



# COTTON CHRONICLE 2020

INTERIM FINDINGS ON UZBEKISTAN'S  
COTTON HARVEST

OCTOBER 2020



**UZBEK FORUM**  
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

## Introduction

For the tenth consecutive year, Uzbek Forum for Human Rights has independently monitored forced labor during the cotton harvest in Uzbekistan. The harvest in 2020 is taking place amidst the significant challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic. There are also important policy developments, such as the nearly complete transfer of the cotton production system to private cotton textile clusters and the abolition of state cotton quotas, as well as existing issues such as the continued lack of independent recruitment channels.

## Methodology

This Chronicle is based on information gathered by Uzbek Forum monitors as well as through media and social media, including private channels to which Uzbek Forum has access. Uzbek Forum monitors permanently reside in the same areas as they monitor and conduct interviews of people directly involved in the cotton harvest. Interviewees include mahalla (community council) leaders engaged in the recruitment of harvesters, farmers, employees of various organizations and local government officials. The information presented in this Chronicle is only a small fragment of a large flow of information received from Uzbek Forum monitors currently in the field, as well as from human rights activists and publications in social networks and the media.

## Payment, Contracts

The cotton harvest in Uzbekistan began on September 15 and in some regions on September 10. According to official data, 3.1 million tons of cotton are planned to be harvested this year.

In 2020, the payment for manual picking of 1 kg of cotton during the first phase of the harvest was increased from 1,000 to 1,200 soums (approximately \$0.10 - 0.12 US), depending on the region. Payment for the second phase is 1,400 soums (approximately \$0.14 US), which is 2 - 4 cents more than last year.

On September 5, Deputy Labor Minister Bakhodir Umurzakov held a briefing where he said that hired workers would be involved in the cotton harvest only on the basis of a contract.

Umurzakov noted that an employment contract was to be formalized between employers and hired workers with the participation of specialists from regional employment centers and representatives of the Ministry of Mahalla and Family Affairs. “No hired worker will be sent to the cotton field without a “temporary contract”, Umurzakov said.

Uzbek Forum monitors note that contracts have been concluded with some voluntary pickers, while employees of organizations who have been forced to pick cotton do not receive contracts.

## Government Involvement in Recruitment

### Central government:

Uzbek Forum received the first report on forced labor in early September. It was from a law enforcement officer who said he had been told to pick cotton for a 15-day shift. He stated:

“I was wondering if you can guarantee anonymity if someone contacts you?

I wanted to tell you about the involvement of law enforcement officers in the cotton harvest. Although it was said (by the Chairman of the Senate Tanzila Narbayeva and Deputy Minister of Labor – Ed.) that this will not happen, [our bosses] still tell us that preparations for the harvest will begin from September 15. I work in the Ministry of Emergency Situations of Samarkand region. Today we were told to get ready from September 15th. In short, these officials bear no responsibility for their words.”

The respondent sent a copy of a Ministry of Emergencies decree with his letter showing that the Ministry of Emergency Situations ordered 2,890 employees from all around the country be sent to pick cotton in Mirishkor district, Kashkadarya region.

### Regional and district governments:

The organization of the cotton harvest throughout the country is managed by regional and district hokims (local officials), regardless of the fact that, in accordance with their contracts, most farmers supply cotton to cotton-textile clusters which are private and not state-owned enterprises. This is because hokims still have general oversight over agricultural lands in their regions and are mandated to “organize” the harvest and ensure the success of cluster operations.

In Andijan region, an order sent to all district hokimiats from deputy hokim Rustam Ismatullayev, states that they are required to attend a meeting on October 8 at 6.30 a.m. in the conference room of each district hokimiat to discuss “ensuring strict fulfillment of the schedule for timely harvesting of cotton in 2020”. Those required to be present include district hokims and their deputies, district prosecutors, heads of police, tax inspections, statistics departments, the farmers’ council, farmers, heads of all district commercial banks, power (electricity) grids, head of cotton and textile clusters and other heads of organizations and enterprises, including even district veterinary services. The author of the document has written ‘head of cotton and textile cluster’ in capitals and underlined.



