

CHRONICLE OF FORCED LABOUR IN UZBEKISTAN

Issue 1, September 16, 2016



(Photo: Namangan, school teachers go in groups to harvest cotton, September 12, 2016)

In Uzbekistan on September 8, began the massive forced mobilization of students and employees of state organizations to harvest cotton. The first who have been sent to collect cotton were university students around the country. Students will be living and working in the cotton fields for almost 2 months before the end of the cotton season. According to students, who talked with UGF monitors prior to the departure, they were told to sign "a letter of voluntary participation to the cotton harvest."

Starting from September 10, mobilization to the cotton fields began for employees of various government organizations. According to the information received from local human rights activists, journalists and monitors, heads of government agencies across the country have been ordered by city and regional administrations to send parts of their employees to the fields or collect money from them, in order to "hire pickers" who will take their place.

In the first days of the monitoring, the Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights received dozens of messages from students, teachers and businessmen, indicating that participation in the cotton harvest was compulsory for them.

UGF, together with Uzbek activists, will monitor the situation concerning forced labor in the cotton fields throughout the whole harvest. The hitherto gathered information are presented in this first issue of 2016 of UGF's "Chronicle of Forced Labour".

Complete information about the results of the monitoring will be available on a new microsite: www.harvestreport.uzbekgermanforum.org

New microsite to present the findings of 2016 UGF cotton harvest monitoring

As in previous years, UGF will monitor the 2016 cotton harvest in Uzbekistan and present its findings publicly. This year, in addition to the harvest report, which will be published after the cotton season, findings of the monitoring and current news about the Uzbek government's cotton campaign will be presented in the course of the harvest (mainly September and October).

For this purpose, a new microsite www.harvestreport.uzbekgermanforum.org was created. It provides general information about Uzbekistan's cotton production system as well as pictures, caricatures and recent news to inform about the ongoing cotton harvest on a day-to-day basis. The aim of the webpage is to inform the international community about the systematic use of forced labor in Uzbek cotton production, to offer up-to-date information from cotton fields, and to present data for international organizations, experts and governments.

Main features of the microsite:

- An interactive map of Uzbekistan that shows data about production of cotton in 13 Uzbek regions and guides the reader to news from a respective region.
- A subpage informs the reader about the general problem of forced labor in the Uzbek cotton production. It further guides the reader to the homepages of UGF and the Cotton Campaign – a global coalition of human rights and labor rights activists, investors and business organizations dedicated to eradicating child labor and forced labor in cotton production.
- Latest news about the progress of the cotton harvest are presented on a subpage with a selection of short articles, caricatures, interviews and other materials, along with relevant links and photos. The news articles are sorted in different categories, for example by regions or by the group of people involved (such as students, teachers, etc.). The categories enable a quick search of specific information and facilitate the drafting process of the harvest report to be published at the end of the cotton season.
- Latest tweets of UGF are presented in a rotating box on the main page.
- A photo gallery shows a collection of photographs of the 2016 and previous cotton harvests.
- A subpage will offer PDF files for download, such as UGF's findings of the spring cotton works, UGF's latest Chronicle, and previous harvest report

The head of the State Institute of Foreign Languages in Samarkand ordered to send to all students, regardless of their state of health, to pick cotton.

September 13, 2016

According to a university student, this year, the order to harvest cotton also applies to pregnant women and sick people, as well as women with small children.

Students were told that sick students could find a replacement or could pay off to be released from the harvest, with a sum of around \$ 200.

Last year, young married women were not sent to the cotton. This year, they are also supposed to be involved. The husband of one of the students told his wife, "if you go to pick cotton, then pack your belongings and never return back home." "The fact that the wives and young brides need to go somewhere far away from their families has a negative impact on their personal lives", said a student of the Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages.

<http://www.ozodlik.org/a/27984318.html>.

University student in the Andijan region died during the cotton harvest.

September 13, 2016

According to data available to Radio Ozodlik, the 20-years-old student Komiljon Asimov died on the evening of September 11 in the Ulugnor District, where he was sent to pick cotton together with other students from the Andijan State University.

