

A CHRONICLE OF FORCED LABOUR OF CHILDREN AND ADULTS

HARVEST UPDATES FROM UZBEKISTAN

Issue 4, October 1, 2012

This chronicle aims to provide fresh evidence of the on-going practice of forced labour of adults, youth, and children in Uzbekistan's cotton industry. Uzbekistan is one of the largest cotton producers and exporters in the world.

(Apologies for cross-posting if any. Please let us know if you do not wish to continue to receive these reports).



Photo: Small village Surhandarya region "Everyone is in the cotton"

Harvest updates - UGF local monitors report:

(20.09.2012 -1.10.2012)

- Schools of several districts in Tashkent and Kashkadarya regions began to send older pupils (grades 7-9) to pick cotton; in Kahskadarya region, children work after school hours.
- On the September 29th, 200 8th and 9th grade pupils from School No 1 in the Zarbdar district of Jizzak region went to harvest cotton. They were led by the school's director, Bakhtiar Elmuradovym. The pupils were told they would be recruited for three days only, from Saturday till Monday.
- For the first time in many years, people forced to pick cotton are not receiving any payment for their work. In addition, they have to fulfill an assigned daily target, usually of 60-70 kg of cotton per day, and are told that if they fail to meet the target they have to buy cotton from the local village population or hire someone to meet the targets in their place.
- Andijan. For the first time in the history of Uzbekistan, students of academic lyceums, where the more talented youth go to receive an education, were sent to pick cotton.
- Teachers from Tashkent schools are still being sent to the fields. Every school has to send between 15- 20 per cent of their personnel. As a result, due to the lack of teachers, the number of classes are reduced and the remaining teachers have to combine groups and teach them together.

- Doctors and nurses in Tashkent are also sent to pick cotton. City hospitals and clinics are required to send approximately 15-16 per cent of their personnel to the harvest. If anyone refuses, he or she has to pay \$150 to the administration, which would hire a casual worker to take the place of the employee in the field. But no one knows how this money is used in reality, it is not accounted for or subject to audit.
- Women's Committee of Uzbekistan (a Government-organized NGO), published an appeal on its website, calling for women in the country to take the initiative and go to attend the hashar (collective voluntary involvement in public work, in reality the form of forced labour) of the cotton harvest. "... Cotton does not belong to one person or an organisation, it is all of ours, it is our nation's wealth! It is a duty for every citizen to take part in the cotton harvest!",- says the appeal.
- These calls for mobilizations to pick cotton were also published by The Spiritual Board of the Muslims of Uzbekistan - to the believers, and by the "Makhalla" Foundation - to the residents of neighbourhoods.
- From interviews conducted with teachers of colleges and lyceums, we learned that they were sent to far and secluded (40-50km away) fields away from the central roads. Young people, between ages 16-18, are working in the fields 40-50 km from the major towns, so that foreign correspondents cannot reach them. They are housed in school sports halls, village cinemas, and meeting halls.
- On August 26th, in Angren (100km away from Tashkent), the Automotive College had a parents' meeting, where they talked about obligatory participation in the cotton harvest. According to the parents, the participation of teenagers between 15-17 years old was presented by the administration of the college as an "act of patriotism and love for the motherland." The cotton campaign in its current form has brought corruption to its highest levels. Cotton harvest related extortions and bribery are widespread throughout the country. Parents of students were told that, "in case a student doesn't go to pick cotton, they would have to pay in average \$150 US dollars in addition to paying for transport and food of another worker."

Deputy Rector of Termez University beats students

17.09.2012

A student of Termiz State University who introduced himself as Farkhod complained that Shukur Khurramov, the deputy rector of the university, is beating and humiliating those students who fail to fill the daily quota of cotton. Professor Khurramov admitted to Radio Ozodlik that he slapped students from time to time. "Should we let them loose instead of being strict with them? – said Prof. Khurramov said to the Ozodlik correspondent, - We only have one demand, to pick cotton and fulfill the targets assigned by the mayor of the region, which is 60 kilo per day. We don't ask for anything else. We might have slapped one or two times when they misbehaved. 60 kilo targets were assigned across the country for everyone and we are also trying to accomplish the assignment of higher authorities."

