

FORCED LABOR IN UZBEKISTAN

**REPORT ON THE 2013
COTTON HARVEST**

**UZBEK-GERMAN FORUM
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**

MAY 2014

Table of Contents

Executive Summary 6

Methodology 8

Introduction 10

Human Rights Overview 10

Cotton Production System In Uzbekistan 12

Government Policy On Child Labor and Forced Labor In The Cotton Sector 13

Legal Standards 13

International Standards 14

Uzbek Law 16

The International Labor Organization's Mission And Report 16

Methodological Limitations 17

Efforts To Evade ILO Monitors 18

Child Labor And Forced Adult Labor 19

Child Labor 21

Cotton Harvesting by Children Age 15 And Younger 21

Recruitment Of First-Year Students 23

Mass Forced Mobilization Of Students, Including Children Aged 16-17 25

Mass Mobilization 25

Coercion 26

Forced Recruitment Of Employees Of State-Funded Agencies 27

Forced Recruitment And Payments From Private Businesses And Individuals 28

Forced Recruitment 29

Mandatory Payments 30

Use Of *Mardikors* 31

Working Conditions 32

Threats, Coercion, And Punishments 34

Public Humiliation 34

Loss of Employment 35

Loss of Social Assistance Or Services 35

Expulsion or Academic Consequences 36

***Physical Punishments* 36**

Compensation And Costs 38

Living Conditions, Food And Water 39

Deaths 41

Recommendations 42

Recommendations To The Government Of Uzbekistan 42

Recommendations To The International Labor Organizations 43

Recommendations To The European Union 43

Recommendations To The United States 44

**Recommendations To The World Bank, Asian Development Bank,
 And other Multilateral Financial Institutions 45**

Recommendations To Companies 45

United Nations Human Rights Council 46

Acknowledgments 57



College student, Samarkand, September 2013

Executive Summary

Forced labor has been an entrenched component of cotton production in Uzbekistan for decades, affecting over a million children and adults every year. The government of Uzbekistan has steadfastly denied the existence of forced labor in the country.

For many years the government used schoolchildren aged 11–15, together with older students and adults, to pick cotton. Apparently in response to sustained international criticism around the use of child labor, in 2012 the government stopped mobilizing children younger than 16 to pick cotton on a mass scale. The government instead shifted the forced labor burden to older students, including children age 16–17 studying in colleges [the equivalent of American vocational high schools] and lyceums [the equivalent of American college-preparatory high schools], and adults working in both the public sector and for private businesses. This pattern was repeated in 2013 and the data suggest an increasing reliance on private businesses. During the 2013 cotton harvest, the Uzbek–German Forum carried out research in six oblasts (territorial-administrative divisions) and the capital, Tashkent, and found that the government's use of forced labor was widespread and systematic, affecting well over a million people across the country, mainly children aged 16–17 and adults. While school children up to age 15 were not mobilized on a mass scale in 2013, children aged 16–17 studying at secondary institutions such as colleges and lyceums were forced to abandon their studies to harvest cotton for periods of between one and two and a half months. The Uzbek–German Forum did not identify significant regional differences in the government's implementation of the system of forced labor. The system of forced labor is highly centralized, directed from the highest levels of government and implemented by regional and local officials, directors of colleges and lyceums, and administrators of government-funded agencies and organizations, including schools, medical clinics, and local governments.

The forced mobilization of labor also imposed enormous social costs across many sectors and communities in Uzbekistan. Many businesses and state-funded agencies and organizations were unable to provide normal levels of goods or services during the two months of the harvest because so many of their employees were forced to work in the cotton harvest. Many individuals and organizations, including private businesses, were exempted from mobilization, but only if they instead made mandatory "contributions" to fund the work of the harvest. In the case of small businesses, government officials such as tax inspectors or officials from the local administration collected these funds, implicitly threatening consequences should a businessman fail to pay. Where this failed they resorted to coercion, including intrusive inspections, tax collections, refusal to grant necessary permits, cutting off utilities and confiscating inventory for trumped up violations of various state regulations.

During the 2013 cotton harvest the government for the first time accepted a mission by the International Labor Organization to monitor the use of child labor. This was an important step but the mission's limited mandate and flawed methodology, in particular including government representatives on monitoring teams, undermined the usefulness of its findings.



On the way to the cotton delivery point

Methodology

Researchers from the Uzbek–German Forum conducted monitoring in the capital, Tashkent, and in six oblasts in Uzbekistan. Data collection in the use of forced labor in the cotton sector is a challenging and dangerous activity, since the government of Uzbekistan takes steps to suppress information about labor practices. However, there are opportunities to collect and corroborate data to construct an accurate picture of what is occurring each year. Research findings from interviews were corroborated with field visits, visits to educational institutions, media monitoring, and voluntary submissions from people affected by the harvest.

As with previous years, research was carried out by experienced monitors. In every case, the monitors are fluent in Uzbek and in most cases also speak Russian. They have received extensive training on research methodology by the Uzbek–German Forum. Before undertaking the monitoring the Uzbek–German Forum met with representatives to conduct trainings and to discuss the upcoming work. Monitors have a thorough knowledge of Uzbek labor law as well as laws and regulations concerning forced labor.¹

Researchers live in the regions that they monitor and have a deep understanding of the local context. Several of the Uzbek–German Forum’s monitors themselves participated in the cotton harvest. Monitors include farmers, teachers, and journalists from local agricultural publications. Their own information, supported by photographs and video, provided an additional key source of information about the harvest. All monitors who documented the 2013 harvest had conducted similar research during past harvests. On average, the monitors had previously worked with the Uzbek–German Forum for three to four years.

Research for this report consisted of three main parts:

Monitors conducted field visits to the cotton fields, worker housing, colleges, and lyceums. Monitors documented working conditions and the mass mobilization of students and employees through video and photography. Monitors conducted short interviews with students and workers picking cotton. During the 2013 harvest the Uzbek–German Forum collected several hours of video testimony of students picking cotton and 20 on-camera interviews.

During the cotton harvest the Uzbek–German Forum conducted a review and analysis of local press related to the cotton harvest. This review provided information for the Uzbek–German Forum’s weekly Chronicle of Forced Labor.² In addition, in advance of the cotton harvest, the

¹ For detailed information and analysis of relevant Uzbek laws, see: <http://www.tashabbus.uz/otvetstvinnost/>.

² The Chronicle of Forced Labor is a periodic update of media monitoring and analysis produced regularly throughout the harvest season, available at: <http://uzbekgermanforum.org/category/cotton-chronicle/chronicle-of-forced-labour-2013/>.

director of the Uzbek–German Forum, Umida Niyazova, spoke on Radio Ozodlik, and requested listeners to provide information about labor recruitment and working conditions. The Uzbek–German Forum received 15 letters from listeners detailing their experiences with forced recruitment.

At the conclusion of the cotton harvest, monitors conducted 133 interviews using a detailed questionnaire.³ Monitors interviewed students of colleges and universities, school teachers (mobilized to harvest cotton), school pupils, instructors at colleges and universities accompanying students to the harvest, residents of mahallas (traditional neighborhood structures), *mardikors* (Uzbek day or seasonal laborers), farmers, medical workers, employees of public agencies, and private entrepreneurs.

Although all interviews for this report were conducted with the knowledge and consent of the interviewees, their identities have not been revealed in this report out of concern that they could face reprisals. In some cases specific identifying details have been omitted and the faces of interviewees in our video interviews have been obscured to protect their identities. During interviews monitors distributed copies of Uzbek laws prohibiting the use of child and forced labor. In several cases this prompted parents to remove their children from the cotton fields.

³ The questionnaire was composed by Alisher Ilkhamov, Uzbekistan Program Manager for the Open Society Foundation and Matthew Fischer–Daly, coordinator of the Cotton Campaign.

Introduction

Before, people were made to do public work under the slogan 'for communism,' but now it's under artificial slogans such as 'for the people, for independence.' Those who refuse to participate are considered enemies of independence, they are against the state, against their own people.⁴

Human Rights Overview

In 2013, the Uzbek government once again used forced labor in the cotton sector systematically and on a massive, country-wide scale, affecting hundreds of thousands of children aged 16–17 and adults. While children younger than 16⁵ were not mobilized on a mass scale in 2013, authorities forced children aged 16–17, studying at colleges and lyceums, to abandon their studies and harvest cotton in every region of the country, for periods of up to two and a half months. The authorities forced teachers from institutions at every educational level to pick cotton, thereby disrupting studies for many children, even those who themselves were not sent to the cotton fields.

Uzbekistan is one of the world's most closed countries and has an atrocious human rights record. It is consistently ranked as having among the world's worst human rights records.⁶ Entrenched human rights abuses violate a wide range of fundamental human rights. Torture is widespread and systematic.⁷ Courts are not independent. Violations of due process and other protections are endemic in the criminal justice system. Uzbekistan severely and unduly restricts the freedoms of religion, speech, assembly, and association. The government has only granted registration to one independent national human rights organization. Journalists, civil society activists and human rights defenders are subjected to harassment, surveillance, and

⁴ Interview with a college teacher, Khorezm, November 2013.

⁵ Although most first-year students are 16, some students are only 15 when they begin colleges or lyceums.

⁶ See for example the International Human Rights Rank Indicator (<http://www.ihri.com/>) and the Freedom in the World Index (<http://www.freedomhouse.org/report-types/freedom-world>).

⁷ The United Nations special rapporteur on torture made the finding that the use of torture in Uzbekistan is "systematic," following his 2002 visit to the country. See: United Nations Economic and Social Council, Civil and Political Rights, Including the Questions of Torture and Detention, Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. UN Commission on Human Rights, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the question of torture, Theo van Boven, Visit to Uzbekistan, E/CN.4/2003/68/Add.2. February 3, 2003, <http://www.unhcr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/0/29d0f1eaf87cf3eac-1256ce9005a0170?Opendocument> (accessed May 14, 2013). In the Concluding Observations of its 2013 periodic review of Uzbekistan, the Committee Against Torture reiterated its concerns about the persistent use of torture in Uzbekistan, CAT/C/UZB/CO/4, available at http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=-CAT_2fC_2fUZB_2fCO_2f4&Lang=en, accessed May 14, 2013.

interference in their work, and in some cases imprisonment, ill-treatment, or torture.

