In late April of 2017, spring field work began in the cotton fields of Uzbekistan. Hundreds of thousands of public sector employees throughout the country are currently being mobilized to help local farmers in the cotton sector.

This year the Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights is again monitoring the involvement of government employees in the agricultural field work. The monitoring is being carried out in six of the 13 regions of Uzbekistan.

According to our preliminary data, forced mobilization for agricultural work affects almost every state-owned organization in the country (except large cities). Employees work on the fields in turns, usually two to three times per week, or pay money to hire someone else in their place.

In addition to the weeding of the cotton fields, these workers are sent to plant pumpkins and corn along the surrounding areas of grain and cotton fields. In some areas they are involved in the cultivation of silkworm caterpillars for the state.
Mobilized employees work for free, often pay for their own travel expenses, and have to bring their own food to the fields

The situation of Uzbek farmers who are being deprived of their economic freedom remains deplorable. They are still denied the right to choose freely what to plant on their land and how to use their products. Instead, they are forced to plant cotton which is not profitable for them.

In April and May 2017, in addition to the systematic mobilization of the Uzbek population for agricultural work, employees of the educational and medical sector are involved in other public services, mainly the cleaning of streets, the planting of flowers and the cleaning of roadside irrigation ditches.

In this issue of the Chronicle of Forced Labor, we offer a selection of articles about the mobilization of state institutions in additional agricultural and “public” services.

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Jizzak region: Mobilization of employees of state organizations for the weeding of cotton fields

On May 22, 2017, the activists Elena Uralieva and Malokhat Eshonkulova met with employees of various state organizations who were weeding the cotton fields in the Pakhtakor district of the Djizak region.

From interviews with them, it became clear that the khokim (governor) of the Pakhtakor district, Ibrohim Karshibayev, was forcing teachers of schools and colleges, as well as staff of clinics, hospitals and kindergartens to weed cotton on a daily basis from the last days of April to the present day. Residents told the activists that khokim Karshibayev often shouted at farmers and even beat them.

The mobilized employees come to the cotton fields from 7 - 8 in the morning. Some of them work until lunchtime and then go back to their main work places. Some work on the fields for up to 18 hours under the guidance of farmers. In some cases, transportation to the fields is organized for them, sometimes they have to organize transportation at their own expense.

The activists talked with the employees of the School No. 2 in the Pakhtakor district who reported that they were working on the fields assigned to their school. Teachers who do not want to weed cotton have to hire a mardikor (substitute worker) at their own expense.

On the cotton field located in the village of Kazakh Aul, the activists met with the staff of School No. 8 whose director is Zulhumor Shodieva. Women there reported that they were technicians who weeded cotton every day until lunchtime and then went back to school to do their actual work.

When talking to these women, the human rights activists observed that they were tired. Some were ill from working in the open fields every day – in Uzbekistan temperatures in spring can reach 39 degrees Celsius.

Malokhat Eshonkulova and Elena Uralieva visited the Bogishamol village where they met teachers from the Schools No. 6 and No. 17, as well as employees of the kindergarten "Guzal" who were all working on the fields of the “Kunga Bokar Yer” farm.

The activists also visited the village of Sadvin where the kindergarten staff and teachers from the regional School No. 7 took it in turns to work on the field.

In the village of Ok Bulak, about 20 employees of the Pakhtakor district Hospital for Infectious Diseases were working on local cotton fields. They work every day, including weekends.

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After the publication of the activists' report about forced labor in the Pakhtakor district on May 23, 2017, the Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights received a letter from a resident of the Andijan region, who wrote:
“In our district of Bulak-Boshi in the Andijan region, we have exactly the same situation as in the Pakhtakor district. Starting from the end of April, nurses, school and kindergarten employees are forcibly sent to weed the cotton fields. In addition, in the run-up to the visit of the president (Mirziyoyev), people are sent to the neighboring district Khuzhaobod to clean up the land alongside the roads. Go to any school or kindergarten, and you will see that a fifth of the staff is constantly absent due to such work. Please do not publish my name.”

(May 25, 2017, letter to UGF via email)

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Report of the Human Rights Alliance of Uzbekistan
May 26, 2017

On May 25-26, 2017, human rights activists Malokhat Eshonkulova and Elena Urlayeva visited the Dustlik district of the Jizzakh region and found that children were also involved in the weeding of cotton alongside employees from various state organizations.

