

**FORCED CHILD LABOR DURING THE COTTON HARVEST
IN UZBEKISTAN:**

**MONITORING RESULTS FOR THE PERIOD FROM
SEPTEMBER TO NOVEMBER 2011**

**Submitted for the Uzbekistan review by the Committee on the Rights of the
Child**

prepared by

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CONTENT

METHODOLOGY.....	3
INTRODUCTION.....	4
WORK CONDITIONS.....	4
PAYMENT.....	5
PUNISHMENT.....	6
LIVING CONDITIONS.....	7
ATTEMPTS TO CONCEAL INFORMATION AND THE HARASSMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS.....	7
VICTIMS OF THE COTTON CAMPAIGN.....	9
THE TEACHER’S ROLE.....	9
CORRUPTION DURING THE COTTON CAMPAIGN.....	10
FROM THE INTERVIEWS.....	11
Commentary on the concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, adopted on June 2, 2006, on the situation of child labor.....	11
Commentary on the third and fourth National Report of Uzbekistan on the implementation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child.....	11
Uzbekistan’s violation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.....	12
CONCLUSIONS.....	13
RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GOVERNMENT OF UZBEKISTAN.....	13

Methodology

This report is based on 130 interviews conducted between November and December 2011 in 10 districts in the Republic of Uzbekistan. Since 2009, our organization has been conducting research on the situation of forced child labor in the cotton fields and has collected a total of over 300 interviews. We conducted surveys among farmers, teachers, students, and parents who were directly involved in the cultivation and harvesting of cotton.

The respondents, who were schoolchildren and college students, were between 10 to 16 years old.

Our monitors who conducted the surveys prepared more than 300 photos as well as several hours of video footage documenting the mass mobilization of children for cotton picking during the cotton harvest in autumn 2011.

The main goal of the report is to inform the Committee about the real situation in the Republic of Uzbekistan concerning forced child labor, particularly in the cotton sector.

Introduction

Uzbekistan is one of the leaders of the world cotton market, ranking sixth place for its cotton production and third place for its export of cotton. Every year in the country, an average of 3.5 – 3.7 million tons of raw cotton are grown and 1 – 1.2 million tons of cotton fiber produced. Cotton harvested in the country is mostly exported to countries such as China, Russia, Iran, Bangladesh, South Korea, and Vietnam.

The system of cotton production in Uzbekistan is based on the use of cheap forced labor. Uzbekistan is the only country in the world in which the state shuts down universities, colleges, and schools during the academic term and sends students and schoolchildren to work in the cotton fields. According to our estimates and observations, every year during the cotton harvest, which lasts approximately two months, between 1.5 to 2 million schoolchildren between the ages of 10 to 15 are sent to the cotton fields, disrupting their educations. Schoolchildren mostly from the provinces and mostly from rural areas and small towns are being forced to pick cotton during the harvest season. The only exceptions are children from the biggest cities, a few regional capitals.

According to Uzbek national law, the legal minimum working age in Uzbekistan is 16. However, 15 year olds may work with the consent of a parent or guardian, and a 14 year old may work if it is an “easy job” and if this does not interfere with his/her education and not during school hours. For such work there must be written consent from his/her parent. None of these preconditions are observed in practice.

On June 24, 2008 Uzbekistan ratified the ILO’s Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (C182) and On March 6, 2009 Uzbekistan, the International Labour Organization’s (ILO’s) Minimum Age Convention (C138). In September 2008, the government adopted a National Plan for the implementation of the ILO Conventions on child labor, which describes the measures to be taken to eliminate child labor. But these measures were reduced to several seminars and promotional activities; there was no impact on the actual practice of using child labor during the cotton harvest.

Despite the existence of laws banning child labor, as well as international obligations, Uzbekistan has not fulfilled its promises to end the systematic practice of forced child labor. Monitoring and field surveys our organization has conducted over the last three years demonstrate that the Uzbek government uses forced child labor in order to quickly harvest cotton and reduce the costs of cotton production. The educational opportunities of the school children and college students are sacrificed for the sake of low cost of cotton production and raise cotton revenues.