The government of Uzbekistan also has a long-standing record of non-cooperation with independent international monitoring and investigation mechanisms and regularly rejects or fails to comply with recommendations made by international bodies. As of 2014, Uzbekistan had failed to respond to outstanding invitations by 11 United Nations special human rights monitors, one of the worst records of non-cooperation in the world.⁸ Although in 2013 the government for the first time accepted a limited ILO mission to monitor the use of child labor during the harvest, this did not indicate a willingness to shine light on the serious human rights problems endemic to the cotton sector or to undertake systemic reforms. In 2013, the government continued to harass, threaten, intimidate, and detain activists and journalists who attempted to research or report on cotton production in Uzbekistan. In one example, independent journalist Sergei Naumov, who was gathering information for an article on the cotton season, was arrested on trumped up charges of hooliganism and held incommunicado for 12 days during September 2013, a peak period of the harvest, preventing him from conducting his research.⁹ Also in September, the authorities arrested Utkam Parдав, a human rights activist who reports on abuses such as torture and forced labor, and who was planning to monitor the harvest. Police beat Parдав during his arrest and kept him in custody for a 15-day administrative sentence for hooliganism and resisting arrest. Parдав believes that the arrest was to prevent his human rights work in connection with the cotton harvest.¹⁰

Cotton Production System In Uzbekistan

The government of Uzbekistan's sensitivity to criticism about its system of cotton production is also explained by the fact that cotton is an export crop and is considered a strategic resource in the country.¹¹ As such, cotton production policy is highly centralized and controlled at the highest levels of government. The president of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, establishes the national cotton policy for the country, including the volume and varieties grown, and the prime minister bears personal responsibility for agriculture, including the cotton sector, and personally conducts conference calls with local authorities throughout the country during all

⁸ They are the United Nations special rapporteurs on torture and other cruel, degrading, or inhuman treatment, on the situation of human rights defenders, on freedom of religion or belief, on violence against women, on the independence of judges and lawyers, on extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary executions, on contemporary forms of slavery, on freedom of association and assembly, and on cultural rights, as well as the working groups on arbitrary detention, and on enforced or involuntary disappearances.

⁹ Naumov was charged with violating article 183 of the Administrative Code of Uzbekistan, a misdemeanor. For more information, see: <https://cpj.org/2013/09/uzbek-journalist-jailed-on-hooliganism-charges.php#more>, accessed May 16, 2014.

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch World Report 2014, Uzbekistan, available at: <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2013/country-chapters/uzbekistan?page=2>, accessed May 9, 2014.

¹¹ For more information on cotton and the financial system of cotton production, see: Uzbekistan's Cotton Sector: Financial Flows and Distribution of Resources, Open Society Institute, presented at the Cotton Campaign Annual Meeting, May 2, 2014, Washington, D.C. A copy of the paper is on file with the Uzbek-German Forum and publication is forthcoming.

phases of the cotton production cycle to ensure compliance with the government's cotton production plan.¹²

Although most farms have been converted to leases since the end of the Soviet Union, cotton production is still controlled by an administrative–command system, a planned, highly centralized system where decisions around cotton production, harvesting, and sales are made by the central government and enforced by coercive means. Who officially owns the land increasingly becomes academic in the face of comprehensive state control on the farmer's decision–making, inputs and access to market. The government establishes annual production targets for each region of the country. Local hokims [the heads of local administrative units] risk losing their seats if their regions fail to meet the targets, while farmers who fail to meet their quotas are subjected to a range of sanctions–economic, administrative, and even criminal prosecution.¹³ Farmers told the Uzbek–German Forum that they risked losing their land if they did not meet the production quota.¹⁴

The government controls every aspect of the production, processing, sale, and export of raw cotton and cotton fiber. Forced labor is an inherent component of the cotton production system in Uzbekistan, not just for picking cotton and preparatory field work such as sowing and weeding, but also for farmers.¹⁵ Farmers are subjected to coercion to grow cotton. The government dictates what varieties of cotton they must plant. Farmers must use inputs and agricultural services provided by government–controlled monopolies and must sell their crops to government–monopoly processors at government–established procurement prices. The government also sets the rates paid to workers for harvesting, which are substantially lower than market wages. Revenues from cotton, estimated at \$1 billion USD annually, are concentrated in the hands of the central government, mainly funneled directly to the opaque and unaccountable Selkhozfond, an extra–budgetary fund of the Ministry of Finance. However, as one analysis concludes “these draconian methods do not result in increased efficiency of cotton production, the quality of which is one of the lowest among cotton producing countries in the world.”¹⁶

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Interview with farmer in Andijan region, November 17, 2013.

¹⁵ Forced labor is an issue for cotton farmers, and in other sectors of the economy in Uzbekistan as well. Many respondents told the Uzbek–German Forum that they are regularly required to do forced, unpaid labor such as cleaning the streets, planting flowers, or guarding construction sites. Systematic forced labor is also an issue in silk and wheat production. The Uzbek–German Forum has conducted 50 interviews with people forced to work in silk production but the present report focuses on the use of forced labor in the cotton sector. For more information about forced labor in silk production, please see: *Uzbeks Toil to Keep Silk Industry's Traditions Alive*, Farangis Najibullah and Sadriddin Ashurov, March 12, 2013, available at: <http://www.rferl.org/content/uzbekistan-silk-industry/24926469.html>, accessed May 8, 2014.

¹⁶ Uzbekistan's Cotton Sector: Financial Flows and Distribution of Resources, Executive Summary.

Government Policy On Child Labor And Forced Labor In The Cotton Sector

For decades the cotton production system in Uzbekistan has relied on forced labor throughout the system and on forced mobilization of the population to harvest. Until recently, the government mobilized schoolchildren aged 11–15 on a mass scale to work in the cotton fields during the harvest. Schools were partially empty throughout much of the country as pupils from the fifth grade and older and teachers harvested cotton.¹⁷ Due to sustained pressure from local and international organization and foreign governments over many years, in 2012 the Uzbek government appeared to shift the demographics of its forced labor policies.¹⁸ Beginning with the 2012 harvest the government of Uzbekistan adopted a policy not to mobilize children younger than 16 on a mass scale.¹⁹ However this shift did not mark a fundamental move away from the use of forced labor. The administrative–command economy and the coercive nature of the cotton production system did not change. Instead, the government appears to have moved the labor burden to secondary students aged 16–18, university students, and employees of state–funded organizations and agencies, and private businesses who were mobilized in greater numbers.

Legal Standards

Are you familiar with the laws in Uzbekistan about forced labor?
I've heard something but didn't ask more. What is the use? Empty words.
– third-year student in Gulistan²⁰

¹⁷ See the reports published on the 2008 and 2009 harvests produced by the Centre of Contemporary Central Asia and the Caucasus, School of Oriental and African Studies (<http://www.soas.ac.uk/cccac/centres-publications/>).

¹⁸ In 2005 the ILO supervisory bodies began to consistently express concern for the use of forced labor of children and adults in cotton production in Uzbekistan. In 2008 the U.S. Department of Labor investigated forced child labor in cotton production in Uzbekistan and added cotton from Uzbekistan to the list of goods made by forced child labor in 2009. The Uzbek government ratified international conventions on child labor in 2008 and 2009. In December 2011, the European Parliament voted 603 to 8 not to extend the EU–Uzbekistan Partnership and Cooperation Agreement to trade in cotton and textiles, and in January 2012 the United States Trade Representative reviewed the Generalized System of Trade Preferences for Uzbekistan. The Uzbek government met with the ILO in Tashkent in March 2012. In October 2012, the French National Contact Point of the OECD issued guidance to multinational enterprises not to trade Uzbek cotton, and in June 2013 the U.S. government placed Uzbekistan in Tier 3 of the 2013 Trafficking in Persons Report. In July 2013 the Uzbek government agreed to allow ILO monitors to observe the cotton harvest, albeit under restricted terms. From September to November 2013, the South Korean Human Rights Commission investigated companies operating in Uzbekistan; the U.S. government applied the Tariff Act by holding shipments of cotton from Uzbekistan; and the World Bank Inspection Panel reported that the World Bank's project in the agriculture sector in Uzbekistan was plausibly linked to forced labor. In April 2014 the Uzbek Government signed a Decent Work Country Program, yet continues to deny its use of forced labor.

¹⁹ "A Systemic Problem: State–Sponsored Forced Labor in Uzbekistan's Cotton Sector Continues in 2012," Uzbek–German Forum and Cotton Campaign, May 2013, available at: http://uzbekgermanforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/SystemicProblem-ForcedLabour_Uzbekistan_Cotton_Continues.pdf, accessed May 16, 2014.

²⁰ Interview with student in Syrdarya region, November 12, 2013.

International Standards

Forcing a person to do work against his or her will under threat of punishment or penalty is absolutely prohibited by international law, which enshrines special protections for children. International treaties to which Uzbekistan is a party prohibit the forced labor of children and adults, including the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (Article 8)²¹, and two ILO conventions, the Abolition of Forced Labor Convention (No. 105)²², and the Forced Labor Convention (No. 29).²³ These fundamental conventions prohibit forced or compulsory labor as political coercion, as punishment for expressing particular political views, as a means of mobilizing, and for purposes of economic development.



College students and teachers
on their way to the fields",
Tashkent region, 12.09.2013



²¹ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adopted December 16, 1966, G.A. Res. 2200A (XXI), 21 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 16) at 52, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966), 999 U.N.T.S. 171, entered into force March 23, 1976. (ICCPR), ratified by Uzbekistan on September 28, 1995.

²² ILO Convention No. 105 concerning Abolition of Forced Labor, adopted June 25, 1957, entered into force, January 17, 1959.

²³ ILO Convention No. 29 concerning Forced or Compulsory Labor, adopted June 28, 1930, entered into force, May 1, 1932.

International law recognizes that many children must work to contribute to their families' income and that some work may have benefits for and be appropriate for children. However international law establishes standards to protect children from exploitation, hazardous work, and work that interferes with children's schooling, development, and future livelihoods.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child,²⁴ the ILO Minimum Age Convention,²⁵ and ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor,²⁶ all ratified by Uzbekistan, generally prohibit the employment of children under the age of 18 in harmful or hazardous work. The Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention defines the worst forms of child labor as "slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children and forced or compulsory labor." It establishes four categories of the worst forms of child labor, one of which is "hazardous labor." Hazardous labor is "work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children; . Convention No. 182 has universal coverage, which means it applies to all sectors of the economy and status in employment (for example including unpaid family labor on family farms) with no exception possible."²⁷ Additionally, the recommendation accompanying Convention 182 notes that the worst forms of child labor also include work with dangerous machinery or tools; work under particularly difficult conditions, such as long hours or during the night, or work that does not allow for the possibility of returning home each day; and work that may expose children to hazardous substances or to temperatures damaging to their health. Put another way, "in essence, child labor is work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity and is considered a violation of fundamental human rights."²⁸

While the ILO does not have a specific list of prohibited occupations for children or occupations that constitute the worst forms of child labor, agriculture is considered one of the most dangerous sectors in which children work. Each country establishes its own national list of hazardous work prohibited for children. Picking cotton is included in Uzbekistan's national hazardous work list and is thus prohibited for all children, defined as all persons under age 18, in accordance with Convention 182.²⁹ Further, the ILO has identified specific "major health hazards in cotton cultivation that children under 18 should not be exposed to."³⁰

²⁴ Convention on the Rights of the Child, G.A. res. 44/25, annex, 44 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 49) at 167, U.N. Doc. A/44/49 (1989), entered into force Sept. 2, 1990, acceded to by Uzbekistan December 23, 2008.

²⁵ ILO Convention No. 138 concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment, adopted June 26, 1973, entered into force, June 19, 1976.

²⁶ ILO Convention No. 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor, adopted June 17, 1999, entered into force November 19, 2000.

²⁷ International Labor Standards and Child Labor in Agriculture, ILO. Available at: http://www.ilo.org/ipec/areas/Agriculture/WCMS_172348/lang--en/index.htm, accessed April 25, 2014.