On September 23, 2020, human rights defender Elena Urlaeva observed children picking cotton in Buvida district of Fergana region. According to Urlaeva, some of the girls were 8 or 9 years old.



## Х А Б А Р И О М А

Туман ҳокимига

2020 йил 8 октябрь куни соат 06<sup>30</sup> да қишлоқ хўжалиги масалаларига бағишланган селектор йиғилиши ўтказилади.

Кун тартиби:

1. 2020 йил пахта йиғим-терим мавсумини уюшқоқлик билан ўтказиш белгиланган графикларни сўз сиз бажарилишини таъминлаш тўғрисида.

2. Такрорий майдонларга ҳамда гўза катор ораларига экилган соя экинларини йиғиб-териб олиш ишларининг бориши тўғрисида.

3. 2021 йил ҳосили учун кузги бошоқли дон экинларини экиш, август-сентябрь ойларида сабзавот экинларини экиш ишларининг бориши тўғрисида.

4. 2020 йилнинг куз ҳамда 2021 йилнинг баҳор ойларида янги бог ва тоқюрларни ташкил қилиш тўғрисида.

Селектор йиғилишига туман студиясига:

Туман ҳокими ва унинг биринчи ҳамда қишлоқ ва сув хўжалиги масалалари бўйича ўринбосарлари, вилоятдан туманга бириктирилган меҳнат фахрийлари, туман прокурорлари, ИИБ ва ДСИ бошлиқлари, "Агроинспекция" раҳбари, туман статистика, қишлоқ хўжалиги, қишлоқ хўжалиги бўлими бошлигининг иқтисодий масалалар бўйича ўринбосари, ер ресурслари ва давлат кадастри, ветеринария, ирригация бўлиmlари бошлиқлари, фермер, деҳқон хўжалиқлари ва томорқа ер эгалари кенгаши раиси, "Агротехсервис МТП" МЧЖ ва "Агрокимёхимоя" ҲАЖ, "Андижон Агропилла" МЧЖ туман филиали раҳбарлари ва тумандаги барча тижорат банклари раҳбарлари, электр тармоқлари корхонаси, дон қабул қилиш шохобчаси раҳбари, ПАХТА-ТЎҚИМАЧИЛИК КЛАСТЕР КОРХОНАСИ РАҲБАРИ, массивлар раислари, дон экиш отрядлари ҳамда кун тартибидagi масалаларга алоқадор тегишли корхона, ташкилот ва муассасалар раҳбарлари таклиф қилинадилар.

Copy of an order from deputy hokim of Andijan region, Rustam Ismatullayev, to all district hokimiats October 8, 2020. © Ozodlik

The recruitment of pickers traditionally takes place through the mahalla (neighborhood) councils, which until recently acted as local public bodies representing the residents of communities. However, in February 2020, mahalla responsibilities were transferred to the newly established Ministry of Mahalla and Family Affairs, bringing them directly under the control of the government.

Mahalla leaders, who are subordinate to hokims, and whose responsibilities also include the distribution of social assistance such as child benefits, bear the most responsibility for ensuring sufficient numbers of pickers.

### Child Labor

Uzbek Forum monitors in Karakalpakstan, Fergana and Jizzakh have observed instances of children picking cotton. Independent activists have also documented child labor in Namangan, Tashkent, and Syrdarya. While it is not yet possible to assess the overall scale of child labor in this year's harvest, preliminary observations point to apparently more cases of child labor than in recent years, when only sporadic cases were identified. The increase in child labor cases is most likely due to the closure of schools because of the coronavirus pandemic, making children available to supplement their family's income. Many families are suffering economic hardship due to loss of income during the pandemic, increasing the risk of child labor. Cotton picking is included in a list of occupations with hazardous working conditions prohibited by domestic and international law for persons under eighteen years old.



