

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

### Week 4



### Karakalpakstan, Kashkadarya and Surkhandarya, October 19

Synopsis: Ferghana.ru reports on the cotton harvest from three regions of Uzbekistan.

In mid- October 2009, in the Karakalpakstan Republic in the north-west of Uzbekistan, the temperature ranges from +3 degrees (Celsius) at night to 25 degrees in the daytime. “Children are gathering cotton, but the money they earn isn’t even enough to purchase new clothes and shoes to replace those that they wear out working in the field – a teacher who has taught for 30 years in Karauzyak district says, sadly shaking his head.

One of the parents of the schoolchildren in Khodjili district was incensed by the low value placed on the work of cotton pickers: "In a district of about 180,000 residents , if 10 percent of the residents came out to pick cotton, then they could quickly gather the harvest. But when you pay the equivalent of two matchboxes for a kilogram of high quality cotton, it’s easier to bend the backs and wills of schoolchildren and students to go into the fields,” complains an interviewee to ferghana.ru. “It’s good that they planted less cotton this year. Nevertheless, they took 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders to the fields, and even younger children. From the Amudarin to Chimbai districts there are women and children in the fields. And these are not the children of farmers with 80 acres of land. These are the children of the rural poor, ages seven to 15... “

In Kashkadarya Region, everyone is forced to pick cotton - even soldiers. These days, soldiers are gathering cotton in the fields of Kasani district. In Uzbekistan, there exists the practice of one-month mobilization dues. This means that reservists are undergoing their military service in the cotton fields.

In Surkhandarya Region, according to employees of regional companies selling petroleum products and gasoline, at the personal instructions of the regional khokim (head of the local administration), they have stopped selling gas to the public, “so that people would not cruising the streets, but participate in the cotton harvest. The khokim some time ago announced in the press, that it is necessary to quickly and with quality, finish picking the cotton.” In the town of Termez, all markets are closed in the daytime, also, because of the cotton campaign. The empty markets only have guards, police.

Students of higher educational institutes, colleges, lyceums, and schools from Muzrabat, Sherabad, and Kyzaryk districts are mobilized for the cotton fields. According to local residents, if students don't fulfill the daily quotas of cotton they are required to pick, then they must continue working after dark. These children get tired, so that upon their return home in the evening, they immediately fall asleep without any supper.

Original title: Uzbekistan: News from the Fields.

Source: Ferghana.ru, 10/19/09, <http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=6340>

### **Mobilization of children for the cotton harvest is President's directive: local khokim**

Synopsis: Human rights activists in the Gallaaral District, Djizak region and Alliance activists were expecting to stage a picket on October 14 in solidarity with human rights organizations in Washington D.C. demonstrating against the exploitation of children and teachers in the cotton harvest in Uzbekistan.

But the action never took place as the activists Nuriya Imamkulova, Gavkhar Berdieva-Yuldashev, Mukhabbat Khasanova, and Elena Urlaeva were detained by security police. Police charged Urlaeva with violation of the law on demonstrations and sent her case to criminal court. Imamkulova and Urlaeva were brought for talks to the deputy khokim on economic issues. In response to the picketers' demands to end the forced labor of children and teachers, he replied that the khokimiyat (local administration) was fulfilling a directive of the President of Uzbekistan.

Sanjar Arifjanov of the Djizak region Interior Ministry Department threatened Gavkhar Berdieva-Yuldashev that she and her relatives would be killed by bricks. Urlaeva's husband, Mansur Mashurov was surrounded by police on October 14 as he left his home and told to expel Urlaeva from his home, and was threatened with dismissal from his job if Urlaeva continued to organize pickets before the [forthcoming parliamentary] elections.

Original title: Picket in Gallaaral Did Not Take Place

Source: Alliance of Uzbekistan human Right Defenders, distributed by email via HR-Uzbekistan Yahoo Groups/10/16/09. Translation and synopsis by OSI Central Eurasia Project

### **President Directive cited to force students to pick cotton**

Synopsis: A document obtained by ferghana.ru indicates that on September 27, more than one thousand students of Bukhara State University were forcibly sent to pick cotton under threat of expulsion. A signed and sealed letter sent to students who failed to show up for the harvest stated the following:

"In accordance with the Presidential Decree of August 20, 2008, 'On Organization and Conduct of the Cotton-Harvesting Campaign' and in accordance with directives from local administrations, the participation of students in the cotton harvest is considered 'practical training in the autumn fields.' Students who do not take part in field work without valid reason will be expelled. In connection with this, I urge you to appear immediately for the cotton harvest. Otherwise, I warn you that you could face expulsion. S.S. Raupov, Dean of the Humanities Faculty of the Bukhara State University."