²⁸ "Child Labor in the Cotton and Textile Sectors," Alejandro Plastina, International Cotton Advisory Committee, 2009. Available at: https://www.icac.org/cotton_info/speeches/plastina/2009/child_labor_lodz.pdf, accessed April 25, 2014.

²⁹ ILO High Level Mission Report on the Monitoring of Child Labor 2013, paragraph 24, p. 7 of 78.

³⁰ These are: 1. Musculoskeletal injuries from repetitive and forceful movements, and lifting and carrying heavy or awkward loads. 2. Poisoning and long term health problems such as respiratory problems, negative effects of pesticides on central nervous system, heart, liver, kidneys, reproductive function. Endocrine system and fast metabolism disorders, manifested

Uzbek Law

The Constitution, Labor Code and laws on child protection in Uzbekistan reflect key elements from international law prohibiting forced and child labor.³¹ Article 37 of the Constitution guarantees the right to work and to fair labor conditions and prohibits forced labor.³² Uzbek law recognizes persons under age 18 as children³³ entitled to specific protections, including protection from exploitation.³⁴ Section 241 of the Labor Code prohibits the employment of persons under 18 years of age in hazardous work, including cotton picking.³⁵ Other laws provide that labor is only permissible if it does not harm development or interfere with education,³⁶ prohibit the use of school children and college students in public works,³⁷ and make labor permissible from age 15 only with a parent or guardian's written consent.³⁸

The International Labor Organisation's Monitoring Mission And Report

After a decade of pressure from local and international groups regarding the use of forced child labor in the cotton sector, the government of Uzbekistan for the first time accepted a

abnormalities due to body-size ratio, skin burns, eye irritation, and mouth irritation from overuse of fertilizers. 3. Acute skin irritation from handling tough fibers and leaves. 4. Injuries from contact with, or entanglement in, unguarded machinery or being hit by motorized vehicles. 5. Symptoms of skin cancer and heat exhaustion due to sun exposure. ILO High Level Mission Report on the Monitoring of Child Labor 2013, Annex A, p. 21.

³¹ For a detailed overview of protection of the rights of the child and protections against child labor in Uzbek law, see: National Laws of Uzbekistan, Child Rights International Network, available at: <http://www.crin.org/en/library/publications/uzbekistan-national-laws>, accessed May 10, 2014; Какие различия существуют между детским трудом и принудительным трудом?, October 29, 2013, available at: <http://www.tashabbus.uz/razlichiya-mejdu-detskim-trudom/>, accessed May 10, 2014; and ILO Report Annex A, p. 27.

³² Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Art. 37, available at: <http://www.gov.uz/en/constitution/>, accessed May 10, 2014.

³³The terms "child" and "children" are used in this report to refer to persons under age 18, in accordance with Uzbek law and international standards.

³⁴ The Law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Art.10.

³⁵ Labor Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Art. 241.

³⁶ The Law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child, Art. 20

³⁷ Law on the State Youth Policy Framework of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Art. 8.

³⁸The law on the protection of the rights of the child, Art. 20

limited ILO monitoring mission during the 2013 harvest. The ILO's 2013 mission to Uzbekistan monitored the application of ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor. The ILO's stated goal was to subsequently develop "a comprehensive national cooperation program in collaboration with the Sub-Regional Office and Decent Work Team covering Eastern Europe and Central Asia."

In the ILO mission report, the conclusion that "forced child labor has not been used on a systematic basis in Uzbekistan to harvest cotton in 2013" reflected both the goal of the exercise—to build trust towards broader ILO program in Uzbekistan—and the limitations imposed on the ILO monitors. It also contrasts with the evidence presented in the ILO mission's own report of the use of the state school system to mobilize students for the harvest. For example, the ILO monitors reported that in eight of nine high schools they visited, classes were not in session and school officials provided no attendance registers or other evidence to support the reasons given to monitors, for example that students were engaged in extra-curricular activities.

Despite the limitations under which the ILO observed the harvest, its mission report did note the use of child labor, emphasized concerns about the use of forced labor for the cotton harvest, and recommended that the government take action to implement ILO Convention No. 105.

Methodological Limitations

The ILO's monitoring mission was not able to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the use of forced labor in Uzbekistan's cotton sector. The mission's scope did not include the use of forced adult labor, nor were monitors present during any pre-harvest stages of work such as preparing the fields, planting, and weeding the cotton. Research by the Uzbek-German Forum indicates that children and adults were forcibly mobilized to plough and weed, as in previous years.³⁹ The US Department of Labor Report on the Worst Forms of Child Labor has also reported on this practice, noting in its 2012 assessment that "Each spring during the pre-harvest season, children also work long hours sowing cotton, followed by weeding through the summer months."⁴⁰

There were other crucial methodological limitations under which the ILO monitors observed the 2013 harvest. The ILO did not ensure the participation of the International Trade Union Confederation, the International Organization of Employers or Uzbek civil society. The monitoring teams all included representatives of the government of Uzbekistan and/or represen-

³⁹ Chronicle of Forced Labor of Children and Adults, Issue 1, June 5, 2013, Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights, <http://uzbekgermanforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/1-Cotton-Chronicle-20131.pdf>, accessed May 20, 2014.

⁴⁰ As of this writing the 2013 report was not yet available. Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Uzbekistan, United States Department of Labor, 2012. Available at: <http://www.dol.gov/ilab/reports/child-labor/uzbekistan.htm>, accessed April 25, 2014.

tatives of quasi-governmental or government-controlled organizations whose independence and impartiality was far from guaranteed. According to the ILO report, the local Coordination Council, which was composed entirely of representatives of government agencies, appointed 40 Uzbek local monitors from the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, the Trade Union Federation including its women's committees, the Chamber of Commerce and Industries and the Farmers' Association, all of which are government agencies or government-controlled. The government of Uzbekistan undoubtedly had a stake in the outcome of the ILO's mission and cannot be viewed as impartial. Further, given pervasive, widespread, serious violations of human rights in Uzbekistan, there is a deeply rooted fear of government and government officials in the population. People interviewed by the monitoring teams may not have felt secure in communicating violations that implicate the government out of fear of repercussions.

Efforts To Evade ILO Monitors

The ILO's mission was also weakened by the government of Uzbekistan's efforts to undermine monitoring, including transferring students, in particular first-year students, back and forth between their classrooms and the cotton fields to evade discovery by ILO monitors and instructing people to lie to monitors. These practices indicate that the government of Uzbekistan did not participate in the ILO mission as a good faith partner and, in fact, actively attempted to undermine the ILO's monitoring.

The Uzbek-German Forum's researchers documented numerous, credible accounts of attempts to manipulate the ILO's findings by transferring students between the fields and classrooms or instructing them how to respond to questions by ILO teams. For example, a 9th grade pupil in Urgench reported that for several days in September, he and his classmates were loaded onto busses and taken to a local college where all students were away harvesting cotton. The children were kept in classrooms and told to pretend they were first- and second-year students in the event of an inspection. A 16-year old first-year student in Akhangaran region, Tashkent oblast reported that he and his classmates were taken to harvest cotton on September 17, and returned on October 15. Classes resumed on October 21. "We, first-years, came back earlier than [second- and third- year students]. I heard that some kind of commission was coming so they had us return to school earlier." In another case, a father reported that

Our son participated in the first ten days of the cotton harvest. From September 15 they were taken every day; . Then suddenly they were returned to their desks in a hurry. They said that a 'high commission from abroad' was coming, therefore all first-year students must study and if the visitors, the important foreign guests, ask 'how much time were you working at the cotton harvest?' they should answer that they didn't work, that they have been at their studies since September 1. They are studying and no one has bothered them about the harvest. Apparently the important commission didn't come. Therefore, or for

different reasons, beginning October 1, they, the first-years, were again taken [to the harvest].⁴¹

On several occasions students arrived at school ready to go to the harvest and were sent home to change clothes and return in case the delegation visited. In a letter sent to the radio station Ozodlik,⁴² a college student recounted a typical example of how he and his classmates were instructed to respond to the ILO's questions, "For the last three years we have been taken to the cotton harvest in Jizzakh. They prepared the lists [of people] and times for departure to the cotton fields. We were also told that international organizations would be conducting a survey. We were instructed how to answer their questions. We were supposed to say that we came to work at the cotton harvest voluntarily, on our own initiative, to help our government lift the economy."⁴³ In another case, forced laborers were not only instructed how to respond to the monitors' questions, but also told that children should attempt to hide.

We were picking cotton. The farmer came and said, look, some foreigners have come, watch what you say. Then the monitors started talking to the children who were also picking cotton. There were children and they were told that when the monitors come they must lie down on the ground so no one could see them. But [the monitors] saw them anyway. They asked them what are you doing? Are you schoolchildren? [The children] said they came from a college, but one of them said they came from a school. I didn't hear anything else."⁴⁴

Child Labor And Forced Adult Labor

According to ILO data, some 2.5 million people worldwide are subjected to forced labor by their governments. Annually, the government of Uzbekistan forcibly mobilizes more than a million people to work in the cotton sector, nearly half the worldwide total.⁴⁵

The data collected for this report indicated that the use of forced labor to harvest cotton in

⁴¹ Interview with parent of a student mobilized to harvest cotton, Jizzakh oblast, October 31, 2013.

⁴² Ozodlik is the Uzbek language service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. See: <http://www.ozodlik.org>.

⁴³ Letter from a third-year college student, Samarkand, November 2013. A copy of the letter is on file with the Uzbek-German Forum.

⁴⁴ Interview with a cotton picker in Kashkadarya oblast, November 2013.

⁴⁵ International Labor Standards on Forced Labor, available at: <http://ilo.org/global/standards/subjects-covered-by-international-labour-standards/forced-labour/lang--en/index.htm>, accessed May 2, 2014.

Uzbekistan was both widespread and systematic during the 2013 harvest, again affecting more than a million people across the country, both children and adults.⁴⁶ The research covered six oblasts and the capital, Tashkent, and did not identify major regional differences in the system of forced labor. The forced mobilization of workers to pick cotton was highly centralized and carried out as state policy from the highest level to the lowest levels of government. Oblast and regional hokims issued directives based on orders from the central government and oversaw implementation regarding the numbers of people to be mobilized from which organizations or institutions. Regional and local officials also imposed daily quotas for picking based on orders received from above and held daily meetings to ensure that production targets were being met and to punish or threaten farmers or workers perceived as not meeting quotas.

People across the country and from a wide variety of sectors were forcibly mobilized to harvest cotton. In most cases, people recruited to the harvest had the option to pay money in lieu of working (see below). In some cases people paid others to work in their stead, in other cases payments were made to institutional or local authorities. For example many students told the Uzbek–German Forum that they could avoid the harvest if they were able to pay.

