shoes of a prosecutor and a police officer. The teacher refused to abide these orders.

Further testimonies have stated that Abdullayev was forcing farmers in the village of Saroy to send 10-20 people to pick cotton. When this was refused, the head of district cut he power supplies to the village. He applied this punishment to several other villages in the Bahmal District when these failed to meet their cotton targets.

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

Uznews.net tried to access Akmal Abdullayev for comment on 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](#), 18.10.10

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

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/>