Cotton Harvest Chronicle 2018, Issue 3

The Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights (UGF) continues to monitor forced labor during this year's cotton harvest in Uzbekistan. UGF monitors collecting information in seven out of Uzbekistan's 13 regions, are recording massive forced mobilization to pick cotton or the demand to pay for replacement workers.

Forced mobilization is taking place under the direct instructions of the heads of districts and regional administrations, affecting the vast majority of all organizations and enterprises, regardless of their form of ownership. The directors of the organizations receive quotas from the local administrations (khokimiyat) for sending their employees to pick cotton and must use all means to find the necessary number of pickers.

Medical and educational staff at this time are not involved in the collection of cotton.

The main burden of mobilization of pickers falls on middle-level officials, chairmen of mahalla committees, tax inspectors, police chiefs, heads of departments of banks and other organizations who have to persuade their employees to pick cotton. At the same time

they are at risk of being punished for "forcing people to pick cotton". UGF will present the full data collected by its monitors at the end of the cotton season. In have been published in independent media.

this issue of the Chronicle, we present a selection of articles on the cotton harvest which

Jizzakh: Entrepreneurs are responsible for cotton In Jizzakh, the largest retail outlet is the Zebo Market. The market houses about one hundred shops which, aside from the daily business of selling household appliances and other goods, are now involved in hiring cotton pickers. With the start of the cotton-picking season, mahalla leaders, local police officers and khokimiyats have ordered merchants at the market to pay money to hire cotton pickers although it is "prohibited by the name of the law of forced labor of citizens of Uzbekistan". Each store owner is requested to pay between 30 and 50 thousand soum (\$4-6 US) daily for the payment and extra costs of field workers. The money is collected by a trustee who reports to the police, mahalla supervisors and authorities. The execution of the order of the authorities is ensured through police raids on shops. Some Zebo merchants, hide from

October 10, 2018

Elena Urlaeva: Cotton pickers request jackets and socks instead of ILO caps On October 6, 2018, human rights activists Elena Urlaeva and Malokhat Eshonkulova visi-

ted the Buka district of the Tashkent region. Malohat Eshonkulova reports: In Buka district we found that 320 employees of the Uzbekugol enterprise (coal mine) were

accommodated in the community hall as well as in buildings belonging to other regional organizations, where the staff of Angren "Vodokanal" were also housed from September 12. Employees of the organization Angren "Uzbekugol" have been recruited to the cotton detachment No. 298 and are required to fulfil the daily cotton quota of 80 kilos.

gol". It is evident that the prosecutor of Angren is responsible for the employees involved in picking cotton; above the door of the building where the staff and employees are housed, there is a notice board stating: "Cotton Information Center of the Prosecutor of Angren".

that these were identity documents and that we needed to show official documents. "Show us the documents giving you the right to distribute these leaflets. We have called our bosses and you cannot leave here until they arrive", he insisted. After that I had to call Erkin Mukhiddinov, the Deputy Minister of Labor and Employment, and explain the situation. He spoke to Akhmedov on the phone and we were released. We then went to the meeting on the implementation of the cotton plan in the Buka district hokimiyat. When we arrived at the meeting, people had already gathered and were waiting for it to begin. When Elena Urlaeva and I entered the room, we started speaking to the audience and handed out flyers. Then there was an announcement that "The meeting has been cancelled for today; the hokim is absent", and the assembled leaders of the detachments were allowed to go home. People talking to us said: "Every day we pick cotton from 5 am to 7 pm. We don't get enough sleep and are exhausted. Moreover, there are meetings every day with the hokimiyat until midnight. It is good that you came. Because of you, the meeting was cancelled. Please come to us every day", said one of those present. The above-mentioned incident, along with reports from our interlocutors show that the workers from Uzbekugol were forcibly taken out to pick cotton. We asked them: "What will happen if you do not fulfil the daily quota?" They replied: "We will be fired from our jobs."