A medical commission checked those students who claimed to have medical excuses for not participating. Students whose excuses were accepted were still forced to appear for work at the university, cleaning up auditoriums or gardening.

Source: ferghana.ru/10/16/09. Translation and synopsis by OSI Central Eurasia Project.

Full version: <http://www.ferghana.ru/news.php?id=13222&mode=snews>

### **Potemkin village of bumper cotton crops for President's visit: Ferghana region**

Synopsis: On October 16, during President Karimov's trip to the Ferghana Valley, local authorities ordered the decoration of fields with already-harvested cotton to create the illusion of fields overflowing with cotton, Radio Ozodlik, the Uzbek service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reported.

Whenever the Uzbek leader visits the provinces, careful preparations are made to demonstrate "the achievements of rural farms." So in order to please the president, Ferghana officials ordered cotton to be laid out in boxes on an already-harvested field alongside the president's route. Numerous workers in the Ferghana and Akhunbabaev districts then had to re-box the already picked cotton.

An eyewitness told journalists that he rode his bicycle to check out the story, and found students laying out the cotton in boxes to make it appear as if a healthy harvest had just been made.

Another witness, a resident of Khadarali, said that along the president's route, cotton blossoms were brought and placed alongside the road. He said that in Altyaryk and Akhunbabaev districts, the cotton blossoms were brought and "replanted," and that hundreds of workers were involved in the exercise.

All stores and cafeterias were closed before the president's visit for 10-12 days and signs were placed urging everyone to go and pick cotton. Thus local businesses lost revenue due to the leader's visit.

Source: "Open Microphone," Radio Ozodlik/10/16/09. Translation and synopsis by OSI Central Eurasia Project. Full version: <http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/1853685.html>

### **Learning not math, but how to pay bribes. Wealthier students bribe to avoid cotton harvest, hire labourers in their place**

Synopsis: In Samarkand, some students, evidently from wealthier families, have been hiring day labourers in their place to work in the cotton fields, ferghana.ru reported. Students told ferghana.ru that because of personal business, such as weddings or the need to help their family in their own private fields, they were sending workers in their place due to the requirement from the authorities that they help with the cotton harvest instead of attend college.

In the past, students have tried to obtain medical exemptions to work in the field, but this year, authorities have examined such documentation far more closely. False certifications have been selling for \$200-300, up from a price of \$100 last year, says ferghana.ru.

Source: ferghana.ru/10/16/09. Translation and synopsis by OSI Central Eurasia Project.

Full version: <http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=6337>

### **Uzbekistan Sells “One Million Tons of Cotton”: Uzbek Government**

Synopsis: Uzbekistan concluded a contract at the 5th International Cotton Fair in Tashkent for 1 million tons of cotton from the 2009-2010 harvest, the state-controlled gazeta.uz reported, citing a statement by Akmal Kamalov, deputy minister for external economic relations. The chief buyers are from Bangladesh, Iran, China, South Korea, Moldova, the United Arab Emirates, Pakistan, Russia, Turkey and Japan.

The fair is organized by the government of Uzbekistan and the International Consultative Committee for Cotton (ICAC), and involved 276 companies from 34 countries. The first fair was run in 2005, and since then, both direct and future contracts have been signed for about 5 million tons of cotton. About 75 percent of Uzbekistan's harvest is exported.

Original title: Very Valuable Million.

Source: [gazeta.uz/10/16/09](http://gazeta.uz/10/16/09). Translation and synopsis by OSI Central Eurasia Project.

Full version: <http://www.gazeta.uz/2009/10/15/fair/>

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More reading:

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

Academic view of the subject: <http://www.soas.ac.uk/cccac/events/cotton-sector-in-central-asia-2005/file49842.pdf>

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