

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

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The world price for cotton has exceeded the psychological barrier of 1 USD per pound



The cost of cotton per pound in the world market has exceeded the psychological barrier of 1 USD (1.0198 US) per pound. In one day the price of cotton has risen to 3.8 per cent and since the beginning of the year to 62 per cent, reports the “Russian Paper”. This is an unprecedented rise in prices over the past five years.

The rise is due to the crop failure of cotton. In Pakistan, which exports 8 per cent of cotton to the world market, the floods ruined the cotton fields; in China (25 per cent of cotton export) the cold weather and rain showers prevented the cotton plants to mature on time. And the updates on harvest in India (12 per cent of world market cotton) will be known approximately in a month.

According to experts, the cotton deficiency in the world might reach 2 million tons and the rise in cost might go up to 2,8- 3 thousand USD per tonne (up to 1.5- 1.4 USD per pound).

This year in Uzbekistan the crop was quite good and the cost rise in the world means only one thing: by all means the “white gold” will be harvested in the country. The schoolchildren (which is officially forbidden), students and public workers have already been involved in the harvest, unofficially ordered by authorities.

It is a tradition for Russia to buy cotton grown in CIS countries. 40 per cent of cotton import in Russia comes from Uzbekistan (approximately 100 thousand tons), 20 per cent from Kazakhstan and Tadzhikistan, 9 per cent from Turkmenistan and 7 per cent from Azerbaijan.

Source: [Ferghana.ru](http://www.ferghana.ru), 22.09.2010

<http://www.ferghana.ru/news.php?id=15594&mode=snews>

Meanwhile Radio Liberty wonders.

Will Uzbek peasants benefit from the cost rise in the world market?

Bobomurod Razzokov, a farmer from Bukhara, says that Uzbek farmers would not benefit from the rise in costs of cotton price in the world market, because in Uzbekistan the government buys the cotton from farmers for a price they like. In Uzbekistan, the difference between the cotton production expenses and the price which government buys is very little, in other words, a farmer benefits only about 10- 15 per cent from the entire crop, he says.

- If the harvest is good and if we meet our contracted target, the profit will be 10 per cent. If let's say we spent 100 million som on our expenses, then our profit will be 10 million. Expenditure is up to 85-90 per cent, says Bobomurod Razzokov.



Kubay Ortikov, a farmer from Karakalpagistan, says that the main profit from cotton goes to the account of the government.

- Government buys the 1st sort cotton for 640 thousand som from us and the 2nd sort for 600 thousand som. The farmers get only 50 per cent of the real price of cotton. The rest goes to the authorities,- says Kubay Ortikov.

In these days farmers do not benefit from growing cotton, when they harvest the crop in autumn, the profit and expenditure is almost equal,- continues Kubay.

- The price of mineral fertilizers is in average 300 thousand som per tonne. 1 liter of diesel oil is 1200 som. A tractor which cultivates costs 27 million som. You can calculate the cost of amortization. The state taxes are so heavy. Farmers pay 16 different taxes. We pay 450 per 1000 som that we take for wages.

According to Bobomurod Razzokov from Bukhara, as long as the Uzbek farmer is not independent from the state, no matter how much the cotton price rose in the world market, the farmer can never gain.

- Every farmer is controlled; internal affairs, prosecutor and all other structures of the state control the farmers. As if there is no other problem in the society except farmers. There is only one thing- live or die but you have to meet the planned target,- says Bobomurod Razzakov, the farmer from Bukhara.

Source: Ozodlik, 24.09.2010
<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/2166436.html>

In the Year of the "Healthy Generation" in Kokand, mothers with underage children are sent to the cotton harvest

On September 22, 2010 the staff of Kokand State Pedagogical Institute announced that everyone is to go to the cotton harvest, including women with young children. Residents of Kokand told this to "Ferghana.Ru".

"We are outraged once again", said one of the Kokand women. "That we collect the cotton and don't get money for it, we have become accustomed to that, it has become the norm. Now a mother with small children must go to pick cotton! And who is there to watch after our children as we collect cotton? What can be spoken about the health of future generations when mothers with young children are being driven to the cotton fields?"