The prosecutor of the Andijan region has launched an investigation in the case of the death of Komiljon Asimov who was a student of the Biology Faculty of the Andijan State University.

The university administration stated that the death was caused by a heart attack. Eyewitnesses however claim that the student died after being beaten by a classmate.

A third year student, who lived together with Komiljon in a rented house provided for cotton pickers at 12th borough in the Ulugnor District, said to Radio Ozodlik speaking on condition of anonymity, that Komiljon had been killed by one of his classmates.

Nevertheless, the management of the Andijan State University insists that Komiljon Asimov died not as a result of the beating but because he had suffered a heart attack.

"The doctors who examined the body have come to the conclusion that he died from a heart attack", said an employee of the University administration, who wished to remain anonymous, to a reporter of Radio Ozodlik.

As it became known to Radio Ozodlik, the suspect in the death of Asimov Komiljon, a third-year-student at Andijan State University, was detained. He is currently being interrogated at the Ulugnor District Police Department. Law enforcement authorities the in Andijan region

have confirmed this information.

On September 12, Komiljon Asimov's body was handed over to his relatives in the Pahtabad district of the Andijan region. The young man was buried on the same day.

Every year during the cotton harvest in Uzbekistan, dozens of people die, including college and university students.

<http://rus.ozodlik.mobi/a/27987394.html>.

Students of the University of Karshi have been forcibly sent to pick cotton.

September 13, 2016



(Photo: Jizzakh State Pedagogical Institute students on the way to the cotton fields, September 10, 2016)

On September 7, students from the Karshi City Pedagogical University were mobilized to the cotton fields. According to a student speaking to an UGF monitor, it is compulsory work – if the students refuse to participate, they are threatened with expulsion from University. Students are

forced to write a statement that they go to harvest cotton "voluntarily", i.e. on their own volition, to "help farmers and the country gather the cotton crop". People suffering from illnesses must provide a health certificate.

But only seriously ill students are exempted from the mobilization: cores have recently undergone a surgery and pregnant students.

On September 8, students from the Karshi University of Agriculture and Irrigation. According to college teachers speaking to one of our monitors, this year, students of colleges and lyceums of the Karshi region will not go to pick cotton. "The students said that in memory of the president, they are exempted. Allegedly, the president wanted to release colleges and lyceums from the cotton this year".

However, according to a teacher of the Karshi City Pedagogical University, this most likely refers only to city colleges and high schools. Moreover, the possibility of mobilizing college students will depend on the weather conditions.

State organizations:

4 employees of government organizations which are associated with UGF monitors stated that the first group of employees had already left to pick cotton for 15 days. Some workers decided to pay themselves free. This costs 200-250.000 Som for 15 days. "But not everyone can afford this amount due to the cash shortages. Therefore, many are forced to go, or at least send relatives".

Makhalla:

The Makhalla committees in Karshi city received an order by the city administration to find 30 to 50 cotton pickers (depending on the number of Makhalla residents). The Makhalla should employ housewives and unemployed residents in the Makhalla to pick cotton. The Makhalla must also collect money from entrepreneurs working on their territory, to cover the needs of cotton farmers or payments for food, such as rice, pasta, canned food and flour.

UGF monitor report.

Shop owners at Abu Sahiy market in Tashkent extorted to make contributions to the cotton harvest.

September 12, 2016

The administration of Tashkent's Abu Sahiy market, which embraces few hundred shops, has ordered each shop owner to support the cotton harvest, either through payments of at least 300 thousand Som, or hiring labourers. The market administration threatens to seize the shops of those who refuse to comply with the order. One of Ozodlik's sources close to the market administration confirmed this fact.

According to another source of Ozodlik, money extortion for the cotton harvesting is taking place since September 5th. As the source revealed, each shop owner is required to pay 50 to 200 USD, depending on trade volumes.

“You either send out someone for harvesting cotton or pay the required sum. If you decide to use the money to hire laborers you have to pay 40 thousand Som per day, which actually amounts to 1,2 million Som per month. This includes monthly food expenses too. Otherwise, you must find and employ a laborer by yourself,” says one of the shop owners at Abu Sahiy.

Another entrepreneur who owns a shop at Abu Sahiy revealed that the administration would cause problems in case one cannot fulfil the given conditions.

