COALITION
AGAINST FORCED CHILD LABOUR IN UZBEKISTAN

Newsletter

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Letter from Editor

Roundtable in Bremen on forced child labour in Uzbekistan

The Coalition Against Forced Child Labour in Uzbekistan will be organizing a roundtable on this issue in Bremen, Germany on April 3, 2008. In the course of our ongoing work on child labour in Uzbekistan we have encountered a serious lack of awareness and understanding of the scale of the problem on the part of international organisations and representatives of the cotton industry. The purpose of the roundtable is to raise awareness, present facts about the situation in Uzbekistan and start a constructive dialogue with all concerned parties.

The roundtable will address the following issues:

- How to evaluate the scale of the problem of forced child labour in Uzbekistan;
- The involvement of the Uzbek government in this practice, and the financial reasons for the continuing use of child labour in the Uzbek cotton fields;
- The legal aspects of this problem in their domestic and international dimensions;
- The potential for international cooperation on eradicating the practice of forced child labour in Uzbekistan, and consideration of the effectiveness of engagement and sanctions with respect to the Uzbek government;
- Other issues related to the practice of forced child labour in Uzbekistan.

The roundtable is being organized to coincide with the 29th International Cotton Conference, which will be held in Bremen from April 2-5, 2008. This underlines the intention of the Coalition Against Forced Child Labour in Uzbekistan to establish a constructive dialogue with the international cotton industry. Our intention is to work with industry leaders to make them fully aware of the social conditions under which Uzbek cotton is produced, with full confidence that the industry will take appropriate and socially responsible measures once they understand these facts.

The round table will take place on April 3, 2008 from 10.00 until 13.30 at the **Ramada Überseehotel Bremen**. We request that anyone interested in attending contact Shahida Tulaganova, Uzbekistan Initiative London, by telephone at +44 78 09 54 59 09, or by email to uil@uzbekistaninitiative.com.

The organiser of this roundtable is the Coalition Against Forced Child Labour

Shahida Tulaganova
Director, Uzbekistan Initiative London
On behalf of the Coalition

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the claim of 'forced child labour in Uzbekistan' about?

Each autumn, all school children in Uzbekistan in the age from 10 to 15, with exception of schools in the capital and a few major cities, are being ordered by their school administration to go for cotton harvesting. This work lasts, as a rule, not less than two months each year.

Lyceum, college, and university students, as well as civil servants in provinces are being also subjected to compulsory work on cotton fields.

Besides, rural children are being ordered to work on fields weeding in the spring season too.

This compulsory work in agriculture takes children out from their school study up to 3-4 months each year.

Cotton pickers, including children, are being forced to work without weekends. Children work as adults, a whole working day, from 8-9 am to 5-6 pm, with a break only for a lunch.

Many school children are staying in field camps during a cotton harvesting season. Most of them are suffering there from malnutrition, lack of elementary living conditions and poor sanitation and medical treatment.

If children live not too far from cotton fields, they may return each day to their homes. In these cases they either are delivered to the fields on tractor trailers, or go on foot, often 2-3 km to each end.

Children are being given a daily plan of picking cotton, varying between 30 and 50 kg. If not fulfilling it they are being denounced by school administration, and sometimes physically beaten. According to some survey results and rough calculations, child labour provides around a half of all cotton picked during a harvesting season.

Who is responsible?

Exploitation of the forced and child labour in Uzbekistan is the result of a deliberate state policy. It is not on the initiative of their parents children work on cotton fields in Uzbekistan, though a few of parents may wish to send their children for picking cotton. All orders come from school administrations which, in turn, receive unwritten orders from local governments (hokimiyats). Taking into account the country's strictly centralised system of governance and cotton industry management, one can guess that order comes from the central government. Without instruction and endorsement from Tashkent no one would be allowed to shut down schools across the country even for one day.

What is the mechanism of coercion?

The children, as well as lyceum, college and university students, are coerced to work on cotton fields under the fear of administrative punishment. The children and the students are being threatened to be expulsed from schools, unless fulfil their duties as cotton pickers. Those parents who don't send their children to cotton harvest risk to losing their social benefits and welfare. School administration and teachers are themselves intimidated by the local government and may lose their job unless obey orders from local administration and fulfil the quota of recruitment and cotton picking plans.

It'd not be exaggeration to claim that during a cotton harvesting season the country is turning into a concentrate camp: children and teachers are aligned into work brigades, they live in barracks, and the cotton fields are patrolled by police.

Are existing legal protections sufficient to curb abuses?

They would be, if these legal provisions were enforced. Unfortunately, because there is no rule of law in Uzbekistan, and both domestic and international laws are flouted, the use of forced child labour is commonplace throughout Uzbekistan.

