I. MONITORING REPORTS

Republic of Karakalpakstan, 13-20 September, 2014

Authorities sent university students to pick cotton, including from the following: Karakalpakstan State University, Nukus State Pedagogical Institute, Nukus Branch of the Tashkent Medical Institute, Nukus Branch of Tashkent University of Information Technology, Nukus Branch of the Tashkent Institute of Chemical Technology, Nukus Branch of the Tashkent Agrarian University. Many students paid for exemptions from the cotton harvest. Farmers report that they prefer not to have the university students, to avoid the burden of overseeing their work. Thus far, one serious fight broke out among students of the Agrarian University.

Authorities sent workers from all public institutions and joint-venture companies in Karakalpakstan to pick cotton. Each institute and company reported they received orders to contribute a certain number of workers and had ceased operations to fulfill them. Each organization determined which workers to send. Some hired day labourers. Many workers paid $200 - $400 for an exemption from the cotton harvest.

While first- and second-year college and lyceum students (ages 15-17) have not been sent to the cotton harvest, some are picking cotton as day labourers.

People working the harvest are living in gymnasiums or paying local villagers for accommodations. The cotton pickers are paying for water and food themselves.

Local offices of the Departments of Education and Health plans to send staff of 56 hospitals, 322 medical clinics, 800 secondary schools, and libraries. Thus far, local authorities have been demanding payments from citizens to exempt them from picking cotton, purportedly for the purpose of hiring day labourers.

Syrdarya Region, 20 September 2014

Authorities have sent 40% to 50% of secondary school teachers to pick cotton. Some schools are trying hard to maintain classes. Some schools are moving the morning classes to the afternoon. Many removed “unimportant” subjects, including physical education, vocational training, art, and music, from the school programme. In all cases, the teachers kept at school have to teach their own classes and those normally taught by the teachers who are in the cotton fields.

We asked a teacher how school is going while some of the teachers are picking cotton. She responded:

“I have taught for 16 years. Since the start of this cotton harvest, we are so confused. We do not know what subjects to teach and the times to teach them. I am a Chemistry teacher, but I have to teach history, literature, and other subjects I don’t know well myself. What is that supposed to accomplish? How does it prepare the students? Often children ask me questions I don’t know. You can imagine the embarrassment. What can I say in such situations? Either I have to lie or avoid responding to the question. If it were my own subject, I would love to answer the questions. This has been going on for several years, at least for two months each year. After the cotton season finished, whether you’ve been in the cotton field or not, you have to fix the documentation to make it appear in the records that you were at school the whole time. Even if school children don’t go to pick cotton, the teachers have to be in their places too.”

Tashkent Region, September 14 – 20, 2014

The joint-stock coal company Uzbekugol sent approximately 1,000 employees to pick cotton, more than in any previous year. Employees had the option of purchasing an exemption for 500 soum, or paying a day labourer. The Uzbekugol employees were transported to the cotton fields on buses. The Department of Culture and Local History Museum sent nearly half of their employees to pick cotton.
Colleges sent 3rd-year students, typically age 18, and teachers to pick cotton in the following areas:

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<th>Location where they picked cotton</th>
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<td>Bekabad Professional College of Utilities</td>
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<td>Chirchik</td>
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<td>Urtachirchik district, Toytepa</td>
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<td>Yangiyul</td>
<td>Yangiyul Professional College of Household Services</td>
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<td>Yangiyul</td>
<td>Yangiyul Medical College</td>
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<td>Yangiyul</td>
<td>Yangiyul Agricultural Vocational College</td>
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<td>Zangiota</td>
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<td>Zangiota</td>
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<td>Kibray</td>
<td>Kibray Professional College of Economics and Services</td>
<td>Buka district, sovkhoz Parkent</td>
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<td>Kibray</td>
<td>Kibray Finance and Economics College</td>
<td>Buka district, sovkhoz Alisher Navoi</td>
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<td>Parkent</td>
<td>Professional College of Agro-Industry and Service Parkentsky</td>
<td>Parkent district, sovkhoz Sukok</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pskent</td>
<td>Pskent Professional College of Construction and National Craft</td>
<td>Pskent district, Usmanov Kh. farming</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urta-Chirchik</td>
<td>Urta-Chirchik Professional College of Industry and Service</td>
<td>Toytepa city neighbourhood</td>
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The Human Rights Alliance of Uzbekistan (HRAU) visited cotton fields near Toytepa, Tashkent region on September 18 and observed children, 3rd-year college students, typically age 18, teachers and retirees in the cotton fields. The college students reported cotton picking quotas of 60 kilograms per day. Security dressed in military fatigues kept watch over the fields.
HRAU visited the cotton fields in the Yukorichirchik area. They observed medical staff, teachers and other public-sector workers picking cotton. The doctors were from the hospital in the city of Toytepa and the district of Akhunbabaev. The teachers were from Kokand school No. 58.

Doctor of Toytepa picks cotton in Yukorichirchik, Tashket region (HRAU 2014).

Sarvina, mother of 3, picks cotton in Yukorichirchik, Tashkent, (HRAU 2014)

Ambulatory care worker Salim picks cotton in Yukorichirchik, Tashkent

Public-sector workers of Risopytnogo Institute pick cotton in Yukorichirchik, Tashkent, (HRAU 2014)
Feruza, a mother of three, including her daughter Valeriya in the first grade reported to HRAU on September 20 that authorities had sent the parents of students of grades 1-9 at school N 19 to pick cotton at the Politotdel sovkhoz. Parents were offered the option of paying sums between 10,000 and 50,000 soums to avoid the field work. Turgunbaeva G., one of the teachers at the school, reported that the school director O.Tashpulatova had ordered the parents to the fields, with the help of the neighbourhood mahalla committees.

HRAU visited cotton fields in sovkhoz Politotdel and found that teachers of school N19 were also picking cotton. The teachers reported that they were organized into shifts, from 40 schools in the Yukorichirchik area of Tashkent. The teachers noted they also are required to clean the highways, whitewash trees along the roads, and conduct other tasks outside of the school.

Near the district center Juma Bazaar, HRAU visited cotton fields and observed teenage students, parents of school children, and day labourers picking cotton. The teenage students include 16-year old Inamjon and many 3rd- year students, who are typically age 18. Young children accompanied women at the field, and security guards kept watch.
II. INDEPENDENT MEDIA REPORTS

Actors of Bukhara theatre are showing the art of picking cotton
09.09.2014

It seems the actors of the Bukhara region Sadriddin Ayniy Music and Drama Theatre will be expanding their talents in the cotton fields. A group of twenty theatre actors, technical staff, musicians and other workers of the theatre were forcefully sent to pick cotton for 15 days. After fifteen days they will be replaced with another group from the theatre.

The artists of the Bukhara region Sadriddin Ayniy Music and Drama Theatre were sent to pick cotton for fifteen days, starting September 9.

“There was a meeting yesterday morning. Our director Shamsiddin Yolliev said that everyone would go to pick cotton starting tomorrow. The first group of twenty people left this morning. My fingers are used to playing music. I don’t know how they can pick cotton. I was listed in the second group. The director told us to write our resignation letter if we refuse to go,” said the artist.

A staff member of the theatre reported that the head of the regional department of culture and sports was the one who forced them to pick cotton:

“Yesterday our director told us in a meeting that was the order from the department. Everyone has to go for a shift in a group of twenty people. One of the artists over age 50 said to the director that he can’t go, that he has a sick father that he has to take care of. But the director told him that he has to go, otherwise he should go to the department and speak to them to get permission to stay,” said the theatre staff member.

According to him, even the excuses of people with health issues, not able to do physical work, were not allowed an exemption.