In one case of child labor, monitors discovered that a mahalla leader in Buvaida district in Ferghana region sent a 14-year-old boy to pick cotton because his family received material assistance from the mahalla. According to the boy, he had to work in the field for two days. A relative of the boy who found out about it spoke to the mahalla leader and explained that child labor is prohibited and that he could be fined. The boy admitted that he wanted to continue to pick cotton as he lives with his grandparents who need the money.

Activists of the Human Rights Alliance of Uzbekistan have visited cotton fields and pickers' accommodation in Namangan, Fergana, Syrdarya and Tashkent regions since the cotton harvest began. Human rights activist Elena Urlaeva reports that more children can be seen in the fields this year than in previous years. Children are picking cotton together with their parents in the fields of farmers who are growing cotton for private textile clusters.

On September 25, Urlaeva observed several schoolgirls picking cotton in Chinaz District in Tashkent region. Pickers told Urlaeva that the cotton is being delivered to the Textile Technologies Group cluster. The children ran away at the sight of a stranger and Urlaeva was unable to speak to them. The human rights activist also observed and photographed several children picking cotton in the Sardoba district in Syrdarya region and in the Pop district in Namangan region.





## De Facto Cotton Quotas?

In March 2020, the long-standing practice of state regulation of cotton prices and production quotas was abolished in Uzbekistan. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev stated that the cancellation of the state quota for the harvesting of cotton and grain would eliminate “the incentive to fulfill the plan”, thus reducing the risk of resorting to forced labor. This was welcomed as a positive step by many organizations, including Uzbek Forum and the Cotton Campaign.

However, monitoring to date indicates that local officials continue to play a role in ensuring that each district and region’s total contracted amount of cotton is harvested. As in previous harvests, hokims and other district and regional leaders monitor the progress of the cotton harvest and hold meetings with farmers, local officials, and heads of organizations about the need to implement the “cotton plan”. “Pakhta shtab” or “cotton headquarters” have again been established throughout the country to provide daily reports on the amount of cotton harvested in each individual district and region.

**2020 йил ҳосилидан тайёрланган пахта хом-ашёси тўғрисида**  
**12 октябрь ҳолатига теъкор**  
**МАЪЛУМОТ**

№	Худудлар номи	Шартномавий режа, тонна	Бир кунда		Маъсум бошидан		Ўтган кунга нисбатан	
			тонна	%	тонна	%	тонна	%
1	Фарғона вилояти	250 000	1580	0,6	244 863	97,95	1302	0,52
2	Андижон вилояти	251 700	3117	1,2	237 874	<b>94,51</b>	2946	<b>1,17</b>
3	Наманган вилояти	201 250	2627	1,3	176 914	87,91	727	0,36
4	Хоразм вилояти	258 000	5743	2,2	226 229	87,69	-668	-0,26
5	Қорақалпоғистон Республикаси	196 000	4445	2,3	160 964	82,12	-563	-0,29
6	Тошкент вилояти	229 600	7290	3,2	181 481	79,04	-508	-0,22
7	Сўғдлар вилояти	203 650	3613	1,8	149 691	73,50	-369	-0,18
8	Сурхондарё вилояти	244 800	3419	1,4	163 885	66,95	430	0,18
9	Қашқадарё вилояти	400 200	8691	2,2	245 121	61,25	13	0,00
10	Навоий вилояти	99 100	3311	3,3	59 809	60,35	-87	-0,09
11	Жиззах вилояти	219 400	7299	3,3	128 308	58,48	-1	0,00
12	Самарқанд вилояти	215 500	9185	4,3	113 935	52,87	23	0,01
13	Бухоро вилояти	331 800	9227	2,8	147 158	44,35	-119	-0,04
<b>Ўзбекистон Республикаси 6-чар</b>		<b>3 101 000</b>	<b>69 547</b>	<b>2,2</b>	<b>2 236 232</b>	<b>72,11</b>	<b>3 126</b>	<b>0,10</b>

Region-wide information on the 2020 cotton harvest including the Republic of Karakalpakstan. © Uzbek Forum

On October 12, 2020, according to the summary information by regions, Uzbekistan reported that it had harvested a total of 2,236,232 tons, or 72% of the planned amount of cotton. This type of summary information is created for each region, whereby regional hokims receive daily information on the amount of cotton to be harvested in each district.

