

## A CHRONICLE OF FORCED LABOUR OF CHILDREN AND ADULTS

Issue 5, October 3, 2013



### **UGF Monitoring Team Observations:**

#### *Andijan-*

- Starting September 10, students of all four universities in Andijan were sent to pick cotton.
- The Universities' employees were also sent to pick cotton.
- As of September 28, high schools in Andijan region were not yet involved in cotton harvesting.

#### *Jizzak Region, Bakhmal District-*

- Residents of Usmat village reported that all kindergartens have been closed, and their employees sent to pick cotton.
- One-third of all public-sector workers have been mobilized to pick cotton in Mirzachul area. "Every year the mass convoy of busses heading for the cotton fields is organized and escorted by city traffic police. This year, the procedure was slightly different. Each organization had to take their employees to the specific cotton field in the Mirzachul area themselves and on their own cost. However, none of the organizations have the capital for this kind of operation. Consequently, all costs are transferred onto the employees. The organizations expect their employees to find their own means of transport to get to the fields. The cost of a taxi to the fields is 1000 soums. In addition, accommodation is no longer provided for. Cotton pickers have to organize and pay for accommodation themselves, usually in the homes of local residents," - said a resident of Bakhmal. Starting September 15, authorities sent all high-school students to pick cotton. On September 25th and 26th, authorities returned first-year high-school students (ages 15-16) to school, apparently prior to the arrival of foreign auditors coming to the region. [Note: The International Labour Organization is currently monitoring the cotton harvest]

#### *Qashqadaryya-*

- Starting September 9, the first groups of employees of the regional hospitals and health clinics were sent to pick cotton. They will stay for 20 days; upon the first groups' return, the next groups of hospital staff will be sent to pick cotton.

#### *Syrdarya Region-*

- Starting September 12, all high-school students in Syrdarya region were sent to pick cotton. From an interview with a mother who recently visited her daughter working in the harvest:
- "My daughter was taken to the Bayavut district. They are required to collect 50 kg per day. It is very hot and there is not enough drinking water provided for on the fields. They wake up at 6.00 am, and only return to their accommodation at 7, sometimes at 8 pm."

- All students of the Construction College in Gulistan city were sent to pick cotton starting September 15. Unlike other high schools, first-year students were not returned back home, but had to remain in the fields. This is because of the over 2,000 students attending the college, only 350 students went to pick cotton. The remainder either presented a medical certificate exempting them from harvest or paid a 150-200 thousand soums bribe.
- Teachers in Syrdarya have been sent to pick cotton. A teacher of secondary school in Gulistan: "On September 13, the director of our school held a meeting and said that starting tomorrow we need to go to pick cotton. Children will continue to study. Teachers should go to pick cotton on schedule base for a period of 10 days. The director read out the names of the first group of teachers who have to go collect cotton. One of the teachers asked the director, "I'm already 60 years old, my health does not allow work on the fields. Perhaps, there is possibility to free older teachers from cotton?" Director roughly replied, "I do not care, sick or old. You have the job, you get the salary, so you must go to work in the cotton field. Or like last year hire someone in your place."
- September 15, the State University in Syrdarya region sent half of its 4,500 students to pick cotton.

#### *Tashkent City-*

- Beginning September 20, employees of Tashkent Hospital of Infectious Diseases were sent to pick cotton in the Arnasay district, Jizzakh region. They will stay there for 15 days. Then they will be replaced by the next group of health workers.
- On September 20, employees of the Ministry of Forestry Agriculture Farming were sent to the cotton fields. According to an employee of the Ministry, each individual was required to pay the costs of transport and accommodation. Many of the workers came back because the poor living conditions. They paid to hire workers to replace them. On September 14, students of the Tashkent Institute of Irrigation left to pick cotton in the Syrdarya region.
- A university student interviewed by UGF reported: "This is the third year of university I am forcibly sent to pick cotton. Prior to that, I picked cotton for three years in school, and then another three years in college. This year, I started having problems with my eyes (vision). The doctor said that I needed to avoid dust and direct sunlight. It was very difficult, but I was able to get a medical certificate to free me from cotton. When I brought the certificate to our deputy-rector (of University) he began to swear at me. He said that sick students should take „study leave“, to make space for healthy students and be treated in hospital. He said, "Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Your fellow students are working and you're not". I replied that I went to pick cotton for nine years. Now I can no longer work in a place with a lot of dust and sun. He demanded that I hire somebody for 10 days. I had to find 100 000 soums (\$30) and pay them to the chief of Cotton headquarters."