“If we do not fulfil their requests, they will surely cause problems for us. The tax inspection would come and find some wrongdoings or violations. But in fact, we all are forced to violate certain regulations. It is just impossible to work fairly. For none of us.”

One of the shop owners mentioned that great pressure was being put on the ones who deny to follow any of the given options.

“They do not really ask you why you refused to hire a laborer or pay the money. They stay silent, but they may get you into trouble later. You become their ‘target’. Thus, it is better to comply with what they demand.”

One of Ozodlik’s sources close to the market administration confirmed that “this practice has been going on for 3-4 years, but has never been publicly discussed”.

The source added that these methods are being applied at other markets as well.

<http://www.ozodlik.org/a/abu-saxiy-savdo/27981817.html>

Doctors in neurosurgery center in Tashkent paid hundred million Som to avoid collecting cotton

September 10, 2016

This year the Republican Scientific Center of Neurosurgery, stationed in the Mirzo -Ulugbek district of Tashkent, will not be engaged in the cotton harvest. The staff of the medical establishment took the only right decision possible, that is to compensate for their non- participation. They collected 200,000 Som (\$ 31) per person through a "strategic" campaign.

“We do not have enough medical staff, there are a lot of patients, and their treatment cannot be postponed. Everyone gave money, even the nurses whose salary does not exceed 350.000-400.000 Som (\$ 55-62). In total, almost 500 people are employed in the clinic. I am not certain, but I heard that the money collected by our institution must be given to the representative of the district administration. Well, they (district administration) could make arrangements with the workers who will be replacing us. In the past years, there were reported cases where hired workers took the money and disappeared” - said one staff member of the medical center.

According to him, no one wants to buy themselves free from the cotton campaign with their own money but people have no choice. No one listens to the doctors’ indignation, but as soon as they start talking about refusing to participate in a “particularly important governmental project” (collecting the country’s “white gold”), threats and intimidations start right away.

An elementary calculation shows that the price that the neurosurgery center had to pay for not having to collect cotton is 100 million Som (\$ 15,600). In total, there are thousands of such groups in the country, not including the private sector. Conclusion: Cotton does not have to be cultivated, because all the money could just be collected from the Uzbek citizens, that is, serfdom could be replaced with a tribute.

<http://www.asiaterra.info/news/vrachi-tsentra-nejrokhirurgii-v-tashkente-otkupilis-ot-khlopka-sta-millionami-sumov>

Money first, and cotton right after: Uzbek doctors will be forcibly taken to fields in a week time.

Looking at the current situation on the eve of the Uzbek cotton harvest, the mass mobilization of doctors and other "state employees" will take place after September 12th. Currently, employees of medical institutions are primarily engaged in collecting money in order to reach a "deal" with hired workers, who are willing to replace doctors and nurses during the cotton harvest.

"Certain rumors indicate that cotton has not reached maturity yet. So, apparently this is the reason for the delayed mobilization. The district Khokimiyat (District council) has not requested a list of people that will be sent to the cotton fields yet. So, we are waiting till September 12th-13th. One will have more clarity by then. The delay may be also related to the upcoming Eid-al-Adha holiday. Perhaps, mobilization will kick off right after the holiday", said a source at the sanatorium "Turon", located in the Mirzo-Ulugbek district of Tashkent that is well familiar with the current situation.

The district administration has requested to allocate one doctor to look after the cotton growers within the assigned area close to the clinic. Doctors sign up with pleasure for this particular job – in this case they do not have to actually pick cotton or pay for the missing kilos of "white gold".

Employees of the Metropolitan Children's Surgical Hospital №2 tell the same story. According to them, the centrally organized forced mobilization of medical employees will take place despite statements by high-profile government officials condemning forced labor, designed for Western audiences.

This year, the employees are expected to go to the Syrdarya region (while last year they were taken to the Jizzakh region). If anyone for some reason is not able to go, he or she is obliged to send out a replacement worker to work on the cotton field for a certain fee for a period of two weeks (rates for this job normally amount to about 30 000 Som per day).

