The Uzbek government continues to force its citizens to work in cotton fields, in hazardous conditions and for no or negligible pay. Meanwhile, the Government has indicated no interest in ending the forced-labour production system, likely due to the significant cotton industry income enjoyed by the governing elite. 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 sent public-sector employees to weed cotton in multiple regions. This Summer, authorities began preparing the mass mobilization of forced labour. During this harvest season we will report on developments to once again highlight whether Uzbekistan is honouring its own laws that prohibit the use of forced labour.

UGF Monitors Report

The most recent reports highlighting widespread preparations by government authorities to prepare the mobilization of forced labour, as in previous years:

At hospitals and other medical institutions across the country, administrators have organized teams of staff to pick cotton in shifts, starting September 5th. The workers not tapped to pick cotton have been informed that some of their salary will be deducted as an expense to cover the cotton campaign.

Authorities have forced doctors, nurses, teachers and other public-sector workers to sign statements that they volunteer to go to pick cotton or to voluntarily pay part of their salaries (about 50 U.S. dollars) for the needs of the cotton harvest. The workers sign such receipts out of fear of losing their jobs.

At colleges, administrators require parents to sign a contract that commits their child to pick cotton, with the administration of the college and submitted with applications. (Colleges and lyceums in the education system of Uzbekistan are the equivalent of high school in the United States and many countries in the European Union; Uzbek children begin at age 15 or 16.)

State media has reported that the Government plan for 2013 is to produce 3.35 million tons of raw cotton, and about 1 million tons of cotton fibre. Uzbekistan is the world’s 6th largest producer and 2nd largest exporter of cotton.

It is expected that the burden of the cotton harvest will fall on the average technical staff of budget organizations and low-income residents of mahalla. Doctors and teachers were told that they will stay in the cotton harvest a week longer than in previous years.

Undergraduates and graduate students have been instructed to be ready to go to the harvest starting September 10th.

Government tells the People: ‘No weddings during the cotton season’

Authorities in Ferghana have „recommended“ to the 2 million residents of the region that they are to organise their wedding ceremonies prior to Independence day, September 1st, or after the cotton harvest. After authorities issued this „recommendation“, they accompanied neighbourhood elders on visits to collect signed commitments from citizens stating, „during cotton season I won’t have a
27 year-old Abdubosit saved money for his wedding by working as a labourer in Russia. After his wedding day was set for September, he bought a ticket from Russia. Then his relatives in Uzbekistan called to tell him that his wedding date had to be changed to August 25th. The district administrator’s office and neighbourhood elders had visited Abdubosit’s relatives and demanded they sign a commitment to schedule the wedding no later than September 1st.

Abubosit spoke with Radio Ozodlik about the experience, noting that he had to buy a new airline ticket as a result. “My ticket was non-refundable, so I lost money on that. I had to buy a new one. I set the date of my wedding for Saturday, September 21, then the district administration and elders made my family change the date,” he said.

According to a source from the mayor’s office, the regional administration sent orders to implement these and other “recommendations” to districts throughout Ferghana.

Another recommendation is to not take children to the fields along the highways between Namangan and Ferghana, Kokand and Tashkent and Ferghana and Andijan. Tacitly, this recommendation gives the district authorities the green light to force children to pick cotton elsewhere.

Government employees are certainly not exempt. “Plans to mobilize all staff of government institutions in all regions have been made,” confirmed a source in the regional administrative office to Radio Ozodlik.

Source: [http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/25073049.html](http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/25073049.html)

**Doctors forced to pick cotton instead of practicing medicine, again in 2013**

19.08.2013

Leading up to the 2013 cotton harvest, Uzbek medical doctors, nurses and other staff of the state medical system have been given their options: pick cotton, give up salary, or find another job. Administrators around the country have organized their lists of staff to pick cotton and those who will contribute part of their salary instead of working in the cotton fields. Medical staff were required to sign commitments to „pick cotton voluntarily“ or „give my salary contribution voluntarily“, under threat of losing their jobs.