Each year, from the beginning of the academic year (from mid-September), schoolchildren and students are sent to work in the cotton fields where they spend between two and three months at work. These children involved in picking cotton are as young as ten years old.

The issue of the use of child labor in the cotton industry has existed since the Soviet era; however, it was not as severe then as it is now. During the years of Uzbekistan's post-Soviet independence, the situation of forced child labor has deteriorated.

The last cotton campaign in 2011, just like previous ones, was conducted with the involvement of almost all sectors of the society, with the widespread use of child labor, a general forced mobilization of schoolchildren and students, done cruelly on the part of officials and law enforcement, and with widespread corruption, extortion by school and college administration of bribes from parents who, being concern for their kids' health condition, don't want to send them to cotton fields.

Work conditions

The mass mobilization to pick cotton started in 2011 on September 5th and finished in early November. The first ones to be sent out, from about September 10, included students from all colleges and institutes (except for those studying in Tashkent city). Their ages ranged from 16 years old and over. Schoolchildren as young as eight years old were sent to the fields around September 15.

The system for mobilizing schoolchildren and students is simple. There are no written documents about sending children to work in the fields. The heads of educational institutions receive verbal instructions from the local administrative body (Khokimiyat) to send the children to the fields. The next morning, the children come to school and, in an organized manner, and under the supervision of their teachers, are sent to work in the cotton fields. School resumed in some areas from the middle of October, in other areas, after the autumn break, November 10.

There are no labor contracts with the schoolchildren or their parents. If a child gets sick or injures his or herself during the autumn work, then the parents are responsible for the cost of his or her treatment.

Throughout the entire cotton season, there are no official days off. Schoolchildren are not allowed to stay home from the fields unless they have a medical certificate of illness. But receiving such a certificate is very difficult, as doctors receive instructions from hokimiyats to limit the issuance of them.

Children worked in September under the scorching sun, when the temperature rose up to 35 degrees Celsius, in many cases until late autumn, when the temperature dropped to zero

degrees. Schoolchildren are given a daily quota of how much cotton they must pick. The quotas ranged from 30 kg to 60 kg per day, depending on the age of the child as well as the time of the harvest season.

Although primary school children under age nine are not sent to work in the fields, they also had some quotas. In some regions, under the direction of the school administrations, schoolchildren from grades one through four were expected to bring to school between 1 – 2 kilograms of cotton per day, or to submit payment in the amount of 1000 soums (1 US dollar).

Older children would have to walk 5 – 10 kilometers to the cotton fields and to work for 7-8 hours each day with a short break for lunch. Most of the students whom we interviewed had brought their own lunch and water to the fields. All schoolchildren noted the lack of clean drinking water. Children who lived out in the fields complained of a meager diet, which mostly consisted of bread, sweet tea, pasta, and vegetable soup without meat.

As we have noted, doctors received instructions not to give out medical certificates for schoolchildren, that would release them from cotton harvest, during the cotton season. In Jizzakh region, a 14 year old schoolgirl, who suffers from dust allergies, went to the doctor to get a certificate about her medical condition. The doctor, seeing the girl's medical condition, gave her a prescription for medication, but refused to give her a certificate. In a conversation that our monitors had with the doctor, they learned that there was an oral directive from the chief physician to not issue certificates of illness that would exempt children from working in the cotton fields.

The facts and documents indicate that the Government of Uzbekistan is the main organizer of forced labor. The mass mobilization of children to the cotton fields is orchestrated at the highest level – on the level of the prime minister. The heads of regional and district administrations try to show their superiors that meeting the cotton quota set for each province and district is of the utmost priority to them. In order to fulfill the mandatory quota they need to mobilize all local human resources, all residents of every village, district, and region, young and old, to participate in the cotton harvest, regardless of the economic rationality, human, social and economic costs.

Payment

Schoolchildren receive payments in the same amount that adult cotton pickers receive. But it is a small amount which does not satisfy adult population, because this payment rate doesn't allow them to provide their families with livelihoods. From 2009 to 2011, the amount of the payment did not change significantly, and has ranged from 100 to 125 Uzbek soums (about 4 – 5 US cents) per kilogram of harvested cotton. This is as much as twice less than what cotton pickers receive in neighboring South Kazakhstan which has the same geographical conditions for cotton as Uzbekistan.

