Introduction

The forced labor system of cotton production in Uzbekistan remained fundamentally unchanged in 2014. As in previous years, the government used coercive means to ensure that farmers met state quotas for cotton production and to systematically and massively mobilize people to harvest cotton throughout the country. Where people were unable or did not want to harvest cotton, the government forced them to pay to hire replacement workers. In the continuation of changes that began two years ago, the government did not systematically and forcibly mobilize children to harvest cotton in 2014. It failed, however, to end the use of child labor in cotton production as in some regions local authorities forcibly mobilized children, particularly in the later weeks of the harvest, to meet quotas assigned by the same central government authorities that simultaneously decreed that children should not be forced to pick cotton.

The Uzbek-German Forum used experienced researchers to observe and document the labor and other human rights issues related to cotton production in six regions of Uzbekistan as well as the capital, Tashkent. Researchers gathered and reviewed government documents, observed cotton fields, conducted visits to educational and other public institutions such as libraries, hospitals, clinics, and local administrations, and interviewed people forced to pick cotton. Researchers also corroborated the ages of students by checking college and lyceum registries.

With technical assistance from the International Labor Organization (ILO), the government of Uzbekistan conducted its own monitoring of efforts to eliminate the use of children under age 18 in the harvest, and the ILO praised the government’s monitoring. A number of the conclusions of that monitoring, however, such as that all schools in the country operated normally throughout the harvest, were clearly contradicted by documentary evidence and eyewitness accounts collected by our monitors in spite of efforts by the authorities, who harassed and detained independent civil society activists and media attempting to report on or monitor labor and other human rights issues connected to the cotton harvest.

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1 The current report contains initial findings and analysis. A fuller report that includes detailed interview data is forthcoming in December 2014.

Further, although the government signed a two-year Decent Work Country Program with the ILO in April 2014, it has not yet allowed the ILO to conduct a survey of recruitment practices required by the ILO to monitor Uzbekistan’s obligations under the ILO Convention No. 105 (Prohibition of Forced Labor) as part of the program. Importantly, the ILO has not engaged with independent monitors or civil society groups in Uzbekistan. Its main social partners, the Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Uzbekistan, are both government-controlled organizations.

**Forced Labor and the Cotton Production System**

The forced labor system of cotton production in Uzbekistan is state-sponsored and directed, with orders, including production and harvesting quotas, coming from the highest levels of government. In 2014 the government continued to direct and control the use of forced labor. For example, a directive signed by the mayor of Tashkent on August 28, 2014 orders the “mass mobilization of workers” from the capital to pick cotton in the Jizzakh and Syrdarya regions. This order implemented the national plan for the harvest laid down by the Cabinet of Ministers in July. The directive assigns tasks to all layers of the Tashkent city bureaucracy, including law enforcement, the department of health, deputy mayors, and mahalla (neighborhood) councils, for the mass mobilization and transport of workers from the capital.3

Coercion forms the central element of the cotton production system in Uzbekistan and despite the reduction in the use of child labor in 2014, the government did not undertake reforms to the system as a whole. As in previous years, the government imposed cotton production quotas on farmers and harvesting quotas on cotton pickers. The Uzbek government maintained its monopoly over land ownership, control of agricultural inputs, purchases of raw cotton and sales of ginned cotton and assigned annual production quotas to farmers. Authorities enforced quotas, including with beatings and public humiliation, the severity of which apparently led at least one farmer to commit suicide.4

At the beginning of the season, the harvesting quota for individuals ranged from 60 to 80 kilograms/day, declining to 50 kilograms in the middle of the harvest and 30-40 kilograms at the end, when little cotton remained in the fields.

In 2014, the government continued to shift the labor burden from one group to another rather than making systemic changes to address forced labor and

3 Resolution of the Mayor of Tashkent city № 719, August 28, 2014. A copy of the original resolution and translation are attached to this report.
other human rights violations embedded in the forced labor cotton production system. Thus, while the forced labor burden on children was reduced, the burden on university students, public sector employees, private businesses, and others correspondingly increased.