The cotton harvest in Uzbekistan commenced in early September and officially lasted until October 25, 2013, when the prime minister announced it was over, although some respondents told the Uzbek–German Forum that they continued working in the cotton fields until early or even mid–November. Numerous people told the Uzbek–German Forum that they were forced to pick cotton for periods ranging from 40–55 days, the entire or majority of the harvest with no days off, although some worked for shorter periods, for example several rotating shifts of 10 days, or only on weekends. During the peak of the season, officials imposed a daily picking quota on workers of 50–80 kilograms per day. The quota amounts decreased as the season progressed and the amount of cotton left to be picked decreased, although many workers told the Uzbek–German Forum that authorities often imposed unrealistic quotas, especially toward the end of the harvest. Workers who failed to meet the quota were often subject to public humiliation and threats, and, in some cases, punishments such as extra work, difficult physical exercises, or physical violence. Adult workers also had money subtracted from their pay or had to pay for cotton they failed to pick.

Cotton pickers were forcibly recruited from state–funded agencies and institutions, including students at colleges and lyceums, university students, local administration officials, medical workers, teachers from schools at all levels, staff at all types of public agencies and service providers such as local water departments or departments of health. In most cases, these agencies and institutions continued to function, albeit at reduced levels, with the remaining staff forced to take on extra work to compensate for the absence of their colleagues who were working at the harvest. In general employees did not receive any additional pay or time off in

⁴⁶ Exact figures are unavailable, yet some estimates put the number at well over a million people. A calculation based on the labor demand for Uzbekistan’s cotton yield estimates that in excess of 4.6 million people participate in Uzbekistan’s cotton harvest. See Financial Flows in Uzbekistan’s Cotton Sector, Appendix 5, p. 61.

compensation for their extra work during the harvest period.

The forced mobilization of employees of businesses and state-funded agencies and organizations imposed enormous social costs across many sectors and communities in Uzbekistan. A complete inventory or detailed estimate of these costs falls outside the scope of this research. However, many people interviewed by the Uzbek–German Forum during the 2013 harvest recounted the negative effect the forced mobilization of labor in the sectors in which they worked. State-funded agencies and organizations were not able to provide the same level of goods or services during the two months of the harvest because so many employees were working at the cotton harvest instead of their regular places of employment. Many individuals who hired replacement laborers (see below) incurred significant expenses. Some institutions, such as medical clinics and hospitals, were unable to provide vital services at usual levels during the cotton harvest. School children through age 15 experienced significant disruptions in their studies since many teachers and staff were absent for shifts of 10 days at a time, leaving schools severely understaffed. Colleges and lyceums either suspended classes entirely during the harvest period or held classes sporadically (for example during periods of bad weather when cotton picking was delayed) or only for first-year students. Although some students evaded working the harvest due to medical exemptions, parental interventions, or other reasons, they also did not have classes during the harvest period.

Supplies of electricity and water were cut off or reduced to some cities and towns either intermittently or for the duration of the harvest period as resources were diverted to supply the harvest. In many cities and towns across Uzbekistan markets were closed during the period of the cotton harvest. Many businesses experienced a drop in productivity and income during the harvest period because their workers were forcibly mobilized or because authorities did not permit them to operate. Small business owners complained that they had fewer or no customers during the harvest period. One worker said that during the harvest period the city empties out: “The bazaars are closed, all the shops are closed, there is no one at the bazaar. The bars and teahouses are closed. If you want to sit at home, there is no electricity, or the gas is cut off. There are few people on the streets. It’s all quiet. Everyone is at the harvest.”⁴⁷

Child Labor

Cotton Harvesting By Children Age 15 And Younger

As in 2012, during the 2013 season, our monitors did not detect signs of mass mobilization of children under age 15 to harvest cotton, although the Uzbek–German Forum did observe and receive reports of schoolchildren working in the cotton fields, findings also supported by

⁴⁷ Interview with a resident, Syrdarya region, November 18, 2013.

the report of the ILO's monitoring mission.⁴⁸ In cases where monitors observed children that appeared to be younger than 15, they were told that the children were present in the fields voluntarily, after school, or together with their families.

Contrary to such claims, monitors from the Uzbek–German Forum interviewed two school-children in two different regions, an 11-year old girl and a 13-year old boy, who said they were forced to pick cotton in 2013 together with other classes from their schools. Several other people interviewed noted that they had picked cotton alongside children from schools. A student from Andijan reported that there were ninth grade students (usually 14 years old) harvesting cotton in the same field,⁴⁹ and a teacher from Yakkabog reported that she accompanied the seventh grade class from her school to the fields and that the seventh, eighth, and ninth grade classes all picked cotton.⁵⁰ Several parents told the Uzbek–German Forum that their school-aged children had picked cotton for periods of several days.⁵¹ One of them, a mother in Shakhrisabz, said that her daughter, in the eighth grade, picked cotton with the seventh, eighth, and ninth grade classes (children aged 13–15) of her school from September 20.

“This year everyone said that they wouldn’t take schoolchildren to the harvest. They took them last year, but this year it seems we believed they wouldn’t, but they took them to harvest cotton anyway; .At first they took them only on the weekends, but from late October they were at the harvest every day.”⁵²

An 11-year old girl reported to the Uzbek–German Forum that her class was supposed to pick cotton for five days. The class was given a daily quota of 100 kilograms for the entire class to fulfill. When the children did not meet the quota they were yelled at and humiliated. After the second day the children were told to bring in money to pay for the cotton in lieu of picking because they had failed to meet the quota. The children were warned not to tell anyone about their work or payments. “They also told us not to tell anyone that we are harvesting cotton or it would be bad. Our teacher said that if someone asks we should say that they are our fields and we are helping. I said, ‘we need to lie?’ And she said, that’s the policy, don’t go around telling that you are giving money for cotton, no one must know that.”⁵³

The girl also reported that in addition to scolding the children, teachers denied lunch and rest breaks to children for not picking enough cotton. “We brought [food] with us, apples, nuts, bread, tea in bottles. But the teachers didn’t allow us to sit much for lunch. They yelled at us, told us to get up and work. If someone harvested 3–4 kilograms, then maybe they let him

⁴⁸ ILO Monitoring Report, Annex C, p. 71 of 78.

⁴⁹ Interview with student in Andijan region, October 30, 2013.

⁵⁰ Interview with teacher from Kashkadarya region, November 29, 2013.

⁵¹ Interview with parent in Andijan region, November 2013, who reported that her son in the ninth grade was made to harvest cotton for two days.

⁵² Interview with parent in Shakhrisabz, November 28, 2013.

⁵³ Interview with 11-year old girl, Andijan region, November 2013.

have lunch. But if you couldn't gather that much they didn't give you lunch, even if you were hungry.⁵⁴

Additionally, one farmer recounted how, in addition to adults sent to harvest cotton by the local authorities, 45 children from the local school worked in the fields as well.

This year schoolchildren came from our region, children from the older classes, 45 pupils; .I could [refuse to allow children to work] but harvesting cotton required lots of people. The plan must be fulfilled quickly, directors require us to get workers, how could you refuse?...[The children] came after lunch, at 1:00 p.m. and worked until 5 or 6 in the evening. On the weekends they worked from 8 in the morning until 5 in the evening with an hour off for lunch. During the harvest you must use every hour.⁵⁵

Recruitment Of First-Year Students

In 2013 there appears to have been an attempt to limit the involvement of first-year college and lyceum students from the harvest. The majority of these students are 15 or 16 years old. According to reports received by the Uzbek-German Forum, at least some local hokims issued decrees prohibiting first-year students from being forcibly recruited, although even in regions where such decrees were issued implementation appears to have varied widely. In some cases first-year students were sent to the fields later or returned earlier than their second- and third-year classmates, while in other cases they worked for the same period as their older classmates. For example, although the hokim of Tashkent oblast issued a decree prohibiting first-year students from being forced to work during the cotton harvest, implementation of the decree was uneven across cities in the oblast, with some first-year students excluded and others being forced to work but for shorter periods than their classmates. In Angren, for example, all first-year students were forced to harvest cotton but were returned to their studies a week before the second- and third-year students. There was an announcement in one institution in Angren that any first-year students younger than age 16 would not be taken to the harvest but that all first-year students aged 16 and older were required to work.⁵⁶

Although in some regions directives were issued to use only second- and third-year students for the harvest, in many cases first-year students were subsequently sent to pick cotton to help schools meet their harvest quotas or to make up for labor shortfalls. In some cases students and teachers reported that the early return was the government's response to the news that a "foreign delegation" or "inspection," apparently the ILO monitors, was coming. A college teacher in Zarbdor region reported that at the beginning of the harvest only second- and

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Summary report of research data for Tashkent oblast, on file with the Uzbek-German Forum.

⁵⁶ Summary report of research data for Tashkent oblast, on file with the Uzbek-German Forum.

third-year students were sent to pick cotton but when the school was unable to fulfill its daily quota the regional hokim ordered first-year students to pick cotton. However first-year students were returned to the classroom when the school learned that the ILO might visit.⁵⁷ In another case, a teacher in Mirzaabad region, Syrdarya oblast told the Uzbek-German Forum that at the beginning of the harvest classes stopped entirely and all first-, second-, and third-year students went to pick cotton but after ten days first-year students were returned to their classrooms. After 10-15 days they were sent back to the fields and did not resume classes until after the harvest.⁵⁸



Schoolchildren, 11 years old, Kashkadarya region, September 2013



11 year old boy gathering cotton, Kashkadarya region, September 2013

⁵⁷ Interview with teacher in Jizzak region, October 12, 2013.

⁵⁸ Interview with teacher in Syrdarya region, November 2013.

Mass Forced Mobilization Of Students, Including Children Aged 16-17

In 2013 the government continued to forcibly mobilize 16–17 year old children on a massive scale, suggesting that the reduction in forced labor of younger children was a tactic to allay pressure rather than a step toward ending the use of forced labor in the cotton sector. The Uzbek–German Forum interviewed 40 students and 36 teachers from colleges and lyceums, as well as 14 parents, and found that the mobilization of students, including children ages 16–17, from lyceums and colleges was both systematic and widespread, and occurred on a mass scale. Students at nearly every higher secondary educational institution were forced to work the cotton harvest, while school officials supervised students and enforced quotas during the harvest.

At first a quota of 80 kilograms a day was imposed. Those who harvested fewer than 60 kilograms were scolded. Then the quota was gradually reduced since there was less cotton. But the norm was always excessive, that's so that we would always feel uncomfortable. Even if we were harvesting on a field where there was no cotton left at all, they still gave us a quota, they didn't care that there was no cotton. Everyone had to stand hanging their heads—student before the teacher, the teacher before the rector, and the rector before the hokim.⁵⁹

All students interviewed by the Uzbek–German Forum noted that their studies were negatively affected by the cotton harvest because they missed so many weeks of classes. As one student succinctly put it: “think about it, if you're in the fields for two months there is no choice except to cut curriculum. Of course they cut it.”⁶⁰ Another student noted, “After our return the burden increases. At the harvest we get physically tired and then at our studies we get mentally tired. It is very difficult to learn material that we weren't taught [because we were at the harvest]. In one lesson they cover two–three units [to make up time] and it is very difficult to understand and remember everything.”⁶¹

Mass Mobilization

In general students were mobilized en masse and taken to the fields in buses. In some cases students were told to come back the next day ready to go to the harvest, in others they were given only a few hours' notice to prepare. The Uzbek–German Forum documented dozens of cases where students were gathered with little notice and transported in large groups to the fields. In many of these cases the entire college or lyceum was mobilized. One student said

⁵⁹ Interview with student in Tashkent region, October 30, 2013.