Uzbekistan has adopted a number of laws, on Youth Policy, on Labour, on Guarantees of Child's Rights. Each of them stipulates limits and restrictions on the employment of child labour. The children are admitted to labour only after the age of 15. Before achieving this age they can be arranged for work only as a school practice, for not more than 15 days. If employed, children are allowed to work not more than four hours per day. But it is on paper. The reality goes in an opposite direction and the children slavery is a commonplace practice in Uzbekistan.

Uzbekistan has signed and ratified two following ILO conventions: No 29, (the 1930 Forced Labour Convention) and No. 105 (The 1957 Abolition of

Forced Labour Convention). These documents were ratified in 1992 and 1997 correspondingly. However, neither the aforementioned national laws, nor Uzbekistan's commitments to ILO labour standards, have resulted in the real abolishment of forced child labour in this country.

Till 2008, two other important ILO conventions, No. 138 (The 1973 Minimum Age Convention), and No.182 (The 1999 Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention) were not recognized by the Uzbek government. Only in March 2008, the Lower House of the Uzbek Parliament (Oliy Majlis) adopted laws on ratifications of these two conventions, yet subject of their endorsement by the Upper House (Senate). The ratification of these two conventions alone doesn't change the situation and the need for further pressure upon the Uzbek government.

Who does benefit from this practice?

The cotton sector in Uzbekistan remains highly centralised. All procurement prices are assigned top-down by the government. The planting of cotton, along with grain, is obligatory on the two third of best arable lands. Farmers, either collective or private ones, don't have right to choose which culture to plant and whom to sell to.

The government still, as in Soviet times, imposes plans of cotton production to all farmers and local governments. The local hokims (governors) are personally responsible for fulfilling the government plans (so called quotas). The farmers don't have right to trade cotton on free market and market prices. They are strictly instructed to deliver their crop to local cotton gins controlled by the government. If exporting their own produce directly to neighbouring countries they are being accused in contraband, sued and jailed. All inputs are also distributed in the centralised way.

Cotton is the main export commodity in Uzbekistan. Only three trading companies created at the Ministry of Foreign Economic Affairs are eligible to trade cotton on world markets. But even they don't fully control the export revenue. All three companies are under direct and strict supervision of officials appointed by President.

The cotton export in Uzbekistan is not transparent and therefore not accountable for the general public. The latter is unaware of how much the cotton export gains in hard currency, under what conditions and prices the Uzbek cotton is being sold, and how the cotton revenue is being distributed.

What are the causes of this phenomenon?

The first and major reason is the reluctance of the government of Uzbekistan to implement reforms in the cotton industry and release its direct administrative control over the cotton sector and farmers. It relies heavily on the price scissors: imposing unfairly low procurement prices on cotton, while selling inputs on prices close to the market ones. Not surprisingly, the adult population in rural areas responds by migrating to other countries in the search for more decent subsistence. Even on the cotton fields in neighbouring Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan they gain in times more than in their own homeland.

Under these circumstances, the government prefers employing forced labour to real reforms. It still relies on administrative methods of coercion, including the use of police and prosecutor offices against those farmers who wary from fulfilling plans on cotton and grain.

What the government of Uzbekistan needs to do?

The government of Uzbekistan needs to abolish, not only on paper, but on practice, the use of child and all forms of forced labour in the cotton industry. To do this it has just to stop ordering, instructing and endorsing the closing down of schools and sending school children and students to cotton fields. The government must also ban the local governments to ordering local schools, lyceums, colleges and universities to work on cotton fields.

To secure this, the government of Uzbekistan should complete reforms in the cotton industry. It is not enough just to transform collective farms into private farms, if the latter remain deprived of land and production rights. The farmers can't be free without free and properly regulated inputs and outputs markets. The government needs to release farmers from its administrative grip and let market incentives to substitute the administrative coercion. The government should switch its involvement in the cotton sector from ordering to regulating management, in interests of all stakeholders, private farmers and entrepreneurs as well as ordinary farmers and citizens.

The use of child labour is commonplace in many developing countries. What does make the situation in Uzbekistan different from other developing countries?

The practice of child labour in the cotton industry in Uzbekistan considerably differs from other developing countries. Unlike the latter the child labour in Uzbekistan is not the initiative of parents, but orchestrated and ordered by the state, which uses various means of administrative coercion to force children to work on cotton fields. It is a part of the totalitarian governance and economic management characteristic for Uzbekistan.

If forced child labor is as widespread as you say, why hasn't the world heard of it before?

Uzbekistan is one of the world's most repressive countries. The media is strictly state controlled and the internet is censored. Uzbekistan has imprisoned numerous human rights defenders, one of whom, Mu'tabar Tajibaeva, who had protested forced child labor and called for a boycott of Uzbek cotton. Journalist Ulugbek Khaidarov was fired from a local newspaper for his writing on this issue. The government of Uzbekistan suppresses all reports of forced labor in domestic media; human rights defenders who try to document the phenomenon have been threatened or worse. International camera crews have also been harassed and pressured; some obtained footage only clandestinely. The BBC aired a documentary on the practice in September, 2007. Thus, the phenomenon is becoming more well-known, but slowly, due to official repression.