“Among our artists there are people with health issues such as asthma and allergies. They said that they have medical certificates, that they will not pass. He said, ‘if you live in Uzbekistan, if you want to work in theatre, then you go to pick cotton.’ Actors come to work in the theatre, to act on the stage, not to pick cotton. Is this the respect for actors? Is this our value? said the theatre worker.

Radio Liberty called the head of the regional department of culture and sports in Bukhara, Ulmasdjon Rashidov, and found him in the cotton field. Mr. Rashidov admitted that the theatre employees were mobilised to pick cotton, and he said there were no creative staff members of the theatre among these workers:

“It is true. We came to help to harvest. But only the technical staff members of the theatre came to pick cotton. There are no actors among them,” said the head of the department.

Radio Liberty called back the theatre workers after the conversation with Ulmasjon Rashidov. A staff member who wanted to stay anonymous said that the head of the department lied:

“Rashidov told you all lies. Only 3-4 people out of 20 are technical staff. The rest are creative crew. Here is a fact for you: actors Fakhriddin, Bozorov Rakhmat, Zayniddin Karimov, who worked 35 years in theatre, and dozens of others are picking cotton as we speak,” said the theatre worker.

Source: http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/26574349.html.

In Romitan students sent to pick cotton sleep at the school where the school children study during the day
10.09.2014

Students of Bukhara Institute of Engineering and Technology were sent to pick cotton on September 10. Students arriving to Kizil Bayrog village of Romitan district reported that they were placed in a school. Due to the shortage of classrooms, at night the classrooms are emptied and prepared as bedrooms for students sent to pick cotton, and in the morning they are transferred back to classrooms again.

In three classrooms of the Kizil Bayrok village school in Romitan district 150 students slept. Due to a classroom shortage, school children and the student cotton pickers are sharing the space:

“We have to be in the cotton field by 7 o’clock in the morning. And we need to prepare the classrooms with desks and chairs for school children. And once we return from the field in the evening, we will have to clear up the rooms again, make our beds and sleep there,” reported one student.
Another student of the Engineering and Technology faculty reported that some students sent hired labourers in their places:

“One or two days before we departed for the harvest, the deputy rector gathered us and told us that if we do not go to pick cotton he would dismiss us from the university on the grounds of violating policy. According to rumours we heard, some students paid up to $500 dollars to stay. Some others sent hired labourers to pick for them. So these people came with us,” said the student.

The officials of the university told students that cotton harvest will last for 40 days.

Source: http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/26575871.html

**Children are not sent to pick cotton, but there is no teacher to teach them!**

11.09.2014

The Uzbek government banned school children from picking cotton, yet at the same time is mobilising teachers en masse. In some schools 70%-80% of the teachers were forcefully sent to pick cotton, and school children are spending the day doing nothing during school hours, according to Radio Liberty’s sources.

In cotton producing districts of Uzbekistan most of the schools do not have teachers at the moment.

According to a teacher from Khonka district of Khorezm region, almost all teachers of the schools 26, 31, 36 and 39 of the district have been sent to pick cotton:

“If there are 40 teachers in our school, then 70% of them were forced to pick cotton. Teachers now have to teach subjects normally taught by their colleagues who are in the fields. For example, a literature teacher is teaching mathematics. And everyone has to go pick cotton on weekends. Those who are objecting to these arrangements were told to submit their resignation letter,” reported a teacher who contacted Radio Liberty anonymously.

The only way not to go to pick cotton for a teacher is to hire someone else to go in his/her place:

“The director says to find someone else to pick cotton in our place and continue teaching. If we give our salaries to a hired labourer, what will we live on ourselves? They present the cotton harvest as government policy and mobilise everyone forcefully,” added the teacher of Khonka district.