Schoolchildren and college students who were forced to live in the cotton fields, in poorly accommodate barracks, were supposed to be reimbursed by farmers for any expenses they incurred for meals and transportation. But they were not. Schoolchildren generally brought lunch from home. Not all children received the full payment amounts in hand. All expenses for meals and transportation, if provided by farmers, were deducted from kids' salaries. In one interview, children talked about how a large part of the money was transferred to the "school fund" to pay for compulsory subscriptions to state-run newspapers and magazines,

for the repairs of the school facilities, and to purchase supplies for the schools. Parents reported that the money that the children were paid was not even enough to buy new clothes and shoes to replace those that were worn out while working in the fields.

Punishment

Many of the children we surveyed admitted that neither they, nor their parents, had even considered the idea of refusing to go the cotton fields, since participation in the annual cotton harvest is simply something they have grown accustomed to. Some children were told that failure to show up for the cotton harvest would affect their standing in school, that they might even get lower grades. Parents do not want to start a conflict with the school administration. Moreover, parents realize that teachers are also under pressure and are just enforcing rules set from above. In some cases, parents are intimidated by the fact that cotton – is politics, and the refusal to send their child to “help the state” is essentially a protest against state policy.

Some parents were forced to send their children to the cotton fields after they were threatened by a local policeman that they may lose their social welfare benefits or that their gas and electricity utilities would be cut off.

There are different kinds of punishments for students who do not work hard enough and do not meet the quotas of the cotton harvest. Most children are told that if they cannot keep up with the quotas, then they would be subject to public humiliation, threats, and lower grades for their academic work. College students were warned that if they refused to show up, they would be expelled from school or college, or would not receive their degree upon their graduation.

It should be noted that state propaganda and patriotic brainwashing also play a role. Some teachers and students completely agree with the notion that cotton is a national treasure, and that helping pick cotton is helping their Motherland.

From an interview with a 13 year old student from Jizzakh region:

“The director [of the school] says that the cotton harvest – it is not his business, but the Motherland’s business. Cotton – is the face of Uzbekistan and nobody has the right to refuse to pick cotton, if you live in Uzbekistan and breathe Uzbekistan’s air, drink Uzbekistan’s water, eat Uzbekistan’s bread.”

In some cases, boys were beaten. A video from the harvest in 2011 was posted on YouTube showing a dean from the Chemistry-Technology Department of the Karakalpak National University dressing down and slapping students who failed to meet their cotton picking quotas. In true Soviet fashion, the Dean administered the humiliation in public, in front of all of the students. The fragment of the clip showing physical abuse begins at the 2 minute and 40 second mark of the video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WOvDIvvoZeY> .

College students were threatened with dismissal from the Institute if they don’t meet daily quota of picking cotton.

Living conditions

The living conditions for students and schoolchildren are often harsh, in terms of access to food, clean water, hygiene products, as well as the basic living environment overall. Students from colleges were placed in field barracks located in buildings not intended for residential dwelling, such as rural schoolhouses, dilapidated barns, local administration buildings, etc.; these are, in general, buildings which do not meet basic health and safety standards for residence.

From an interview with a father who visited his daughter – a student at the field camp:

“I noticed that there was a concrete floor that was covered with a thin mat, and that my daughter, along with the other girls, slept on the floor. My daughter was crying and said that the food was disgusting, that there were no facilities for bathing, and asked if I could take her back home. Her teacher did not allow me to take her away. Only after cajoling after having brought her a bag full of food, the teacher let me take my daughter home for two days under the condition that I leave my passport as collateral. So, I handed over my passport and my daughter was able to rest at home for two days, after which I brought her back to the fields.”

College students wrote about the difficult conditions in online chat rooms and forums, social networks, and appeals to journalists. On September 12, students from the Pediatrics Faculty of the Andijan Institute of Medicine sent an email to Radio Liberty describing the poor conditions under which they were forced to work and asking for someone to rescue them from the tyranny of their teachers.