Uzbekistan is a poor country and it needs the income it derives from cotton. Perhaps children's work on the harvest is the only way it can bring in the cotton?

During Soviet times, about half of Uzbekistan's cotton was harvested by machine. Since independence, the state has not invested funds in agriculture, resulting in the total degradation of agricultural machinery. With a crackdown on corruption, the proper investments and proper use of foreign assistance, Uzbekistan could raise the amount of machine-harvested cotton. In addition, neighbouring countries Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have introduced full-scale market reforms in their agricultural sector, and cotton is farmed there quite profitably, using hired labor paid market wages to harvest the crop. Ironically, many of Uzbekistan's over 1 mln labor migrants abroad, (most of whom flee rural areas in search of a living wage) go to Kazakhstan to work in the cotton harvest there.

The Uzbek government claims that child labour had been used in the Soviet past, not now. What has in reality changed since then?

In soviet times Uzbekistan achieved a comparatively high level of social and economic development, although the achievements coincided with a number of acute social and environmental issues. Almost a half of cotton was picked then by cotton picking machines. For the moment, the use of machinery has been reduced to zero level. It is definitely a result of mismanagement, the lack of reforms, the wrong system of incentives and unfair distribution of cotton revenue.

Nowadays, despite some minor improvements (for instance, the introduction of quality control, packaging and stocking systems), the cotton industry as a whole experiences the process of de-modernization. The scale of forced labour not only has not been overcome but even increased. Its conditions and social compensation have declined along with the decline of the overall social welfare system. Especially devastated is the rural area.

How the Western countries responded?

The response from the West has been so far inadequate. The United States and the European Union have granted the Uzbek cotton and textile with the so called Generalized System of Preference (GSP), the import tax exempt which is to be assigned for poorest developing countries. In Europe, the Uzbek cotton was granted GPS in June 2005, right after the Andijan massacre.

The GPS was deemed to be a remedy of securing fairness in relationships between North and South, but in the case of Uzbekistan it turned out to be a buttress of social injustice. GPS makes the Uzbek cleptocratic regime even regime richer and the abuse of children rights and interests perpetuated.

What countries and companies import Uzbek cotton?

For the last period of time, Uzbekistan tries to divert its cotton export from European to Asian countries, especially China and Bangladesh. However, after being processed in Asia into textile and garments the Uzbek cotton still finds its way to Western markets.

Some Western countries keep directly purchasing the Uzbek cotton fibre. For instance, Germany, via

Bremen Cotton Exchange, increased cotton fibre import from Uzbekistan from 6,642.7 metric tonnes in 2004 to 11,742.8 metric tonnes in 2006. Bremer Baumwollbörse re-exports the Uzbek cotton to other European countries, first of all Czech Republic, Austria, Poland, Greece and Italy. Accidentally or not, exactly these countries recently opposed the extension of the EU sanctions against Uzbekistan that were adopted in response to the Andijan massacre committed by the Uzbek regime in May 2005.

Among companies, the most active in importing the Uzbek cotton have reportedly been Paul Reinhart AG (Switzerland), Cargill Cotton, Weil Brothers and Stern, Plexus Cotton (UK), Louis Dreyfus (Belgium), DEVCOT (France), Dunavant Enterprises (USA), Daewoo Textile Company (Korea), Indutech S.P.A. (Italy), and others. Such banks as Citibank, ABN-AMRO, and others are said to provide financial support to importing the Uzbek cotton.

Whether all Western companies are not responsive to the reports on the forced child labour in Uzbekistan?

Fortunately, not all of them. A growing number of retailers in Europe are becoming increasingly concerned of what are the sources of textile commodities they sell to consumers. Such companies as Tesco, Marks and Spencer, Debenhams, Sainsbury's (UK), Marimekko Corporation (Finland), Auchan Groupe (France) have announced their intention to exclude the Uzbek cotton from their procurement sources.

What western companies and governments should do?

They should warn the Uzbek government to abolish immediately the use of forced and child labour in the cotton industry. Until they receive credible reports that this practice has ceased in practice, the western companies, cotton importers and retailers, are recommended to refrain from dealing with the Uzbek cotton and the textile produced from it.

The Western governments should start with withholding the GPS status on importing Uzbek cotton and textile produced from it. This benefit may be resumed only when credible reports on the abolishment of forced child labour are received. To avoid further the abuse of child's rights in developing countries the EU and other Western countries should introduce the system of certificate and labelling that would allow retailers and consumers track down the origin of cotton they import and buy.

ILO and UNICEF should finally turn their attention to the issue of forced child labour in Uzbekistan and start truthfully reporting on this issue to the international audience.

