UGF Monitoring Team Observations:

- Tashkent school administrators have ordered teachers to pick cotton or pay 400,000 soums to contribute to this year’s cotton harvest. 400,000 soums is the equivalent of one month’s salary for the teachers, and the order included teachers from kindergarten and up. It is assumed that the administrators will use the money collected to hire day labourers, to meet the school’s cotton picking quota.

- In Kashkadarya region 800 workers of Shurtanneftgaz company were sent to pick cotton for 15 days, starting on September 10th. Shurtanneftgaz is located in the Guzar district, and the workers were sent to cotton fields in Kasbi and Mirishkor districts. The company administration threatened dismissal or cutting bonuses of anyone who refuses to go. Shurtanneftgaz employs four thousand people total. After 15 days, another group of 800 people will be sent to replace the first group.

- Nationwide on September 10th, students of colleges, lyceums and universities and teachers, doctors and other public sector workers left to start picking cotton. [Note: 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.]

- Students of colleges in Samarkand were forced to write letters of commitment to participate in cotton harvest and “fulfil their duties to the motherland”.

Lyceum students on their way to the cotton fields, Tashkent region. September 2013.
- On September 13th, one fifth of the Trastbank staff in Tashkent left for the Jizzak region to pick cotton.

- In multiple regions, local authorities have reportedly ordered the mobilization of college students in their second year (typically age 16) and older.

- The Namangan regional administration press service stated that over 180,000 “volunteers” will work in cotton harvest this year. The statement continued to say that a majority of the “volunteer” cotton pickers are university students and employees of private enterprises and public organizations from the region. It added that the current payment for 1 kilogram of cotton collected is 210 soums.

- Tax inspection offices are leading the mobilization of the private sector for the cotton harvest. On September 15, the owner of a private design firm from Tashkent with only 2 employees received a phone call from the local tax officer, who ordered him to send his employees to the cotton field or hire someone to pick cotton in their place. According to the business owner, the cost of hiring a worker to pick cotton is 40,000 soums per day or 2.5 million sums (US $900) for 2 months.

- Employees of the Tashkent printing company Rotex were ordered to pay 1 million soums (US $400) in order to be freed from the cotton harvest.

- Officials in Tashkent ordered private café owners in the capital city to send their employees to pick cotton. In addition, the officials demanded that the business owners pay 300,000 soums ($120) for food for the cotton pickers.

- Students of Tashkent Institute of Irrigation received the order to begin picking cotton on September 19th. They will be working in Syrdarya region. The same order was received by first and second year PhD students attending Tashkent State University.

- In Syrdarya region, government officials mobilized one fifth of all public-sector workers along with college students and university students, to pick cotton.

- At a recent meeting of the college administration in Almalyk, Tashkent region, officials announced that, in accordance with an order from the regional governor (“hokim”), first-year college students will be on “reserve” during cotton harvest. While the order did not define “on reserve”, local residents understood it to mean that second and third year students will work throughout the harvest, and first-year students will be sent only in special situations.

- During the week prior to September 15, college administrators in different parts of the Tashkent region convened meetings of students and parents to prepare for the departure to cotton fields. Some college administrators reminded parents and children that students leaving and missing classes would result in problems for their studies and for the parents. During the meeting, the students were given sheets of paper and asked to sign them to indicate their voluntary participation in the cotton harvest. Parents were required to sign similar documents about their children’s “voluntary” participation in the cotton harvest to secure their children’s admission to the college.
In the residential areas surrounding Tashkent city, mahalla committees have been visiting the homes of the community residents and asking them to give 89,000 soums (US $30) to the cotton harvest. The mahalla committee representatives informed the residents that they would have problems with their electricity if they refused to pay. One pensioner reported that he already refused to pay and lost power, cut due to construction, according to the mahalla committee representatives. The man then paid the fee for the cotton harvest, and the power returned.

Coverage by Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty Uzbekistan service “Ozodlik” and the BBC Uzbek Service
12.09.2013

Radio Liberty is receiving email messages about the cotton harvest. One email stated:

“Today the director gathered us for a meeting. According to what the director said, we have to be ready to pick cotton. And we also have to prepare our blankets and covers, foldable beds and aprons. And we would leave as soon as they receive the go ahead from the regional government administration. We all wrote letters of acknowledgment which said that we would go to pick cotton.”

Another Uzbek citizen sent Radio Liberty a copy of the letter of acknowledgement addressed to the director of the college of Samarkand Social Economics A.A Nosirov. The letter stated:

“I ______________________, the student of course # ___ acknowledge to obey all the internal rules and regulations of the college and to attend all the classes.

   I also acknowledge to participate in cotton harvesting, the national wealth of our nation, and sincerely fulfil my duty to my country, my nation and my family. I promise to earn the respect of my teachers and administration of the college by my exemplary behaviour. I will follow all the safety rules. If I do not fulfil the above mentioned promise, I agree to retake the course and be penalised by all means shown in the law. Signature”.

Radio Liberty journalists investigated the practice of obtaining these letters of acknowledgement from students sent to pick cotton and found that they are used throughout the country, not only in Samarkand Social Economics College.

A staff member of Samarkand City College of Economics, who identified herself as Gulchehra, tried to justify the acknowledgement letters from students when she spoke with Radio Liberty:

“It’s true, such acknowledgement letters are being taken. A student who doesn’t go to pick cotton should at least retake the course, or be punished in accordance with the law. If you don’t force them like this, do you think they will freely go to pick cotton? Can you tell me?”– Gulchehra, Samarkand City College of Economics staff.