“We are tortured in a fascistic manner. We are driven off to the cotton field at 4 o’clock in the morning and forced to pick 100kg of cotton every day. There is no water. We get lunch at 1pm, and go to bed at 12 midnight. They can come and wake us up at any time during the night and begin interrogations. The teacher Husan Ganiyevich [teacher’s first and middle name] humiliates the students in front of others with unendurable offensive words. We are waiting for help.” -- Students of the Faculty of Pediatrics.

High school students worked and lived under similar conditions.

Attempts to conceal information and the harassment of human rights defenders

Human rights activists and journalists could not openly monitor the situation in the cotton fields during the harvest. The Uzbek government prevents openness on this issue in every way, using the police, local informants from the mahallas, to discourage any attempt to gather information from the cotton fields.

This year the local authorities took extra security measures to conceal information about the mobilization of schoolchildren to the cotton harvest. In some districts the teachers were instructed to report any unknown people they saw in the fields; and children were instructed to say, if asked what they were doing, that they were working at their own volition and helping their families.

The schools and premises where the children lived were guarded by police or specially designated people; the fields in which the children worked, in many regions, were also guarded. The teachers themselves, under whose guidance the children were working, had to report on any instances in which any unauthorized people came to the children or to the barracks where they were living. There were cases in which the teachers chased these

“strangers” and called the police if someone tried to photograph the children working or ask them about their work.

According to the parents surveyed, in Tashkent region, children were not allowed to bring cell phones so that they could not take pictures of what was transpiring. Intelligence officers or police would be situated near the children working, to see that the children were not communicating with strangers and did not have any photo or video equipment.

Despite these difficulties, human rights activists and journalists in Uzbekistan recorded numerous instances of child exploitation in the cotton fields; they have been harassed, arrested, and beaten.

In September and October 2011, Elena Urlayeva, the head of the public movement “Human Rights Alliance of Uzbekistan,” volunteered as a cotton picker in the cotton field where schoolchildren were also working. She submitted the facts, in writing, of the specific schools and colleges, with the names of teachers and khokims, responsible for sending children to pick cotton, as well as photos, videos, with compelling evidence documenting the mass exploitation of children, to the country’s authorities and to international organizations.

The reaction of the Uzbek authorities was to arrest her when she was attempting to further monitor the situation and gather information. On October 19 2011, at 10:00am, policemen from the Yangiyul Department of Internal Affairs, Tashkent Region, detained Elena Urlayeva while she was documenting on video the facilities of empty school No. 4. The school was empty because all the children were in the fields. The human rights defender said: “The police took off my clothes, patted me down, looking for something. I was not informed why I was detained. Despite the fact that I was demanding it, no one wrote up my case. After three hours, I was taken through the back entrance of the Department, put into a car, and driven to Tashkent.” The human rights defender did not get her memory stick with the photos of the empty school back.

There have been other cases in which human rights activists were detained merely by standing in a cotton field, or by trying to speak with schoolchildren who were working. On September 15, 2011, human rights activists from Kashkadarya region, Gulshan Karaeva and Nodir Akhatov were detained by the policeman from the Kasansky district Department of Internal Affairs, after interviewing children in the fields. They did a search on them and seized memory sticks from cameras and audio recording devices. Gulshan Karaeva said that at the police station they were ordered to write a note that they would not return to Kasansky district. The human rights activists were released after nine hours of detention.

School principals demand that teachers not disclose any information about the fact of the exploitation of children or else risk dismissal. Some teachers didn’t comply with this order. One of them, Ziyodullo Razzakov, a teacher from secondary school No. 1, Zarbdarsky district in Jizzakh region, was fired from his job after he gave a series of interviews to Radio Liberty about the conditions under which children worked and an argument with the school principal on the decision to send children to pick cotton. Decree No. 82 from January 12, 2012, signed by the school principal Bakhtiyor Elimuradov states that the school terminated Razzakov’s employment contract.

In his radio interview, the teacher spoke about how schoolchildren were taken to the fields in trucks, like “sacks of potatoes.” And that for the transportation costs, 400 soums per day was taken out of their payments.