Doctors in hospitals of Tashkent receive approximately 250,000 soms ($118 USD) per month, and those who won’t be sent to the cotton fields have been told that half will be deducted during the harvest. When some doctors voiced concern at losing half of their salary, the head doctor explained that the decree came from the President and warned them not to interfere in politics, because the consequences would be very bad.

Elena Urlaeva, head of Uzbekistan Human Rights Defenders’ Alliance spoke with doctors of the No.5 Children’s hospital in Tashkent Miro Ulugbek district. Ms.Urlaeva reported that the list of staff members who will go to cotton was being made. „Those who cannot go have been strictly warned that 100 thousand soms($47 USD) will be deducted from their salaries“, says Urlaeva.

Ikbol Avloqulova from No:1 hospital of Yangiyul district, Taskent region told Radio Ozodlik that they have also been warned about going to cotton harvest. „They are saying that the cotton harvest starts on September 5th,“ he reported. „You know first of all, the conditions are really bad out there. Secondly, shouldn’t medical doctors do their own jobs? Last year our nurses went to pick cotton and suffered terrible conditions. Around 60 physicians and nurses from our hospitalare sent to the cotton fields each year. Last year, those who didn’t go had to pay 80 thousand soms from their salaries,“ said Mr. Avloqulova.

Source: [http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/25079622.html](http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/25079622.html)

**Uzbek teachers enlisted in preparation for child labour during the cotton harvest**

23.08.13
School administrators have required college professors in Angren to prepare farms for the arrival of students who will pick cotton.

The teachers are preparing makeshift sleeping quarters for the students, in spaces that are not actually designed to be used as residential spaces, such as school gyms, auditoriums and storage halls. The professors themselves will also have to pick cotton and will sleep in slightly more comfortable accommodations. A professor, who did not wish to disclose their name, reported that educators are currently checking electric wiring for possible faults and sometimes installing new wiring in order to make all the accommodations more liveable.

Given these preparations, Angren college students are expected to be sent to pick cotton at the beginning of the autumn term, which starts September 2. Some reports indicate that picking cotton will start after September 5.

Unverified sources report that college freshmen will not be forced to work during this cotton season. Even if such a policy is implemented, its purpose is unclear, considering most Uzbek college students are too young to legally harvest cotton. In the education system of Uzbekistan, colleges and lyceums are the equivalent of high school in the United States and many European Union countries, so students are between ages 15 and 18. Section 241 of the Labour Code of Uzbekistan prohibits the employment of persons under age 18 in hazardous work, including watering and gathering cotton by hand.

Source: http://www.uznews.net/news_single.php?lng=en&sub=hot&cid=3&nid=23565

Uzbek Government to mobilize state employees for the cotton harvest
23.08.2013

Administrators of several state-funded organizations in Tashkent recently notified staff that they will be required to pick cotton starting in September. Fergana News received reports of the summonses from several independent sources in the Uzbek capital.

Among others, doctors and nurses employed by Tashkent clinics and hospitals are preparing to be sent to the cotton fields around September 10. As in previous years, the Government will not cover or reimburse transportation, food and lodging for the public-sector employees. The citizens will, therefore, bear all expenses related to this “voluntarily” “assistance to farmers.”

According to a Tashkent resident who has personally experienced the “joys” of joining farmers on the field, “The regular Tashkent resident pays for his/her travel—on a bus or a train—to the appointed field, pays for food, bedding, and cooking supplies during the entire assignment period, because organizers do not provide them. They only offer bread, tea, and, in rare cases of extreme generosity, some kind of hot meal. However, the cost for food is billed, and the city resident must collect between 40 and 60 kilograms a day to cover that bill. The city resident is physically incapable of collecting that much cotton. He will therefore have to buy the missing cotton from local cotton pickers.”

“On top of all this, the city dweller will have to rent a place from a local resident. Last year local farmers provided one room for 5-6 people and charged each temporary tenant 10,000-15,000 soms ($5-7 USD) for the period, he said. „Those who stayed back in town contributed 100,000-150,000 soms ($47-71 USD) to cover expenses of their colleagues on the field.”


Feel free to disseminate these reports further and post them on your websites. More reading:

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