Further, the government continued to impose cotton quotas on schools, lyceums, colleges, universities, and hospitals, as well as other public institutions. With the move away from using children to harvest cotton, more teachers than ever were forced to work the harvest. In schools across the country 50-60% of all teachers were absent from classrooms at any given time, leaving schools severely understaffed and unable to conduct normal classes. As a result, while most children nominally remained in school, the state’s harvest policies left many schools effectively shuttered or functioning at significantly reduced levels. Some parents were also forcibly mobilized to help schools meet their institutional quotas. Thus, the government’s forced labor policy continued to result in widespread and systematic violations of the right to education, as well as the right of teachers and hundreds of thousands of other workers to be free from forced labor.
Child Labor

The government failed to end child labor in 2014. During the harvest the authorities appeared, however, to reduce the number of children forcibly mobilized to harvest cotton.\(^5\) As in 2013 and 2012, the government appears not to have forcibly mobilized school-aged children to harvest cotton on a mass scale. The Uzbek-German Forum’s monitors did document state-sponsored forced mobilization of school-aged children mostly from 7th-9th grades (13-15 years old) harvesting cotton in the Kashkadarya, Jizzakh, and Samarkand regions. In some cases children picked cotton on family farms or with their parents, on weekends or after school. However the Uzbek-German Forum’s researchers also documented local government officials using the education system to forcibly mobilize children, including school-aged children in several regions, especially toward the later part of the harvest. In Kashkadarya region, for example, schoolchildren in the 6th-9th grades harvested cotton on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. In some cases, such as the Nishon district of Kashkadarya, children also picked cotton after school.\(^6\)

Beginning on October 15, local authorities in the Bukhara and Kashkadarya regions ordered schoolchildren from upper grades to pick cotton. In one case in the Syrdarya region, teachers stated that the order came from the hokimiat (local administration) that teachers must go to pick cotton during the school break from November 3-10 and must organize their classes to pick cotton during this time as well.\(^7\) A parent in the Jizzakh region reported to Radio Liberty that for two weeks all classes for 7th-9th grades had stopped and the children were in the fields picking cotton.\(^8\) A parent in the Samarkand region reported that school children were sent to the fields at the end of the harvest to gather any remaining cotton and that classes that had not picked 10 kilograms per child were not allowed to return to school.\(^9\)

These cases indicate that the government of Uzbekistan has not undertaken durable, structural reforms to eliminate definitively child labor in Uzbekistan. Nor has the government made it clear to local officials that child labor will not be tolerated and task them with enforcing laws prohibiting child labor. Rather, local officials’ actions clearly indicate that they believe the central authorities still care more about their fulfilling production and harvesting quotas than about their adherence to the ban on the use of child labor. In this sense, the central authorities remain complicit in the forced mobilization of child labor in many parts of the country.

\(^5\) In international law and Uzbek law, a child is a person under age 18. In Uzbekistan colleges, vocational institutes, and lyceums are secondary education institutions. First-year students are often 16 years old, 2nd year students are often 17 years old, and third year students are often 18, although some 3rd year students are only 17.

\(^6\) Kashkadarya monitor’s report.

\(^7\) Syrdarya monitor’s report.


The government did take steps to avoid mobilizing first- and second-year students of colleges (high schools) and technical institutes, who are usually 16 and 17 years old. Nevertheless, in a few areas our observers did record cases in which 1st and 2nd year students were mobilized. In the Karakul district of the Bukhara region, 1st and 2nd year students from eight colleges were sent to pick cotton beginning on October 12. Beginning on October 15 all colleges in five districts of Kashkadarya region sent 2nd year students to the harvest and several colleges also sent 1st students.

The Uzbek-German Forum’s researchers found that third-year students, including 17 year olds, were forcibly mobilized on a mass scale across the country. In every region monitored by the Uzbek-German Forum the government forcibly mobilized third-year students from every college to pick cotton for 30-43 days, depending on the region. Uzbek-German Forum researchers reviewed the registration journals of several colleges where students’ names and ages are recorded. In the registries we reviewed, approximately 8% of all third-year students were younger than age 18. If this percentage is valid nationwide, that would mean that approximately 40,000 17 year olds were systematically and forcibly mobilized for the cotton harvest in 2014.