Radio Liberty obtained an audio recording of a teachers meeting convened by the director of one of the schools in Khonka district. In this meeting director said that the cotton harvest is more important than classes:

“One subject can be taught in a three-hour lesson. For example, three hours of music or three hours of Russian language can be taught. This is the situation at the moment. The Government provided you with everything. You get your bread and butter. The cotton you pick is weighed and accepted. You get your salaries. What else do you need? Be ready at 7 am in the morning here! Do you think 60 people should wait for you?” said the school director at the meeting.

Bakhdir Tillaev, the deputy head of Khorezm region of the national Education Ministry denied that teachers are all massively sent to pick cotton, in a conversation with Radio Loberty:

“I also oversee the schools belonging to the department. Only 15 teachers out of 100 go to pick cotton. I sent 250 people from 16 institutions. This doesn’t disturb the classes. There are teachers who have few classes. They go to pick cotton if they don’t have a class to teach, and tomorrow another one goes,” said Mr. Tillaev.

The telephone conversation continued:

Radio Liberty: “Isn’t a teacher’s place at school? Why should he go to the fields to pick cotton?

Bakhodir Tillaev: So what can we do? The cotton has to be harvested!

Radio Liberty: “Is picking cotton a teacher’s task?”

Bakhodir Tillaev: “They go on the days they don’t have classes. Then they also have financial benefits. They get paid for the cotton they pick. I also went on Sunday and picked 50 kilograms of cotton. I was paid 12,000 soms for that. It’s fresh air. I’m a deputy head of the administration, and I want to go. I go and get paid.”

Radio Liberty: “Do you go there voluntarily, or did the regional administration order you to do it?”
Bakhodir Tillaev: “The regional administration gave a plan under which 15% of the workers go to pick cotton. Workers and teachers who do not have classes are going.”

Radio Liberty: “Does your department report to the regional administration or to the national office of the Ministry of Education?

Bakhodir Tillaev: “This doesn’t obstruct the work plan of the Ministry or the curriculum. If they live in this country, they should contribute. The cotton harvest is a celebration for us. We harvest it within a month. In exchange we get paid from the budget, new schools are built, billions and billions of dollars are coming. Who shouldn’t contribute? Who should stay aside and watch? Cotton is our wealth. Uzbekistan lives on cotton. It clothes us. When we are born, they wrap us in a cotton cloth, and when we die, we will be buried wrapped in cotton cloth.”

Urinboy Kamolov, former director of one of the secondary schools in Nukus, reported that the local officials don’t care about the orders from the national office of the Ministry of Education:

“Now it is the same situation in Karakalpakstan. 60-70% teachers have gone to pick cotton from bigger schools. In this way, children will become illiterate. The ministry cannot do anything, because the real bosses are the local officials,” said Urinboy Kamolov.

Source: http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/26578023.html

In order to keep teachers at school from cotton, money is collected from students
14.09.2014

A Radio Liberty reported that a director of an academic lyceum in the city of Chirchik, Tashkent region told the parents of the 1st- and 2nd-year students to collect 100,000 soms each, and the third-year students 400,000 soms each if they do not want to go to pick cotton. According to the caller, the lyceum director said that that money collected from the first- and second-year students will be spent on hiring replacement labourers to keep the teachers at school and teach.

Dilbar lives in Chirchik city of Tashkent region and reports that her sister is a 2nd-year student at Chirchik Academic Lyceum, and that the lyceum director gathered the parents and asked them to collect 100,000 soms each. The director explained to them that the money collected from the students’ families would be spent on hiring replacement labourers, so that the teachers could stay and teach the classes.

“The director of the lyceum called all the parents and held a meeting about the cotton harvest. My father attended the meeting. There, the director told the parents that 1st- and 2nd-year students wouldn’t go to pick cotton, that only the 3rd-year students would go. Then he said that if the third-year students do not wish to go to pick cotton, they should pay 400,000 soms each, and the 1st- and 2nd-year students should pay 100,000 soms each. Apparently, if the teachers of the 1st- and 2nd-year students leave for picking cotton, then there won’t be anyone to teach the students. That’s the reason the director gave for collecting 100,000 soms from each student, to keep the teachers at school to teach the classes and hire labourers to replace them in cotton fields,” said Dilbar.