The activists met and spoke with many employees of different rural organizations. These are mostly women who work full days in the cotton fields without payment and under threat for refusing.

Cotton weeding continues for a month with people working from 6-7 am to 4 pm. According to the staff, weeding is absolutely mandatory and every day they are ticked off on lists prepared by the management of their organizations.

The human rights activists spoke with the employees of the school No. 6 of the Navruz settlement, who received orders to carry out weeding by the school’s director, Gayrat Yakhyoyev.

Cotton fields on farms in the villages of Manas, Navruz and Pakhtakor are also staffed by government organizations. Some of the employees are not able to work under such high temperatures in the open sun and hire cotton pickers in their place whom they pay several dollars a day from their modest salary.

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During their trips, the activists saw children weeding cotton in place of their parents. Jizzakh, May 26, 2017 © UGF
Traditionally, every spring, farmers are given the additional burden of cultivating silkworm caterpillars for state needs. This work is very time-consuming, low-paid, but mandatory for farmers. Local authorities also distribute caterpillars among state organizations and order them to grow caterpillars.

In the Ferghana region, farmers returned silkworm caterpillars to the khokimiyat which they were obliged to grow by order of the state.

A farmer in the Rishtan district told an Eltuz correspondent:

"We were given two boxes of silkworm caterpillars, but I have neither the conditions nor fresh mulberry leaves to feed them."

According to the farmer, over the past few years, due to a shortage of gas and electricity, the population cut down mulberry trees growing along the roads and in the fields, and used them for fuel.

"And that's why it takes a lot of time to find enough mulberry leaves. In addition, I started to sow cotton and wheat, and have to attend daily meetings at the khokimiyat, which sometimes last until midnight. I do not have time to grow caterpillars as well."

School staff grow cocoons at home

An Eltuz correspondent spoke to an employee of the Public Education Department of the Uchkuprik district and with several employees of the school and kindergarten. It emerged that educational institutions must take part in the cultivation of silkworm caterpillars on the instructions of the khokimiyat.
According to the employee, caterpillars are grown not in schools and kindergartens as before, but in the private homes of employees.

“The most important thing is that workers engaged in growing caterpillars continue to carry out their main work. At home, the caterpillars are looked after by their family members, the daughter or daughter-in-law”, said a public education official.

According to farmers who received boxes with silkworm caterpillars, the payment for this kind of work is so low that it is easier to bury and destroy all the caterpillars than to grow them at a financial loss. When it’s time to deliver the cocoons, farmers pay for the missing crop, according to the plan originally set by the khokimiyat.

(Original source: http://eltuz.com/kundalik/200030/)

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Andijan teachers sent to clean private yards
10 May, 2017

Workers of district schools in the Andijan region were involved in cleaning private court-yards along the roads. This order was received from the khokimiyat of the Andijan region. It is linked to the fact that the new president of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyev, might make unexpected visits to the homes of ordinary people on his trips to the regions.

"The new president has not yet arrived in Andijan. You cannot predict whose yard he wants to inspect. For this reason, the khokimiyat, gave the order to clean up all the streets and court-yards the president could possibly drive along, just in case", said the employee of the City Administration of Public Education.

This is how the mobilization of employees of public education institutions to clean up private households became the responsibility of Shukhrat Abdurakhmanov, the khokim of the Andijan region.

An Eltuz correspondent talked with a teacher who cleans private yards. "Every morning, while the owners of the yards are asleep, we sweep the streets near their gates. We work for free", he says. According to him, the yards are assigned to different schools and each teacher gets one court a week.

"When it's our turn, we go to the court-yards assigned to us. We clean the yard and weed the garden. The day before yesterday, I cleaned the windows and hung up curtains in one house", said a schoolteacher from the Oltinkul district (Andijan region).

Spring most difficult time of year for teachers

In springtime in the Andijan region and throughout the whole country, school employees go to weed cotton fields. In addition, there are various kinds of other public works to be carried out. A teacher an Eltuz correspondent spoke to, said that they had just received the order to plant flower seedlings near the city airport. "We have to buy these seedlings at our own expense. Each seedling is brought from Namangan for 1,500 thousand Soums, and for this every teacher from our school collected for 10,000 Soums", said a teacher from one of the schools of the city of Andijan.
"Recently, we planted lemons in the school yard. All expenses had to be borne by us. We collected money from teachers and students. Now, we again collect money for flowers; they say that inspectors come from Tashkent" said the teacher from Andijan city.