Would the boycott of Uzbek cotton harm Uzbek farmers and other ordinary citizens?

No. The immediate producers and pickers of cotton in Uzbekistan receive a negligible share of the overall cotton export revenue. The adult rural population is in fact already boycotting the Uzbek cotton by running from the country in the search for more fair income. Their children receive some payments for picking cotton, but it is gained at an unacceptable price, the decline of the quality of their education.

The boycott of the Uzbek cotton would force the Uzbek government to take real measures to reform its cotton industry. It is already making some concessions, but mainly on paper, for instance, by ratifying the ILO conventions 138 and 182.

Does the ratification of the ILO conventions 138 and 182 mean a real progress in tackling the issue of forced child labour?

Not yet. While this step deserves endorsement, the government still needs to prove in practice its determination to eradicate forced child labour. Otherwise, the ratification of these conventions would share the same fate as other ILO conventions ratified by the Uzbek government long time ago and remaining unfulfilled. The government of Uzbekistan doesn't lack legal conditions and commitments to end immediately the practice of forced child labour. The adopted legislation per se remains hollow declarations and smoke screen for hiding the dare reality in the country's cotton sector. As an indication of the government's genuine intention to abolish forced and child labour may become its steps on reforming the cotton industry. The government's determination to eradicate this shameful practice will be tested in the forthcoming periods of weeding and cotton harvesting.

Coalition Call for International Action to Eradicate Child Labour in Uzbekistan's Cotton Industry

The Uzbek Coalition's goal is clear and simple: an end to the widespread use of forced child labour in Uzbekistan's cotton industry. We can no longer tolerate the international community's turning a blind eye to this shameful reality, and we must break the conspiracy of silence.

How can we achieve our goal? How can we elicit positive change: through 'dialogue', which has in practice meant negotiations behind closed doors? Or by raising awareness, denouncing forced child labour and urging sanctions and boycotts in response?

Since the break-up of the Soviet Union, and Independence for Uzbekistan in 1991, Western governmental and intergovernmental organizations have tended to pursue a strategy of negotiation behind closed doors. This strategy has failed to achieve significant results on human rights issues: forced child labour in cotton production has in fact increased in Uzbekistan over the past 17 years.

The coalition's campaign, together with those of other INGOs and growing media awareness over the past 12 months, have already resulted in the Uzbek regime's first concessions on the issue: to ratify two key ILO Conventions on child labour*.

But will this ratification signify tangible progress in eradicating forced child labour in Uzbekistan? Experience shows that the Uzbek regime has often responded to criticism of its poor human rights record by issuing laws and signing international conventions. However, these are too often empty gestures; poor implementation and lax enforcement. We note that the ratification of ILO conventions on forced labour No. 29 and 105 produced no tangible effect in eradicating the routine use of forced labour in the cotton industry. We believe that new commitments to other ILO conventions will suffer the same fate unless the government of Uzbekistan abandons its pressure on local governments, schools and farmers who are compelled to meet quotas on cotton production.

Monitoring of the cotton harvest in autumn 2008 will demonstrate whether the Uzbek regime is genuine in its public commitments to eradicate forced child labour. In the intervening period, the regime should prove its intention towards genuine reforms in the cotton industry, by immediately undertaking the following key steps:

- Release farmers from direct administrative pressure;
- Abandon the top-down, government procurement of cotton crops, and allow market supply and demand to set the price of cotton;
- End the compulsion for farmers to grow cotton, and allow farmers to make decisions on the crops they grow, and who to employ;
- Release farmers from an obligation to deliver their raw cotton to central and local government-owned cotton-gins;
- Remove the government monopoly on inputs to, and outputs from cotton production;
- End the government monopoly over cotton fibre exports;
- Use regulatory powers to protect property and labour rights and resolve environmental and social issues caused by cotton production; and provide fair compensation for the loss of jobs caused by the privatization of land.

Crucially, these reforms – by providing incentives for a decent living wage - would attract adult labour back to the cotton sector and reduce the need for forced adult or child labour.

Such reforms have been long-awaited and encouraged by IFIs, such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and others. The Government of Uzbekistan must now develop the necessary political will that will enable the rapid implementation of the IFIs' recommendations. These reforms are essential for addressing the issue of forced child labour.

Given past experience, we remain very sceptical that the Government of Uzbekistan would voluntarily undertake these reforms. We therefore believe that international pressure – together with the threat of losing profits resulting from the boycott of Uzbek cotton - will prompt the regime to undertake these much-needed changes.

Our vision for international dialogue and actions on Uzbekistan:

1. The United States and EU Governments should demonstrate their support for the rights of Uzbek children and commit to the following:

- Introduce regulations to guarantee the ethical sourcing of cotton and textile imports; and provide for certification and labelling systems that identify the origin of cotton in the textile and garments imported from developing countries and former Soviet Union.
- Revoke the GSP (Generalised System of Preferences) status from Uzbek cotton and the textile produced from it, which provide preferential trade terms for the regime's exports.