⁶⁰ Interview with student in Syrdarya region, November 15, 2013.

⁶¹ Interview with a student in Andijan region, November 20, 2013.

that nearly her entire university was mobilized, comprising 65 busloads of students.⁶² A second-year lyceum student recounted that after being promised that they would not pick cotton,

On September 14, they told us we are going to the harvest and that we should come to the college at 7 a.m. the next day with our mattresses. I went home to my region to get my mattress and things. The next morning we all got calls saying that the harvest work was cancelled and we weren't going. I called my teacher and she said that was only for first-years and the rest of us were going. When I came with my things to the lyceum, they said classes were continuing for everyone and that we should forget that we had gotten ready for the harvest. I went home again to bring my things back. It was strange, since all other colleges were empty and we had classes. On the 17th we had class. On the September 18 the war began. A column of buses came, the police were everywhere, all students were told to quickly gather our things and go to the harvest. We came back on November 5.⁶³

Coercion

In some cases local officials or academic administrators forced parents to sign letters granting "permission" for their children to be sent to work at the cotton harvest. In other cases, parents were told that harvesting cotton was one of the conditions of acceptance at the institution. The mother of a college student who was made to harvest cotton for 20 days in 2013 told the Uzbek-German Forum "[the authorities] never ask permission [to send children to the harvest]. They demand, saying there is an order. We can't even decide for our children. Because when they were accepted at the college we signed a note saying that we agree to allow them to be recruited for the cotton harvest. Therefore we can't say anything until they finish college."⁶⁴ In another example a parent told the Uzbek-German Forum that teachers forced his son to write a request to go to the harvest.

Who is going to ask [our permission to allow our children to work]? We aren't used to that. And no one asked for any kind of note. I heard that requests were taken from my child and his classmates. They wrote to the regional hokim and the director of the college REQUESTS, saying that they are already adults. They feel responsibility before their fatherland, before their parents, and during such an important time they want to be in the first ranks of cotton harvesters.⁶⁵

Some students did manage to evade the harvest by presenting medical excuses, hiding during

⁶² Interview with student in Andijan region, November 20, 2011.

⁶³ Interview with student, Khorezm, November, 2013.

⁶⁴ Interview with parent in Andijan region, November 2013.

⁶⁵ Interview with parent in Jizzakh region, October 31, 2013.

mobilization, or making payments in lieu of harvesting. Many students reported that even students who presented documented medical excuses, such as injury, pregnancy, or invalid status, were required to pay to avoid the harvest. Students told the Uzbek–German Forum that those who did not want to work during the harvest usually paid between 300,000–600,000 soum (approximately \$100–\$200 USD) to teachers or academic officials but that they did not know what the money was used for.

Local authorities and school officials harassed and intimidated families that did not want to allow their children to pick cotton, including threats to expel students or impose other academic consequences. In many cases local police came to families' homes to force students to go to the harvest. Children who were perceived to be bad workers or who failed to meet the daily quotas were berated by teachers, threatened with poor grades or expulsion, and made to perform additional work, such as scrubbing toilets or peeling potatoes. The Uzbek–German Forum documented several cases where students who failed to pick the daily quota were punished by being forced to perform arduous physical activities such as push-ups or running. Researchers also documented at least ten cases of students being hit or beaten to force them to work or as punishment for failure to meet the quota.

A parent told the Uzbek–German Forum that she did not agree with the supervision or discipline imposed on the students during the harvest.

They take [the students] very far away, to another region; .The teachers go with them and take care of keeping order. The quota was 10 kilograms per day [at the end of the season when there was little cotton left to be harvested]. If they didn't fulfill the norm [the teachers] beat the children. The boys were beaten badly; the girls were yelled at with curses and called 'prostitutes.' At night they woke the boys [who didn't fulfill the quota], at 4 a.m. and put them in the corner and made them stand there. The teachers got drunk and while drunk beat the children. I got very upset that the teachers who are supposed to be educating our children do that.⁶⁶

Forced Recruitment Of Employees Of State-Funded Agencies

State funded agencies and organizations forcibly recruited their employees on a mass scale to harvest cotton or perform another aspect of work related to the cotton harvest in 2013. Forcible recruitment of this category of worker was both widespread and systematic, and the data suggest that recruitment of these workers increased from previous years. Every government–funded organization the Uzbek–German Forum encountered during the course of research had to send employees to the harvest. Employees of state funded agencies and organizations mobilized to harvest cotton included teachers, medical workers, postal workers,

⁶⁶ Interview with parent in Fergana region, November 2013.

bank employees, and employees of regional and municipal agencies, such as departments of water and sanitation. In general, employees mobilized to work the cotton harvest either worked themselves, usually in rotating shifts of 2–3 weeks, or hired and paid for a day/seasonal laborer to work in their place. Workers of state-funded agencies who were not mobilized to harvest cotton remained at their usual jobs but in many cases worked additional hours or took on additional tasks to cover for their colleagues who were harvesting cotton. Employees did not receive additional compensation for the extra work. A nurse told us that she and her co-workers each spent two to three weeks harvesting cotton during the season and had additional work for the remainder, “I work in the maternity department. My overnight shift is every three days, but during the cotton season it is every other day. We work more than usual.”⁶⁷

One employee of a state-funded agency told the Uzbek–German Forum about the burden on state-funded employees to harvest cotton:

“[We worked] until the end of the cotton harvest. It’s the law. Every year it is this way for us. We are a state agency foremost. We are the first ones in the cotton fields. And we are the last to leave the fields; We return like heroes although we do not receive anything. But it’s always this way—I have worked in this organization for nine years, nine seasons have passed, and all nine seasons it is the same picture.”⁶⁸

A schoolteacher said, “If you do not arrive to pick cotton, what will happen? They will make you work anyway. Or pick cotton or quit. We are told that this is our duty to the state. If you do not like it, quit. I cannot quit, then who is going to feed my family? So I have to go. I will work my 25 days and go back to school.”⁶⁹

Forced Recruitment And Payments From Private Businesses And Individuals

In 2013 the government of Uzbekistan forced many private businesses to provide both money and labor to the cotton harvest. One owner described working the harvest himself for ten days and then paying: “In reality I spent a lot because of cotton. For 20 days I paid a hired worker 300,000 soum (approximately \$100 USD), for transportation I gave him 15,000 soum (approximately \$5.50 USD), then I paid a hired worker 15,000 soum per day for individual days of work [toward the end of the harvest]. We get no benefit from cotton. Business is bad [during the harvest] and then we have to pay money.”⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Interview with nurse in Andijan region, November 2013.

⁶⁸ Interview with state agency employee, Zarbdor region, Jizzakh region, November 15, 2013.

⁶⁹ Interview with a schoolteacher, October 2013, Tashkent region.

⁷⁰ Interview with business owner, Kashkadarya region, November 29, 2013.

Forced Recruitment

The government forcibly recruited workers from large and small privately owned businesses, such as factories, shops, and restaurants. In many cases the recruitment was carried out by the tax service or other regulatory agency. Workers told the Uzbek–German Forum that business owners widely understood that if they did not send their employees to work at the cotton harvest or make payments their businesses would have trouble with the authorities. A shop worker in Syrdarya oblast told the Uzbek–German Forum, “I sell things at the bazaar. It’s a privately owned shop and I just work there ; . The tax service came. They said that someone from each shop at the bazaar would have to be sent to the fields and he had to go by September 19. We were at the cotton harvest until October 25. We went with other salespeople like us, and restaurant and café workers.”⁷¹ A business owner wrote to the Uzbek–German Forum to say that:

I have my own business ; Literally three or four days ago I received a call from the regional hokimiat where my business is registered and was told to come in. I asked why and was told to come in and they would talk to me there. I showed up at the hokimiat at the appointed time and went to the office of the vice–hokim of our region and we began to talk. Two other people were present. One was a representative of the State Tax Inspectorate, and the other was a representative of the prosecutor’s office. At least that’s how they introduced themselves. They began in right away saying the cotton campaign is beginning and you are required to provide two people for the campaign. I answered that my firm only has four employees and that I can’t send two of them to the harvest and they answered ‘then hire two people who will harvest cotton for your organization.’ I also refused this idea. And then the worst began. They began to accuse me that I ‘don’t help the government to harvest cotton when after all the government helped you to open your firm!’ And I answered that I didn’t open my firm for free, I paid for it, in the very same hokimiat. My work is in order, I pay all taxes. As for helping the government to harvest cotton it is, excuse me, not my job, for this there are agricultural organizations. I am not an agricultural organization and am in no way connected to cotton. But they didn’t stop there and began to make direct threats. They promised to flood me with inspections from the Tax Inspectorate and Prosecutor as well as other inspection agencies, but I told them go ahead, my business is clean and they let me go. That day I wasn’t the only one at the vice–hokim’s office. There were representatives of around 40 private firms!⁷²

⁷¹ Interview with shop worker, Syrdarya region, November 2013.

⁷² Letter to the Uzbek–German Forum from a business owner in Tashkent, received September 16, 2013. Letter on file with the Uzbek–German Forum.

Mandatory Payments

In some cases employees of state-funded agencies and private enterprises were exempted from forced mobilization if they instead made mandatory “contributions” to fund the work of the harvest. These contributions were used to cover food and other expenses for workers harvesting cotton. This practice was particularly common for small businesses and in effect amounted to the government requiring private businesses to subsidize the cost of the cotton harvest. Many small business owners reported to the Uzbek–German Forum that various authorities such as tax inspectors or officials from the local administration visited their businesses at the start of the harvest period to collect funds for the harvest. These contributions generally ranged from around 500,000–700,000 soum (approximately \$185–\$260 USD), although sometimes more. Authorities used regulations to punish business owners who refused to supply money to the cotton harvest. These sanctions included intrusive inspections, tax collections, refusal to grant necessary permits, having the electricity cut off, or inventory confiscated for trumped up violations of regulations. In the words of one business owner,

In the beginning of September our inspector came from the tax inspectorate and said that we should go to the harvest or send people in our place. He said one person from our company should go, for no less than a month. Well, I just gave him money right away. I gave 500,000 and told him to hire someone, I don’t have time, and he left ; .If you don’t send someone they won’t leave you alone. If you have a factory like mine they can send the gas inspector to inspect the gas use and he can cut off your gas. They can close stores, they won’t let you work in any case. One day I went to give my report to the tax inspection and saw that there was a meeting going on. The head of the tax inspectorate was yelling ‘close the shops, make them go to the harvest or hire someone. Go to all the shops–if they refuse, close the shops.’⁷³

Businesses variously made payments in cash directly to officials, to special bank accounts owned by the local hokimiat, or delivered money to the cotton fields to cover payments, food, or other costs for workers. Where payments were made to bank accounts, several people told the Uzbek–German Forum that the accounts were not explicitly earmarked for the cotton harvest, but for general items such as “assistance” or “city purposes.”