Андижон вилояти туманларида пахта тайёрлашни бориши тўғрисида 2020 йил 12 октябрь кунига бўлган тезкор								
МАЪЛУМОТ								
№	Туманлар номи	Режа тонна	1-кунда тонна	Фонз %	Мавсум тонна	Фонз %	Кечаги кунга нисбатан фарқи +/-	
							тонна	%
1	Булокбоши	9 700	50	0,52	9 897	102,03	50	0,52
2	Мархамат	16 250	42	0,26	16 578	102,02	42	0,26
3	Пахтаобод	20 500	71	0,35	20 830	101,61	64	0,31
4	Балнқчи	34 100	602	1,77	33 537	98,35	581	1,70
5	Избоскан	26 900	351	1,30	26 102	97,03	326	1,21
6	Улугвор	19 500	250	1,28	18 901	96,93	210	1,08
7	Жалмадук	20 250	299	1,48	19 415	95,88	299	1,48
8	Хўжобод	5 750	60	1,04	5 360	93,22	60	1,04
9	Шахрихон	24 240	182	0,75	22 118	91,25	144	0,59
10	Андижон	14 350	262	1,83	12 739	88,77	247	1,72
11	Олтинқул	18 500	308	1,66	16 344	88,35	283	1,53
12	Қўрғонтепа	25 800	490	1,90	22 542	87,37	490	1,90
13	Бўстон	15 860	150	0,95	13 511	85,19	150	0,95
<b>Жами:</b>		<b>251 700</b>	<b>3 117</b>	<b>1,24</b>	<b>237 874</b>	<b>94,51</b>	<b>2 946</b>	<b>1,17</b>
<b>2019 йил</b>		<b>240800</b>	<b>5101</b>	<b>2,12</b>	<b>227102</b>	<b>94,31</b>	<b>-620</b>	<b>-0,26</b>

The table shows the cotton quotas for the individual districts for the Andijan region. The amount of harvested cotton and percentage of the quota that has been fulfilled is recorded on a daily basis.

**While planning for certain yields is normal in agricultural production, in Uzbekistan, the responsibility of hokims in fulfilling any plan raises concerns that they could resort to coercion, given their past role in mobilizing forced labor to fulfil state quotas.**

## Administrative penalties for Forced Labor

Uzbekistan introduced criminal penalties for repeat violations of forced labor (first offenses remain administrative violations) in January making this the first harvest since criminalization. The State Labor Inspection of the Ministry of Labor announced that as of October 12, 2020, it had identified 652 people forcibly involved in the cotton harvest. 18 officials were charged and fined a total of over 200 million soums (approximately \$2,000 US). To date, the labor inspectorate has received 163 complaints concerning violations of labor rights, according to a press release on the website of the Ministry of Labor.

However, according to reports from Uzbek Forum monitors and human rights defenders, the actual number of forced pickers, including those who have hired cotton pickers to go to the fields in their place, is much higher than the cases cited by the Ministry of Labor.

## Evidence of forced labor of employees of state organizations

Employees of organizations who do not want to harvest cotton are required to hire cotton pickers in their place and are posting search announcements to find replacement pickers on various Telegram channels. Uzbek Forum contacted the authors of messages searching for cotton pickers posted on the Nukus-Vacancy Telegram channel. The people who were posting the messages were looking for cotton pickers to replace employees of the Tax Inspection Department of Nukus city, the Kungrad Soda Plant, which belongs to the state agency Uzkimyosanoat, the Irrigation Department of Kungrad district, which belongs to the Ministry of Water Supply, as well as a branch of the Info Bank of Nukus city. The employees hire pickers for 10-15 days, paying them \$20-35 US in total. Another person was looking for pickers for the Central post office in Nukus. In a telephone conversation with Uzbek Forum, he said that the Post Office had to send 20 pickers a day.