2. Western retailers and manufacturers should join the initiatives of Tesco, Marks and Spencer, Debenhams, Sainsbury's (UK), Marimekko Corporation (Finland), and Auchan Groupe (France) in excluding Uzbek cotton from their supply chains, and move towards greater transparency in the supply chain.

3. Western consumers should avoid purchasing goods produced from Uzbek cotton or where the ethical sourcing of these goods is not guaranteed.

4. The International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC) and other international cotton associations should protect the reputation of the cotton industry by introducing ethical standards and encouraging the Uzbek Government to adopt these standards, especially in regard to child and labour rights. ICAC should not shield the Uzbek government from international criticism relating to violations in the cotton industry.

5. UNICEF and ILO should make information publicly available about what they are doing to promote child and labour rights in Uzbekistan, and specifically to combat forced child labour in the cotton industry. They should engage actively not only with the government but with independent civil society groups which have proved to be watchdogs on the issue of child labour.

6. Civil society groups and the wider public should consolidate their energy and efforts to make national and international institutions more effective and accountable in addressing the issue of forced child labour in Uzbekistan. The success of this action could set a valuable precedent for addressing similar issues in cotton and other sectors globally.

This call for action is endorsed by the following Uzbek activists and their international colleagues and supporters (see on page 10):

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* In March 2008, the Uzbek Government signed the international labour organisation's (ILO) Convention No. 182, 'the worst forms of child labour'; and No. 138, 'the minimum age for admission to employment'.

Campaign updates

Dutch Foreign Minister denounces child labour in Uzbekistan

The practice of forced child labour in Uzbekistan has received a strong rebuke from the foreign minister of the Netherlands, Maxime Verhagen. Speaking at the 7th session of the United Nations Human Rights session in Geneva on 3 March 2008, Verhagen said, "Human rights apply to all people, in all places and at all times. They apply to children in Uzbekistan picking cotton for long hours for little or no wages, when they should be in school. Worldwide, over 200 million children labour in harsh conditions. Over 75% of these children are victims of the worst forms of child labour, such as prostitution, slavery and trafficking. There is no excuse for their exploitation and bleak prospects. The Netherlands emphasises children's rights in its human rights policy. To the European Commission, I have proposed a ban on the sale of goods that have been produced using any form of slavery or practice similar to slavery, such as debt bondage, serfdom or forced or compulsory labour."

Maxime Verhagen, a member of the centrist Christian Democratic Appeal party, was appointed foreign minister of the Netherlands on February 22, 2007. He was a member of the European Parliament from 1989 until 1994. He has also been a member of the supervisory board of Free Voice, a media organisation that lobbies for freedom of the press in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and Eastern Europe.

British retailer Sainsbury's refuses to use Uzbek cotton

The Coalition Against Forced Child Labour in Uzbekistan has written to a number of British retailers in order to provide them with detailed information about the use of child labour in the Uzbek cotton industry, and to ask them to join the growing number of companies which refuse to sell products made from Uzbek cotton.

In a letter dated xx March 2008, the leading British retailer Sainsbury's gave its formal response to the Coaltion. The company's Head of Corporate Reponsibility, Jan Sahota, wrote to us to say the following: "We are aware of reports that serious human rights issues exist in Uzbekistan and in no way condone the use of forced child labour. In light of this we have assessed our supply base to ensure no Uzbek cotton is used in our garments."

Survey report on Child Labour in Uzbekistan: Part 2

A group of human rights defenders and journalists in Uzbekistan conducted a survey in autumn 2007 on the practice of forced child labour in Uzbekistan and the orchestrating role of the state in this practice. The fieldwork was conducted in two regions of Uzbekistan, Kashkadarya and Sirdarya. This summary of the results of the survey is continued from the previous edition of the newsletter.

Children's lives and labour conditions during the cotton harvest

Children and their parents complain not only about them being forced to pick cotton, but also about the awful conditions of work and life in the cotton fields. What follows are few of these complaints.