On October 8, Elena Urlaeva again visited the Baku district to find out whether any investi-

Human rights activists were told that on that day, Sherzod Kudbiyev, the Minister of Employment and Labor Relations, was supposed to go to where the pickers were being housed. Upon arrival, Urlaeva found that the forcibly mobilized pickers were still on the

Elena Urlaeva brought 150 caps bearing the slogan "My labor – My choice" to the fields, provided by the local office of the International Labor Organization (ILO). However, the "wet and frozen cotton pickers asked for jackets and socks instead," reports Elena Ur-

gations had been carried out regarding the complaints submitted by the activists.

fields and so far no investigations have been carried out.

laeva.

Ozodlik that "a conflict arose over the forcing of 49 people to pick cotton." "The police officer and the chairman of the mahalla committee were set a quota for recruiting people to pick cotton. The police officer organized a team of cotton pickers and began to put their names on his list. Then the chairman of the mahalla came up and began to curse, shouting: "These are my people, as low-income families they receive material assistance from the mahalla". He began shouting at the policeman using obscene words, and the policeman beat him in response," explained a resident of the Navruz mahalla. https://www.ozodlik.org/a/29523537.html, October 3, 2018

"Two uniformed men brought us to Mirzachul and left us here. No one met us. We rent accommodation from the locals. We have no money for food. None of the officials have contacted us," said Otabek, one of the pickers. "For three days now we have been standing in the mud, in the rain, and not a single farmer has met us. We have not eaten for three days. Even the toilets were locked. They ask for a thousand soum to brew tea. We rented accommodation for 5,000 soum per day. Our money has run out. The farmer says, let your hokim supply you with food, let the ministry of internal affairs take care of this," 55-year-old Zuharokho told the BBC.

The pickers said that the chairmen of mahalla committees and district inspectors in Namangan asked temporarily unemployed citizens to go to pick cotton in the Jizzakh region.

"Do you want to collect cotton for 900 - 1200 soum per kilo? Food and accommodation are included, they said. We believed them and arrived. Upon arrival, we learned that it seems there is no need for cotton pickers. Only one woman who works in the women's council came to us. We do not know where to pick cotton and there are no facilities," said Otabek.

Oidin Guliyeva, an employee of the Mirzachul branch of the Women's Committee of Uzbekistan, told the BBC that she helped as much as she could with making arrangements for

"It's been raining, so we didn't pick cotton. We have provided facilities for them as far as is possible. I told the *hokimiyat* about their situation. 260 more people came from Namangan.

On October 9, officials from the regional hokimiyat came to see the pickers and promised to create the necessary facilities. After that, the cotton pickers received food, but not everyone got it. 12 people were left without lunch. Officials were not able to solve the problem with the toilet. The local population has closed the public toilet and are refusing to open it

According to the pickers, they were told that they had arrived at "the best place in Mirza-

Those still left in Mirzachul hope that promises to improve conditions will be soon be fulfil-

chul," quoting the words of Hasanjon, the deputy hokim of the Jizzakh region.

https://www.bbc.com/uzbek/uzbekistan-45798577, October 9, 2018

Our chairman said that we will work out a plan together," said Oidin Guliyeva.

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to visit them except an employee from the local women's committee.

TASHKENT - "Students who do not fulfill the daily quota for picking cotton write explanatory letters to the minister." "We are writing from the Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Uzbekistan. We have had no peace since the start of the cotton-picking season. We cadets are dressed in civilian clothes and taken to the cotton fields. Well, if it is necessary for the prosperity of the country, then we will pick cotton, but the bad thing is that we have a daily quota to pick 100 kilograms. It's not easy to pick so much cotton. And the worst thing is that those who do not fulfill the quota are forced to write an explanatory letter addressed to the Minister of Internal Affairs. It's not fair to exclude cadets from the academy due to the cotton, to shame our parents! If necessary, we are ready to sacrifice our life for the Motherland. But we'd like to show our skills on the battlefield, not on the cotton fields ... " https://www.ozodlik.org/a/paxtagram-toshkent-iiv/29521108.html , October 2, 2018 JIZZAKH - "Food expenses for four hundred cotton pickers allocated to market merchants." "Since September 23, the compulsory collection of money for cotton began in the central market of Jizzakh. Those who do not want to pay are required to vacate their commercial premises. The merchants are not happy, but everyone is silent. Bazarkom, the director of the market, says: "I have the responsibility to supply 400 cotton pickers. Who will feed them?! Well, of course, powerless and defenseless entrepreneurs!"