Radio Liberty noted that there is no such law stating punishments for college students who do not pick cotton, and asked the college representative why the students should be forced to pick cotton. She replied, patriotically, “If you journalists say so, what can you expect from other parents? We picked cotton every year, and we will pick this year too. If you have further questions, please speak to higher authorities.”
Tashkent schools received “order” to go to the cotton harvest
9.09.2013

Tashkent general education schools started getting involved in cotton harvest. According to several reports taken from schools throughout the city, support staff - including cleaners, guards and secretaries - received orders to go to Tashkent regions to pick cotton on a daily basis starting from September 9th.

Radio Liberty contacted several schools in Tashkent city and discovered that the schools received the orders from city mayor’s office to organize staff to go pick cotton.

Uzmetronom Internet online media reported that the staff of Tashkent city schools, including kindergartens, staff members are mobilised to pick cotton. Uzmetronom also reported that those who did not want to go to pick cotton could purchase an exemption from the order. According to the site, staff governmental offices have to pay 400,000 soums to their respective administrations. Last year this price was 300,000 soums. Heads of the government offices who collect these payments are supposedly using it to hire day labourers to pick cotton.

A staff member of “Uzbekistan Railways”, the state-owned holding company, reported that all the workers of Tashkent city government and social organisations received orders to go to pick cotton starting September 10.

In Tashkent region, Buka district a staff member of the local government office reported that five “helpers” from each neighbourhood of the district would be sent to pick cotton.

"We were also given orders to find five people from each neighbourhood. It will be difficult, because many people here have small children. So we have to tell them there won’t be child benefits if they don’t go! If we endure it for one month, it will pass,” said the Buka district administration staff member.

The cotton harvest is fully underway in southern regions of Uzbekistan. A nurse from one of the hospitals in Navoi city, Kashkadarya region reported that her colleagues have been picking cotton and staying overnight near the fields in Kiziltepa district since the 6th of September.

“It’s been three days since our women went to pick cotton and sleep there. They will return in 10-15 days, and then others will replace them. Then if they send us on a ‘day harvest’, we will go to pick cotton daily,” said the nurse.

In Surkhandarya region workers of private companies and public organisations in southern districts started to pick cotton starting on September 6th.

In Kashkadarya region the mass mobilisation for the cotton harvest will start September 10th
7.09.2013
According to reports arriving from Kashkadarya, workers of all plants, factories, offices and other organisations were warned that starting September 9th they would all be involved in the cotton harvest.

In addition, the workers were told that they would have to pay for all the expenses related to the cotton harvest.

People from Kashkadarya who spoke to BBC confirmed this information.

According to them, it is expected that workers and neighbourhood residents, starting September 10, and university students starting September 15, will go to pick cotton.

Those people who cannot go to pick cotton due to their circumstances will have to pay the value of the daily quota of cotton; otherwise, they might be penalised, not get their salaries, or even be dismissed from their posts.

A bank worker in Kashkadarya reported that he and his colleagues have already started preparations to go to pick cotton. He added that in the university where his son studies, it was obligatory to go to cotton, and those students who refuse to go were clearly explained that they will be expelled.

A supervisor of a neighbourhood committee reported that farmers will allocate a transport for people who go to pick cotton. It has been promised that they will go to pick cotton in the morning with this transport and come back in the evening, and that they will receive their work payments on time.


**In Namangan residents and businessmen are forced to pay money for cotton**

13.09.2013

Mass mobilisation for the cotton harvest has been announced in the Namangan region. After workers of private companies and public-sector organisations left for the cotton fields, officials began mobilizing people from the neighbourhoods. Households who couldn’t send anyone from their family are being forced to pay to hire a day labourer to take their place.

According to a statement issued by the Namangan region governor’s spokesperson to the local media, in this year’s cotton harvest season students of three universities in the region, companies and public organisations will all be involved in picking cotton.

After the orders from the regional government, officials began mobilizing people in all neighbourhoods of the city.

According to Nazirjon, a resident of Namangan city, each family is forced to either send someone from the household to pick cotton or give money to hire a labourer to take their place:

“If a family pays around 25,000 thousand soums, they don’t go to pick cotton. Neighbourhood committee members are collecting this money from house to house. Businessmen are required to pay 200,000 to 500,000 soums, depending on their business activities,” said Nazirjon, of Namangan.

The head of the police department of Kosonsoy district in Namangan region is convening meetings in the
neighbourhoods and warning residents of the consequences of going off to find work in other regions. Radio Liberty’s source in Kosonsoy reported:

“At the moment the head of the police is holding meetings in neighbourhoods. Last year people went to Djizzakh, Sirdarya and Kazakhstan to find seasonal work. So he is strictly assigning neighbourhood committees to ensure that this year too people wouldn’t go off,” said the Radio Liberty source.

An official from Namangan governor’s office, who requested anonymity, confirmed the mobilisation of companies and organisations, but he denied that money is collected for cotton harvest.

A worker of a private company in Tashkent region reported the following to Radio Liberty by email:

“My name is Shokhrukh. I learned from Radio Liberty that ILO representatives came to Uzbekistan to monitor the situation. We too have been sent for now three years to pick cotton in Djizzakh. A list of people who would go and when they would go has been made. They even mentioned that international organisations will hold questionnaire. They even gave instructions on how we should respond to their questions. In other words, we have to say that we came to pick cotton voluntarily in order to help our government, to raise the economy of the country and work hard for our motherland”, reported Shokhrulk, a private-sector worker in Tashkent region.

http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/25105254.html