One story of how students are transported to the cotton fields comes from an 8th-grade pupil of the school named after Khafiz Djalolov in Kamashi district of Kashkadarya region:

> *This year, during the cotton harvest, 25 girls shared the same room. There was no toilet, not to mention even the most basic hygine facilities. The water basin was only filled once or twice a day. There was no soap to wash one's hands or to take a shower. We slept in a room full of cockroaches, fleas, ants and other biting insects. We worked in the fields from morning until evening. In the evening when we got to our room, we were so exhausted that we fell asleep straightaway.*

Here is a complaint from one parent of Darga village in the Mirishkor district of Kashkadarya region, who is concerned about the health consequences of cotton picking for her daughter:

> *The rains are already starting during during cotton harvest, meaning that scratches on the body are prone to quick inflammation. I have to struggle to restore the scratched hands of my daughters to a normal state using vaseline and creams. They want*

to earn some money and that's why they are working hard. But they will regret it later. There is an expression, "Golden hands pick white gold," but I can say that even if the hands of people who pick cotton might be golden, I would never call cotton "white gold." If cotton doesn't bring our nation prosperity and doesn't improve our living conditions, then why do we need this gold? This is not gold, but a parasite which is eating the lives of our children…

-Interviewed on September 20, 2007

Farmers who employ children at their farms admit that they don't have time to think about the children's health. According to the director of one farm in the Boyovut district of Sukhandarya region:

Every year during the cotton harvest, I myself bring drinking water to the pupils. There is a water pipe in the district centre, and I bring water from there in a special barrel. Sometimes, when there is no water coming from the pipe I bring water from a channel which runs through our district. It's very difficult to judge the quality of this water. I grew up drinking this kind of water, and thanks to God, I am healthy. However, doctors at the Central Hospital say that water should at very least be chlorinated. But these instructions are not followed by everyone, since we are anyways sure that no one has been poisoned from drinking this water. The doctors say that dirty water causes kidney stones and liver failure. Maybe they are right. But as a farmer, I am responsible for the harvest. The children's health is the responsibility of their parents.

-Interviewed on September 30, 2007

The poor quality of the food given to the children while they are in the cotton fields is another major issue. One children's dietician in the Kashkadarya region has the following to say about the food standards:

The nformation I am giving you is not official. Due to the fact that recruiting children for cotton picking is illegal under Uzbek law, the Ministry of Health is organizing food rations only by word of mouth. In some cases this has no legal force. The finance departments of local administrations are allocating funds to children's food from their budgets. For example, every child should be given 70g of meat and fish, not less then 30g of butter, and 250g of bread. Taking into consideration the fact that this is just a minimum standard, it is understood that school administration and farms should increase these rations and pay for the additional food from their own budgets.

But in practice everything is different. There is no meat, no eggs and no milk in children's rations, and no one is responsible for looking after the quality of food. One 8th-grade pupil of the school named after Mukimi in Miroshkor district of Kashkadarya region says the following:

There was an epidemic in the chicken farm which was right next to cotton fields where we were working. Therefore, some sick chickens were slaughtered and served to us for lunch. We were very happy. On other days we just had unpalatable soup with spaghetti. We had so much cabbage that we couldn't look at it anymore.

Children are constantly at risk of hurting themselves or breaking something. They are transported to the fields in trailer trucks, in contradiction of safety rules. According to the 8th-grade pupil of the school named after Mukimi in Miroshkor district of Kashkadarya region:

Every morning at 7am, we gather in school's courtyard. After a roll call, we are taken in tractor-trailers to the field. Sometimes, farmers take children themselves in their cars. It depends on the how well their farm is doing. If a cotton field is not far then sometimes we walk there.

One day, according to a mother of a student from a school in Miroshkor district of Kashkadarya region, there was an accident when a tractor run over a child who had fallen asleep in the field.

I think that the tractor driver was not properly qualified, and that this was the cause of the accident. A child is always a child. It was hot outside and he fall asleep. One of my sons legs got run over by the wheel of a water tank which the tractor was pulling. At first they said that my son's leg would heal soon. Half of our medical expences were covered by the tractor driver. But as fate would have it, my son became disabled. I don't want to talk about it. It is too hard. (She cries.)

Payment for labour

According to our observations, some proportion of the pupils and their parents are interested participating in the picking of cotton because in this way they can earn some money. However, the number of such families is small, and their earnings cannot be compared with the overall damange to children's health and education. One 9th-grade pupils of school № 9 named after Gafur Gulyam of Kasbiisk district expresses her dissatisfaction:

Every year we participate in the cotton campaign. We got used to it. Our fathers and elder brothers also picked cotton. It is the destiny of evey citizen of our country. However, the conditions in which we work and live in the cotton fields are unbearable,

while the payment we receive is very small. I don't know how much others earn, but I earn 70,000 to 80,000 (USD 55 to 63) for the whole season. This is not even enough money to buy new clothes to replace those I was wearing in the cotton fields.

One schoolteacher in the Mirishkor district of Kashkadarya region adds:

In the beginning of the cotton harvest the government set a price of 50 soms (USD 0.04) for one kilogram of cotton. However, in the middle of the cotton season, the local authorities reduced the price to 40 soms, and then later in the season to 30 soms. If an average pupil receives 40 soms per kilo then it means that he or she would be paid approximately 1200 soms (just under 1 US dollar) per day. In two months of cotton picking, a student can earn 72,000 soms (USD 56). If we calculate that every day students are spending 1000 soms on food and other necessities, then it means that they are basically working for free. For example, the cost of all textbooks for 7th-grade pupils is 25,000 soms. Even if the pupil is fully paid for his or her work, still they would not earn enough to afford textbooks. This is sheer slavery.