Uzbek Forum monitors personally observed replacement pickers from the Kungrad Irrigation Department going to the cotton harvest on October 12 at 7.30 am. The head of the personnel department and an assistant are responsible for the recruitment of pickers.





## Forced Labor in Jizzakh Region

- **Pakhtakor District**  
South Mirzacho'l Main Canal which belongs to the Ministry of Water Resources of Uzbekistan, is the largest enterprise in Jizzakh region. The central office of the enterprise in Pakhtakor district sent all employees over 55 years of age to Arnasay district in Jizzakh region to pick cotton. In an interview with Uzbek Forum, the employees complained about poor conditions and lack of drinking water.
- **Zafarabad District**  
Employees of the Finance Department in Zafarabad district, which is controlled by the Ministry of Finance, were ordered to hire replacement pickers, a form of forced labor. One employee reported that he hired a cotton picker in his place for the duration of the entire cotton harvest, costing him a total of \$150 US. The order to provide pickers came from the district hokimiat.
- **Zarbdor District**  
The district Road Department hired 15 cotton pickers on the orders of the hokimiat.
- **Yangiabad District**  
The leaders of the Youth Union from 17 schools in Yangiabad district had to find money to send five pickers every day at a cost of 30-35,000 soums a day. The 17 leaders were ordered by the chairman of the district Youth Union to collect money to pay for the pickers.
- **Jizzakh City**  
The Beautification Department sent 100 workers to pick cotton in Zafarabad district. According to one employee, the order was received from the hokimiyat of Jizzakh city.

The enterprise Suv Okava, a water supply company, sent 25 workers, including replacement pickers who received 40,000 soums per day. Employees were told that they should quit their jobs if they refused to pick or pay for replacement pickers.

## Educational and Hospital Staff

For the most part, employees of universities, schools and medical institutions are not being forced to participate in the cotton harvest. Uzbek Forum is aware of only a few cases involving school staff in Ferghana and Kashkadarya regions in the harvest.

A group of teachers from several schools in Buvaida District in Ferghana region wrote a letter to Radio Ozodlik stating that on September 18, the head of the district branch of Public Education, Adham Umarov, called the school directors and told them they must "voluntarily help with the cotton harvest". The letter was accompanied by an audio recording of Umarov's conversation with one school director in which he asked the school staff to "help the district with the cotton harvest".

Furthermore, the letter states that with the beginning of the cotton season, which coincides with the beginning of the school year, some school directors (e.g., schools Number 15 and Number 30) have been appointed as heads of cotton brigades. An Uzbek Forum monitor was able to confirm that the directors of these two schools have also been given responsibility for the wheat harvest.

Uzbek Forum’s investigation found that the decision to involve schools in the cotton harvest was made at a meeting held on September 18 in the Buvaida District hokimiyat. The hokim, Bekzod Ibragimov, asked the heads of the district organizations to help with the “implementation of the plan”. One of the school directors confirmed with Uzbek Forum that on September 18, Umarov asked him to send school staff to the fields on Saturday and Sunday. Several schoolteachers told Uzbek Forum that they went to pick cotton voluntarily because they work only a few hours a day at the school and receive a small salary.

After this information appeared on Ozodlik’s website, Ibragimov gathered school directors in the hall of one of the schools and said, “Well, don’t go out to the cotton harvest. I can fulfill the plan without you, but after the cotton harvest I will have to say goodbye to many of you,” a clear threat of penalty. This also creates risk that school directors could pressure their own staff to pick cotton involuntarily.





## Bankers Required to Pick Cotton

The Banker's Diary is a Telegram channel which publishes dozens of reports from bankers throughout the country who claim they are forced to go to the cotton harvest under the guise of 'voluntary assistance'.