(Original source: www.eltuz.com/asosiy-mavzular/199918/)

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Minister of Agriculture ordered "to disgrace" children of farmers who do not grow cotton

May 3, 2017

Djizak farmers were ordered to grow only cotton on their land. Farmers who violated this order have had other crops forcibly removed from their land. Local officials recorded these measures on video and threatened farmers that they would show the videotapes to the educational institutions where their children study.

In April, local authorities forced farmers who had planted sunflowers, onions and corn on rented land to remove these crops and to plant cotton instead. The recorded videos were shown at meetings at the local administration.

According to sources of Radio Ozodlik, a conference call was held in the Jizzakh region on April 28 with the Minister of Agriculture and Water Resources of Uzbekistan, Zoyia Mirzaev. During the meeting, the participants decided to show the collected video footage in the educational institutions of those children whose parents had refused to grow cotton on their leased land.

This was reported to Radio Ozodlik by an anonymous source in the Jizzakh region who had attended the meeting with the Minister of Agriculture and Water Resources:

“In the Zarbdar district (Jizzak region), the process of destroying onion crops that farmers had planted on 5 hectares of leased land was recorded on videotape. The team responsible brought two Arion tractors and destroyed all the onion crops and replaced them with cotton. This video was shown during a conference call. After the presentation, Zoyir Tayirovich (Mirzaev Zoir Tayirovich - Minister of Agriculture and Water Resources of Uzbekistan - Ed.) addressed the audience and said: ‘Show this video in the school, college or institute where the daughter or son of this farmer is studying. Gather the class teacher and classmates of this farmer's children and let them all watch this video. Expose these children! Act in a way that the children of this farmer cannot study any longer, and he himself will end up living on the street!’ After his words, all those gathered were very scared," the source from Jizzakh said.
According to one of the officials of the khokimiyat of the Djizak region, the local administrations are indeed instructed to discredit the children of those farmers who do not want to grow cotton on leased land.

“This doesn’t only happen in our region. This instruction was given “from above” to the heads of all regions throughout the country. In April, we warned them that they would not be allowed to grow anything but cotton on their leased land. But still, some farmers resisted. We asked them, we warned them. But this had no effect. If the children of these farmers are now disgraced for their father’s actions, other farmers may be afraid to act arbitrarily”, an official from the Jizzakh Regional Administration told the Ozodlik reporter.

At the same time, he added that the video footage recorded on the fields of the "disobedient" farmers had not yet been shown in educational institutions of their children:

According to farmers who managed to talk to the Ozodlik reporter, many of them suffered heavy financial losses after they began growing only cotton and grain. To cover the losses and earn some extra money, farmers are now being forced to grow other additional crops in secret.

The law enforcement authorities are instructed to monitor farmers who do not grow cotton on their leased land. Just recently, in the Zafarabad district of the Djizak region, sunflowers were forcibly removed from the land of two farmers. Farmers from the Tashkent region told Radio Ozodlik that local authorities had increased the control over farmers who were growing sunflowers on their leased land to cover the losses from growing only cotton and grain.

(Original source: https://rus.ozodlik.org/a/28465985.html)

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Staff of Cancer Center busy with renovations instead of treating patients
May 2, 2017

The Republican Cancer Research Center of Uzbekistan has been transformed into the Republican Specialized Scientific and Practical Medical Center of Oncology and Radiology of the Ministry of Health of Uzbekistan. Its branches will be reorganized in different Territorial Oncological Departments and the Tashkent City Oncology Department. In connection with this, the clinic is undergoing renovations.

One of the doctors of the Republican Cancer Research Center complained to Radio Ozodlik that all doctors and nurses of the Center were involved in the repairs and renovations that began on April 4. According to him, all medical personnel of the Center were sent to help with the repair of the premises.

"The doctors are forced to carry new furniture, brought for the newly created center, and to clean the premises. In addition, doctors are forced to pay drivers who bring this furniture to the Center, and our nurses are dragging bricks. The entire medical staff is tired, both physically and morally", complained a doctor of the Republican Cancer Center.