Victims of the cotton campaign

Children are transported to the cotton fields in such conditions that are threatening to their health and even to their lives. In most cases, the children are packed onto cargo trucks which are not aimed for carrying passengers. Often, it’s a tractor trailer. If schoolchildren have to walk to the fields, this also puts them in the face of danger, as children have to walk on the edge of roads with high speed traffic.

On September 24, 2011 upon their return from the cotton fields, one 13 year old cotton picker, Bakhodir Pardayev, who was a student in the sixth grade from School No. 24 from Chirakchiksky district, Kashkadaryo region, got into an accident, hit by a bypassing car. The boy was in a coma for 22 days. When he came out of the coma, he could and still can no longer speak. He got a blank look in his eyes. After human rights activists found out about this incident, the parents were pressured to say that “this is not related with cotton policy, but that this is just an ordinary unfortunate incident.” On March 3, 2012, the Kashkararya district court threw a case brought by Pardayev’s parents to bring to justice those responsible for sending schoolchildren to pick cotton; the court even noted that this particular unfortunate incident was unrelated to the cotton campaign. At this time, Pardayev, though no longer in a coma, cannot speak or control his arms or legs.

The teacher’s role

Teachers are hostages of the cotton campaign. They are assigned their own role in organizing the children to go out to the cotton fields. They are expected to keep an eye on the school and college students while they work. They are also forced to go from home to home and convince parents to allow their children to pick cotton, and tell them what could happen if they refuse to send their children.

In interviews, all the teachers spoke of how at the instructions of the school principal, they are required to fill out all school records as if there had not been any disruption of the educational process. The two month disruption in studies to pick cotton undoubtedly affects the quality of education. To make up for missed classes, they increase the number of classes after students return from the harvest, and they shorten the autumn and winter breaks, and students aren’t able to fully keep up with the curriculum.

Teachers admitted that it was pointless to challenge the system, as the decree to mobilize children comes from the Tashkent authorities. And those who try to challenge it will find many obstructions along the way and will likely be fired.

And this was how the vice principal for education of School No. 4 in Olotsky district, Bukhara region, Gaibullo Bektashev lost his job. According to Bektashev, he refused to fill out the school records from September 19 to October 17 to look as though classes were in session, and demanded that the schoolchildren be sent back from the cotton fields. He was fired on November 22, 2011. His written appeals on the violation of the rights of teachers and children that he sent to the Ministry of Education were regularly returned to the district education department.

Corruption during the cotton campaign

For those who do not wish to participate in the compulsory cotton harvest, there are ways of “buying your way out” of this service or sending a worker in your place. By many accounts, the amount of a bribe to get out of picking cotton in 2011 was from 200,000 to 300,000 soums (US\$ 100- 125). For approximately the same amount, students and schoolchildren could buy a doctor’s certificate of exemption. Students who were indeed sick spoke about the difficulties of obtaining a certificate from a doctor without a bribe.

According to one doctor, in the fall of 2011, the hospital in Buka (Tashkent region) was overflowing with patients with colds, allergies, and inflammation of the appendix (many of them were students), but doctors refused to give certificates of exemption from cotton picking, citing the risk of losing their jobs.

Exempting your children from cotton picking is also possible if you are close to the authorities. Officials of various ranks take advantage of the opportunity to skim a profit off the cotton campaign, at the expense of citizens who choose to buy their way out of participating in the harvest.

From the interviews

"Our teacher is a very good woman. She's always thinking and caring about us. She's worried that we are working on the field. She never scolded us. The director is constantly scolding her because of us. Once I saw her alone on the field in tears. It turns out that director wanted to fire her from school due to the fact that we are bad at picking cotton. When we heard about it, in order to protect our teachers, we tried to pick more cotton on that day".
7th grade pupil, Kashkadarya region. November 2011.

"We bring our lunch to the field from home everyday. The food is very cool by midday. We did not wash our hands before dinner. Those who washed, their hands cracked from the cold. We had lunch for half an hour, and then picked cotton again. Usually we had our dinner at the edge of the field on the ground. On windy days, our food is crumbling dust".
8th grade pupil, Surhandarya region. November 2011

"Let down with this cotton! Let the earth swallow it! As long as I can remember, I'm always on the cotton field. Since my childhood, my mother took me on the field. If I would do my studies in the city, I would never come to the village again".

