



September 24, 2013

Ms. Constance Thomas
Director, International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)
International Labour Office
Route des Morillons, 4
CH – 1211 Geneva
Switzerland

Dear Ms. Thomas,

We appreciate the efforts of the International Labour Organization to promote the application of ILO conventions in Uzbekistan. As a global coalition of business, labour and human rights organization, we have long advocated for high-level, tripartite ILO monitoring of the cotton sector, which is a vital first step towards ending forced labour and forced child labour in Uzbekistan. We are pleased that the ILO has begun monitoring this year's harvest. Yet we remain deeply concerned that the Uzbek government has prevented unfettered access for the ILO and that the people of Uzbekistan are unable to fully participate in the monitoring.

The root cause of forced labour and forced child labour in Uzbekistan is the state-order system, under which the government coerces both adults and children to grow and harvest cotton. It is undeniable that the state-organized, coercive mobilization of over a million children and adults to work in the cotton fields in Uzbekistan is forced labour for economic development on a massive scale. Already this year, Uzbek civil society has documented clear instances of forced labour. In the spring, authorities mobilised children and adults to plough and weed,¹ and authorities beat farmers for planting onions instead of cotton². Prior to this school year, administrators required parents to sign commitments that their children would pick cotton in order to register for school.³ Starting September 6, authorities mobilised teachers, doctors and other public-sector workers to pick cotton or pay fines.⁴ Starting September 10, high-school and university students have been sent to pick cotton, and government officials have ordered business

¹ Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights, *Chronicle of Forced Labour*, Issue 1, June 5, 2013, <http://uzbekgermanforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Reports-from-the-cotton-fields-Issue-1-2013.pdf> (accessed 20 September 2013).

² "Vice-governor beats 8 people at government meeting in Uzbekistan," *CA-News.org*, 26 April 2013, <http://www.cottoncampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/CA-NEWS-Vice-governor-beats-8-people-at-government-meeting-in-Uzbekistan.pdf> (accessed 20 September 2013).

³ Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights, *Chronicle of Forced Labour*, Issue 2, August 26, 2013, <http://uzbekgermanforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/2-Cotton-Chronicle-2-20132.pdf> (accessed 20 September 2013).

⁴ Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights, *Chronicle of Forced Labour*, Issue 3, September 9, 2013, <http://uzbekgermanforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/3-Cotton-Chronicle-2013.pdf> (accessed 20 September 2013).

owners to send their employees, contribute financially, or face tax inspections.⁵ On September 16, 200,000 people were sent to the fields from Tashkent city alone,⁶ and government officials have mobilized one-fifth of all public-sector workers in Syrdarya region.⁷

It is vital that the ILO take these reports seriously, as evidence that the government has not demonstrated its commitment to end forced labour. Already, Uzbek citizens have reported that authorities have instructed them to tell international monitors ‘we came to pick cotton voluntarily in order to help our government, to raise the economy of the country and work hard for our motherland.’⁸ This raises serious concerns that Uzbek government participation in on-the-ground monitoring is having a chilling effect on Uzbek citizens’ willingness to speak openly with the ILO monitors

Again, we emphasize the vital importance of unfettered monitoring, which we see as independent of government interference, timely access to all locations, full participation of civil society, and tripartite validation. Given these concerns and that the root cause of child labour is the forced-labour system, we urge you to raise the level of transparency of the ongoing ILO monitoring mission in Uzbekistan: first by making public the implementation plan and survey instruments, second by taking into account reports from independent civil society, and third by ensuring the findings are validated with the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and International Organisation of Employers (IOE).

By taking these important steps we believe that the mission can be an effective first step toward eliminating the root causes of forced labour and forced child labour in Uzbekistan.

Sincerely,
The Cotton Campaign

Advocates for Public Interest Law



American Federation of Labor and
Congress of Industrial Organizations

AFL-CIO



American Federation of Teachers

Anti-Slavery International



⁵ Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights, *Chronicle of Forced Labour*, Issue 4, September 19, 2013, <http://uzbekgermanforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/4-Cotton-Chronicle-2013.pdf> (accessed 23 September 2013).

⁶ Initiative Group of Independent Human Rights Defenders of Uzbekistan (IGIHRDU), 16 September 2013, <http://ca-news.org/news:1080594/> (accessed 16 September 2013).

⁷ Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights, *Chronicle of Forced Labour*, Issue 4, September 19, 2013, <http://uzbekgermanforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/4-Cotton-Chronicle-2013.pdf> (accessed 23 September 2013).

⁸ *Ibid.*

Association for Human Rights in Central Asia



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Uniting Church in Australia,
Synod of Victoria and Tasmania



Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights



CC: Kari Tapiola, Special advisor to the ILO Director-General