#### *Tashkent Region-*

- Starting September 15, authorities mobilized public-sector workers en masse, including workers from the education and health systems. Prior to the mobilization, authorities required the public-sector workers to sign forms indicating that they are participating in the harvest voluntarily. Workers are being told they will be harvesting for 25-30 days, as opposed to last year when people were sent for 20 days at a time. The price to buy your way out of harvesting duty varies from place to place in Tashkent province from 300,000 to 800,000 som, while the price of hiring a laborer to harvest in your place runs 400,000-500,000 som.
- In Angren, mass mobilization began on September 16, and over the next three days almost all municipal transport was relegated to moving workers to the fields. Some drivers were stopped by the police and threatened with traffic fines if they did not take people to the cotton fields.
- Despite earlier word that they would not be mobilized, in Angren first year high school students (children ages 15-16) are being mobilized. However, in at least some schools not all students have yet been mobilized. The observer reports that in most cases their families have paid to have their children exempted from harvest duty.

## Media Reports:

### 6-year old child died under the cotton in Vobkent

19.09.2013

Amirbek Rakhmatov, a six-year old boy, suffocated to death under a pile of cotton in Vobkent district of Bukhara region. District police told Radio Liberty that the child accompanied his mother to pick cotton, climbed into a trailer for transporting cotton, and fell asleep. No one noticed, and when cotton was loaded into the trailer at the end of the day, the child was suffocated under the weight of the cotton.

The tragedy happened on 15 September in Narchok village of Vobkent district. Amirbek Rakhmatov was born in 2007. Earlier in September, he had just begun his first year of primary school at the Nasahiy school. Amirbek was buried on Monday, the day after his tragic death.

Amirbek went to pick cotton with his mother, so that she could meet her quota. Tired, he took a nap in the cotton trailer. When the day's cotton was loaded into the trailer, no one noticed him in it. The body of the child was only discovered when the trailer unloaded the cotton at the warehouse.

This tragedy was the third fatality in the first two weeks of the cotton harvest that has been confirmed by Radio Liberty. A second-year student of Karshi State University, History Faculty stabbed four other students of the same faculty in a cotton field on 16 September. One of the stabbing victims died on the spot. Muhlisa Rajabova, born in 1996 and beginning her second year at Hilol Agriculture College of Karshi, died of electrocution in a cotton field on September 2.

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/25111365.htm>

### Cotton: Teachers are assigned the role of trackers for students

17.09.2013

**As the compulsory cotton picking season in Uzbekistan began, high-school teachers were ordered to organize students to be sent to the cotton fields. This is the story of an Uzbekistani teacher:**

Cotton picking season has started. The high school has been closed for 1.5 months. Despite my poor health, I was ordered to work in the field as well. But what made it even more difficult for me was to fulfill orders to find 30 high-school students and force them to come to the cotton field. In addition to picking my cotton quota, I was made responsible for 30 students to meet theirs, because some of them sometimes tend to disappear suddenly. They run away, and I have to chase them.

The cotton season officially started today, but 10 days prior to that the director assigned us the role of detectives, asking to search for students who were not attending school. We had to look for them in "bazaar and makhallas" (markets and neighborhoods) (markets and local communities). I found some of them and make them sign a guarantee letter that they would go work in the cotton fields. We were instructed that if the teenagers were to break this promise, they would be put on a list of the local police.

There are many, 10-15%, of students registered as attending high school who do not attend and instead work in the markets, cafes and so called "paynet" mobile service offices. They are typically 17-18 years old and need to earn money, but education is compulsory. One is not allowed to work until he completes 12 years of compulsory education.

There are also a sufficient number of teachers who list the teenagers in the school registry while knowing that the young people are not attending school, and these teachers take the money for it. However, we ourselves cannot be bothered to look for those missing students and bring them back to school, so even though their tables in the classroom remain empty, we record them as attending.

Once while searching for my missing students, I went to a house close to the market. There was an old man sitting and selling brooms by the house. "Ganijon had to come to the cotton field. Where is he?" I asked. "Ganijon doesn't live here, and he doesn't go to the field. His parents work in the Prosecutor's

Office. Talk to his mother,” said the old man in a threatening tone. “Please tell Ganijon that I visited and that he must attend the cotton picking,” I said. I returned the next day, but there was no news about Ganijon. I asked the old man: “Father, what job does Ganijon’s mother do in the Prosecutor’s Office?” “She is mopping the floors there,” he said.