9th grade pupil, Kashkadarya region, November 2011

"Cotton is like an army. When drafted into the army, the permission is not asked from the parents. During the harvest, on the doors of all institutions it says "Everybody to the cotton." This inscription is above any law. Those who do not like cotton say only good things about cotton. As if they would go to jail if they talked bad about cotton".
Parent, Kashkadarya region, November 2011.

Commentary on the concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, adopted on June 2, 2006, on the situation of child labor.

In its concluding observations on Uzbekistan, adopted on June 2, 2006, the Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern about the participation of school-age children in the cotton harvest, and made several recommendations, including:

- adopt all necessary measures to ensure that the participation of school-age children in the cotton harvest is in full compliance with international standards of child labor;
- ensure regular inspections during the cotton harvest to monitor and guarantee full compliance with international standards of child labor;
- establish control mechanisms to monitor the scale of all forms of child labor;
- ratify ILO Convention № 138 (on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment) and № 182 (on the Prohibition and Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor).

Although Uzbekistan has signed and ratified the ILO conventions on child labor, the Government of Uzbekistan itself remain the main organizer of the participation of school-age children in the cotton harvest, disrupting the academic term for two to three months every year. Picking cotton for children is mandatory, heavy physical labor, which can only be avoided in cases of serious illness. The working conditions, the amount of payment, the lack of access to clean drinking water in the cotton fields, the interruption of a child's education, as well as other factors have a cumulative negative impact on child health and development. The mobilization of children to pick cotton is done without taking into account the will of the children themselves and of their parents. In other words, in spite of its international obligations and its own laws, the use of child labor remain a deliberate policy adopted by the government of Uzbekistan.

Uzbekistan has not taken any actions to limit or end the participation of children in the cotton harvest or to comply with international standards of child labor. This report presents facts indicating that the Government of Uzbekistan has ignored the recommendations of the Committee and does not demonstrate serious intention and genuine political will to address the problem of forced child labor in the cotton fields.

The Uzbek state media regularly puts out information on the creation of monitoring teams to monitor the situation with child labor during the autumn harvest. These types of measures are purely a formality, as the commission conducting the "monitoring" is composed of representatives from ministries and government departments that are fully at the mercy of the government. No invitations have ever been extended to independent human rights group to participate on these commissions, which could give them more reliable, independent perspectives. Neither the government has extended an invitation to ILO to take part in monitoring during the cotton harvest.

Commentary on the third and fourth National Report of Uzbekistan on the implementation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child

Over the last few years, forced child labor in Uzbekistan's cotton fields has been an issue raised by many human rights organizations including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. Despite this, the 279 page National Report, prepared by the National Center for

Human Rights in Uzbekistan, does not raise or address the issue of child labor in the cotton harvest.

The national report only provides information on the ratification of ILO conventions and on amendments and additions to the national law, adopted in response to the Committee's recommendations.

The report provides no information about whether the situation has changed in practice. Research has shown that the variety of activities conducted such as seminars, conferences, and training sessions listed in the report have not been effective in solving the problem of forced child labor in Uzbekistan. Indeed, for the last five years, many new laws and national programs were adopted, designed to limit the economic exploitation of children and prevent child labor. However, the main problem remains that these adopted laws do not work and are not put into practice. They remain on paper, and have no effect on the officials who make the orders to send children out into the fields. There haven't been even one case when a local official issuing orders to mobilize children for cotton during academic year would be brought to account, charged on criminal offence or even denounced publicly.

The orders to mobilize children for the cotton harvest come from the heads of the local administration (hokimiyats). But these heads (hokims) are direct subordinates of the central government which appoints them to their positions. Thus, if there were genuine political will, it would be very simple to have an order issued from the president and his cabinet of ministers, to stop sending children to the cotton harvest, and the hokims would end this practice overnight. It is clear that the government would, at the same time, have to provide some kind of incentives for adults to work in the cotton fields. This government is not taking any such measures, preferring to keep the status quo, that is, cheap child labor, at the expense of their future, their education, and their health.