"I am writing to you from Almalyk, Tashkent region. In Almalyk, even those who were called up for one month's military service were kicked out to the cotton fields ..." https://www.ozodlik.org/a/paxtagram-harbiylar/29514618.html , September 28, 2018 Khorezm: Police Officers Must Hire Cotton Pickers at their Own **Expense**

"Coercion to pick cotton continues in Khorezm. The first deputy of the Department of Internal Affairs (IIB) of the Khorezm region requires workers to find 50 cotton pickers under

https://www.ozodlik.org/a/paxtagram-mahalla-zangiota/29514626.html, September 28,

ALMALYK - "Even those who have been called up for one month's

military service have been taken to Almalyk to pick cotton."

https://www.ozodlik.org/a/paxtagram-toshgres/29527745.html, October 5, 2018 Karakalpakstan: Bank Employees Pay Cotton Tax Employees of a branch of the "Kishlokkurilishbank" in the Beruniy district have had 450,000 soum deducted from their salaries for the cotton harvest. In addition, each worker has to hire two cotton pickers every day. The authorities say that this is happening volunta-

rily. Shouldn't bank employees spend their hard-earned money on their own families? Why do bank employees have to pay "cotton tax" from their salaries, and even hire two cotton

https://www.ozodlik.org/a/paxtagram-bank/29527741.html , October 5, 2018

Jizzakh: Farmers Locked in Building of District *Hokimiyat*

https://www.ozodlik.org/a/paxtagram-fermer/29525528.html , October 4, 2018

down by the university management. UGF monitors visited Karakalpakstan State University on October 6 to verify this allegation and spoke to several employees who confirmed that all of their staff, except teachers, had https://www.ozodlik.org/a/paxtagram-universitet/29525521.html , October 4, 2018

From reports in the official press, it is evident that large organizations and enterprises throughout the country are involved in picking cotton. Chairman of "Uzagrotehsanoaholding" Muhtor Karimov Went to Pick Cotton in the Syrdarya Region "Cotton is our national treasure," Karimov said. Harvesting without loss is the duty not only of farmers and dehkans [trans. - small farmers], but also of each one of us. That is why today I personally participated in "khashar" [community service day]. The main reason for my going to the field is to personally familiarize myself with the conditions created for collectors, to solve problems that arise on the spot." Currently, more than 500 workers of "Uzagrotehsanoatholding" are participating in the cotton harvest. They are provided with three meals a day and accommodation. In addition, the authorities pay them 950 soum [approx. \$0.11 US] for every kilogram of cotton harvested. Successful collectors are also rewarded with valuable gifts and cash prizes. https://kun.uz/news/2018/10/02/uzagrotehsanoatholding-raisi-sirdaredagi-pahta-terimida-katnasdi, October 2, 2018

raids, lock the doors of their shops and do not go to work. If the merchants are caught, they are required to pay an even greater penalty.

https://centre1.com/uzbekistan/dzhizakskie-predprinimateli-v-otvete-za-hlopkovuyu-stradu/, "The prosecutor of the city of Angren visited us and held a meeting during which he demanded that the daily quota should not be less than 70 kilos, "said the workers of "Uzbeku-

When we started handing out ILO caps and flyers from the Uzbek trade union, a young man approached us and, without introducing himself, told us: "Enough, stop! Who allowed you to distribute these leaflets? Do you understand what you are doing? You are agitating the people! You know, cotton is the national wealth, our pride, our white gold!" He grabbed me and dragged me into a separate room. He also snatched the flyers out of our hands where the trade union phone numbers were written and tore up the remaining two or three copies. Later, we were able to establish that the name of the man who tore up the flyer was Ruzibayev. Soon, one of the group leaders appeared in military uniform and presented himself as Akhmedov, and asked us for documents. When we showed them our ID cards, he said

Fight between Policeman and Chairman of Mahalla Committee due to Lack of Cotton Pickers On October 3, Radio Ozodlik published a story about a dispute that developed into a fight between the chairman of the Navruz mahalla from the Angor district of the Surkhandraya region in connection with the forced mobilization of cotton pickers. The fight took place between a police officer, 29-year-old lieutenant Ilkhom Abdullayev and the 61-year-old chairman of the mahalla committee, Abdunazir Zoirov, each of whom organizes cotton picking

