

CHRONICLE OF FORCED LABOUR OF CHILDREN AND ADULTS

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Context: Forced labour of children and adults is a systematic and widespread practice in the cotton industry of Uzbekistan. The Uzbek government continues to exploit its citizens making them work for free or negligible pay in cotton fields. Given the significant revenues generated by the cotton production system for the governing elite, Uzbekistan is not interested in conducting serious reforms to end forced labour. The 2013 cotton production cycle is underway and, by all indications, state-sponsored forced labour of children and adults is continuing this year. This Spring, the authorities have already sent children, university students and public-sector employees to weed cotton in multiple regions.

Medical personnel from Yangiyul were forced to go to weed cotton

27.05.2013

Beginning May 27, doctors, nurses and other staff of the central hospital of Yangiyul district in Tashkent region have been forced to work in the cotton fields.

Nadejda Kunisina, a 50-year old paramedic who has worked at the hospital for 20 years, reported the forced mobilization to Radio Liberty.

“Now we are weeding cotton on these hot days, in Toshovul farm of Yangiyul district. Nurses, doctors and other medical staff members are forced to work in the fields against their wills. We are exhausted from working all day. Even working half day wouldn’t be that bad,” Ms. Kunisina said.

Anvar, a driver who also works for the Yangiyul central hospital, told Radio Liberty that medical staff taken to work in the cotton fields were not given food.

“Every morning we are taken on buses to the fields. We take our own food with us. In the evening they bring us back again on buses. The conditions are severe. We have to work in the field all day,” Anvar said.

The interim head doctor of Yangiyul district central hospital, Abror Mominov, commented on the situation. He told Radio Liberty that there is a clause in the hospital employees’ contracts that says “I voluntarily will help with agricultural and farming work.”

According to him, medical staff members who signed that contract went to weed and cultivate cotton voluntarily.

Ms. Kunisina confirmed that newly hired staff has been forced to sign a contract with this clause, even if they did not want to do so.

“Are we medics or peasants in the fields?! Today they send us to weed cotton. In February they made us clean the fields. When September comes, we will have to go to pick cotton again,” said the medic.

Source: <http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/24994813.html>

Schoolchildren were sent to plough cotton fields in Amudarya district

15.05.2013

Schoolchildren in Amudarya district of Karakalpakstan have been forced to work in the cotton fields, weeding and ploughing, since the beginning of May. Elena Urlaeva, a human rights defender who recently travelled to this autonomous republic reported her observations to Radio Liberty, but the National Education Minister’s assistant denied the report.

We asked Elena Urlaeva if she had seen children working in the fields herself:

“I have seen it myself. I even took photos with children,” said Ms. Urlaeva. She reported observing the schoolchildren from School No.32 of Amudarya district working in the cotton fields near Tulkin village on May 9-10.

The human rights defender told us that, according to the children who were working in the fields and their teachers, students of 4th grade and higher (ages 10 and older) have been working in the cotton fields since the first days of May.

Mamirdjon Azimov, a resident of Djizzakh region, reported that the teachers of his district have been forced to work in the cotton fields on the weekends:

“On weekends school teachers and other organisations’ employees are mobilized. But school children were not taken to prepare the cotton fields. However, if a teacher has to lead three classes, another teacher takes over his lesson while the first is helping with cotton work,” reported Mr. Azimov.

Source: <http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/24987039.html>

In Angren all residents mobilized to weed cotton fields

16.05.13

For the first time in 22 years of independence, the entire workforce of Angren for spring field work.

In early May, workers, students and teachers from the pedagogical college in Angren were sent to weed cotton fields in the Tashkent region.

They are forced to work involuntarily under the threat of dismissal from work or expulsion from their studies.

The personnel of the Angren power plant were sent to work in the cotton fields starting on May 4.

The plant's administrators told personnel that those involved in spring field work would not be sent to pick cotton in autumn. Those who refused were asked to resign from their jobs.

Those who could not leave their workplace or needed to stay in town for other reasons sent their children in their place, to avoid losing their jobs.

A shift in the fields lasts for 10 days. Last year was the first time that the power plant's personnel were sent to weed fields, but then only for five days.

Buying freedom from cotton was an option for some. Many teachers refused to weed cotton, but to keep their jobs, they had to pay 20,000 sums (\$10). Teachers reported that the payment was only 10,000 sums last year.

Students of the Angren Pedagogical Institute who were sent to weed cotton missed their classes ahead of their summer exams. However, the students reported that their teachers have promised good grades for good work in the fields.

Source: http://www.uznews.net/news_single.php?lng=en&sub=usual&cid=2&nid=22737