

**COTTON 2014: A CHRONICLE OF FORCED LABOUR OF CHILDREN AND ADULTS**  
Issue 1, May 15, 2014



**Public institution worker go to the weeding Jizzak © UGF**

*Context:*

*Forced labour has been a defining component of the state-order system of cotton production in Uzbekistan for decades, violating the rights of millions of children and adults. The government of Uzbekistan steadfastly denies the existence of forced labour in the country.*

*In April 2014, the planting of cotton started, and the Uzbek authorities are continuing to use forced labour. As in previous years, they appear set to use forced labour at all stages of cotton production, including spring planting and the autumn cotton harvest. During this year's planting, authorities once again coercively mobilize, teachers and medical professionals to the fields.*

*According to information received from UGF's monitors, local authorities attracted public sector employees to weeding cotton in droves. The main burden bear educational and medical institutions.*

*Doctors and teachers gather each morning at local hokimiyats, where they organize and are exported to the cotton fields. They receive no payment for work and need to bring lunch with them.*

*According to the teachers, the situation is that dissatisfaction or rejection of the field work will result in immediate dismissal from work.*

*This Chronicle presents media publications related to the cotton campaign 2014.*

**Teacher from Akhangaran: “Every day we go to weed cotton fields, spending 15,000 soums of our own money”**

13.05.2014

Jonibek Usmanov, a 42-year-old teacher from the Akhangaran district of Tashkent region, reported that the Akhangaran school district sent teachers to weed cotton fields for two weeks at a time. According to Mr. Usamanov, local authorities announced that weeding would last 45 days. The teachers were made responsible for the costs of meals and accommodations.

In a radio interview, available for listening online at radio Ozodlik, the teacher said:

"I work in a school. We are fed up with this cotton. These days, we are forced to go out to weed cotton for 10 days in a neighbouring district. We are living in the old school building, sleeping on the floor on a blanket. We are made to work for free, and we have to spend our own money for food and transportation. For 10 days each teacher spends around \$50 of their money. Officials from the Hokimiyat [district government office] and the Prosecutor's office visit the fields to control the number of teachers that came to weed, but they are not interested in the quality of work. According to the farmers, the land is abandoned and unfit for cotton cultivation, but officials also forced them to plant cotton there. Farmers say that it is not profitable for them to plant cotton. They manage to plant vegetables on one hectare of land. Due to this, they survive. Yet cotton brings nothing but losses. I have already worked four days. They say weeding will continue for 45 days, during which teachers and nurses will have to work in the fields. In the autumn again, so there will be no rest for us with the cotton harvest."

“Оҳангаронлик ўқитувчи: Кунига 10-15 минг сарфлаб, текинга пахта чопаяпмиз,” *Ozodlik*, 13 May 2014, <http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/25382939.html>

**“I have regretted that I am a teacher a thousand times”**

12.05.2014

“I am a teacher. I have worked as a teacher only one year, but I have regretted I chose this profession already a thousand times.

In the beginning of September, the refrain and reality is: Everyone to the cotton! This is not news. One month we will pick cotton, nobody will die. Then came a new order: All to the cotton, and teachers stay to conduct classes. This order meant: the state plan for cotton will be executed, but teachers will pay for others to pick the cotton.

I work at a high school in Tashkent region. My wife is also a teacher. I get a salary of 600.000 soums (\$200), and my wife's salary is 300.000 soums (\$100). The authorities demanded every teacher pay 600.000 soums (\$ 200). We cannot give 1.2 million soums for my wife and me. It would be better for me to go to pick cotton, but the authorities accepted no excuses about the lack of money. "This is an order. Who will conduct classes for you? No need to go for cotton, hand over the money," said the boss.

The money was deducted from our salaries.

October came. The cotton plan was executed. The President congratulated the nation. We were relieved, thinking that at least we avoided picking cotton. But a day later another order arrived. The Ministry of National Education issued ordered education workers to "voluntarily" harvest cotton for another 10 days.

Strange. Yet we also survived this.