In an interview with a Radio Ozodlik reporter, the police officer accused the chairman of the mahalla of forcing people to pick cotton and of using abusive language towards a go-

"As a state representative, I organize the cotton picking and I became a target for insults. This chairman of the *mahalla* shouted at others as well, threatening that "if the residents did not come out to pick cotton, he would strike them from the list of people receiving social benefits." I defended the residents of my area from this local government official," said

The chairman of the Navruz mahalla committee, Abdunazir Zoirov, told Ozodlik that police officer Abdullayev beat him, hit him and almost kicked him to death. It appears from his statement that the dispute arose because both representatives could not find the number

"He [ed. – Abdullayev] took credit for the number of people I recruited for picking cotton, and made out he had brought them to pick cotton. I told him not to do that, and he put them on his list. And then he looks at me and says that I should go to hell. Then he punched me in the head. He grabbed me with both hands and kicked me in the stomach. And

An eyewitness to the incident, a resident of the Navruz mahalla, Olimjon Sadinov, told

of cotton pickers established by the local administration (khokimiyat).

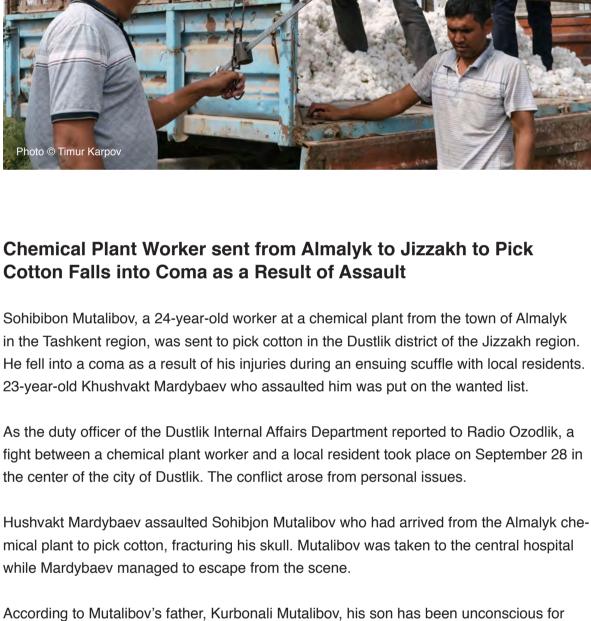
then he started punching me with his fists," said the chairman of the mahalla.

and were tasked with finding a given number of cotton pickers.

vernment official.

Ilkhom Abdullayev.

Cotton pickers: We have stood in the rain and not eaten for three days 63 cotton pickers from Namangan, who were recruited to pick cotton in the Mirzachul district of the Jizzakh region, complain that none of the officials made any arrangements for their accommodation and food. The pickers had to rent rooms in local residents' houses at their own expense and are running out of money because they are not picking cotton due to rain and lack of interest from farmers to employ them. The BBC learned that on October 8, more than 1,000 cotton pickers left from the train station in Namangan to work in the Jizzakh region. Several of them appealed to the BBC and reported that 63 cotton pickers had found out upon their arrival that no one was there to receive them and none of the authorities came



"For the fourth day he is in a coma. Doctors say that until he comes round and opens his

The day before this tragic accident, Radio Ozodlik published the following message on its

"Cotton slavery continues in the town of Almalyk, Tashkent region. Workers of the Almalyk chemical plant are being forcibly mobilized to pick cotton. Those who refused will be dismissed from their jobs ...", said the report, which was sent to Ozodlik's PakhtaGram

https://www.ozodlik.org/a/paxta-dostlik-jizzax-iib-prokuratura/29521380.html, October 2,

Radio Ozodlik launches PahtaGram, publishing dozens of messages from its readers rela-