-Interviewed on September 17, 2007

According to the witness account of one employee of the company Kashkadaryo-pahtasanoat, 96% of the picked cotton handed over by the farmers is considered first-grade cotton. This means that somebody is lining their pockets, while underpaying the cotton pickers.

Media on forced child labour in Uzbekistan

Report from Sirdarya region

Ezgulik, human rights society in Uzbekistan, reports that on November 17, 2007, student of accounting of Agricultural college of Sirdarya district of Sirdarya region, Azamat Vafoev stabbed his teacher, Umida Gaipnazarova to death. He refused to go to pick cotton and Ms. Gapinazarova has visited his house several times, shaming him in front of his parents, insulting and putting him under psychological pressure. As a result of serious insult in front of his friends and parents, he killed her.

Source: Press release of Ezgulik Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan, 29.01.08

Report from Kashkadarya region

Ezgulik human rights society of Uzbekistan reports that a college student was killed by accident on a cotton fields. Student has fallen asleep on a field and was run by a tractor, when its driver failed to notice him. Student died instantly.

Source: Rapid Response Group for Prevention of Torture, Comments on the Report of the State of Uzbekistan Concerning the Implementation of the UN Convention Against Torture and Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment and Punishment, November, 2007

Khafiza Kudratova is a school girl from Yakkabog district of Kashkadarya region. She is 16 years old. In September 2004 together with other school-kids she was taken to a farm # 39 in Koson district – 120 kilometers far from her home, to pick cotton. In an interview with a human rights activist she mentioned: “We don’t have even a normal drinking water. I pick cotton starting from September 14th and haven’t taken a shower ever since. Every day I have to pick 50 kilos of cotton. I don’t like the food here. For breakfast they give us only tea with sugar and bread. We take hot meal only for lunch and dinner, but it comes without meat”.

Source: Ezgulik Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan, 29,01.08

Report from Samarkand region

In September 2006 a train near the cotton field hit two school kids from Djomboy district of Samarkand region F. and I.. The boys were among the school children. Early in the morning they woke up and went to the railway near the camp where they were based. They wanted to watch the approaching locomotive. They were standing on the railway and were hit by the locomotive. One of them died at the place, another one was hospitalized with serious traumas to the district hospital. The complaints of the parents and some Uzbek human rights defenders were studied by the Djomboy procurator’s office and the office of the Procurator General. At the time of the writing there were no

results of the investigation of this case.

Source: "Veritas" Youth Human Rights Movement of Uzbekistan, May 15th 2007, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Report from Andijan region

Students of Andijan hydro land Improvement College were taken to the territory of "Mashal" collective farm of Markhamat district in September 2003. They were forced to go to the fields and pick cotton even during rainy days of October 2003. They slept in the barracks without window-glasses with any heating system and hot water. Only during September-October 2003 20 students of the college out of 100 became ill and were allowed home in the critical state of health. On October 15th 6 students refused to pick cotton. They played football in the school stadium. Soon on that day they were summoned by college director Abdumalik Razzakov. The director offended the students with degrading words and threatened them with expelling from the college. After that as a punishment the director ordered to students Shokir Mamadaliev, Arsen Seitmuratov, Farkhad Tursunov, Erkin Turakulov, Botir Muhiddinov and Azizbek Giyasov to cut fire wood in the yard of the college. Those students at behest of the director were deprived of food that day. In five days Botir Muhiddinov had to return home because of sharp pains in kidneys. He was hospitalized because of inflammation of kidneys.

Source: Rapid Response Group for Prevention of Torture, Comments on the Report of the State of Uzbekistan …

Uzbekistan cotton – A thread of hope in the retail fabric

The specter of Uzbek cotton being imported into Europe has once again raised its ugly head. But activists and one enlightened retailer are determined to take a stand

Several years ago, stickers appeared on lampposts across east London. "I. Karimov killed Farhad Usmanov," they read, accusing the president of Uzbekistan of being responsible for the high-profile death in custody of an activist who opposed the despotic Uzbek regime. The stickers later vanished, but thanks to the $32 billion a year cotton industry, Uzbekistan's bad name is swiftly regaining its previous notoriety.

Talk to anyone about cotton in Uzbekistan and the picture drawn is horrific. Forced child labour picks much of the country's annual 800,000 tons of cotton exports – Uzbekistan is the second biggest cotton exporter in the world. Uzbekistan is one of the five countries that dominate the global cotton industry, the others being China, the US, India and Pakistan. Of the cotton produced in Uzbekistan, 43% is exported to Asia and 19% to Europe.