Although the Uzbek–German Forum documented cases of coercion or threats to extract payments from business owners, many business owners reported that they understood these payments to be part of the cost of doing business in Uzbekistan and that they preferred to pay rather than suffer the consequences. A woman in Tashkent region told the Uzbek–German Forum, “I have owned a small hair salon for four years. Every year they ask me to give money for cotton. And every year I give. This year I also paid. It was 700,000 soum (approximately \$250 USD). Everyone I know who owns a business like I do pays money. I gave [money] to the

⁷³ Interview with business owner, Kashkadarya region, November 11, 2013.

hokimiat—they have an account for assistance, whoever wants to help, [I paid] there. But really it's extortion."⁷⁴ A shop owner told the Uzbek–German Forum that the payments were coerced, not voluntary.

To me and to all the shop owners [the authorities] come right to the bazaar and say that the cotton harvest has begun and you, that is I, must transfer 550,000 soum as "sponsor assistance" to the account of the Angren hokimiat. And they give the account number to which I must transfer the money on a piece of paper. They came sometime in the second half of September; . I asked—am I required to do this? They answered—You understand, this is cotton. Everyone gives money for cotton. You are not the only one. It's a directive of the hokimiat."⁷⁵

Use Of Mardikors

In 2013 individuals and enterprises forced to harvest cotton for the government were not allowed to refuse to comply with the orders to provide labor. Employees who attempted to refuse for medical, personal, or other reasons, were threatened with losing their jobs and other penalties. The Uzbek–German Forum documented only a very few cases of people attempting to refuse being mobilized. However, those forced to provide labor were allowed to send someone else to take their place at their own expense. Thus, some individuals hired *mardikors*, (local seasonal and day laborers) to harvest cotton in their place and some business owners hired mardikors instead of sending their own employees.

In 2013 people who hired mardikors generally paid between 10,000–15,000 soum per day (approximately \$3.70–\$5.50 USD) per day. Mardikors received additional payment for each kilogram picked. Mardikors who harvest cotton in someone else's place usually do so under that person's name, even if that person continues working at his usual place of employment, a bit of fiction that appears to be accepted by the authorities. For example, a cafe worker in Syrdarya oblast told the Uzbek–German Forum, "I sent someone [to the harvest] in my place and continued to work in the cafe. I thought, how much work I have done in just one day! I pick cotton in the field and work in the cafe. And what—the worker picking cotton in my place is in the field using my name. The cotton he picks is recorded to my name."⁷⁶ In another example, a nurse said,

We were told that we had to go [work the harvest] from September 9, right when the harvest began. I had agreed that someone would go in my place and I paid him 150,000 for 15 days. Eleven of us from my department were supposed to go and no one went, everyone hired a laborer. We all are women with families and children, no one wanted to

⁷⁴ Interview with business owner, Tashkent region, November, 2013.

⁷⁵ Interview with shop owner in Angren, November 2013.

⁷⁶ Interview with café worker, Syrdarya region, November 2013, interview on file with the Uzbek–German Forum.

go with overnights. Then, when the 15 days were over that said I had to go for individual days of work. For one day we paid 10,000 soum. [When we pay for someone else to harvest] we go to work [at our usual jobs] and pay money so as not to go to the harvest.⁷⁷

Even those people who hired mardikors or had worked their designated shifts at the harvest were sometimes forced to harvest cotton on the weekends.

In our school the teachers went to the harvest in shifts of 10 days. That is 10 days picking cotton, 10 days working at school. I already worked two shifts, 20 days total, and then harvested cotton on all weekends and holidays. On October 24 it was my turn to go to the harvest again. The day before there was a meeting and the director said that our colleagues can't fulfill the quota and she has to listen to swearing at the meeting every night between 9–10 p.m. She said that because they can't harvest the quota, she has to purchase the remainder with her own money at a cotton facility. I decided to hire a worker to work in my place for the third shift, and agreed on 10,000 soum per day. But the director told me I should give the money to her instead and she'd buy the cotton at the cotton facility.⁷⁸

Working Conditions

International labor standards require that workers be provided with safe working conditions and have access to clean, safe drinking water, and adequate rest or days off.⁷⁹ Across the board, workers interviewed by the Uzbek–German Forum reported that their working conditions failed to meet these basic standards. Workers worked long hours, often in the heat, without days off. Living conditions were crowded and unsanitary, and although most workers living away from home received food, many reported that the quality was poor and safe drinking water in insufficient supply.

While reports about living and working conditions for those laboring in the cotton fields varied widely, the Uzbek–German Forum found that children and adults picking cotton worked long shifts, generally beginning work between 7:00 and 8:00 a.m. and ending between 5:00 and 6:00 p.m., sometimes remaining in the fields for an hour or more to deliver their cotton and

⁷⁷ Interview with a nurse, Andijan region, November 2013.

⁷⁸ Letter from a college teacher, Syrdarya region, October 25, 2014. Letter on file with the Uzbek–German Forum.

⁷⁹ ILO Convention No. 161 Occupational Health Services Convention, adopted June 25, 1985, entered into force February 17, 1988.

have it weighed. Many workers had to travel significant distances each day to reach the fields. Some of those living at home during the harvest traveled by bus or car for up to an hour each way, or walking up to an hour to reach the fields. Workers staying in barracks usually walked to and from the fields, sometimes for up to half an hour each way. They reported difficulty obtaining medical leave and limited medical care. People harvesting cotton worked under threat of punishment; those perceived not to harvest enough were subjected to threats and punishment including public humiliation, threats of sanctions, and even physical violence. Those living at home provided their own food and water. Those living in workers' barracks reported crowded quarters and problems with hygiene and sanitary conditions. Workers reported that food was generally sufficient, though sometimes of low quality, and many noted insufficient water provided for drinking and washing. Some workers were required to pay for their food, transportation or housing or incurred other expenses related to their work.

Most workers interviewed by the Uzbek–German Forum reported that they had no days off or periods of rest during the period they were forced to spend harvesting cotton, although in some cases the harvest was interrupted due to rain. Workers, such as students and their teachers, who worked for the duration of the entire harvest worked in excess of 50 days without a break or day off. Others worked in rotating shifts of 10–15 days at a time, with no days off. Asked whether he and his classmates had received any days off, one student responded, “Where are you from?? Do you not understand what it’s like here? I’ve worked for several years and can’t remember receiving a day off.”⁸⁰

A secondary school teacher told the Uzbek–German Forum that teachers from her school each worked on average 45 days and that there was no break, even for an important holiday, “During Ramadan Eid there was also a massive mobilization to the harvest announced.”⁸¹

Crowded, filthy living conditions and stressful, arduous working conditions in which exhausted workers are humiliated for failing to meet quotas contribute to fights and other altercations. In one case, a fight broke out between students that resulted in the deaths of two people. Radio Liberty reported that on September 16, a dispute over cotton quotas erupted amongst fourth-year students from Karshi University living in barracks housing, and one student stabbed at least four others, killing two of them, Kozim Omonov, age 22, and Samandar Nurmatov, age 23.⁸²

⁸⁰ Interview with student in Syrdarya region, November 12, 2013.

⁸¹ Interview with secondary school teacher, Syrdarya region, November 2013.

⁸² Uzbek Students Stabbed to Death in Dispute Over Cotton Picking,” Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, 31 October 2013, <http://www.rferl.org/content/uzbekistan-cotton-picking-killing/25153889.html>, accessed

Threats, Coercion, And Punishments

The forced labor system in Uzbekistan relies on threats and punishment to force people to work. In 2013 the Uzbek–German Forum documented numerous cases of threats and coercion to mobilize people to harvest cotton against their wills, including threats that they would lose their jobs or be expelled from their institutions, have trouble with their businesses, be refused social assistance payments made by local authorities, or face criminal sanction.

Public Humiliation

Nearly every person interviewed by the Uzbek–German Forum reported that threats, foul language, and public humiliation were a fundamental method used systematically by everyone in power during the cotton harvest to spur people to work or punish them for perceived insufficient work. This tactic was apparently used to make people feel afraid and unwilling to stand up for themselves, from local officials, to employers supervising their employees, to teachers supervising students. The majority of students interviewed by the Uzbek–German Forum in 2013 reported that students were yelled at and subjected to public humiliation by their teachers for poor work performance or for failure to meet daily quotas. In the words of one student, “Near all the other students they yell at you, insult you, call you all the bad words in the dictionary.”⁸³ In particular, local hokims and officials from the hokimiat exercise enormous control over the harvest in their regions and hold meetings to check in on progress and threaten or punish farmers and workers.

At midnight every day there is a meeting at the hokimiat, where they discuss who turned in how much cotton, how much is still left. When it’s almost your turn your heart starts pounding from fear. The local police are there and prosecutors. Farmers who can’t meet the quota are yelled at, made to write applications to give up their land. During the harvest the hokim uses such [strong] language to excoriate the farmers. It’s all the same to him if it’s a woman or a man before him, he spits such cursing on the whole room everyone has to listen. Our work is hard.⁸⁴

Forced work at the cotton harvest also means that employers, such as school directors, must take on the role of enforcing the cotton quotas among their employees who have been forcibly recruited to pick cotton. A kindergarten teacher told the Uzbek–German Forum of the negative dynamic created:

A certain number of employees of all the kindergartens in the city were at the cot-

⁸³ Interview with student in Syrdarya oblast, November 15, 2013.

⁸⁴ Interview with farmer, Khorezm region, November 2013.

ton fields with overnights. The heads of the kindergartens were aware of every kilogram of cotton harvested each day. If employees of our kindergarten did anything they shouldn't, didn't fulfill the quota, didn't follow the orders of the controller at the field, this was passed to the heads and then they would personally talk with those workers. You would be humiliated in front of your colleagues, they would yell at you and insult you, saying hurtful words."⁸⁵

Loss Of Employments

Nearly all employees of state-funded organizations said that they would lose their jobs if they refused to harvest cotton. The only alternative to working the harvest was to hire and pay for someone else to work in their stead. One nurse explained to the Uzbek-German Forum, "We were told to that we had to go [to work the harvest]. Whoever doesn't want to go can immediately hand in his resignation. They told us 'you work in government positions, you receive your salary from the government, you are required to go.' Therefore there was no one who would refuse. But there were some who hired others to work in the place or paid money to the head doctor not to go."⁸⁶

In another typical example, an employee of a government bank told the Uzbek-German Forum, "we were warned right away that going to the cotton harvest was mandatory and whoever doesn't want to go can write a letter of resignation. But we didn't have anyone like that. This threat is made every year and everyone knows that it's either cotton or getting fired."⁸⁷

Loss Of Social Assistance Or Services

People who rely on the state for social assistance were forced to pick cotton or they risked losing their assistance payments. In particular, this applied to poor women with children. In a typical case, a mother of two told the Uzbek-German Forum, "Yes, I was sent [to the harvest] by the mahalla [neighborhood] committee. I receive the social assistance payments for children that are given to children from poor families ; .The mahalla committee told all women who receive aid to go to the cotton harvest. In September, they didn't pay the children's money. First go to the harvest, then you'll receive your money, that's what they said."⁸⁸

In some cases authorities, particularly mahalla committees, recruiting workers or soliciting payments in their neighborhoods threatened individuals who refused or were unable to work

⁸⁵ Interview with a kindergarten employee, Syrdarya region, November 2013.