Deputy head of the Oncology Center: "This is an ordinary subbotnik1"

As stated in a conversation with the Ozodlik reporter, the deputy chief physician for the administrative and economic department of the Center finds that the complaints of the doctors are exaggerated:

"The Center is organizing work to implement the presidential decree from April 4 on improving the oncological service in the republic. We were provided with new equipment.

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1 "Subbotnik": A term for voluntary collective free work to carry out any kind of socially useful work assignment. It was used by the Soviet regime to attract people for free community work on Saturdays.
Our doctors unload and install this equipment. As for the nurses, they are involved in the annual work of putting the premises in order. The operations are indeed being carried out with a delay, but we have a valid reason for this. Our center is being transformed”, the deputy head doctor of the Republican Oncology Center told the Radio Ozodlik reporter.

(Original source: https://rus.ozodlik.org/a/28463165.html)

News from the Uzbek blogosphere

May 19, 2017

Under President Karimov’s rule, the official press refrained from publishing any criticism of the regime. However since his death, material has appeared in the Uzbek blogosphere that would have been unimaginable even just six months ago. Although local journalists understand that criticizing the highest authority remains taboo, expressing some criticism at the local level seems to be possible. In the following section, we present a selection of blog entries about the involvement of educators and medical professionals in compulsory "public" works without any financial compensation. Once again, we would like to point out that the websites on which these publications are posted are not blocked in Uzbek territory, in contrast to our website (www.uzbekgermanforum.org).

Article of the Uzbek local newspaper Oila Davrasiada about the forced labour problem (title: “Mathematics’ -to scrap metal, ‘Literature’ to clean the streets”), May 19, 2017 © UGF

Work also on weekends

“I teach Uzbek language and literature”, says a teacher from the Almalyk School who wanted to remain anonymous. “While other organizations mostly work five days a week, we work all seven days. On Sunday, we visited at least six students at their homes; we took a group photo with the parents and students. The goal is to show that the teacher controls his students, even on the days off. In schools, the greatest attention is being paid
to paperwork. Teachers are compelled to write reports, about their work. How can we prepare our lessons with this amount of extra work?".

“Subbotniks” and meetings

“I’m a primary school teacher”, said another teacher who did not want to state his name. “Recently, because of too many public work assignments, and despite the fact that I love my profession, I do not want to work as a teacher anymore. I’m tired of the extraordinary subbotniks, the additional meetings, cleaning the floors in rooms and corridors despite the fact that there are cleaners in the school. But I cannot decide to leave my job. I hope that this will change. And I am sorry for the money that my parents spent, paying for four years of studies at the institute. Recently, my colleagues said that now teachers would have to plant tomatoes and pepper in the school garden. If this happens, we will simply turn into peasants.”

Forced to attend concerts

“Like other schools, we have a lot of unnecessary problems and paperwork”, says an English teacher from a school in the Tashkent region. "The teacher has recently become an assistant for the mahalla and the khokimiyat. “We are also forced to attend concerts. Last month, the teachers of our school were given tickets for a concert by an Uzbek artist. It did not matter if we wanted to go to this concert or not. 20,000 Soums were deducted from our salary. In April, we teachers had to go around houses assigned to us, counting inhabitants, as well as the trees growing around these houses.”

‘All these stories are true. We did not cite the names of the teachers to protect them from unwanted consequences’, reported the author of the article which was published in the official “Oila Davrasida” newspaper.
(Original source: http://kun.uz/news/2017/05/19/matematika-metallom-jigisga-ada-biet-kuca-tozalasqa)

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Another website operating in the Uzbek domain published an article about the mass mobilization of employees of public organizations in the Andijan region:

Teachers are free workforce in Andijan

May 24, 2017

The article says that journalists visited four districts of the Andijan region and found that staff of schools, colleges and medical centers go out to weed cotton every day, including weekends. "Mardikors or substitute workers are paid for the work, but teachers are paid nothing for their field work. On the contrary, they withhold the wages of those who do not go to weed cotton and intimidate them", a journalist reported who recently visited the Andijan region and spoke to people working in the cotton fields.
The journalist called the khokimiyat of the Andijan region to ask for comment. He was told that there is no forced labor in the region. Responding to the journalist's remark that he had seen and spoken to such people himself, an unknown employee of the regional administration replied that their department does not deal with such issues.