My feet are aching from chasing after these kids. I went to the healthcare clinic hoping to get a certificate for my sick legs, but I found everyone there in a state of fear and panic. I was told no certificates were allowed to be given, and the clinic was under strict control. Starting from that day, there would be a daily meeting at 9 p.m. in the Mayor’s Office. Everyone will be obliged to report to the Mayor and Prosecutor on the process of cotton picking. The doctors, nurses and other staff are to attend the meeting along with their director and his deputies. When I told the deputy about my sickness, he angrily said: “What makes you special among others? Everyone is sick. You must attend the fields no matter what.”

### **Other accounts shared with the BBC**

“My sister is a teacher at school #22 in Norin district. Twenty nine teachers are full time employees. Not long ago, the school director received a letter ordering him to enlist around 30 people in the cotton harvest, though students themselves were not required to pick up the cotton. There are only 29 teachers at school. If all of them must go to the field, who is going to teach the kids then? Or will they have to find somebody else instead who will be paid from a teacher’s already miserable salary? I can’t understand the work of this administration!” - **Sardor, Namangan region**

“My friends and I spent some time in “chayhana” (café) the other day. The main topic of discussion was the cotton harvest. Because the majority of us work in the governmental administrative offices: Airport, Information Committee and etc. But 80% of those being sent to the cotton fields have to leave their families and workplaces for 15 days. According to the calculation, expenditure of almost 1,000,000 sums is estimated for food and drink in the fields and buying cotton from others when the individual cannot pick the required amount. Think for yourself, this cotton picking costs this much of money. Even though the cotton itself is cheap, its value and picking procedure turns out to be too expensive. I wonder if Uzbekistan is able to run some other profitable side of the cotton industry or a different industry. And finally, the world’s other developed and developing countries don’t get their profit from cotton! Why should we continue growing seeds which have been left since the Soviet times? Look at the questions, question after question....and yet left without a single answer so far....” - **Hojiahmad, Tashkent**

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/uzbek/uzbekistan/2013/09/130917\\_cotton\\_teacher.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/uzbek/uzbekistan/2013/09/130917_cotton_teacher.shtml)

### **Cotton Season causes the rise of the labor market in Tashkent**

16.09.2013

While the government harvests the cotton at the expense of its workers and private entrepreneurs, the labor market in the capital experiences a sudden rise in wage rates. We interviewed the leader of the Action Group of Independent Human Rights Defenders of Uzbekistan Sur’at Ikromov and asked him about the work volume of the people sent to pick cotton this year.

BBC: Who are among those who are being sent to the cotton fields: government employees only or are there any representatives of other sectors?

Sur’at Ikromov: Here are people from everywhere: be it entrepreneurs, bankers, everyone is to carry this burden.

BBC: How is it possible to oblige an independent businessman to collect cotton in the field?

Sur’at Irkomov: By Mayor’s decree, they are called by the State Tax Inspection. For every businessman, it becomes necessary. Some go to the fields personally; some send someone instead or pay the necessary amount of money.

BBC: Is it actually possible for a Tashkent businessman, who has never seen cotton in his life before, to collect the required daily volume?

Sur'at Ikromov: If the businessman refuses to come to the field, he can do this under the condition that he sends a laborer on his behalf. The government needs people to harvest the cotton. They don't need precisely bankers, businessmen or doctors coming to the cotton fields. The laborers are actually in a very good position at the moment; their daily payment has been increased up to 50.000 soms. They refuse the cotton work, if offered pay less than that.

BBC: Why wouldn't the administration directly address those laborers then, instead of calling businessmen and doctors to do the job?

Sur'at Ikromov: How would they address them? The laborers are spread all over, how would they be collected and got together? Secondly, in case of employing the laborers, the government would have to pay them from its own budget. The main thing here is that laborers should not be paid by the government, but by the businessmen.

BBC: Are there any complaints and disagreements about this practice being reported and addressed to the human rights activists or the prosecutor's office?

Sur'at Ikromov: We can protect those who come to us with such complaints. If people come to us without a proper complaint letter, we are not able to protect and assist them. What is happening now is that people are instructed by the government officials to say that they come out to the cotton fields voluntarily, by their own free will; no one forces them to -- in case they are interviewed by any foreign journalist. People are also required to say that they do such sacrifice for the sake of their love to the Motherland, trying to contribute to the country's economy.