⁸⁶ Interview with nurse from Kashkadarya region, November 2013.

⁸⁷ Interview with bank worker, Tashkent, November 2013.

⁸⁸ Interview with woman in Andijan region, November 1, 2013.

at the harvest with consequences such as the loss of services such as utilities. A woman living near Tashkent reported that

In the area of cottages outside Tashkent representatives of the mahalla committee went to all the cottages where people were living full-time (not seasonally) and asked everyone to contribute one minimum salary, about 89,000 soum (approximately \$33 USD) to the cotton harvest. If anyone refused the money they said there would be problems with electricity. According to one pensioner, when he refused to pay an electrician came and cut [the pensioner's house] off from the main electric cable, as if he were doing repair work and during a week cut him off from electricity. When the pensioner paid, all the 'repair' work ended and there were no more problems with electricity.⁸⁹

Expulsion Or Academic Consequences

Students who refused to work or parents who refused or attempted to refuse to allow their children to work were threatened with expulsion or not being promoted to the next year of studies. While a few students said that while the cotton harvest was mandatory nothing would happen to them for failure to work in the fields or for poor harvesting, most students interviewed said they feared various academic consequences. These included expulsion, poor grades, failure to be promoted to the next year of study, and a vague notion that there could be "problems."

Some teachers or directors made direct threats to students. A teacher admitted, "we frighten [students], tell them that we'll kick them out, threaten not to promote to the next class. We are forced to talk like that because they require us to ensure that all the students go to the harvest."⁹⁰ In one case a parent told the Uzbek-German Forum that teachers from her son's college went house to house to send students to the fields but that she did not allow her children to go this year because "I didn't give birth to them for them to harvest cotton, I want for them to study and get a good profession." As a result, she said, there were problems for her son. "They are still yelling at him. When classes started after the harvest; they told my son that they were demoting him a class lower."⁹¹

Physical Punishments

Most cases of violence or other physical punishments documented by the Uzbek-German Fo-

⁸⁹ Interview with Tashkent resident, November 2013.

⁹⁰ Interview with teacher in Kashkadarya region, November 28, 2013.

⁹¹ Interview with parent in Kashkadarya region, November 29, 2013.

rum during the 2013 harvest were inflicted on students, although the Uzbek–German Forum received some reports of violence against other workers and some of these cases were also reported by the media.⁹² A college teacher told the Uzbek–German Forum, “yes, we take measures against those who work badly. We can’t not punish them because it would set a bad example for the others.”⁹³

Many students told the Uzbek–German Forum that teachers used extra work or arduous physical exercises to punish students perceived to be poor workers or for failing to meet the quotas. A student at a pedagogical college recounted how:

every day we worked from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. If we didn’t fulfill the quota the boys were made to do physical exercises, run for hours, [do] push ups, pull-ups. We were already returning from the fields so tired, those kinds of exercises completely strained us. Then we would sleep like the dead from fatigue, and wakeup call was between 5–6 a.m. They made the girls clean vegetables in the kitchen [as punishment for failure to meet quotas].

A college student in Khorezm similarly reported that:

students who couldn’t harvest the quota would return from the fields frightened. Because each day they [the supervising teachers] would meet with students who couldn’t harvest the norm. Sometimes they met with them alone, sometimes they yelled at them in front of everyone. Everyone had to participate in meetings in the evenings. At the meetings they would announce the names of students who were bad workers and call them to the middle. And they began to yell at them, insult them with hurtful words, sometimes they hit them or punched them, or they forced them to do physical exercises such as pull-ups.⁹⁴

Teachers used violence to frighten students into working harder and to punish them for “laziness.” A student from Andijan said that his teacher got angry when the class was not working hard and had failed to meet the quota and called the class to a meeting in the evening. “One [teacher there] was this big guy, a teacher from the military department, he hit one guy and the guy flew across the room. He said if tomorrow we will work like that it would be even worse for us.”⁹⁵

⁹² For example, Ozodlik reported on the beating of a farmer by a police office for being late to a cotton planning meeting, “В Янгиюле схвачен милиционер, обвиняемый в убийстве фермера,” Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty “Ozodlik,” 3 May 2013, http://www.uznews.net/news_single.php?lng=ru&cid=38&nid=22628, accessed May 23, 2014.

⁹³ Interview with college teacher in Syrdarya region, November 2013.

⁹⁴ Interview with college student in Khorezm region, November 2013.

⁹⁵ Interview with college student in Andijan region, October 30, 2013.

Compensation And Costs

The government mandates payments to workers mobilized to pick cotton. In 2013, these payments ranged from 170 to 200 soum (approximately \$0.06–0.07 USD) per kilogram of cotton harvested.⁹⁶ The government has tried to create the impression that workers picking cotton do so willingly, as a means of supplementing their income. Although some workers do come voluntarily, most voluntary workers come early in the season when the cotton is at its peak. Many of these are mardikors as opposed to professionals or students. Some mardikors work for longer periods because they have been hired to replace people mobilized to work the harvest. In such cases the mardikors receive the government-established fees in addition to the higher fee paid by the individuals they replace.

Workers faced costs and payments that ate away at any money they might earn from the harvest. In some cases, if workers did not pick enough cotton, they were recorded as owing a debt for the day and the debt would count against future earnings. One student noted, “they paid 190–200 soum [per kilogram]. From that they were always deducting for something, I even forget how much money I was supposed to receive. Therefore I don’t remember exactly how much they paid me. They deducted for food. Once they even deducted for magazine and newspaper subscriptions! They deducted [the monetary equivalent of] 23 kilograms per day for food.”⁹⁷

Money was deducted for food and housing costs, sometimes for transportation, and sometimes for other costs as well. Uzbek–German Forum researchers documented numerous cases of state-funded workers, in particular teachers and medical workers, being taken to the fields for day labor in the second half of October when the harvest was winding down and being required to pay for their own transportation.⁹⁸ In most cases workers paid for their own food for or contributed money to pay for food for other workers. Most workers who lived in barracks housing had food costs deducted from their payments. Workers also incurred incidental expenses and reported using their income from picking cotton to buy supplement food supplies and purchase other necessities, such as soap and detergent.

Some workers reported to the Uzbek–German Forum that they were able to earn a bit of money from the harvest, for example a student in Andijan region, said that he worked hard to meet the quotas and came home with 300,000 soum (approximately \$111 USD), enough to buy warm clothes for the winter.⁹⁹ A nurse said she was able to earn a decent supplement to

⁹⁶ Here payments are calculated according to the unofficial exchange rate, used by most people. In September 2013, it was approximately 2700 soum/dollar.

⁹⁷ Interview with student in Syrdarya region, November 15, 2013.

⁹⁸ Summary report of research data for Tashkent region, on file with the Uzbek–German Forum.

⁹⁹ Interview with student in Andijan region, November, 2013.

her income, particularly as she continued to receive her regular salary during the harvest. A 13-year old boy told the Uzbek–German Forum that he earned 7,000 soum (approximately \$2.59 USD) for working weekends and occasional school days over at least a month, which he put toward the purchase of new fenders for his bicycle.¹⁰⁰ However, the majority of respondents reported that they had little or nothing left after fees and some people were actually left in debt.

Living Conditions, Food And Water

Living conditions for cotton workers varied considerably, with some workers living at home and transported by bus or walking to the fields every day, while others stayed on farms or in other housing near the fields. Housing arrangements ranged in quality but were generally reported to be crowded and uncomfortable with limited facilities. Abandoned farm outbuildings, garages, usually made of concrete or with concrete floors, were frequently used as housing for workers on farms. One worker reported that he and other lived in tents near the fields.¹⁰¹ Those who stayed in temporary housing near the fields said they were assigned to closed schools, kindergartens, or garages. Workers generally slept on the floor and all workers reported bringing their own bedding, including mattresses, from home. In a typical description, a teacher in Kashkadarya region reported that she and other laborers were living in garages near the fields and sleeping on bedding spread on the concrete floor.¹⁰²

No special equipment such as boots or gloves were supplied. One student told the Uzbek–German Forum that since 2013 was her fourth cotton harvest she knew what to expect and brought sufficient warm clothes for the end of season as well as appropriate footwear.¹⁰³ Others, she said, came unprepared, not knowing what to expect or when they would return home and did not have appropriate clothing for the weather or to stay warm in the barracks, which were unheated. Workers in barracks had no secure place to store their belongings and some noted problems with theft. One worker told the Uzbek–German Forum, “I can’t even hang my underwear out to dry anymore. I did my wash and hung my things to dry and someone stole my underwear, can you believe it? Even though it is hot we wear a lot of our clothes so they are not stolen.”¹⁰⁴

Maintaining good hygiene was difficult for many workers living at the harvest. Water supply was limited and worker housing generally had no bathing facilities. Some workers said they

¹⁰⁰ Interview with pupil in Shahrizabz, November 28, 2013.

¹⁰¹ Interview with mahallah worker, Jizzakh oblast, November 13, 2013.

¹⁰² Video of teacher in field, Tashkent region, September 28, 2013.

¹⁰³ Interview with student, Syrdarya oblast, November 15, 2013.

¹⁰⁴ Video of teacher in field, Tashkent region, September 28, 2013.

bathed at bathhouses in local villages at their own expense or traveled home periodically to take a bath. Sometimes workers heated small amounts of water to use for washing. There were generally only a few toilets in each facility to accommodate many people. One student noted,

Sometimes there were 20 students sleeping on one room, having worked all day in the heat. After coming back there were no facilities to wash up or bathe. We only wash our hands and feet in cold water and lie down to sleep like that. From all the unpleasant smells the room had a terrible stench. There was always a line for the toilet. Anyway about washing, we were just happy to get through the line to get some water from the big barrels.¹⁰⁵

Cotton control police point, Namangan, September 2013



Most workers who were deployed for longer periods and stayed in lodging near the fields told the Uzbek–German Forum that breakfast consisted of tea with sugar and bread, and some workers also reported receiving butter at breakfast. One worker noted that the quantity and quality of food tended to decrease as the season progressed, saying, “we used to receive a big piece of butter, but as of this week we only get a little bit.”¹⁰⁶ For the midday and evening meals, workers received mainly soups, such as macaroni, pea, or borsch, or porridge made from rice, barley, or other grains. Many workers were fed macaroni every day. Although some found the food adequate, if not very good, one worker commented that it was so bad he “would not even feed it to his dog.”¹⁰⁷ One student reported that although the food was usually fine, “one day the farmer left everyone hungry. He said ‘you are all working in different places [picking cotton inefficiently], so I won’t cook for you.’ That day we ate only bread.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Interview with student in Syrdarya oblast, November 13, 2013.

¹⁰⁶ Video of teacher in field, Tashkent region, September 28, 2013.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Andijan businessman, November 16, 2013.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with student in Andijan oblast, October 30, 2013.

Some workers noted the monotony of the food provided as well as the lack of meat and dairy. Many students interviewed by the Uzbek–German Forum reported that they used a portion of their earnings or their own money to supplement their meals by buying food in local villages or from local people who brought food for sale to workers’ accommodations.