Forced Adult Labor

Forced recruitment of adult workers in 2014 was widespread across all the regions investigated by the Uzbek-German Forum and occurred systematically and on a mass scale. People were forced or coerced to pick cotton under threat of penalty such as loss of social benefits payments, loss of employment, loss of utilities and other public services, social exclusion, fines, administrative harassment, and criminal prosecution.

In 2014 we observed an increased forced labor burden on adults, apparently to compensate for reduced numbers of children forced to pick cotton. For example, researchers documented instances of parents being forced to pick cotton for schools and kindergartens in place of their children. In past years, monitors from the Uzbek-German Forum documented that public organizations were required to send up to 16% of their entire staff to pick cotton. The percentage of staff members required to pick cotton increased significantly in 2014, with public organizations obligated to provide as much as 30-60% of their personnel for the duration of the harvest. In some cases, organizations provided up to 80% of their staff. Staff who did not want to or could not pick cotton were forced to pay for replacement workers (see below). This labor requirement seriously undermined the provision of key

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10 Kashkadarya monitor’s report. The five districts that sent 2nd year college students to the harvest are: Qas bi, Nishon, Mirishkor, Karshi, Koson. The Kashkadarya region is one of the highest producers of cotton in Uzbekistan, producing more than 400,000 tons per year.

11 Andijan monitor’s report.
public services, such as health care. For example, one medical clinic in the Khorezm region normally staffed with two doctors and 13 nurses had to operate with only one doctor and one nurse for the duration of the harvest as the rest of the employees were forced to pick cotton. Village medical clinics in some regions were forced to close temporarily during the harvest. In another example from the Khorezem region, a grandfather reported finding no doctors at the district hospital to treat his grandson and instead, only a sign reading: “All at the cotton harvest.”

Local police and representatives from mahalla committees used pressure and threats to conduct broad forced recruitment of people in their districts, including pensioners, people with health problems, and single mothers. In particular, they threatened that people would face consequences such as the loss of their maternity, child, or other social payments if they refused to pick cotton. The authorities did not make exceptions for breastfeeding mothers or people caring for young children or the elderly. The breastfeeding mother of an infant told Radio Liberty that she either had to take her baby to the cotton fields or pay for a worker to replace her under threat of losing her maternity benefits. A nurse in Andijan was forced to flee the cotton fields after permission to leave was refused so she could care for her two-year old son who was seriously ill. In the Jizzakh region, even people visiting from other regions were forced to harvest cotton. One person told Radio Liberty, “Recently my brothers-in-law came to visit us from Samarkand. They were taken on a bus from the street and made to pick 40 kilos of cotton.” A local human rights group reported that mahalla committee representatives in the Andijan region attempted to force a blind man to pick cotton.

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13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
16 Materials for final report email (29 October).
17 Alliance email, Andijan region, 4 November 2014.
Working Conditions

In 2014 monitors observed a disturbingly higher number of accidents and deaths as a result of the cotton harvest and poor or unsafe working conditions. Numerous vehicle crashes occurred while transporting workers to the cotton fields or transporting cotton. In one case, a cargo truck transporting students crashed, injuring 29, some of them seriously; the youngest was 16 years old. At least 17 people died and 35 were injured after being struck by cars or tractors. Two children in Karakalpakstan died from smoke inhalation when they were trapped in a burning home while their mother was forced to pick cotton. Although she usually took her children to the fields with her, she had been told that the authorities would monitor the fields that day and she could not bring her children. A neighbor reported that the local police had gone house to house informing residents that they would lose child benefits unless they picked cotton. At least five people apparently died from heart attacks or other health complications while picking cotton or immediately upon their return from the fields. At least three people committed suicide during forced deployments to pick cotton, including a 7th-grade girl in the Samarkand region and a farmer in the Khorezm region who was humiliated and threatened by local authorities for failing to meet his production quota.

All 3rd year college students, all university students and some other workers picked cotton for the entire two-month period of the harvest and did not attend classes or work at their normal jobs during this time. First and 2nd year college students deployed to the harvest picked cotton instead of attending class for 10-15 days at a time and did not stay overnight at the fields. Adults employed at publicly funded organizations including schools, hospitals, clinics, and local administrations usually worked 25-day shifts, longer than the 10-day shifts prevalent in 2013.