Uzbekistan's violation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography

Despite the fact that secondary education in Uzbekistan is free and compulsory, the state policy of sending children to pick cotton during the academic term violates Article 28, paragraph "e" of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This article stipulates that the state "shall take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates." In taking a child out of the educational process for two to three months every school year, the Uzbek government violates the child's right to education.

Uzbekistan has also violated Article 32 of the Convention which provides for "the child's right to protection from economic exploitation from performing any work that may pose a risk to his or her health, or to interfere with the child's education, or is harmful to his or her health, or physical, mental, spiritual, moral, or social development."

Facts and information contained in this report indicate that the economic exploitation of children in Uzbekistan takes place on a massive scale and throughout the country. The harsh working conditions in the cotton fields, the amount of cotton they are required to pick, the punishments for refusing to work, the closure of schools during the cotton picking season is in direct violation of Article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

It should be stressed that that actions of government officials on the economic exploitation of children not only prevent the implementation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child, but violate it in a crude and cynical manner.

Uzbekistan also grossly violated Article 3, paragraph “c” of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. Paragraph 3 Article 3 of the Protocol stipulates that “each State Party shall ensure that, engagement of the child in forced labour is fully covered under its criminal or penal law, whether such offences are committed domestically or transnationally or on an individual or organized basis.”

Conclusions

Uzbekistan has conducted the cotton campaign in 2011, as well as all previous cotton harvests, in violation of international standards and in violation of its own laws, involving almost all sectors of the society, with the widespread use of forced child labor.

The Uzbek government has taken no real actions to eradicate child labor other than formally adopting laws and the so called National Action Plan to implement ILO conventions on forced and child labor. Instead, the government continues to support a system which employs child labor to handle its cotton harvest and maximize profits from it.

To date, there is no indication that the government is deliberately carrying out reforms in the agricultural sector so that it can end the practice of cheap forced labor and can attract adults, by fair payment, to work in the cotton sector.

The situation shows that the government continues to retain the command economy in the cotton industry, in which there are no market mechanisms working, and there is no intentions to change the situation.

The root cause of the forced labor is the low pay rate set by the government to pay cotton pickers, which is not attractive to the adult working population. All farmers that we interviewed said that it would be possible to harvest the cotton without using child labor if the rates for the wages were, at the very least, doubled. That would immediately appeal to the adult work force, which is in abundance in the country. It is worth to mention that according to estimations by international experts, unemployment in Uzbekistan is not less than 15%. In rural areas it is even higher. This can be confirmed by the fact that every autumn many adult cotton pickers from Uzbekistan leave for seasonal jobs picking cotton in neighboring Kazakhstan. According to our information, farmers in Kazakhstan would pay twice as much for one kilogram of cotton than Uzbek farmers did.

Recommendations to the Government of Uzbekistana

We recommend that the Government of Uzbekistan take immediate and concrete measures ensuring that laws prohibiting child labor are put into practice. First, it is essential to:

- Provide guidance to local hokims to cease the mobilization of schools and other educational institutions to participate in the cotton harvest;
- Carry out reforms in the country’s cotton sector, so that there would no longer exist the need and demand for child labor on a massive scale;

- Invite ILO observers into the country to monitor the situation with forced child labor during the cotton harvest;
- Include representatives of independent human rights groups in the supervisory mechanisms to monitor the use of child labor, and ensure that the human rights groups are not substituted by the government controlled NGOs.

We hope that the Committee on the Rights of the Child will take up our findings in their discussions with the Government of Uzbekistan and take into consideration our findings into its final document.

About us:

UGF, the Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights', is a human rights organisation founded and established in Berlin in the summer of 2009. It is our aim to better the human rights situation in Uzbekistan and to strengthen and further civil society in the country.

One of the main focal points of our work is the fight against forced child labour in Uzbekistan's cotton sector. UGF aim to raise awareness about the ongoing exploitation of children in Uzbekistan and working together with other European NGOs, will build strong awareness campaigns to inform the public about the ongoing and systematic forced child labour in Uzbekistan's cotton industry.

Website: <http://uzbekgermanforum.org/>