Another fundamental issue for many workers was access to clean, safe drinking water. People carrying out arduous physical labor, especially in the heat require additional water each day. Many workers living at home during the cotton season reported bringing a daily supply of water with them in plastic bottles and carrying the bottles around the field with them. Workers staying in temporary housing relied on farmers to provide water. Tap water in Uzbekistan is considered unsafe to drink and most people boil water before drinking or purchase mineral water. Most workers interviewed reported that farmers did not supply boiled water, and many noted that insufficient water was supplied overall. A college student in Angren reported that “water was always scarce, just two barrels per day for many people. The constant lack of water caused [health] problems.”¹⁰⁹ Many reported drinking or obtaining water directly from streams. A student told the Uzbek–German Forum, “they brought two plastic barrels to our barracks, one labeled ‘for drinking,’ the other labeled ‘for washing.’ But it is the same water and we use it interchangeably.”¹¹⁰ One worker reported that in her region workers had resorted to drinking from irrigation canals, which could contain dangerous pesticides, fertilizers, and other chemicals.¹¹¹

Deaths

As of September and October 2013, there were ten reported deaths related to cotton harvest work in Uzbekistan, two suicides, six accidental deaths due to the lack of safety technology or due to hazardous conditions, and two violent deaths (mentioned above). It is unclear if any official investigations are being conducted into deaths connected with the cotton harvest, or if anyone has been held to account for the conditions that contributed to or caused the deaths.

Workers are forcibly mobilized to harvest cotton in Uzbekistan with no regard for their personal or professional circumstances. People face difficulty in getting exemptions for poor health or family obligations such as caring for small children or elderly parents. In a tragic case, Amirbek Rakhmatov, a six-year old boy from the Bukhara region accompanied his mother who was forced to harvest cotton and had no one to care for her child. Amirbek fell asleep on a trailer and suffocated when cotton was loaded on top of him. His body was only discovered

¹⁰⁹ Interview with a college student in Tashkent region, November 2013.

¹¹⁰ Interview with student in Syrdarya region, November 13, 2013.

¹¹¹ Interview with kindergarten worker in Syrdarya region, November 2013

when the trailer was unloaded.¹¹²

In another case, Erkaboy Yuldashev, a 16-year old student died in his barracks in the Urgench region of Khorezm at 10 p.m. on October 21, shortly after returning from the cotton fields. In an interview with Ozodlik, Erkaboy's teacher, who was responsible for 40 high school students during the harvest, reported that Erkaboy suffered a heart attack. It is unknown if he had a previous heart or other medical condition.¹¹³

Recommendations

Recommendations To The Government Of Uzbekistan

- Take immediate and effective time-bound measures to eradicate forced labor of children and adults in the cotton sector.
- Cooperate fully with the ILO to implement all fundamental labour standards, including permitting unfettered access for ILO monitors to monitor ILO Convention No. 105 on the Abolition of Forced Labour during the 2014 cotton harvest with the participation of the International Trade Union Confederation, International Organisation of Employers and civil society, and ratifying and implementing ILO Convention No. 87 on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize.
- Abolish compulsory cotton production quotas and state-established prices of raw cotton, and grant farmers the right to refuse government orders concerning farming, including the right to refuse to grow cotton.
- De-monopolize agricultural support industries, including input suppliers (of seeds, fertilizers, agro-chemicals, electricity, machine and tractor services, credit, etc.), purchasers and processors of raw cotton, and sellers of raw and processed cotton.

¹¹² Dispatches: Death at Uzbekistan's Cotton Harvest, September 26, 2013, available at: <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/09/26/dispatches-death-uzbekistan-s-cotton-harvest> (accessed May 23, 2013).

¹¹³ "A 16 year old dies in hostel during forced labor at the cotton harvest in Urgench," A Chronicle of Forced Labor of Children and Adults, Issue 7, October 28, 2013 <http://uzbekgermanforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/7-Cotton-Chronicle-Issue-7-20131.pdf>, also available at: <http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/25144742.html>, October 22, 2013 (accessed May 23, 2014).

- Eliminate the dual system of credit and banking operations and establish and implement transparency requirements in the entire banking sector. This includes replacing the system of special accounts managed by the Selkhozfond of the Finance Ministry with a system that operates in accordance with international standards on banking and finance.

Ensure freedom of speech, association, and assembly, including by allowing monitoring of the cotton production sector by independent human rights organizations and activists.

- Ensure freedom of the press, including by allowing investigations by independent journalists into the cotton production system.

Recommendations To The International Labor Organization

- Establish, monitor and report on clear benchmarks for the Uzbek Government, to fulfill its international commitment as a member of the ILO to the application of all fundamental labor conventions. This includes the elimination of state-orchestrated forced labor of children and adults in the cotton sector, starting with the 2014 cotton harvest.

- Ensure the participation of the IOE, ITUC and International Union of Food Workers as well as the continuous consultation of independent Uzbek civil society in the development and implementation of all monitoring and technical assistance activities in Uzbekistan.

- Monitor the use of forced labor of children and adults during the 2014 cotton harvest, and establish a two-way channel of communication with the Uzbek-German Forum and other independent Uzbek civil-society organizations to support information gathering and analysis.

- Publicly report findings, activities and recommendations concerning fundamental labor standards in Uzbekistan.

Recommendations To The European Union

- Urge the Uzbek Government to implement the recommendations herein in all diplomatic engagements.

- Urge the ILO to follow the recommendations herein during the 2014 International Labor Conference.

- Exclude cotton from Uzbekistan from the EU's Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) until the government of Uzbekistan ends its forced-labor system of cotton production.

- Ensure that the EU does not support forced labor in Uzbekistan by banning business with any company using cotton from Uzbekistan for EU procurement and urging global brands to do implement a similar ban.

Recommendations To The United States

- Urge the Uzbek Government to implement the recommendations herein in all diplomatic engagements.
- Urge the ILO to follow the recommendations herein during the 2014 International Labor Conference.
- Maintain Uzbekistan in Tier 3 in the 2014 Global Trafficking in Persons Report until the forced-labor system for cotton production is ended.
- End Uzbekistan's eligibility for trade preferences under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) until the Uzbek government ends its forced-labor system of cotton production.
- Continue investigations into the crimes of importing forced-labor produced goods into the U.S. and knowingly benefitting from forced labor by companies trading in goods made with Uzbek cotton.¹¹⁴
- Exercise 'voice and vote' at the World Bank and Asian Development Bank to prevent any investment that would benefit the Uzbek Government's forced-labor system for cotton production.

¹¹⁴ The Tariff Act of 1930 (19 USC §1307) states "All goods, wares, articles, and merchandise mined, produced, or manufactured wholly or in part in any foreign country by convict labor or/and forced labor or/and indentured labor under penal sanctions shall not be entitled to entry at any of the ports of the United States, and the importation thereof is hereby prohibited, and the Secretary of the Treasury is authorized and directed to prescribe such regulations as may be necessary for the enforcement of this provision." 18 USC §1589 states "(a) Whoever knowingly provides or obtains the labor or services of a person by any one of, or by any combination of, the following means—
(1) by means of force, threats of force, physical restraint, or threats of physical restraint to that person or another person;
(2) by means of serious harm or threats of serious harm to that person or another person;
(3) by means of the abuse or threatened abuse of law or legal process; or
(4) by means of any scheme, plan, or pattern intended to cause the person to believe that, if that person did not perform such labor or services, that person or another person would suffer serious harm or physical restraint, shall be punished as provided under subsection (d).
(b) Whoever knowingly benefits, financially or by receiving anything of value, from participation in a venture which has engaged in the providing or obtaining of labor or services by any of the means described in subsection (a), knowing or in reckless disregard of the fact that the venture has engaged in the providing or obtaining of labor or services by any of such means, shall be punished as provided in subsection (d)." A letter from U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement to Matthew M. Fischer-Daly, regarding ICE FOIA Case Number 2014FOIA08532, 7 March 2014, stated: "You have requested any and all determinations from the United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP) concerning cotton and cotton products from Uzbekistan. Any and all records for actions taken by United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement to detain, hold, and/or investigate cotton products from Uzbekistan;" "I have determined that the information you are seeking relates to an ongoing law enforcement investigation."

Recommendations To The World Bank, Asian Development Bank, And Other Multilateral Financial Institutions

- Postpone consideration of all loans and investment in the investment to support the development of the agriculture sector in Uzbekistan, including support for the purchase of equipment to mechanize cotton harvesting, until the government of Uzbekistan ends its forced labor agricultural production system.

Recommendations To Companies

- Establish a company policy that prohibits the use of Uzbekistan's cotton and prohibits business with companies that are either invested in the cotton sector in Uzbekistan or using Uzbekistan's cotton, including explicitly all companies of Daewoo International Corporation, Indorama Corporation, and other companies identified as operating in Uzbekistan (listed here: http://www.cottoncampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/ahrca2012Uzbek_textile_companies_Eng.pdf).
- Incorporate language into vendor agreements and purchase orders that effectively prohibits suppliers from doing business with all companies that are either invested in the cotton sector in Uzbekistan or using its cotton;
- Require suppliers, suppliers' subsidiaries and suppliers' affiliates to establish a company policy that prohibits the use of cotton from Uzbekistan and prohibits business with companies that are either invested in the cotton sector in Uzbekistan or using its cotton, including explicitly all companies of Daewoo International Corporation, Indorama Corporation, and those companies identified as operating in Uzbekistan, and incorporate language into vendor agreements and purchase orders that effectively prohibits their suppliers from doing business with all companies that are either invested in the cotton sector in Uzbekistan or using its cotton;
- Remove all companies of Daewoo International Corporation, Indorama Corporation, and identified companies operating in Uzbekistan (See link in step 1) from the company's supplier database. Lock suppliers out of the company's supplier database that have not signed the revised vendor agreement and established company policies prohibiting the use of cotton from Uzbekistan and prohibiting business with companies invested in the cotton sector in Uzbekistan or using its cotton.
- Verify compliance with the company policy by incorporating a check on implementation of the ban on business with companies that are either invested in the cotton sector in Uzbekistan or using its cotton into supplier social compliance audits; and
- Publicly release documentation of these steps.

United Nations Human Rights Council

- Establish a special rapporteur on human rights in Uzbekistan, to ensure sustained scrutiny and reporting on human rights in Uzbekistan.
- Urge the government of Uzbekistan to grant access to the 11 special mechanisms that have requested invitations to the country.

Acknowledgements

Research for this report was conducted by 12 local researchers who conducted interviews and traveled around cotton fields for a three-month period. Umida Niyazova, director of the Uzbek–German Forum for Human Rights, trained and supervised researchers, conducted additional research, and supervised the report. Guidance and input were provided by Matt Fischer–Daly, coordinator of the Cotton Campaign, and Alisher Ilkhamov, program manager at the Open Society Institute.

This report was written by Allison Gill, an independent human rights consultant.

Jeff Goldstein, senior policy analyst for Eurasia at the Open Society Foundations, Matt Fischer–Daly, and an anonymous expert, reviewed this report and provided valuable commentary.

The Uzbek–German Forum would like to express its gratitude to the brave people of Uzbekistan who came forward to tell their stories.