"Every year, during the cotton campaign, we find ourselves between a rock and a hard place", complain the doctors. *"On the one hand, we are forced to give up our main job, leave our families and children. On the other hand, we are assigned to fulfil an impracticable plan and forced to pay fines for not being able to do so. At the same time, authorities strictly prohibit to disclose 'inner secrets' of this unlawful process to the public, threatening us with all sorts of repressions."*

It must be said that doctors from Tashkent were expected to go to the cotton fields for two-week shifts on September 3rd. However, the death of President Karimov apparently brought some

unexpected changes to the "strategic" agricultural campaign.

<http://www.asiaterra.info/news/snachala-dengi-potom-khlopok-cherez-nedelyu-uzbekskie-mediki-budut-prinuditelno-vyvezeny-na-polya>

Uzbek students are mobilized to pick cotton on a "voluntary" basis

September 9, 2016

Uzbekistan began to send university students to harvest cotton. Despite the government's promise to abolish its forced labor practice, most university students were again mobilized to harvest cotton.

Nearly 10 thousand students from the only four universities in the Andijan region were forcibly sent to the fields starting from September 8th.

Nevertheless, university directors denied that students were sent to harvest cotton under coercion.

According to the employee, answering a phone call at the reception of the Andijan Medical Institute, students specializing in general medicine, pediatrics, and professional education voluntarily agreed to help cotton growers in the area.

“The Pediatrics Department, the Department for General Medicine, and the Vocational Education Department voluntarily went to pick cotton. This year, people are sent to harvest cotton on a voluntary basis. Our graduate students are studying”, said an employee of the Andijan Medical Institute.

However, the employee could not answer the question of whether not all of the students preferred to study than to pick cotton: "On this issue, you need to contact their parents", - said the employee of the Andijan Medical Institute.

Students of most universities in the Ferghana, Namangan, Jizzakh, Surkhandarya and Kashkadarya regions and forcibly sent to pick cotton.

Source: <http://www.ozodlik.org/a/ozbekiston-pahta-terimi-talabalar/27978985.html>

All district khokimiyats and other organizations must prepare for the harvest

September 7, 2016

In the beginning of September, during a meeting that took place in the Syrdarya Khokimiyat (regional administration body), the Khokim of the Syrdarya region announced that all district khokimiyats (district administration body) and other organizations must get everything in order for the harvest, since mass mobilization will take place continuously. The reason for this lies in the experience of last year's harvest mobilization. Teachers and doctors were forced to

travel to the cotton fields on a daily basis because it was not possible to accommodate the workers at the workplace. This caused numerous problems: the busses needed to transfer workers to the cotton fields and back demanded high expenses on fuel; the harvesting could only start late in the morning; and the work generally was less efficient. Thus, school principals were warned to get everything ready and be prepared for the mobilization of teachers.

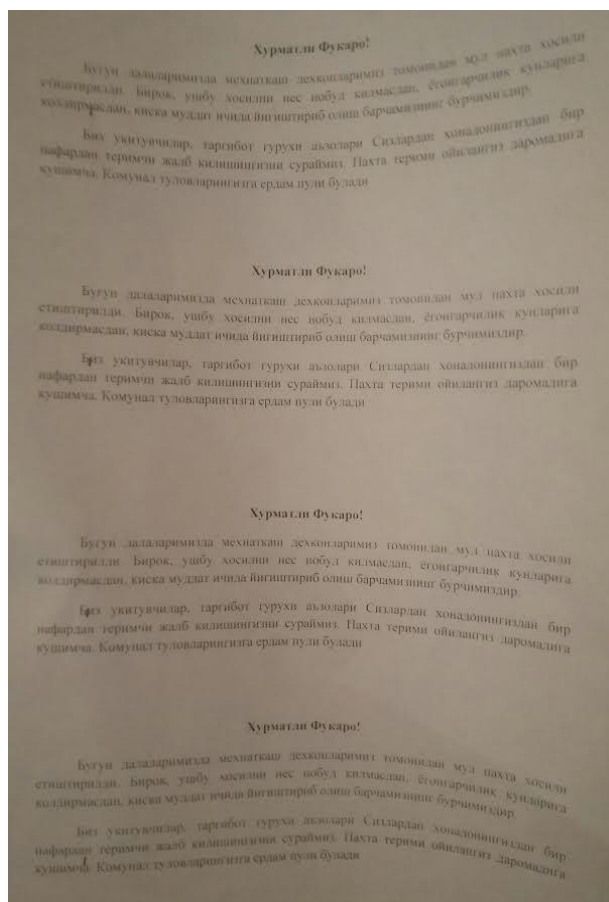
UGF monitor report

We, the teachers, are members of a propaganda group!