A doctor (name withheld), from one of the medical institutions in Kokand, said, "I do not understand how this could come into the head of the local authorities. Where and how will these mothers and their little ones live, seeing that mothers will breastfeed their children, who will cook them food, because children under five years old need special, different kind of food than adults. And then, at the residences of cotton growers there are, as a rule, no normal living conditions, there is a complete lack of sanitation. Where will mothers hang their children's clothes, where will cradles and cribs be put- the general barracks?"

According to this doctor, farmers cannot withstand the unemployed residents of the Ferghana Valley who are ready to pick cotton for pennies. The same doctor recently witnessed as a farmer announced that for the collected cotton he will pay in cash and he needs 50 pickers. More than 150 people came from local villages. When the farmer said that he does not need so many, the villagers have proposed: "Pay for the entire harvested cotton and we'll split it between us. What is the difference for you how many people gather your cotton? We are many - it will go faster. "

In this situation, the question arises: how justified is the decision of the local authorities to force mothers with young children to pick cotton, while thousands of unemployed people are willing to pick cotton for little pay.

Source: Ferghana.ru, 22.09.2010
<http://www.ferghana.ru/news.php?id=15595&mode=snews>

In Uzbekistan, a student was expelled from university for not meeting the cotton target

Javlon Togaev, a student at the Guliston University in Sirdaryo province, has been expelled from university for his absence in picking cotton and it was announced to other students to set an example.

In order to clarify this report, the BBC contacted Bakhtiyor Khamroev, a human rights activist from Djizzakh.:

“This has been proven, but the university administration cannot say the reason was cotton, they expelled the student for some other reason”.

BBC: What was the reason then? Is it for sure?

“Apparently the student wrote a letter permitting to expel him if he does not attend the harvest and the classes. He went to talk to the rector of the university, but he said that it was a final decision, that he would be expelled”.

BBC: So he was exempted while he was picking cotton?

Bakhtiyor Khamroev: “It looks like that. The demands of meeting the daily target of harvesting the crop are rising for students. Because the crop is really good this year and no matter what, they want to collect it as quickly as possible”.

BBC: What is the amount of the daily target?

Bakhtiyor Khamroev: “Depends on their age: 30-40 kg for schoolchildren, 70-80 kg for college students and 100 kg for university students. The pay is 120 som per kg. As usual, children bring their own food. The drinking water is a big problem. I recently have been in desert areas. In Pakhtakor, Dostlik, Zafarobod, Mirzachol districts, 80% of the area is not provided with drinking water. Children drink water directly from sewages, or concrete pools.”

Source: BBC, 23.09.2010

http://www.bbc.co.uk/uzbek/uzbekistan/2010/09/100917_cy_cotton_student.shtml

In Kokand 4 thousand residents are sent to pick cotton

In the Kokand city of Fergana province 4 thousand workers and personnel of companies are mobilized in the harvesting season.

Independent news agency Kharakat reports:

Four thousand workers and personnel of companies are sent to pick cotton in various provinces of the country. About 1,5 thousand people were sent to Sirdarya and Djizzakh provinces.

We would like to note that the distance between Kokand, Sirdarya and Djizzakh is around 500 kilometers. More than 2 thousands men and women are taken to cotton fields, which are close to the Kokand city, on a daily basis.

The same situation is happening in Fergana city. According to CA- News, workers and personnel of all companies in Fergana city were sent to pick cotton for 10 days and that includes school and kindergarten teachers.

Source: [Ca-News.org](http://www.ca-news.org), 23.09.2010
<http://www.ca-news.org/news/490151>

The schoolchildren of Bekabad are also in the fields

As it was reported by the newspaper Harakat, on 15th of September Shodibek Khamraev, the head of the administration in Bekabad district, ordered that children of the schools No. 6, 7, 11, 13 and 55 be sent to the cotton fields. It is reported that there is a daily target to pick cotton for schoolchildren, which is 70 kg a day. Shodibek Khamroev is checking the fields and demanding from teachers to provide daily reports on attendance of those children working in the fields, as well as the quantity of the harvested cotton. The mayor of the district insults and threatens the school teachers who have not been able to organise the full presence of children in the fields. Numerous complaints to the police from the residents of Bekobod district on violation of legislation on labour of minors remained unanswered. It seems, it is because Shodibek Khamroev is a Member of Committee in the Senate of Oliy Majlis (Parliament) of the Republic of Uzbekistan on the issues of budget and economic reforms, believes the news agency Harakat.

