

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

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Uzbeks Plan Reduction in Raw Cotton Sales

Uzbekistan plans to turn cotton into textiles produced locally rather than selling the unprocessed lint to the rest of the world. This might be the result of a boycott of Uzbek cotton by international clothing manufacturers concerned with the ongoing use of child labour in the country's cotton sector.



During the annual cotton fair, Prime Minister Shaykat Mirizioev announced that by 2015, 70% of the cotton output should be going to local clothing manufacturers. Currently about 400,000 tons of the estimated 3.5 million tons, which are collected annually, are used for local textile production. Boosting manufacturing so that 80% of cotton is turned into textile and exporting the finished product, cotton industry revenues as a whole could triple.

Analysts suggest that the new domestic manufacturing plan is a direct response to

the recent problems Tashkent has been facing with western buyers. Large manufacturing companies such as Wal-Mart and Tesco started boycotting Uzbek cotton in 2007 after campaigners highlighted the routine, state-sponsored use of children to weed and pick cotton in Uzbekistan. Though the Uzbek government responded with legislative changes, children are still in the fields.

Others say it is only a strategy to divert attention from Russian and Asian purchasers that quickly filled the gap the American companies left behind. As one Tashkent economist puts it, "The place occupied by Europeans and Americans was quickly filled by purchasers from Russia, Asia and the former Soviet Union, who aren't so sensitive about child labour issues".

Yet others predict the Uzbek government will form joint ventures with China and Bangladesh, themselves cotton-growing countries, to make it more difficult to trace back the origin of the cotton in the textile. A cotton trade expert said, "A significant proportion of Uzbek cotton will undoubtedly be processed in China and Bangladesh after changing hands in several sales," he said. "All the participants in this resale process will set up companies with the sole purpose of suppressing the fact that finished products are being made from Uzbek cotton."

Source: [News Briefing Central Asia](#), 5.11.2010

"As I have not been in Uzbekistan, I cannot say anything about child labour in this country"

The Minister of Commerce of Bangladesh, Forukh Khan, came to Tashkent to find and regulate a stable mechanism of quick cotton provision and buy it without the help of dealers.

Bangladesh buys 39 per cent of the 4 million tons of cotton from Uzbekistan through dealer agencies. Said Manzurul Khuk, the Vice President of the Union of the Bangladesh Textile companies says, that buying cotton directly from the country without dealers is beneficial for both countries.

"Between the years of 2006- 2009, Bangladesh covered 60-65 per cent of its cotton needs with Uzbek cotton. As you can see, our country depends very much on Uzbek cotton. This year it makes up 39 percent of overall needs. So if we buy the Uzbek cotton without dealers, it will be much cheaper for us", says Said Manzurul Khuk.

Due to forced child labour, number of foreign companies stopped buying Uzbek cotton in recent years. Leading companies of Europe and the US warned Bangladeshi government to stop buying clothes made of Uzbek cotton.

“I can’t say anything about child labour in Uzbekistan, as I haven’t been in this country, continues”, Said Manzurul Khuk, the Vice President of the Union of Bangladesh Textile companies.

“Number of companies boycotted Uzbek cotton and warned us too. We also in our turn warned the Uzbek government about it, and the Uzbek government promised to improve the situation. I think these reasons are old now. Because, when I recently met with the Trade minister, he told me that there is no such problem”, says Said Manzurul Khuk the Vice President of the Union of Bangladesh Textile companies.



Uzbekistan takes the 3rd place in cotton export and the 6th in manufacturing it, and sells its cotton to mainly China, Russia, Iran, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

Source: [Ozodlik](http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/2215261.html), 9.11.2010

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/2215261.html>

Uzbekistan: German Rights Official Criticizes Tashkent’s Reliance on Child Labor

On November 9th, 2010, Germany’s federal commissioner for human rights, Markus Löning, issued a landmark statement in which he demanded that Uzbekistan put an end to the use of child labor in harvesting cotton, and has called for inspections to be carried out by the International Labor Organization (ILO).

The use of forced child labour in Uzbekistans cotton industry has increasingly been the focus of international media. This has put the Uzbek government under more pressure to change its policies, which lead to the signing of the ILO Convention 182 and 138, pledging to eliminate the use of child labour. However, human rights monitors have found abundant evidence that children continue to be forced out into Uzbekistan’s cotton fields to participate in the harvest.

In a statement, Löning raised his concerns, “I am greatly concerned by continued reports of child labor being used in cotton harvesting...Uzbekistan is obliged under international agreements to combat child labor...I therefore call on the Uzbek government to clear up these accusations and finally let observers from the International Labor Organization into the country.”

The statement followed a complaint issued by the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights bringing attention to the ongoing use of forced child labour in Uzbekistan.

Löning’s comments constitute perhaps the sharpest European Union criticism to date of Uzbekistan’s child-labor practices. ILO experts have so far not been allowed to verify Uzbekistan’s compliance with its treaty commitments.

Source: [Eurasianet](http://www.eurasianet.org/node/62365), 11.11.2010

<http://www.eurasianet.org/node/62365>

'Such a massive cotton campaign hasn't taken place in the last 10 years in Uzbekistan'

Cotton harvesting was finished in Uzbekistan and children returned to schools; according to human rights

activists such massive involvement hasn't been observed in the last two decades of Uzbek history.

Children were recently returned from almost two months of cotton harvest and went back to study from the beginning of this week.

Forced child labour in agricultural work in Uzbekistan caused criticism by many international organisations and number of governments.

This time, the Special Representative on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid of Germany, Markus Löning, called on Uzbekistan in his speech on stopping the use of child labour.

Mr. Löning said that he is seriously worried about the reports on Uzbekistan still using child labour during the cotton harvest season.

For many years now using child labour has become a tradition, and this situation caused many international companies to boycott Uzbek cotton.

According to the reports coming from different regions of Uzbekistan, the situation remained the same even this year, and schools were closed during the cotton harvest season and children forced to go to fields in order to pick cotton.

Bakhtiyor Khamroev the human rights activist from Djizzakh says that:

1-5 school children were all involved in cotton harvesting and therefore we observed that some of the district schools did not teach classes at all. The reason for the massive use of students' and children's cheap labour is that the crop was excessive this year. Uzbek government is making big profits on cotton. And for that reason, they tried not to waste the crop and as a result, the children suffered badly from this.

Source: [BBC](#), 11.11.2010

http://www.bbc.co.uk/uzbek/uzbekistan/2010/11/101111_uzbek_cotton_ends.shtml

“My letters do not reach the President”

Says Nasrullo Shodiev the head of the Vohid Khudoyberdiev farm in Bukhara province. According to the farmer, he could not produce the targeted crop for cotton as a result of the local authorities' intrusion.

The farmer is not happy about the local government intruding in agricultural farming without any knowledge of their work.

- Before the cotton bushes are ready they demand us to defoliate it. As instructed by the district prosecutor I had to defoliate the cotton before time. Then I told him that as a result of his demanded defoliation the cotton was burnt that I can't provide cotton to him now. If the immature cotton is defoliated, it doesn't give neither fibre, nor seeds, nor oil which caused me the loss of the crop. For example, I have to go 70 kilometres for 500 kg cotton and the same distance for 5 tons and as a result I have to pay extra expenses. I complained to the local government about the early defoliation, but the local authorities swore me off and insulted me badly for that.

I wrote a complaint letter to the President, but it didn't reach him- says Nasrullo Shodiev, farmer from Bukhara.

Source: [Ozodlik](#), 19.1.2010

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