August 28, 2016

In the Syrdarya region the preparations for the forthcoming cotton harvest have begun. In order to draw people's attention to the cotton-picking season and make people go to the cotton fields, school teachers were required to carry out propaganda work with local communities to raise their interest in the cotton harvest. For example, a school director assigned to teachers a certain part of the makhalla (residential buildings and neighborhoods), located close to the school.

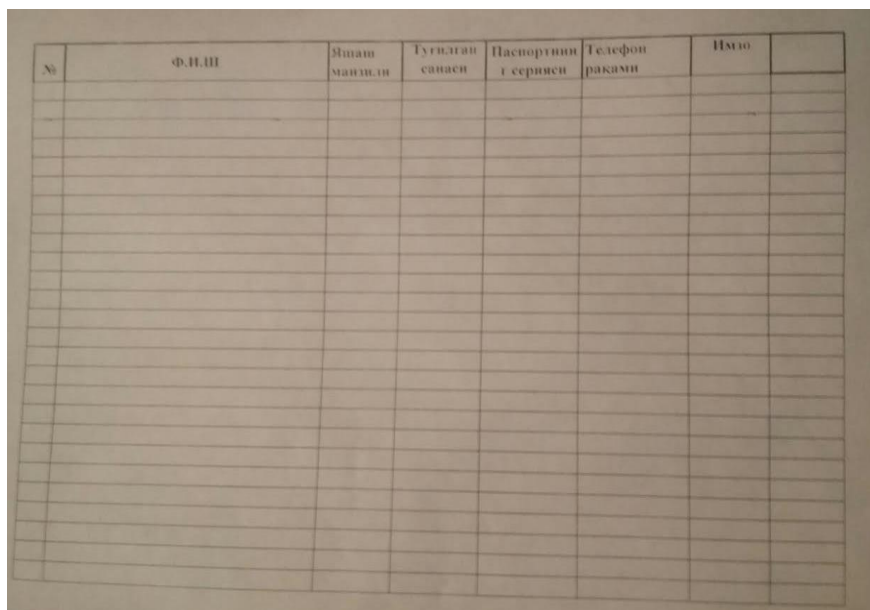
Teachers are obliged to visit certain number of homes, make a list of people living there and get signatures of those who agreed to go and pick cotton. Signed lists are then handed to the school director. Eventually, school director sends the lists to the regional or the city department of education.



English Translation:

“Our hardworking farmers have sown and cultivated a rich harvest of cotton. Our duty is to gather this harvest as fast as possible before the start of the raining season.

We, the teachers, are members of a propaganda group. We ask you to send one member of your family to pick cotton. Picking cotton will bring some extra income to your family, and will help you pay your utility bills as well.”



Nr.	Name, patronymic, surname	Address	Date of birth	Passport number	Telephone	Signature
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UGF monitor report

Healthcare specialists confirmed that money was secretly collected to pay cotton growers.

August 25, 2016

In order to pay cotton growers, Jahongir Dostmukhamedov, the chief doctor of the Health Inspection Services of the Mirzo Ulugbeksky district in Tashkent city, reportedly extorted 100,000 Uzbekistani Som (\$33 or approximately one fourth of monthly salary) from each of the Health Inspection Services staff under threat of dismissal. The human rights activist Elena Urlyayeva called the police, the prosecutor's office, and the Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan to report on Dr. Dostmukhamedov's actions.

Later, employees of the aforementioned Health Inspection Services came to Elena Urlaeva's apartment. Three people, including a representative of the Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan (introduced as Tatiana) persuaded Elena Urlaeva not to complain about the Dr. Dostmukhamedov again.