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/uzbek/uzbekistan/2013/09/130916\\_cotton\\_season\\_mardikors.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/uzbek/uzbekistan/2013/09/130916_cotton_season_mardikors.shtml)

## **Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty "Ozodlik" received the following reports from listeners:**

19.09.2013

### **Even those who have medical certificates are forced to go to pick cotton**

One of the cotton pickers wrote on the Radio Liberty blog that even some students with diagnosed health issues are forced to go to pick cotton.

*"... There is a big queue to get their medical certificates stamped. I went to university a moment ago, apparently even those who have their medical certificates are told to go to pick cotton starting tomorrow, even if they can pick 3 kilos a day. They didn't accept my medical papers either, so I've been told that tomorrow at 8am we would depart from the Northern rail station..."*

### **One shower costs 3 thousand soms**

A listener reported from Samarkand region on picking cotton and the conditions of accommodations for cotton pickers. He wrote that there was no gas or electricity, and the washing facilities were in awful condition. He wrote:

*"...So university students came from Samarkand to pick cotton. But there is no gas and electricity. Many people are not satisfied with conditions. That's why guys are paying to rent out elsewhere. Rent costs 35,000 soms plus 3,000 soms for each shower. Think yourself, money paid for cotton is very little. If a student comes back from a cotton field to have shower, the wages they pay won't even cover one month worth of showers...."*

### **What should a pupil do in a school where there is no teacher left?**

Letter from Kashkadarya region.

*"... One thing makes me think: now it is talked a lot that children shouldn't pick cotton, and in many schools and high schools teachers are forced to go to pick cotton instead of children now. So one thing makes me think, if there are no teachers left in school, what will a child do in an empty school?"*

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/25104210.html>

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/25111213.html>

## **How urban residents are paying for cotton**

16.09.2013

Tashkent entrepreneurs who refuse to delegate their workers to pick cotton are required to sign an agreement under which they allegedly purchase food for the cotton pickers for the amount of 3 million soms. This agreement is given to businessmen by the representatives of the district administration and, as a rule, in the presence of the local prosecutor's office.

According to the agreement, the "provider" of the food is Mega Food Store, a company directed by O.Z Ortikov. The "purchaser" (the businessman) is obliged to transfer 3 million soms within five working days to the bank account of Mega Super Food Ltd № 20208000900240375001 ХЕАТ «Давр банк» Yakkasaray Branch, Tashkent city МҒ001069, phone: 252-10-22, ИНН3026588018 ОКОНХ 71280.

It is assumed that accumulated money in Mega Food Store accounts will be used to hire unemployed citizens to pick cotton. But that is only in theory. In practice this agreement is a means for businessmen to buy their way out of harvest and other forced agricultural work, and it is one of the latest corruption schemes for money laundering from small and medium businesses. Where all the money goes is not known.

Sample of the agreement:

[http://www.uzmetronom.com/2013/09/19/kak\\_gorozhane\\_oplachivajut\\_khlopok.html](http://www.uzmetronom.com/2013/09/19/kak_gorozhane_oplachivajut_khlopok.html)

Shop owners in Sergeli automotive market in Tashkent have three options: they must go for three days to pick cotton in Djizzakh region, directly hire someone to go in their places, or pay 40,000 soms per day for hiring someone (\$19.5 exchange rate of Central Bank of Uzbekistan). The head of the district administration decided that the administration would manage hiring of unemployed people.

Refusal and complaints are not permitted – otherwise the shops will be closed. To find an excuse for that in any moment is very easy, and most importantly, for proper legal reasons.

[http://www.uzmetronom.com/2013/09/16/ushli\\_na\\_grjadki.html](http://www.uzmetronom.com/2013/09/16/ushli_na_grjadki.html)

### **In Karshi a sick student who didn't go to pick cotton was dismissed from school**

21.09.2013

Students of academic Lyceum # 2 in Karshi city who didn't go to pick cotton are being expelled from school. Teachers are delivering expulsion documents to those students who refused to go to pick cotton to their houses. The lyceum administration says that such an order came from 'above'.

A teacher brought dismissal documents to Barhayot Turaev, a third-year student of the lyceum, to his house and announced that he had been dismissed from the lyceum.