People forced to pick cotton, including children, generally worked long days, usually arriving to the cotton fields before 8 a.m. and working until 5 or 6 p.m. and then waiting an hour or more to deliver their cotton and have it weighed. Many people were forced to work even longer. The Uzbek-German Forum’s researchers found that some students in the Bukhara region picked cotton from 5 a.m. until 7 p.m., and were then forced to gather firewood for cooking fires from 9-11 p.m., a manual labor requirement of 16 hours per day for 44 days. During the harvest season workers did not have weekends, holidays, or rest days off. Teachers were forced to “celebrate” Teacher’s Day in the cotton fields as it falls on October 1, the height of the harvest season. In no cases did monitors find that people forced to pick cotton were provided with protective gear such as gloves.

19 Bukhara monitor’s report (2 November).
20 Jizzakh monitor’s report (24 October).
Workers living near the fields generally provided their own food. Workers who stayed in temporary housing near the fields generally received food from the farmer, but always had to pay for it with deductions from their earnings, usually the equivalent of 20 kilograms of cotton per day. Most people reported that the food they were provided was monotonous and of poor quality. One student returning from a 40-day stint picking cotton said: “Goodbye cotton and goodbye macaroni!” referring to the bland, monotonous diet provided by the farmer.\(^{21}\)

Housing was usually poor, crowded, and unsanitary, with many workers being housed in garages, unused farm buildings, or local schools. Nearly all housing was unheated, even during cold weather at the end of the season. In numerous cases students were housed in tents that provided insufficient protection from rain.\(^{22}\) Workers had to provide their own bedding and in many cases had no access to hot water or facilities for hygiene. In many cases workers bathed in nearby streams or paid to use local facilities.

**Payment and Costs**

The forced labor system again imposed enormous costs on Uzbekistan’s population through forced payments, lost business, reduced production, and reduced provision of essential services including education and healthcare. People forced to pick cotton receive nominal payment, usually between 200-250 soum (approximately $.07-.08 USD) per kilogram of cotton harvested, however this amount was reduced by fines for failure to meet the quota, for cotton evaluated to be of lower quality, and to pay for food, housing, transportation, or other costs. Payments were generally made every five days so some workers forced to pick cotton only for a few days at a time received no payment at all.\(^{23}\)

The government extorted payments from businesses and entrepreneurs in the form of mandatory “contributions” to the cotton harvest. The size of the payments depended on the size of the enterprise. For example, small-scale market traders such as sellers of sunflower seeds in Karakalpakstan were forced to pay 2,000 soum (about $.60 USD) per day during the harvest whereas small enterprises generally paid around 500,000 soum (approximately $167 USD) for the harvest.\(^{24}\) The Swedish telecommunications company Telia Sonera reported that it was required to contribute $50,000 to the harvest in 2014 and that such contributions are a requirement for companies to do business in Uzbekistan.\(^{25}\)

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\(^{21}\) Andijan monitor’s report (2 November).

\(^{22}\) Bukhara monitor’s report (2 November).

\(^{23}\) Uzbek-German Forum interviews with nurses and teachers, October 2014.

\(^{24}\) Karakalpakstan monitor’s report.

Businesses made these payments under threat of penalty such as increased inspections or forcing the business to close. Officials from the tax inspectorate visited businesses to extract payments and apply pressure such as the threat of burdensome tax inspections and the finding of violations. Businesses also suffered lost business and reduced productivity because they were forced to provide workers to the harvest or pay for food for workers.

Citizens who did not want to or were unable to harvest cotton, including for health reasons, or professional or personal obligations such as caring for young children were forced to hire workers to replace them, usually at a cost of 20,000-25,000 soum per day (approximately $6-7 USD per day or more than $200 USD per month). Individuals or institutions such as schools or hospitals that failed to meet their harvest quotas were obligated to use their own money to purchase cotton to rectify the deficit. They purchased this cotton from local residents who sold it at inflated prices—350 soum (approximately $.10 USD) per kilogram instead of the 250 soum the government paid workers for cotton picked.