According to the student, the professor said: "You are not human, dirty dog, you didn't come from humans, and you are a dog child." The health conditions of the students are not taken into account at all. Some of them might be ill, but they never receive care, - says Farkhod.

661 students of Termiz State University have been picking cotton since 5 September 2012 in Pari village of Muzrobod district in Surkhandarya. According to university authorities, the daily target per student was assigned at 60 kilos, in total the students have to pick 39 tons and 660 kilos of cotton per day.

Source: <http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/24710620.html>

Schoolchildren already in the fields

29.09.2012

It's been four days since lessons have stopped for upper-class pupils of Ishtihon district schools, Samarkand region. Starting September 28, even the 5th grade pupils were taken to pick cotton. "Schoolchildren are sent to pick cotton. In the school where I work there weren't any classes yesterday for 5th graders. They were also sent to pick cotton. Schoolchildren from schools # 8, #17 and #33 all were let out of class and sent to pick cotton. 7th, 8th and 9th graders were also sent to pick cotton four days ago. Before them, all the teachers went to the fields to pick cotton, now they are sending children, - said the teacher from one of the schools in Ishtihon district to Radio Ozodlik.

Radio Ozodlik spoke with one of the 5th grade children of school # 8:

Radio Ozodlik: Did you go to pick cotton?

Pupil: Yes, they let us out of school for cotton.

Radio Ozodlik: How long have you been picking cotton for?

Pupil: About three days now

Radio Ozodlik: How much cotton you are picking per day:

Pupil: We are picking ten kilos a day

Source: <http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/24723781.html>

Students escaping from cotton crushed by the train

25.09.2012

On the September 16th, in Turtkul district village, Republic of Karakalpakstan, 17 year old Masharip Siddikov and Doston Amitov, were run over by a train.

The investigation results found that the two were fleeing the cotton field they were working in and died while trying to run away back home.

According to a report by an anonymous source from Turtkul district, the students fell under the train while trying to jump off it. The reason they ran away was because they weren't given any food and were starving while working in the fields. Both had been picking cotton in Miskin village since the beginning of September. The incident was confirmed by the the Turtkul police.

Source: <http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/24719640.html>

Mothers of small children punished for refusing to pick cotton

24.09.2012

For the past week, the electricity has been cut off in the houses of women with small children who did not attend the cotton harvest. These cases took place in Samarkand village of Pakhtakor district, Jizzakh region.

Jasurbek, a villager, told Radio Ozodlik, that this punishment was being enforced by local authorities and police officers.

“The mahalla committee, the local police, the representatives from the Women’ committee and an electrician all came to cut off the power. They did it in retaliation for the women’s refusal to go to the cotton fields. They send everyone receiving welfare benefits to pick cotton. When they refuse to go, they all come and cut off the power. These committee people and the police never leave them alone, coming to their homes daily,- says Jasurbek.

According to human rights activist Uktam Pardaev, in some areas women who are not attending the harvest but still receiving benefits for their children, are punished even more severely having their benefits cut off. A staff member of the Jizzakh regional office of Labour and Social Protection did not deny that women with small children were forced to go to pick cotton.

Source: <http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/24718319.html>

Fifteen year old students sent to pick cotton

20.09.2012

According to reports by a Fergananeews.com reader on September 15, 15- year old students from a college in Samarkand city were taken to pick cotton in the fields.

“They were told to take enough food for three days. I don’t know which village they were sent to in Pastdargom, said the reader, - It is also unknown when they will be back.Perhaps when the plan has been fulfilled.

Source: <http://www.fergananeews.com/news.php?id=19479&mode=snews>

Uzbeks are picking cotton in Kazakhstan

20.09.2012

Thousands of Uzbeks are picking cotton in southern areas of Kazakhstan. The payment in Kazakhstan is as twice of what is being paid in Uzbekistan.