An employee of the Health Inspection Services, introduced as Zulfiya, said that the state had adopted a policy according to which a contract for a duration of several years was signed with the Ministry of Health to deploy doctors to pick cotton. Every year, they go to the Jizzakh and the Syrdarya regions to harvest cotton. They have to do so because, due to the very short size of cotton plant, machines cannot be deployed for this work.

Zulfiya mentioned that since they do not want to go to the cotton fields anymore, this year they received an instruction coming from the head of the Health Inspection Services ordering 20 people from the staff to pick cotton. The staff members also had to pay the cotton growers. Last year Health Inspection Services collected 200,000 Som which they packed in a box and transported personally to the cotton growers.

Zulfiya also said that the chief doctor Dostmukhamedov provided money for the cotton-picking. The representative of the Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan Tatiana said that the doctors were helpless, and that she, as a trade union representative, could not do anything to help and had no hope that the Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan would provide any support.

Elena Urlaeva recorded this conversation. Defenders of the Uzbekistan Human Rights Alliance intend to protect Uzbek doctors from the illegal extortion of money and forced labor in the cotton fields. The Uzbekistan Human Rights Alliance demands an investigation of these facts, and an identification of those who are giving secret orders to force doctors to pick cotton.

Alliance Press Center, Tashkent

Polyclinic mobilizes health care specialists and doctors to pick cotton

August 22, 2016

The Uzbekistan Human Rights Alliance received evidence that the Polyclinic No.33 of the Almazar district in the city of Tashkent had prepared a list of 70 health care specialists, scheduled for the mobilization to the cotton fields on September 5, 2016.

In addition, doctors of the Polyclinic No.8 in the Mirzo Ulugbeksky district of Tashkent city, have complained to the Uzbekistan Human Rights Alliance that money was extorted from them in exchange for being replaced on cotton fields. Under the threat of employment termination, each doctor has to pay 100.000 Uzbekistani Som (\$33 or approximately one fourth of their monthly salary) as ordered by the chief doctor of the Polyclinic No.8.

The Uzbekistan Human Rights Alliance reported the incidents to the police and to the Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan, as well as State Healthcare hotlines. However, the only local police officer that responded to the reports is not in a position to challenge the chief doctors of the polyclinics, since they are affluent community leaders.

Human Rights Alliance press release

Teachers and doctors are sent to “aerate” the cotton fields

August 18, 2016

According to an order by the Khokim (governor) of the Jizzakh region, public employees of the region have been deployed for the “aeration” of the cotton fields. Every employee has been assigned to walk through one hectare of cultivated cotton. The organizers explained that the “aeration” would strengthen the cotton stems and contribute to a faster growth of the cotton bolls. As reported by Radio Ozodlik (Uzbek desk of Radio Liberty), all public employees of the region were forced to get involved in this work.

“Currently in the Jizzakh region there is an intensive preparation for the cotton harvest. The Khokim Sayfiddin Ismailov holds meetings twice a day on this matter. The Khokim requested each organization to delegate 20-30 people to walk-through and “aerate” the cotton fields”, said a resident of the area.

The spokesperson of the Jizzakh regional administration, in a conversation with “Ozodlik”, did not deny the practice of “aerating” the cotton fields, but claimed that the public employees were involved in this work on their own volition:

“At the moment, the cotton stems are stuck together. Therefore, the cotton leaves do not get enough oxygen. By “aerating” the cotton, air begins to flow between the stems. This gives the plants the necessary oxygen and contributes to a faster growth of cotton bolls. Each participant was given one hectare of land for this work”, said one of the Khokim’s office employees (who did not introduce himself).

Another initiative by the Khokim of the area, Sayfiddin Ismailov

At the end of July, the Khokim of the Jizzakh region requested 40 thousand Som from each public employee. The reason given was to contribute to the implementation of the state plan for cauliflower export. Some organizations were ordered to transfer money to the “MicrocreditBank”, while others had to grow cauliflower and deliver the harvest to the government.

<http://www.ozodlik.mobi/a/hashar-paxta-jizzax-ozodlik-uzbekistan/27931910.html>.

Uzbek doctors are sent to harvest cotton.