At the end of the season many public sector employees in the Tashkent region were forced to stay in the cotton fields to attempt to meet harvesting quotas of 30 kilograms per day. Many workers reported that with so little cotton remaining in the fields it was impossible to pick more than 20 kilograms in a 10-hour workday. With no cotton available to buy at the end of the season to make up the difference, local officials instead demanded the cash equivalent but there was no evidence how these payments were recorded or accounted for.26

Forced payments from businesses, payments to replacement workers, and payments to compensate for unmet quotas made under the threat of penalty, amounted to a massive, unregulated, and unaccounted for direct subsidy to the government’s cotton production system and masked the true cost of cotton production in Uzbekistan. These payments also contribute to the corruption of local officials in charge of the harvest.

Recommendations

Although the forced labor system of cotton production in Uzbekistan remains intact, the acceptance of an ILO monitoring mission in 2013, continued engagement with the ILO, and steps to reduce the systematic use of forced child labor to harvest cotton indicate that the government feels compelled to respond to the pressure it has come under as the result of sustained, multilateral advocacy on these issues.

26 Tashkent region monitor’s report.
Although resolving the problem of forced labor requires systematic reform of the cotton sector, it is a mistake to assume that this will require years of preparatory work. Considering that the system of forced labor is fully organized and controlled by government structures, including the prosecutor, police, tax inspection, and other administrative and enforcement agencies, forced labor in Uzbekistan can be eliminated as soon as the government muster the political will to do so. It is therefore necessary for Uzbekistan’s international partners, including multi-lateral institutions and individual governments, to use their influence to urge Uzbekistan to eliminate all forms of forced labor and make the elimination of forced labor a key condition of engagement with Uzbekistan.

To the Government of Uzbekistan

- Enforce national laws prohibiting forced labor and child labor.
- Allow independent human rights organizations, activists and journalists unfettered access to investigate and report on conditions in the cotton production sector.
- Reform the cotton sector, including to immediately cease the use of forced labor, ensure financial transparency of expenditures and revenues, end mandatory cotton production and harvest quotas, cease penalizing farmers who do not fulfill cotton quotas, and de-monopolize agricultural inputs and the cotton sales markets.
- Permit the ILO unfettered access to conduct a survey of the application of ILO Convention No. 105 on the Abolition of Forced Labor and for ILO monitors to monitor Convention No. 105 throughout the 2015 cotton season with the participation of the International Organization of Employers (IOE), International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), and local independent civil society activists and groups.
- Ratify and implement ILO Convention No. 87 on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize so farmers and farmworkers can form independent organizations to represent their interests, speak out against and seek redress for violations such as forced labor, and negotiate for better working conditions.

To the International Labor Organization

- Conduct a survey of the application of ILO Convention No. 105 on the Abolition of Forced Labor and monitor the use of forced labor of children and adults during the 2015 cotton harvest in cooperation with independent Uzbek civil-society organizations and not the government-controlled official unions and employers association.
- Establish, monitor and report on clear benchmarks for the government of Uzbekistan to fulfill its commitments to implement the fundamental labor conventions of the ILO. This includes the elimination of state-orchestrated forced labor of children and adults in the cotton sector, starting with the 2015 cotton production cycle.
- Ensure the participation of the IOE, ITUC, and International Union of Food Workers (IUF) as well as regular consultation with independent Uzbek
civil society groups in the development and implementation of all monitoring and technical assistance activities in Uzbekistan.
• Publicly report findings, activities, and recommendations concerning fundamental labor standards in Uzbekistan.

To the United States and European Union

• Exclude cotton from Uzbekistan from benefitting from trade preferences under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) until the government of Uzbekistan ends its forced-labor system of cotton production.
• Exercise ‘voice and vote’ at the World Bank and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development to prevent any investment that would benefit the Uzbek Government’s forced-labor system for cotton production.
• Investigate and prosecute companies that are benefitting from or contributing to the forced labor system of cotton production that are in violation of international and national laws.
• Publicly communicate to other companies operating in Uzbekistan the importance of fulfilling their human rights due diligence responsibilities, as established in the United Nations Principles for Business and Human Rights and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises.
• Prior to providing any development assistance to Uzbekistan, consult independent civil society organizations (in the country and in exile), and require that the government of Uzbekistan demonstrate financial transparency and accountability around cotton production as a condition for releasing project loans and publicly report on progress.

