

A CHRONICLE OF FORCED CHILD LABOUR: REPORTS FROM THE UZBEKISTAN COTTON HARVEST 2009

Week 2

Aggregated statistics of reports on forced child labor, cotton harvest 2009

Reports, at least, from the following regions of Uzbekistan suggest that school and college students are sent to pick cotton:

- 1) Andijan
- 2) Bukhara
- 3) Djizak
- 4) Fergana
- 5) Kashkadarya
- 6) Khoresm
- 7) Navoi
- 8) Samarkand
- 9) Syrdarya
- 10) Surkhandarya
- 11) Tashkent Region

There are 13 regions in Uzbekistan in total.



Tashkent Region, October 4

Students at high schools and colleges in Yangiyul District of Tashkent Region have been forcibly sent to the cotton fields to work, reports ferghana.ru. According to local residents, school children in some remote villages were sent to pick cotton at the beginning of the season.

In the city of Yangiyul, 30 kilometers to the southwest of Tashkent, there are several Russian-language schools much sought after because they have been exempted from forced labor during the harvest.

Desperate parents pay bribes to the local administration to get their children into these schools. Residents say that this year, education officials also solicited bribes of one dollar per student in order to persuade the local khakim (head of administration) not to send the children to pick cotton.

Ferghana.ru correspondents visited two schools in the village of Gulbakhor, School no. 45 and School no. 1, near the local administration offices, where they found the doors locked and the schoolyard empty.

Villagers told them that the children had been sent to pick cotton. The reporters found children as young as age 12 and photographed them, despite efforts by both the students and teachers to discourage them and threatening to call the police.

Students from the 6th and 7th grades along with a group of teachers, were given a quota, and told that if they did not meet it, they would not get paid. Supervisors said that the children had "volunteered for the good of the state," ferghana.ru reported.

Source: Ferghana.ru/10/04/09.

Full version: <http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=6321>

Syrdarya region, September 29

School children from Syrdarya Region have been sent to the cotton fields, ferghana.ru reports. Although officials say that they have restricted labor in the cotton fields to students age 14 and older, the reporters found children ages 12 and 13 in the fields.

Syrdarya, formerly a manufacturing center in the Soviet era, is a small town with about 30,000 residents. Many people have left the area in search of work abroad. Without jobs, the remaining adults and children are compelled to work in the cotton fields. Local officials close government offices and even marketplaces during the day, and for some unknown reason, have stopped automobile traffic on the main highways in the area, apparently in a bid to compel people to work in the fields.

One man who worked as a taxi driver told ferghana.ru correspondents that he sent his 14 year old into the fields where he worked from 8:00 am to 5-6:00 pm. When it was rainy and cold, he kept his son at home, but local officials would pressure him to work. For one kilogram of cotton, his son was paid 85 soums or about five cents, and could pick about 15-20 kilograms a day, making about 1500 soums, some of which had to be used for food.

A 14-year-old girl told ferghana.ru that almost all the students in her class were in the fields except for those who managed to get a note from a doctor, and walked to the fields to work from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm. A woman and her 12-year-old son said they were volunteering to work, because they needed the money. Another boy age 14 said that he and his class were also working voluntarily for a month, and that they had to bring their own food from home. A teacher whispered to the journalists that in fact, they were all forced to pick cotton and did not want to suffer reprisals for publicizing this fact.

The reporters saw many fields along the road to Tashkent where children were working. When interviewed, they expressed a sense of resignation to their fate.

Source: Ferghana.ru/09/29/09.

Full version: <http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=6316>

Bukhara region: Lyceum teachers are mobilized for picking cotton

Faculty of Bukhara's Academic Lyceum at Bukhara State University received a gift in honor of their professional holiday - Teacher's Day - to go to pick cotton. 30 teachers of the Bukhara Academic Lyceum were sent on September 30 in the morning to the cotton fields in Bukhara's Jondor district. On their professional holiday - Teacher's day - celebrated in Uzbekistan on October 1, as well as for the next five days and nights, they will spend on a farm, where they have been given a place to stay with a minimum of amenities.

"After five days we will be replaced by another group of 30 teachers; in the Lyceum, we have 60 teachers in total. After that, it will be our turn again, and so this will continue until the end of October," explained one of the teachers of the Academic Lyceum.

"And cotton - is politics. To be against cotton - means to be against the state, " - explained the teacher.

The only possibility that Bukhara teachers not wishing to participate in the cotton harvest have to get out of it, is to buy their way out. This means that they have to hire someone else in their place. The approximate cost to hire a cotton picker is between 50,000 – 200,000 soums per month. It is also the fourth day of work a few thousand students of the Bukhara State University in the cotton fields of Bukhara region. For young people unwilling to participate in the cotton campaign, it is much harder to buy your

way out and miss the harvest of "white gold." The price for exemption from cotton picking for students can reach up to U.S. \$ 200.

Source: Uznews.net/ 10/01/09

Full version: http://www.uznews.net/news_single.php?lng=ru&sub=hot&cid=2&nid=11414

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

To read more digest reports on Uzbekistan subscribe to UZBEKISTAN NEWS BRIEFS at <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/uzbekistan/index.shtml>

To read more reports forced child labor visit www.cottoncampaign.org

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>