As one banker put it, **"Whatever the facts, we live in a society where no one can influence anything. Officials promise, inspectors constantly control, but nothing changes. Forced labor remains and employees are forced."**

Навоий вилоятида 2020 йил ҳосили пахта хомашёсини йиғиб териб олиш мақсадида пахта теримиға ўз ташаббуси билан чиқаётган уюшмаган аҳоли сони ва терилган пахта миқдори тўғрисида  
МАЪЛУМОТ

№	Банклар номи	Пахта теримиға чиқиши лозим бўлган теримчи сони	Жами терилган пахта (кг)
А	Б	1	2
1	Агро банк	24	
2	Микрокредитбанк	24	
3	Халқ банк	24	
4	Миллий банк	24	
5	Ипотека банк	21	
6	Асака банк	21	
7	Саноатқурилишбанк	21	
8	Савдогарбанк	15	
9	Қишлоққурилишбанк	21	
10	Туронбанк	20	
11	Ҳамкорбанк	18	
12	Ипак йўли банк	18	
13	Алоқабанк	21	
14	Инфин банк	16	
15	Марказий банк	12	
ЖАМИ БАНКЛАР:		300	

A document titled "Information on the number of voluntary cotton harvesters for the 2020 harvest in Navoi region" lists 15 state and private banks that were required to send a total of 300 cotton pickers. The banks named in the list are Agrobank, Microcreditbank, Halk Bank, National Bank, Ipoteka Bank, Asaka Bank, Sanoatqurilish Bank, Savdogarbank, Kishloq Qurilish Bank, Turonbank, Hamkorbank, Ipak Yo'li Bank, Aloqa Bank, Infinbank and Central Bank.

On September 29, the Banker's Diary channel published another document listing 17 banks in Namangan region whose employees were required to go to the cotton harvest. According to the document, 1,470 employees from banks were assigned to harvest cotton in Uchkurgan District.

According to the above data, on September 21, 1,164 bank employees participated in the cotton harvest and collected 4,166,622 kg of cotton. The table also shows the places of temporary accommodation of the pickers and the farms where the cotton was harvested.

The press service of the Ministry of Labor stated that the involvement of bank employees in the cotton harvest in Namangan region is being investigated and that "some of the facts have been partially confirmed."

The Banker's Diary channel published another document, dated September 20, apparently prepared by the hokimiat of Andijan region under the title "Information on additional pickers from organizations and enterprises of the region during the cotton harvest in 2020". The document contains a list of 35 state organizations in the Andijan region, including 14 bank branches. According to the document, the hokimiat ordered that the organizations send a total of 7,950 people to the cotton harvest although the number of cotton pickers from these organizations or the number of cotton pickers hired by them totaled 6,500.

**Based on the evidence and documents received to date, it can be concluded that the main organizers of numerous cases of forced labor and extortion are state authorities, primarily the hokims of districts and regions.**

## Messages from Pakhtagram

Since 2015, Ozodlik has hosted the Telegram channel Pakhtagram (Cottongram) from the beginning of the cotton season each year where people can post messages about their experiences in the cotton harvest. A selection of these messages is published on Ozodlik's website.

## Mahalla Employee Attempts Suicide after Public Shaming for Failing to Recruit Sufficient Cotton Pickers

Shahnoza Bahromova, a 45-year-old mahalla employee in Kasan district in Kashkadarya region was hospitalized on September 23 after an attempted suicide. The woman regained consciousness and blamed the incident on the staff of the Kashkadarya Regional Department of the Ministry of Mahalla and Family Affairs. In an interview with Ozodlik, Bahromova said that she had been publicly shamed for failing to recruit sufficient cotton pickers.

Her suicide note reads, "Why do the government need people only during the cotton harvest? After all, the people are the taxpayers! When people ask for roads, electricity, gas, justice, the state prefers to watch what is happening. I'm tired of writing false reports and saying that we are doing great. In Kasan district, forced labor continues. I am tired of everything. I am even tired of life."



The woman also gave the reason why she tried to commit suicide:

“I have been working in the mahalla for three years now. Although I follow all the instructions of the hokimiat, in some cases even better than I am required to do, the head of the Ministry for Mahallas and Family Affairs of Kasan district, Nadira Kadyrova, publicly wrote on Telegram that I do nothing. They say that there is no forced labor. I was vilified only because I had not enough cotton pickers. Ordinary people, according to their abilities, go to the cotton harvest of their own will. I cannot give them different promises and forcibly send them to the harvest.”