Source: [Harakat](http://www.harakat.net), 22.09.2010
http://www.harakat.net/el_news.php?id=6790

“Nasaf” football team is in cotton field

In Kashkadarya everyone is picking cotton: students, schoolchildren, workers and even military is contributing to the harvest of the white gold.

On 24th of September Kashkadarya paper reported that the famous football team “Nasaf” is also in the field.

In this year’s football season the “Nasaf” players will work hard to test their abilities not only on the football field, but also in cotton fields- says the news report.

In this “match”, which was held in Kasbi district on the “Kenja bobo Egamberdiev” farm, the footballers and the administration team were lead by the main team coach Anatoliy Demyanenko into the fields.

Source: Uzbek Human rights Society, 24.09.2010

Uzbekistan Starts Coercive Cotton-Picking Campaign

As the cotton harvest got well under way in mid-September, the authorities are coercing growing numbers of schoolchildren as well as students and public sector workers to work in the cotton fields, by using a number of tactics in an effort to keep up the pretence that the extra labour is entirely voluntary.

Even though, in the face of an international boycott of its cotton, the Uzbek government reinforced legal prohibitions on the use of child labour, the practice continues.

“Schools and colleges are closed, and year-one children stay at home while teachers and other schoolchildren work in the fields,” Yelena Urlaeva, head of the Tashkent-based Human Rights Alliance said. She also mentioned that the security presence in the fields increased.

Due to good weather conditions, this year’s harvest will be a good one and the authorities have set a target of over 3.5 million tons of raw cotton. To achieve this they will need to recruit more “volunteers” than ever.

In the central region of Jizak, human rights activist Rasuljon Tajibaev reports that all the markets in Pakhtakor district are closed. “Everyone is picking cotton,” he explained.

Coercion is overlaid with propaganda, as the government appeals to the nation’s sense of patriotism. On September 15, Khorezmskaya Pravda, a state newspaper in northern Uzbekistan, published an appeal headlined “Cotton is Our Pride, Our National Wealth”. “Every one of us should be working in the fields today,” the statement said.

Muslim clerics in the eastern Andijan region have been drafted in to support the campaign. An article in a local newspaper said “picking every gram of cotton is a sacred duty for every Muslim”.

An observer in Khorezm region argues that the authorities are “using this rhetoric to conceal their interest in cheap labour from coerced workers”. And some people are so used to the annual cotton campaign that they see nothing wrong with it. An education sector employee in a Tashkent suburb insisted there was no question of coercion. “We’ve been picking cotton for 20 years,” he said. “And our children will gather it.”

Source: IWPR, 25.09.2010
<http://iwpr.net/ru/node/48546>

The people of Fergana were mobilized to the cotton harvest on 27th of September 2010

University students, workers and public servants of Fergana city were massively mobilized to the cotton harvest.

According to the source, from the mid of last week all students were sent to pick cotton, taking a school break, even though the authorities of the city declared earlier that this year university students would not be involved in the harvest season.

According to the source, regional authorities commented on this decision and that it was with regards to the expected cold weather changes and rain from the 5th of October. In relation to that, the heads of businesses in the region were ordered to send their workers to pick cotton. Workers and personnel of the companies are leaving for neighbouring provinces to participate in harvesting for a few days. People who refuse to go are threatened with dismissal, regardless of the reasons for refusal, whether they have small children or other family circumstances.

We remind you that in mid-September, residents of Bukhara, Samarkand and other provinces were involved in large numbers in cotton harvesting.

This year the people of Tashkent, the capital of the country, were also partly drawn into the cotton campaign.

During the entire season when the university students work in agriculture they are withdrawn from the studies, the cotton picking is carried out seven days a week from 7am till 7pm.

Source: Ca-News.org, 27.09.2010
<http://www.ca-news.org/news/492361>

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/>