To the World Bank and Asian Development Bank

• Require that the Uzbek government demonstrate financial transparency and accountability around cotton production as a condition for releasing project loans and publicly report on progress.
• Ensure robust and fully independent third-party monitoring of compliance with core labor conventions in the project areas.
• Take all necessary measures to prevent reprisals against community members, journalists, and independent organizations for monitoring or reporting on human rights violations in these areas, for engaging with the Bank’s project monitors, or for filing complaints, including by seeking an enforceable commitment from the government that it will not interfere with independent reporting and engagement.
• Support independent access to markets for farmers so they can sell their products outside of the government’s forced labor system.
• Immediately cease financing these projects if forced labor occurs in the project areas.
• Establish a confidential and accessible grievance mechanism and provide effective remedies, including legal and financial, to any person who is subjected to forced labor in the project areas.
The Republic of Uzbekistan
The Resolution of the Mayor of Tashkent city № 719
August 28, 2014

For internal use

A copy

On the mass mobilization of cotton pickers in the Jizzakh and Syrdarya regions due to the start of the 2014 cotton harvest season

For the purpose of implementing the activities planned during the meetings of the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan, the reference number 04-04/1-98, dated July 20, 2014 and the reference number 07/55-5 dated August 12, as well as the full implementation of all activities planned as part of a thorough preparation for the cotton harvest.

Resolution:

1. To ensure a timely and quality cotton campaign in 2014, the Information and Analysis Group of the Tashkent city municipality (B. Shaislamov) is to
mobilize cotton pickers to the Jizzakh and Syrdarya regions from the organizations of the Tashkent city and regional municipalities. For the purpose of propaganda and mobilization of the population from kishlaks (villages) and makhallyas (neighbourhood communities) of the Mirzachul region the group is to develop a list of responsible people in Tashkent and to submit it for approval.

2. The heads of organizations, management and regional municipalities mobilized for the cotton campaign as well as the responsible people attached from Tashkent to the Jizzakh and Syrdarya regions are to fulfil the following tasks:
   To define the exact tasks for the staffs organizing a systematic cotton harvest; Depending on the number of people mobilized for the cotton campaign this year, to determine the places for their accommodation and to create the necessary conditions for them; To provide cotton pickers with foodstuffs, utensils and the necessary household items; To agree the cotton harvest activities and swift problem solving; To transport cotton pickers to the defined areas of the region and to ensure the necessary amount of vehicles for their return; To develop one location from which the mobilized cotton pickers and workers will be transported to the cotton harvest in an organized manner and to submit it for consideration to the Tashkent city municipality.

3. The Main Department of Internal Affairs of Tashkent city (M.Adylov) and the Internal Affairs departments of the Jizzakh and Syrdarya regions are to outline measures for the secure transportation of people engaged in the cotton harvest to the required places and providing on-site safety.

4. The Main Public Health Department of Tashkent city (B. Mamazhanov) is to ensure that health workers provide necessary medical assistance to cotton pickers in the Jizzakh and Syrdarya regions in accordance with the established order and to provide them with ambulance cars.

5. The Main Amenity Department (A.Karimov) is to undertake measures for the delivery of the necessary technology to assist cotton pickers in the Jizzakh and Syrdarya regions.

6. The heads of departments, organizations and businesses engaged in the cotton harvest are to consider measures to incentivize the most active workers in the cotton harvest.

7. The Deputy Mayors of Tashkent city and regional governors together with the heads of organizations, businesses and administrations are to coordinate practical work for the cotton harvest in an organized manner, to analyse and swiftly solve the existing problems.

8. To entrust the execution and monitoring of this resolution to the first Deputy Mayor of Tashkent city B. Rakhmonov and the Economic and Social Development Department of the Tashkent city municipality.

Mayor of Tashkent city R. Usmanov