A photocopy of Bakhromova’s handwritten note is available at Uzbek Forum.

Local officials said in an interview with Ozodlik that Bakhromova’s words were “inappropriate” and “far from the truth”.



Shahnoza Bahromova, mahalla employee in Kasan district in Kashkadarya region was hospitalized on September 23 after an attempted suicide.  
@ Uzbek Forum

## **Khorezm: Workers hired to fight Coronavirus sent to pick cotton**

On October 8, Radio Ozodlik published a letter to heads of city and district medical directorates from Sapaev, the chief doctor of the Sanitary and Epidemiological Department of Khorezm region. The letter states that with the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic and the worsening situation, the regional Department of Employment had hired an additional 500 people to carry out disinfections of houses of residents under quarantine. However, since October of this year, disinfections have stopped because these workers have been reassigned to pick cotton.

Ozodlik spoke to an official of Khorezm region's Sanitary and Epidemiological Department who asked not to disclose his name. He said, "The quarantined areas must be disinfected with chlorine every day. 500 people were hired to do this work. Since October 1 they have been sent to pick cotton. Now, there is no-one to do this work and we therefore must ask medical workers to take it under control."

### **"Cotton Tax" on Traders**

Traders of a building materials market in the city of Namangan told Ozodlik that since September 20, each trader had been ordered to pay 800,000 soums to help with the cotton harvest.

Traders working at the large trade market Chinni Bozor in Tashkent region also told Ozodlik on September 23 that they were told to pay between one and two million soums depending on the income of their business "to hire cotton pickers". In a letter, one trader states: "There are more than 400 stores in the market.. Those who refuse to pay will be 'blacklisted' and will be checked by tax inspectors. The media say that the collection of money for cotton is prohibited, but the market managers behave as they want. Traders have been sitting at home without work for six months. Now that the markets have opened, this problem has appeared."

Ozodlik contacted one of the market management employees in Tashkent region who said, "Traders think that we collect this money for ourselves. But we are fulfilling an order. I know that during the quarantine traders are in a difficult situation because of the downturn in business. But who has it easy now?"

Traders at the Kushnichor market in Jizzakh city sent a message claiming that on September 22 a meeting was held at the market organized by employees of the hokimiyat and tax inspectorate. Traders were told to either go to the cotton harvest themselves or pay two million soums each (approximately \$200 US) to hire a replacement picker.

### **Forced Mobilization of Employees in Jizzakh Region**

Radio Ozodlik received a letter from an employee in Jizzakh city stating that organizations had been required to send employees to Arnasay district to pick cotton in shifts involving overnight stays. The letter was accompanied by a screenshot of a message from the secretary of the hokim of Jizzakh region addressed to the directors of district organizations and enterprises. The letter states: "The most important task now is cotton. The regional hokim ordered the recruitment of people from tomorrow to pick cotton in Arnasay district. I know it is not an easy task, but it must be done."



The letter included a photocopy of a document listing five organizations and the number of employees to be sent to pick cotton in Arnasay district:

- Department of Privatization, Demonopolization and Competition Development of Jizzakh region - 21 pickers;
- Department of Investment and Foreign Trade of Jizzakh region - 20 pickers;
- Jizzakh region State Property Rent Center - 10 pickers;
- Jizzakh Antimonopoly Department - 10 pickers;
- Jizzakh regional Department of Capital Market Development - 5 pickers;

On September 24, Ozodlik contacted one of the employees whose telephone number appears on the list. The employee confirmed that he was picking cotton in Arnasay district. The representative of the cotton headquarters in Arnasay district also confirmed with Ozodlik that 1,030 out of a total of 3,000 employees from various organizations in Jizzakh city had already arrived.

In a short interview, an official of the Jizzakh regional hokimiyat rejected reports by Ozodlik that employees were being forced to pick cotton.

*Uzbek Forum will continue to conduct independent monitoring of the cotton harvest in Uzbekistan which is expected to last until at least the middle of November.*



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