NAMANGAN - "Mr. President, protect us from forcible involvement

"We are writing from the Kasansay district of the Namangan region. Small businesses are tired of the disaster called cotton. On the one hand, local leaders threaten: "Give people to pick cotton, organize a detachment, otherwise we will dismiss you from your job!" If we form the detachments for cotton picking, people complain that forced labor is used, they hold us accountable, and whom do we lie to? If local leaders cannot resolve this issue, then let the President himself intervene in the situation and stop cases of forced cotton

https://www.ozodlik.org/a/paxtagram-prezident/29523264.html, October 3, 2018

collect it themselves have to pay 25,000 soum [ed. - approx. \$3 US]".

https://www.ozodlik.org/a/paxtagram-namangan/29521091.html, October 2, 2018

https://www.ozodlik.org/a/paxtagram-namangan/29519001.html, October 1, 2018

KARAKALPAKSTAN - "During the cotton harvest season, pressure on the chairmen of *mahallas* and villages has

https://www.ozodlik.org/a/paxtagram-mahalla/29523259.html October 3, 2018

NAMANGAN - "Cotton tax was also introduced in our mahalla."

"We are writing from the No. 5 micro district of the Umid mahalla. The mahalla committee collects money from residents to pick cotton. We read that this year the President and the Cabinet of Ministers have banned forcing people to pick cotton and collect money. However, it seems that the decisions of the leadership of the republic have not yet reached

"We are writing to you from Hojeli district of the Republic of Karakalpakstan. Pressure and threats towards the chairmen, local policemen and officials of mahallas and villages have increased in connection with cotton picking. Managers demand that we bring people to pick cotton by any means, while the population protests against coercion and scandals. We somehow persuade the unemployed to pick cotton, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to find those who want to do it. Every evening we are called to meetings and put under

NAMANGAN - "Every family should send one person to the cotton

"We are writing from the Shuro mahalla, Uychi Street of the city of Namangan. The representative of the mahalla committee is going from door to door demanding that one person from each family should go to pick cotton from Monday and those who do not want to

Almalyk - "Chemical Plant Workers Forcibly Mobilized to Pick

eyes, they cannot do anything, they cannot say anything," says the victim's father.

PahtaGram channel of the 2018 cotton season:

In the Remzavod market, (trans. - where spare parts for cars are sold), between 35 and 50 thousand soum [approx. \$4-6 US] in cotton tax are collected depending on the size of the retail space. https://www.ozodlik.org/a/paxtagram-bozor-jizzax/29521102.html , October 2, 2018 TASHKENT - "Mass 'invitations' to pick cotton are being sent on behalf of the *hokim* of the Yangiyul District."

"We are writing to you from the Yangiyul district of the Tashkent region. Residents of the Yangiyul district received 'invitations' to pick cotton on behalf of Abdukahar Tuhtabayev, the

head of the district administration. We usually receive invitations to weddings. And now, we are living in times where we receive invitations to pick cotton! The pompous invitation, written in the spirit of the Soviet era, recalls that cotton occupies an important place in the welfare of the people and is therefore necessary to harvest to the last gram. The hokim of the district recommends that the population go to the nearest farmer's fields and make a worthy contribution to the cotton harvest. People are unhappy that the hokim writes in his invitation that cotton is the property of the Uzbek people. Our intelligentsia know that cotton is not the property of the Uzbek people and that the income from cotton cultivation belongs only to farmers, and not to all the people. Even President Shavkat Mirziyoyev noted that the contribution of cotton to the income of the state treasury is meager and it is therefore better to cultivate fruit and vegetables instead of cotton. And the head of our district seems to be unaware of this news. Otherwise, why would he write in his address, in

https://www.ozodlik.org/a/paxtagram-xatirchi-mahalla/29521094.html, October 2, 2018

JIZZAKH - "TV is deliberately spreading false information in order

"In the districts of the Jizzakh region, 800 soum is paid for each kilogram of hand-picked cotton. Naturally, cotton pickers are not happy with this state of affairs, since we know that 950 soum is paid in other areas. In propaganda-style television programs it is claimed that the state incurs expenses for transportation and food for the pickers. We asked officials why they pay so little for cotton picking. It turns out that they retain 150 soum for every kilogram of cotton picked to cover food expenses. We reminded them of the television broadcasts claiming that all transportation and food expenses are covered by the state. And the officials say: "Do not believe everything that is said on television. Where does the state get so much money from?" And we naively thought that they speak only the truth on television. It turns out that television is spreading false information on behalf of the state in order to

https://www.ozodlik.org/a/paxtagram-tv-jizzax/29519013.html , October 1, 2018

https://www.ozodlik.org/a/paxtagram-sharoit/29518989.html, October 1, 2018

TASHKENT - "Hiring cotton pickers for each *mahalla* costs

SYRDARYA - "No decent working conditions have been created

"We are writing to you from Syrdarya. We arrived to pick cotton, but there are no decent working conditions. We ourselves work at the Khorezm cotton factory. We were sent to

pick cotton in the Bayavut district of the Syrdarya region. Who is in charge of the preparati-

