

PURGE THE UZBEK COTTON OF THE STAINS OF FORCED CHILD LABOR!

To: European Union U.S. Administration The government of Russian Federation The government of China European Bank for Reconstruction and Development World Bank UNICEF International Labour Organization	CC: International Cotton Advisory Committee; Gdynia Cotton Association; Bremen Cotton Exchange
From: civil society activists of Uzbekistan	15 November 2007
RE: Call for boycott of cotton produced by forced child labour in Uzbekistan	

A group of civil society activists from Uzbekistan call for a boycott of cotton produced by forced child labour in Uzbekistan. Unlike other developing countries, the child labour in the cotton sector of Uzbekistan is not the result of poverty or the illiteracy of the population; it is caused not by a willingness of children to help their parents, but rather is a result of a deliberate coercion policy adopted by the central government. The boycott would not affect the interests of ordinary citizens in Uzbekistan, farmers and rural families, who not only do not see any benefits for themselves from Uzbekistan's cotton export, but also suffer from it. Each autumn, their children are being interrupted from school study for at least two months. The boycott shall affect only the interests of a narrow elite group enjoying excess-profits from trading the Uzbek cotton at world markets. We hope that the boycott will force the Uzbek government to begin real reforms in the cotton industry: abolish forced child labour, relieve farmers from the dictates of the state in state in deciding what to sow in their fields and sell at what price.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

The practice of forced child labour is continuing in Uzbekistan since the Soviet times. Not only it has not been still abolished since then, but on the contrary, has become even more horrific. If under the Soviet Union forced labour was followed with certain care of the state about the health condition of children, quality of their nutrition, and the development of rural social infrastructure, then now the forced labour is compensated neither by means of decent payment, nor through public funds. The ruling regime tries to drain as many resources as possible out of the villages without giving back anything in return.

Every year, starting in September, schools across the country in large numbers are closed for no less than two months with the exception of only the big cities. Students are forced to collect cotton by the order of central and local authorities. Children work at least 8 hours a day at the cotton fields with no rest days. While working in the

fields, they inhale dust, saturated with the residues of chemicals, pesticides and defoliants, abundantly used in the cotton fields before the collection of cotton.

The prevailing practice of child labor in Uzbekistan flagrantly violates the norms of national legislation in the field of children's rights and labor rights as well as the norms of international law, above all:

- The 1989 Convention on Rights of Child;
- The 1973 Minimum Age Convention (No 138);
- The 1999 Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No 182);
- The 1930 Forced Labour Convention (No 29);
- The 1957 Abolition of Forced Labour Convention (No 105).

Numerous facts are evidence of the fact that child labor provides no less than half of the cotton produced in Uzbekistan. Moreover, during the collection of cotton the labor of college and university students as well as those of provincial government officials is actively used. A refusal to collect cotton is followed by tough administrative measures to the extent of expulsion from the educational institution. There have been cases when school students were beaten by school administration for their refusal to leave home for cotton.

The remuneration for child labour is just negligible: it is 12 times lower than cotton prices at world markets. Only three trading companies controlled by the President family are licensed to operate deals of Uzbek cotton export.

As the main source of hard currency, the Uzbek cotton exports are not transparent and accountable to the society. Karimov's regime is using the super-profits from the sale of cotton for its own benefit and for the sake of a small group's interests as well as to maintain the repressive machine, consisting of the army, police, security forces and prosecutors, who have become an integral part of a system of coercion of children and the youth to work in the cotton fields.

With regard to the adult population in rural areas, they are avoiding these modern forms of slavery in the cotton fields by migrating from the country in search of work and livelihood. Virtually, a park of corn harvesting machines has been disbanded in the country, since the exorbitant purchase prices do not allow farmers to use the expensive machinery. In this situation the burden of the collection of cotton falls upon the shoulders of children and students. Thus, they are victims of inefficient economic policies of the government, serving the selfish interests of the ruling clan.

In order to break this vicious system, it is necessary to deprive those who control the export of cotton in Uzbekistan of their unfair excess profits. Only an international boycott of Uzbek cotton could reach that goal. The boycott will force the Uzbek government to repeal child labor and provide farmers real economic freedom. The cotton sector in Uzbekistan could be profitable without the exploitation of child and forced labor.

We are not opposed to the active role of the state in regulating the economy and the cotton sector, in particular. But, in our opinion, state interference should be aimed at limiting the side effects of a market economy in order to serve the interests of farmers and the rural population. Now the ruling regime is expropriating the village resources, depriving Uzbek children of the prospects of receiving quality education.

The boycott would not affect the interests of the ordinary citizens of Uzbekistan, farmers and rural families, since they do not see any benefits in it for themselves. Moreover, under the current system it brings enough harm. Cotton could become a source of the welfare of farmers as in neighboring Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, but the administrative dictate of the authorities hinders it. Under these circumstances, a significant part of the adult population in the villages is presently surviving not due to the care of the state, but rather the earnings from the labor emigration.

We hope that the boycott on Uzbek cotton will not be of too long duration. It may be imposed for a limited period of time in order to give a chance for the Uzbek government to rethink its approach to the development of the cotton sector and start genuine reforms.