Teachers were forced to pay billions of soums and work in the fields for the cotton harvest. In this regard, one question kept troubling me: Our school officials told us the money we paid was used to buy cotton and record it as the school's contribution to the harvest plan. What would have happened if we did not pay? Would the state not collect the cotton? Cotton would be delivered to the state. Then, the question is: for what did we pay money?

Now, as we approach the summer holidays, anyone who thinks that they will receive their full salary is mistaken. We already received a new order: pay 50.000 soums for weeding the cotton fields. What does the government think of us? We are powerless slaves, always ready to do any kind of work? Sorry if my words hurt someone. But this is the bitter truth today."

Letter received by radio Ozodlik

"Блог: Ўқитувчи бўлганимга минг пушаймонман" Radio Ozodlik, 12 May 2014,  
<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/blog/25381369.html>

## **Private businessmen were taken to hoe cotton fields**

06.05.2013

Authorities mobilized private businessmen to hoe cotton fields in Oqurgon district of Tashkent region. The businessmen reported the authorities gave them two choices: work in the fields, or pay them for an attendance confirmation letter from the farmers. Two weeks earlier, authorities sent public-sector workers of the same district to work the cotton fields in .

Businessman Abdusalom from Oqurgon reported to Radio Liberty that this year the government is not even giving private businessmen a pass from cotton field preparations:

“Our local policeman doesn’t leave us alone, he comes every day and tells us there is an order from the government that either we have to go to the cotton fields or send someone else to replace us,” said Abdusalom.

According to the businessman, they are now making deals with farmers to solve this problem:

“We can’t go there and abandon our businesses. Who will do our work? That’s why we go and give 15-20.000 soums to the farmer, and he writes us a letter, which confirms that we worked for a day in his field. We show it to the officials and get our peace back,” said Abdusalom.

Another businessman from Oqurgon, who requested anonymity, also said that they now have to buy a letter of confirmation from farmers:

“We don’t have any other option. We pay 30-40.000 soums to a farmer, then he writes us a letter,” said the businessman.

An official from Oqurgon district administration confirmed to Radio Liberty that a mass mobilisation to cotton hoeing is underway:

“Recent rainfalls made the situation difficult for farmers. Grass covered the cotton fields. That’s why the district administration mobilised all companies and organisations, colleges and schools to help farmers. In such situation everyone who can help is obliged to support the farmers,” said the government official.

On 25 April, Radio Liberty received a report that in Boyovut district of Sirdarya region, teachers of colleges and lyceums were forced to work in cotton fields. According to teachers, they are taking turns to weed and hoe the cotton fields.

"Оққўрғонлик хусусий тадбиркорлар пахта чопиғига чиқарилди," Radio Ozodlik, 6 May 2014, <http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/25374873.html>.

## **A teacher from Olot who stood up against child labour in cotton is under pressure once again**

04.05.2014

Gaybulla Bektoshev a teacher from Olot, Bukhara region, stood up against forced child labour in cotton harvesting complained that he is under pressure from the education department of the region. Bektoshev, a deputy director of the school #4 in Olot district of Bukhara region, was fired for refusing to falsely register attendance of students while they were picking cotton, and reinstated in his position after he complained to higher authorities.

“At that time I was reinstated to my post after I appealed to the President. But since then my previous authorities have not been given back to me. As the deputy director, I should have access to all the documents and paperwork, but they don’t give it to me. The official of the national department for education apparently wants me to have this responsibility and simply doesn’t want to accept it when I tell him that I don’t have any access to the documents,” said Mr. Bektoshev.

In 2011, Mr. Bektoshev received a warning for refusing to authorise the registration of classes while the students were picking cotton, and he was charged as “having not fulfilled his authorised responsibilities”.

At the time, he did an interview with Radio Liberty saying that schoolchildren were taken to pick cotton from 19 September to 17 October without any order or authorisation. He was fired in December.

A Radio Liberty journalist contacted the official of Bukhara region’s department for national education, Olim Khofizov. He completely denied any of these allegations.

Although the pressure from local authorities increased, Mr. Bektoshev was able to get reinstated to his job after appealing to President Islam Karimov, even so he now alleges that the pressure by the local authorities still continues.