None of the parents said anything in response to the lyceum director.

“My friend talked with her friends from another college. They were asked to collect 50,000 soms each. They were also told that this money would be spent on help and hiring labourers to replace the teachers. But in our lyceum 1st and 2nd-year students were told to collect 100,000 soms each,” said Dilbar.

In her opinion, it is not fair to demand that much of money from students to keep the teachers from going to pick cotton.

“T’m surprised. If they take that much from every student, how much will that be? How many groups are there among the first and second year students? How is it possible to ask that much? Why should the burden of keeping teachers at work lie on to the shoulders of the students?” asked Dilbar.

Source: http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/26581942.html

In Uzbekistan under 18 youth are forced to pick cotton
15.09.2014

Despite the instructions given by the government on not to involve youth under 18 in cotton harvest, it’s been reported that college students who are under 18 and even school children are sent to pick cotton.
The first year students of Kizil-uzak Agricultural college in Chimgan district of the Republic of Karakalpakstan were sent to pick cotton starting on September 14.

One of the college students reported to Radio Liberty:

“The college is located in a village, there are cotton fields nearby the college and students are sent to these fields. We were told that only second and third year students would be sent to pick cotton, but they sent the first year students to pick cotton too,” reported one of the college students

In Gurlan district of Khorezm region, some of the school children were sent to pick cotton together with college students.

“Here even the school children are working hard in cotton fields at the moment. They come in their school uniforms in the morning. They take one or two hours of classes and then they are taken to pick cotton to the fields near school,” reported Bakhtiyor, a Gurlan resident.

The local government officials firmly denied that school children were forced to pick cotton.

“Schools didn’t participate. If we receive orders from above, they will go. Last year the prime minister ordered us not to involve schools, so we didn’t. This year too we were ordered not to involve children under 18 in cotton picking, and we are not involving them. But the colleges will be sent to pick cotton,” said one of the officials of Gurlan district administration.

In Samarkand it has already been announced that second and third year students of colleges, typically ages 17 and 18, will go to pick cotton. Toshpulat Rakhmatullaev, a blogger from Samarkand wrote:

“The second-year students of college are children who are not even 17. My grandson is a second-year college student. On the 5th of September the parents of college students were called for a meeting. I also went. They gave each of us a paper and a pen and asked us to write a letter that our children go to pick cotton voluntarily and that we the parents are not against it. I wrote that I am against sending my grandchild to pick cotton, because he just turned 16 in September. According to Uzbek government’s decree, children under 18 are not allowed to go to pick cotton. After that the head of the college took me to the side and told me ‘what can we do, they are demanding us to send 2nd- and 3rd-year students, and we have to give them the numbers they demand. They don’t ask about the age.’ So that is the story.”

The day after Toshpulat Rakhmatullaev wrote this on his blog, he received a phone call from the Samarkand region administration.

“He said, ‘We won’t send students under 18-years old. They gave you the wrong information.’ I replied to him that in the beginning they were saying that second- and third-year students would be sent to pick cotton. Second-year students are 17-year-old children, so they cannot be sent to pick cotton. College administration says that they have no choice but send the children to the fields. Now a government official calls me and says that the college administration misunderstood them, that they wouldn’t allow sending children under the age of 18. I am surprised. One says this, another one says something else,” wrote the blogger from Samarkand.

Source: http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/26584906.html.

Students of TATU: we didn’t enter the university to pick cotton
16.09.2014

"We are in a mountainous area of Kashkadarya region’s Kitob district. This place is very cold. We are fed up with this. Everyone wants to go back. There is not enough space for many of us. We have to sleep either in the street or in cotton fields.” – TATU student

Many students complained that they didn’t enter university to pick cotton. But the administrators are telling them, “if you flee or refuse to pick cotton, you will be dismissed from school.”