We propose that the European Union, the United States administration, the governments of Russian Federation and China use their regulative power and impose restrictions on imports of Uzbek cotton and textiles, produced from it, and maintain these restrictions until the Uzbek government rescinds forced child labor, and in reality, not just on paper.

We call upon the European Bank and the World Bank to refrain from financing projects in the cotton and textile sectors in Uzbekistan until the above mentioned reforms are not carried out.

We suggest UNICEF and ILO to finally turn their attention to the shameful practice of forced child labour in Uzbekistan and provide the international community with objective and honest report on the issue.

We also call upon the business community in the West and in the world to support the boycott and to refrain from buying the Uzbek cotton and products from it as long as the Uzbek cotton is not purged of the stains of forced child labor.

Sincerely,

Nuriddin Nizom, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of the Netherlands, member of the Democratic Youth Movement 'Uighon Uzbekiston' (Awaken, Uzbekistan'),

Dildora Fozilova, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of the USA, member of the Democratic Youth Movement 'Uighon Uzbekiston' (Awaken, Uzbekistan'),

Farmon Hamroyev, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of the USA, member of the Democratic Youth Movement 'Uighon Uzbekiston' (Awaken, Uzbekistan'),

Suleimon Murod, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Canada, representative of the 'Erk' Democratic Party in Canada and the United States,

Ismail Dadadjanov, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Sweden, Chair of the Democratic Forum of Uzbekistan,

Rafick Ganiyev, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Sweden, former representative of 'Ezgulik' Human Rights Society in Ferghana,

Members of the movement 'Human Rights Defenders Alliance of Uzbekistan' and Sun Shine Coalition, all citizens and residents of Uzbekistan, press.centre.alliance@gmail.com:

Abdullo Tojiboy-ugly,	Dilshodbek Pulatov,
Lyudmila Babadjanova,	Valentina Stepchenko,
Olga Barysheva,	Valentina Talipova,
Svetlana Bahramova,	Rasul Tojiboyev,
Anatolyi Varaksin,	Anatoly Uzhov,
Vera Zaporozhets,	Yelena Urlayeva,
Zhanna Ignatenko,	Ahtam Shaimardanov,
Yusuf Imamov,	Yuryi Konoplev,
Karima Kamalova,	Tatyana Tirbakh,
Lyudmila Kudryavtseva,	Murod Sultonov,
Akramhodja Muhitdinov,	Oleg Sarapulov,
Afhhodjon Muhtarov,	Valery Makarov
Natalya Panteleeva,	

Nigara Khidoyatova, citizen and resident of Uzbekistan, leader of the 'Ozod Dehqonlar' party, member of the Sun Shine Coalition,

Bahodiy Namazov, Chair, the Prisoners of Conscience Committee, member of the Sun Shine Coalition,

Nadejda Atayeva, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of France, President, Association 'Human Rights in Central Asia', le-Mans,

Kudrat Babadjanov, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Sweden, Freedom of Press Group of Uzbekistan, Timro,

Bahodiy Isamuhamedov, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Sweden, Chair of the 'Mahalla' Project for supporting citizens' local self-government institutions, Stockholm,

Surat Ikramov, citizen and resident of Uzbekistan, Chair of the Initiative Group of Independent Human Rights Defenders of Uzbekistan,

Safar Bekjan, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Switzerland, member of the International PEN, Lozano,

Dustnazar Hudoinazarov, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Sweden, Chair, Society for protection of refugees from Uzbekistan,

Kamoliddin Rabbimov, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Kazakhstan, political scientist,

Hatam Hadjimatov, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Norway, author of the Project 'Vatandosh', <http://jakob.clan.su/>,

Maksud Bekjan, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Norway, writer, member of the Norway Helsinki Committee, Oslo,

Alisher Taksanov, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Switzerland, freelance journalist,

Yodgor Obid, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Austria, poet,

Vitalyi Krasilovsky, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of the USA, lawyer,

Ulugbek Zainobiddinov, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Ukraine, human rights activist,

Mufaffarmirzo Iskhakov, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Norway,

Nasrullo Saidov, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Canada, former Member of Parliament (Supreme Council of Uzbekistan),

Avaz Fayazov, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Ukraine, representative of 'Birlik' party in Ukraine,

Oleg Marutik, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Norway, representative of the movement 'For Democratic Reforms and Minority Rights in Uzbekistan' in Norway,

Sergey Goron, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Norway, representative of the movement 'For Democratic Reforms and Minority Rights in Uzbekistan' in Scandinavia,

Anvar Khasanov, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Sweden,

Ma'ruf Abdugafforov, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Sweden, representative of 'Erk' party in Stockholm,

Yuldash Ochilov, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Sweden, representative of 'Erk' party in Sweden,

Feruz Mirzakulova, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Sweden, member of 'Erk' party,

Mashhura Salohiddin, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Sweden, journalist,

Alexander Urinov, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Sweden, Asian ex-champion of weightlifting,

Yan Be'fer, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Sweden,

Andrey Zhidick, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Sweden,

Nabijon Akibayev, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Sweden,

Flora Gorohova, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Sweden, activist of 'Erk' party,

Akmal Gaziyeu, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of France, Muslim activist