Radio Ozodlik spoke about this with Khasanboy from Jizzakh who visited his relatives in Kazakhstan:

“I asked them why they don’t pick cotton in Uzbekistan since we have so much of it? They said that there is not enough land and they pay very little for the harvest, and even that payment you can’t get fully on time,” - said Khasanboy. According to his estimates, there are over 300 Uzbek cotton pickers in the village in Kazakhstan he visited.

Abdurakhmon, one of the private land owners in Maktaorol district of Kazakhstan, who has 10 hectares of cotton fields, says that he pays 10 cents (US) per kilo for picking cotton. According to him, he also provides the labourers from Uzbekistan with accommodation, food and other expenses. In a conversation with him, Radio Ozodlik asked him why the pay for cotton pickers is twice more than it is in Uzbekistan and if the profit from cotton justifies the expenses.

“We get a good profit that is why we are building houses and buying cars. We can grow anything we want on our lands, but we choose to grow cotton, because it is more profitable. The government provides us with cheap fuel, energy, and mineral fertilizers. Every year the government gives us subsidies. For example, this year we received 12 thousand tenge (\$80US dollars) per hectare. And we sell the cotton directly to firms through auctions. We are neighbours with Jizzakh region, I am in touch with farmers in Uzbekistan. They say that even when they fulfill the government quota, they are still in debt to the government. That really surprises me,- says Abdurakhmon the land owner in Kazakhstan.

Source: <http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/24714500.html>

“The government only made half a step”

22.09.2012

In Bukhara oblast, schoolchildren have not been seen in the cotton fields. They remain at school while 15-17-year-old teenagers from colleges are sent to pick cotton.

The leader of the Human Rights Alliance of Uzbekistan (HRAU), Elena Urlayeva, spent the whole day on September 18 in remote areas of Bukhara Region, but could not find schoolchildren in cotton fields.

“Teachers pick cotton only on Sundays,” she said. “I specially chose Jondor District where I was last year.” The human rights defender said last year fields were crowded with children, including first-grade pupils that “could not even reach the top of the cotton shrubs.”

“Every school was assigned to a cotton field, but this time I only saw adult cotton pickers in those fields,” Urlayeva said. Locals told Urlayeva that they had been surprised by the authorities’ move to ban the use of schoolchildren to pick cotton.

But unlike Tashkent oblast where the majority of teachers were sent for cotton harvesting and children are virtually not studying, classes are held in full in schools in Bukhara. If the parents of schoolchildren in Jondor District are lucky, one cannot say the same about the parents of 15-17-year-old college students who are being mercilessly exploited this year, just as previously, in cotton fields.

“I did not like conditions in which students of Bukhara’s law college are kept, it seemed to me that their barracks are not only terribly miserable but also damp,” Urlayeva said.

Future lawyers walk to cotton fields at 6:30 in the morning and finish work at 6:30 in the evening. It takes them over an hour to walk to “their” fields and the same amount of time to get back to the barracks. A similar situation is in the neighbouring Romitan District visited by Urlayeva. Schoolchildren are in school this season while college students are exploited to the full.

“During the monitoring visit I asked people who were travelling from Bukhara to Karakalpakstan or vice versa. All of them said the situation with the use of child labour was similar there (in Karakalpakstan),” Urlayeva said.

Human rights activists are happy by the fact that, against all expectations, there are no schoolchildren in the cotton fields in Bukhara oblast and Karakalpakstan, even in the most remote areas. “But the government has only made a half-step by releasing schoolchildren from cotton conscription. They

should make a full step so that all children are released,” Uralyeva said. She referred to the Constitution of Uzbekistan, which states that “children” covers all persons under 18 years of age.

Source: http://www.uznews.net/news_single.php?lng=en&sub=top&cid=2&nid=20890

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/cccac/events/cotton-sector-in-central-asia-2005/file49842.pdf>

Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights, 2011: <http://www.uzbekgermanforum.org>