"I am writing to you from one of the *mahalla* in the Zangiota district of the Tashkent region. On the eve of the cotton harvest, the *hokim* of the district gathered heads of regions and chairmen of the mahalla and ordered each leader to mobilize a certain number of collectors. Our mahalla is supposed to send 20 cotton pickers. You can only hire employees from the region. The cost of travel, wages and three meals a day for them is 1.5 million soum [approx. \$180 US]. So one mahalla has to spend 30 million soum [approx. \$3,600 US]. The chairmen of the *mahalla* committees do not know where to get the money. It is problematic to collect money from the population and people are expressing their discontent. And now they say they will keep two months' salary of the staff of mahalla committees in order to feed the collectors. Is it only mahalla employees who need to pay for cotton collection? The media write that the use of forced labor is not allowed. But look at what is happening."

the spirit of Soviet times, that cotton is our national wealth?!"

to bring people to the fields!"

bring people to the cotton fields!"

for cotton pickers."

30 million soum"

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2018

stop it?

pickers every day?

Pick Cotton

been sent to pick cotton.

on of conditions for the collectors?"

threat of dismissal for failing to do so. Employees of the Department of Internal Affairs hire pickers every day, paying them 100,000 soum. There is no other way out. This situation happens every year. This year, we thought that forced labour would end. Who will listen to the problems of low-level workers?!" https://www.ozodlik.org/a/paxtagram-xorazm-iib/29531857.html, October 8, 2018 Bukhara: Medical personnel of the Internal Affairs Directorate pick cotton "of their own free will". On weekends, 50 medical personnel from the Department of Internal Affairs are called upon to pick cotton. The management orders them to wear ordinary clothes on the field and if anyone asks, they are told to say that "we are picking cotton of our own free will". In reality, everyone goes by force. Because those who refuse will be deprived of bonus payments. https://www.ozodlik.org/a/paxtagram-iib-buxoro/29531855.html , October 8, 2018

In the Turakurgon district of the Namangan region, teachers are being forced to pick

https://www.ozodlik.org/a/paxtagram-uqituvchi-namangan/29531850.html, October 8,

Tashkent: Workers of the Tashkent Hydroelectric Power Plant

The director of the Tashkent Hydroelectric Power Station forcibly sent workers to pick cotton. Workers went to the Kuyichirchik district in the area of "Pyatiletka - 2". Those who refuse will be fired. And, as if mocking us, we are also forced to write statements that "we pick cotton voluntarily". The situation on the fields is difficult. On October 2, one girl fainted. Indeed, this year both the president and the prime minister promised that no one would be forced to pick cotton. If the president doesn't stop this tragedy called cotton, then who will

cotton. This was said at a meeting where it was demanded that everyone keep this order secret. From one school, six or more employees have to go to the cotton harvest. The presidential decree not to force teachers to pick cotton has been overturned in Turakurgan.

Namangan: Teachers Go to Pick Cotton

Sent to Pick Cotton in Large Numbers

We write from the Sharaf Rashidov area. We, the farmers, were locked in the building of the district hokimiyat, and told that "the minister will arrive". A police officer was near the door and we were only able to escape at midnight." (This message was sent to Ozodlik on September 23. The reader who sent this message also sent a video confirming his story. For the safety of the reader, we decided not to publish the video).

Karakalpakstan - University Employees Except Teachers Sent to

The State University of Karakalpakstan in Nukus are sending all its employees except

teachers to pick cotton. So far teachers have not been included. This was an order handed

Official Uzbek media have also widely covered the cotton season. These publications are dominated by statements about collective work to assist the country in picking cotton.