“During many years nobody ever has raised this issue. They don’t like me because I raised this issue and told the truth. Because the education system is completely corrupt and they don’t like to hear the truth.”, He added that he will go on fighting for his rights.

<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/25372615.html>

## **Citizens again forced to weed the cotton fields**

06.05.2014

On May 5 Angren's mahalla committees received orders to start weeding the freshly planted cotton fields. Each mahalla, the community-level representatives of the government responsible for distributing public welfare benefits, has been assigned one hectare.

According to one of these committees, the Tashkent province hokimiyat ordered each mahalla committee to weed one hectare of cotton plants and to send one employee for ten days to do the job.

Chairs of the mahalla committees are now discussing whom to send, as obviously no one is thrilled to work for ten days in an open field under blazing sun in exchange for a bowl of soup.

Some mahalla committees chose to find a resident near the fields who was willing to do the work in exchange for a modest payment, which the committee would pay out of its own budget. Sometimes all members of a committee pitch in to raise the necessary funds; in a few cases, the committee was able to use the funds left over from someone's unclaimed government subsidy.

There are 52 mahalla committees in Angren responsible for 52 hectares of cotton fields in the Bukinsky district of Tashkent province.

The mahalla's experiences indicates the spring weeding drive is in full swing in the province and affecting not just only the mahalla committees.

"Cotton season 2014: Citizens again forced to weed the cotton fields," *UzNews*, 6 May 2014, <http://www.uznews.net/en/human-rights/26186-cotton-season-2014-citizens-again-forced-to-weed-the-cotton-fields>

## **Karakalpakstan students expected to weed cotton fields**

12.05.2014

University and college students in the Republic of Karakalpakstan have been notified of the imminent start of the cotton season.

Students from Karakalpakstan State University are scheduled to start their farming duties in the Turtkulsy district on May 16.

The agricultural area traditionally assigned to the university is situated in the south of Karakalpakstan and more than 200 km from the capital Nukus.

In the past the students have often found themselves in conditions that are barely livable, yet expectations for their efforts are always high.

Not only that: Students are expected to pay for everything – water, electricity, gas. Given accommodation in the houses of local residents they are even asked to pay for electricity should they wish to charge their phones.

The board provided usually consists of lunch only and is only a basic pasta. Students are expected to provide for all other meals themselves, which then become an extra burden on their families.

### *Pay off is cheaper and easier*

Many prefer to simply pay off the organizers in order to be “excused” from the field work. Students report that the price of such a payoff has already announced at the university and is 500 thousand soums (about 165 USD) this year.

Those students who have the means say that it is much better to get out of the cotton work. Anvar, a history major sophomore, says that he is definitely going to get out of his cotton duties.

“It’s not yet clear how this upcoming weeding will be from the safety point of view. Usually not a single tour passes without some trouble: either the locals get drunk and start fights or a drunk teacher slaps your face,” says Anvar.

Sapargul, whose daughter is attending the state university, agrees with this sentiment.

“After last year’s works my daughter’s stomach started hurting – they gave the students bad food and water that is inappropriate for drinking. No, it’s certainly better to pay the money and keep your child at home. Otherwise this amount of money or even more can be then needed to doctors.”

### *Pedagogical Institute – where to?*

The Nukus State Pedagogical Institute is also scheduled to leave for the cotton fields on May 15, but students and administration are not yet sure where they will be sent.

Usually the institute is responsible for fields in Amudaryo district but the fields there seem to have already been weeded.

The students from Nukus State Pedagogical Institute expect to be sent either to Sumanajsky or Kegejlinsky district, or perhaps split between both.

Here the price of being excused from the cotton work is 350-400 thousand soms (120-135 USD).

The more prestigious a place of learning is the more its students get charged to get out of cotton work, even while the conditions on the fields remain the same.

“Karakalpakstan students expected to weed cotton fields,” *Uznews.net*, 12 May 2014,  
<http://www.uznews.net/en/human-rights/26246-karakalpakstan-students-expected-to-weed-cotton-fields>

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

More reading: FAQ: <http://www.cottoncampaign.org/frequently-asked-questions/>

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