September 7, 2013

The Asia-Terra website reported that Uzbek doctors were given notice that the cotton harvest begins on September 3. All doctors will be divided into groups and taken to the cotton fields for shifts of 13-14 days.

Each of them will be given a compulsory daily plan that requires them to collect 70 kg of cotton a day. In case they fail to fulfil the daily plan, a penalty fee must be paid to compensate for shortages.

As one of the sources of Asia-Terra reported, one hospital delegated 42 doctors for the cotton harvest this year (including surgeons and nurses respectively). The source added that the volume of the compulsory plan was decreased due to the low number of people being sent to the cotton fields from this particular hospital.

Traditionally, doctors are given the option of hiring a worker to go to the cotton fields on their behalf. However, in this case, doctors themselves must pay hired workers, without any further compensation from the government.

The mobilization of doctors and apparently the entire public sector, as well as employees of private companies will take place despite the Uzbek government's commitment to end its forced labor practice.

<http://www.asiaterra.info/news/snachala-dengi-potom-khlopok-cherez-nedelyu-uzbekskie-mediki-budut-prinuditelno-vyvezeny-na-polya>



(Photo translation: The cotton is yours, mine, ours)

Tashkent factory extorts money from its employees for the cotton harvest

August 23, 2016, in Tashkent Region

The Tashkent oil and fat factory's ("Тошкент ёғ-мой комбинати") management collected 200 thousand Soum from each employee for supporting the cotton harvest 2016. As it was reported by several employees of the factory, directors of the company threatened to fire anyone who refused to pay the requested sum. However, the "Tashkent oil and fat factory" Joint Stock Company (JSC) denies all the allegations. The JSC specializes in fat and oil production and is considered to be one of the largest in this field.

According to anonymous sources within the company, this increased the discontent and anger among employees even more as they had not received salaries for 4 months already.

“We have not received our salaries for four months. The factory itself is not really working as before. We don’t have much work to do here. And after all, our management is forcing us to pay 200 thousand Soum and is threatening to fire us otherwise...”, said one of the workers.

“Due to a lack of production means (seeds), the factory is not functioning normally”, said one of the workers who had contacted Radio Ozodlik (Uzbek service of RFE/RL).

Company officials, however, said that the “factory is temporary shut down due to reconstruction works”. Furthermore, they added that “all workers receive their salaries on time.”

While officials are eager to give the impression that everything is in order, company’s employees said that “they were not paid since May, when they received their salaries for February.”

Employees also informed Radio Ozodlik (Uzbek service of RFE/RL) that “only 60-70 people are involved in preparation works for the new season”.

One of the sources close to the factory’s management said: “Representatives of the National Security Service, the State Prosecution Office, the National Tax Committee and the Sanitary & Epidemiological Service shut down the factory while it is being investigated”.

The “Tashkent oil and fat factory” JSC is one of the largest production plants in this area out of all 17 in Uzbekistan. It employs around a thousand people.

It is recalled that employees of large state and private companies in Uzbekistan are forced to provide financial support for the seasonal cotton harvest every year. Furthermore, it has become a well-accepted tradition to forcibly mobilize hundreds of thousands of people every year to participate in the cotton harvest.

Wheat and cotton harvest campaigns are the primary reasons of forced labor in the country. Forced mobilization of employees of state-owned companies for the annual cotton and wheat harvest has triggered criticism on part of numerous international organizations against the Uzbek authorities.

This article has been translated from Uzbek – (Тошкентдаги ёғ-мой комбинати ишчилардан пахта терими учун пул ундирмода.)

Source: Ozodlik – Uzbek Service of RFE/RL; accessed 17/08/2016;
(<http://www.ozodlik.org/a/uzbekiston-paxta-hashar-pul/27928865.html>)

Citizens are forced to sign up for “voluntary” cotton harvest mobilization

September 7, 2016

District authority (makhalla) leaders and teachers of all districts of the Jizzakh region have been approaching local residents at their homes to enforce their participation in the cotton harvest. In particular, citizens are being forced to sign an acknowledgement paper to affirm their participation on a voluntary basis. Those who deny to sign up for the “voluntary” mobilization are threatened to be cut off from gas and electricity supplies.

UGF Monitor report