Another TATU student reported, “There are no adequate living conditions here. The food is only tea and bread.” The photos [included in the article online] indicate the conditions in which the students are residing and working.

Source: http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/26583178.html.

Angren college students leave to pick cotton
16.09.14
Third-year college and lyceum students from Tashkent province’s city of Angren departed to the cotton fields on September 15.

Students from eight colleges and one lyceum were ordered to help with this year’s harvest.

On the eve of their mandatory cotton works the students were told at an assembly that picking cotton is a way to help their country and is an expression of patriotism.

Those who do not wish to be patriotic were threatened with expulsion and other consequences.

On the day of departure a debate broke out at one of the colleges between human rights activists, parents, and a professor about Uzbek labor laws, which are supposed to ban the practice of forced labor in the country.

The professor accused human rights activists of attempting to sabotage the country’s cotton harvest. Speaking to the parents, the educator insisted that this is within the norm of the law and is based on the tradition with its roots from Soviet times. In other words, cotton is part of the government’s policy and should not be disputed.


Karakalpakstan students pick cotton
16.09.2014

Karakalpakstan university students have been picking cotton since September 11 despite the harvest being not yet ready.

On September 11, staff and students at the Nukus State Pedagogical Institute found out about the start of their cotton shifts mere hours before actually being taken to the fields. Students rushed to pack their possessions and to buy groceries. In years past students were at least given two or three days warning before they needed to depart for their force cotton work, some students complained.

However, Karakalpakstan farmers say that cotton is not yet ripe, especially in the northern areas of the province, such as in Shumanajsky district. The late harvest cost the Shumanajsky district Khokim, Ibragim Davletmuradov, his job – he was fired in August.

Despite the plants not being ready for harvesting the forced laborers are already toiling in the fields. Insiders say there was an order from Tashkent – begin the harvest – and no one had the courage or desire to contradict orders coming from the capital.

Source: http://www.uznews.net/en/economy/27625-karakalpakstan-students-pick-cotton

Retirees pick cotton in Tashkent province
17.09.14

Retirees are toiling in the cotton fields of Tashkent province and their daily quota is 70 kg, reports the Human Rights Alliance of Uzbekistan (PAU).

Activists from the the PAU have conducted an independent inspection of the cotton fields in Tashkent province and saw both sick retirees and people likely to be less than 18 years old picking cotton.

The PAU activists witnessed retirees working in the fields on the way from Tashkent to Yangibazar, an urban center of the Tashkent province’s Verhnechirchiksky district, a mere 35 kilometers from the country’s capital.


Twenty nine students injured in a traffic accident in Chirokchi, Kashkadarya, en route to the cotton fields
19.09.2014

29 of 39 students of Chirokchi Textile College suffered injuries and were taken to the hospital after a traffic accident, incurred while the students being transported in a ZIL truck to the cotton fields the morning of September 17.
The traffic accident happened in Chiyal village of Chirokchi district at about 9:30 in the morning. A witness informed Radio Liberty that the children ranged in age from 16-18 years old. Of the 39 students in the ZIL truck, 29 suffered injuries and were taken to the emergency unit of the Chirokchi district hospital about one hour after the accident.

Reports from the hospital indicated that some of the children broke their wrists and shoulders. The Chirokchi district administration reported that the conditions of the injured children were good and that two of them were released to go home on the September 19.

Source: http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/26595450.html

III. REPORTS FROM CITIZENS EMAILED TO UGF

In Khorezm all the university students were sent to pick cotton starting Saturday, September 13.

“They said it is for a month. All students are being sent. There won’t be any classes. They even made everyone write acknowledgement letters stating that they are going to pick cotton voluntarily. Students who refused to write this letter were warned that they would be dismissed from the university,” said a Khorezm student.