Gulshan Koraeva, the aunt of Barhayot Turaev, said that her nephew has a skin disorder, and for two consecutive years the medical commission exempted him from going to pick cotton, but this year his request for an exemption was denied.

„My nephew has a skin disorder. His skin on his arms splits open. This year he went to get a medical exemption and was told that he wouldn't pick cotton but do other chores there. But in the fields his hands get infections; that's why he didn't go,“ said Gulshan Koraeva.

According to Koraeva, dozens of other students who didn't go to pick cotton were also dismissed. Their course leader has been taking their documents to their homes.

The dean of the lyceum Begimoy Rizaeva confirmed that the students who didn't go to pick cotton have been dismissed. According to Begimoy Rizaeva's statement to Radio Liberty, this order came from 'above':

„This is the director's order. It is not just us. All the other lyceums will give back the [registration] documents of students who didn't go to pick cotton. Uzbekistan's cotton is everyone's cotton, it is not mine or the director's,“ said Rizaeva.

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/25113332.html>

## **Doctor refused to see the ill student**

25.09.2013

A high-school student of Guliston city had a kidney infection and returned home from the cotton fields with the help of his classmates.

His brother reported to Radio Liberty that emergency hospital doctors of Boyovut district, where his brother was picking cotton, and Guliston city all refused to attend to his ill brother:

„Two of his friends brought him home. The emergency hospital in Boyovut didn't accept him. We took him to Guliston city emergency hospital. Doctors asked if he was a student. When we said yes, they didn't receive him. They told us to take him back. What, should now a 16 years old boy die?“ - Brother of a student with kidney infection

Radio Liberty contacted the emergency hospital in Guliston city. A doctor who didn't offer his name strongly denied the claims that the hospital is refusing to examine students:

„We only receive here extreme, severe conditions. If it is a light health issue, we send them to regional hospital or a general practitioner's clinic. If he walks in, it doesn't count as extreme condition, so the same thing might have happened with that boy.“

According to Isroil Rizaev, Syrdarya regional chairman of the Society for Human Rights in Uzbekistan "Ezgulik", cotton policy has become so strict that students are forced to pick cotton till their last breath:

„Cotton is very strict. I went to see my student nephew who is picking cotton in Guliston district. I witnessed a first- year student girl taken away in an ambulance. She had a very high fever, to the degree that she started having fits. Kids are picking cotton with fears of being expelled.“

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/25117335.html>

## **I protested against picking cotton, they took my car away**

22.09.2014

Jamoliddin Ortiqov, a resident of Yakkabog region, reports that he has been harassed by local officials for having prevented Mehriniso Ziyodullayeva, his niece and a first-year high-school student, from going to pick cotton. On September 22, Internal Affairs authorities took his car, a Nexia model, for no reason, according to his report.

“I rent and run a car wash service near the city of Yakkabog. Today two militia officers came to my workplace and took away my own car Nexia, unreasonably. Afterwards, they compiled a protocol saying: “It's a Prosecutor's order, who said that my automobile tried to overtake his car on the highway,” said Ortiqov.

Mr. Ortiqov strongly believes that the officers gave him the story for “official” purpose only, and the real reason behind taking his car was his open protest against college students being forced to pick cotton.

“On September 19, a group of people consisting of a police officer, college teacher, representatives of the local community (makhalla committee), the principal of school #45 came to my brother's house and harshly demanded that my niece, a first-year student at the College of Economics, go to the field to pick cotton. I obviously went against that, to which the police officer threatened: “You are going against the government policy; I'll shut down your car wash!” said Ortiqov.

Jamoliddin Ortiqov listed the reasons why he didn't let his niece go to pick cotton: “Firstly, there are no proper conditions there. Everyone comes back saying it's intolerable. And she is a girl, a young girl! Secondly, she has recently had heart and circulation issues; her health is not good. That's why I said, no matter what, she wouldn't go,” he said.

A representative from the mayor's office of Yakkabog region, who did not offer his name, confirmed the fact that all the students from 11 high-schools had been sent to pick cotton. However, he refused to comment on the cases of authorities visiting homes to force sick students to go out to the fields.

The makhalla committee representative who participated in these visits was from the "Madaniyat" Kishlak's Citizens' Committee. He reported that the cotton harvest management is based on orders delivered from above.

"We go to every house, collecting people for the harvest, sister. People from households need to pick the cotton. We were told to mobilize college students. I'm just the one who does what he's ordered to do, sister," said the Citizens' Committee representative.

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/25114088.html>