The oppressive, crumbling Uzbek government runs the country as a fiefdom for some 20 powerful families. It massacred hundreds of protestors in 2005. Craig Murray, author and former UK ambassador to Uzbekistan, says Uzbek cotton ends up in one in four cotton garments bought in the UK. Since Ethical Corporation last covered the issue in 2005, it appears conditions in the country have worsened dramatically.

Andrew Stroehleim, director of media and information at the International Crisis Group, which produced a 2005 study on the country and cotton, says that in the past two years there has been a significant deterioration of human rights in Uzbekistan. He also says that cotton exports are propping up the Karimov regime financially. But, he says, it is hard to generate a popular consumer boycott for Uzbek cotton since in the European clothing market "it's so difficult to tell where cotton comes from".

Source: Ethical Corporation, 4.07.07

Full text: http://www.ethicalcorp.com/content.asp?ContentID=5409

Interviews with parents

The end of the cotton picking season is the hardest stage of cotton campaign. There is almost no cotton left on the fields, but farmers refuse to pick the leftovers, because of the very low pricing of cotton. Local authorities do no have economic leverages to force farmers to deal with cotton leftovers, so they force pupils, students and state employees to do that.

Manzura: I have four children-two daughters and two sons. All of them study in the city school. My youngest daughter is in the 4th grade and she goes to pick cotton sometimes, normally after school. On contrary, every year in autumn, my older children have only 3-4 days of schooling and then schools are closing and children are taken to pick cotton. I understand that our country needs cotton to be picked, but it can't be done in expense of child labour! Children work in the fields from morning till evening without days off. Every day they go to school at 8am and then they are taken to the fields on cars, this is 15 km away from the city. They return in the evening, when its' dark. Nobody asked our permission for this. On contrary, if a child stays at home at least for a day, his class teacher visits him at home and accuses him of "missing school". Children are forced to collect from thirty to forty kg of cotton. They are paid 40-50 Soms per kilo. But what's the point? We can't even buy new cloths which were ruined during cotton picking for this money.

Kahraman: I am a math teacher. For the last three years I am assigned with collecting, analyzing and handling the data on cotton picking in our school to the district head quarters. Children from fourteen classes are sent to pick cotton from our school. At the end of each day, class teachers submit to me data on the number of their pupils who were working that day. Last year, our school collected roughly 2500-3000 kilos of cotton. If our school collected less cotton then this, then the headmaster was summoned to district headquarters for a conversation. Next morning he was shouting at teachers and pupils.

Source: Ferghana.ru, 23.11.07

The Country of Fish: Black paper about white gold

Russian daily Novaya Gazeta's special correspondent has spent 3 days in one of the Uzbek regions during cotton campaign of 2006. She writes, that every day crowds of little slaves are gathering in the courtyards of their schools. Instead of school bags, every pupil had big sack with narrow stripes. The villages visited by the reporter was located two km away from the cotton fields and every day she was marching with children and teachers along noisy and dusty road from the school to the cotton field. Some children have bread with them, some have watermelons. "I honestly get a sack and start picking cotton-children show me how to do it. This is already fifth picking. Cotton is not very good, but it has to be collected. Half dried bushes are cling onto my cloths, cotton boxes don't open well, my back is aching and after half hour I am really thirsty. I collect one small sack-less then a kilo-and give up. Children continue to work". The reporter witnessed that to miss cotton day is worse then to miss school. In front of her, head teacher was shouting at two boys, who missed coming to the field. The journalist describes state of fear and paranoia among her interviewees-people didn't want to talk about cotton campaign. She managed to get access and writer her article by introducing herself as a writer.

Source: Novaya Gazeta, 20.11.06

Full text: http://www.novayagazeta.ru/data/2006/88/26.html

Uzbekistanis who has signed the Coalition's call for action (see p. 6):

1. **Yodgor Obid,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Austria, poet
2. **Ismail Dadadjanov,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Sweden, Chair of the Democratic Forum of Uzbekistan,
3. **Shahida Yakub,** born in Uzbeksitan, UK citizen, Director, Uzbekistan Initiative London, UK
4. **Nadejda Atayeva,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of France, President, Association ' Human Rights in Central Asia', le-Mans
5. **Suleimon Murod,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Canada, representative of the 'Erk' Democratic Party in Canada and the United States
6. **Talib Yakubov,** citizen of Uzbekistan, Chairman, Society of Human Rights in Uzbekistan, resident of France, Ange, France.
7. **Bakhtiyor Hamraev,** citizen of Uzbekistan, Chairman of Dzhizak regional branch of the Society

for Human Rights in Uzbekistan, Dzhizak, Uzbekistan.

8. **Azam Turgunov,** citizen of Uzbekistan, Executive Director of «MAZLUM», human rights organisation, member of Central Council of the ERK Democratic Party of Uzbekistan, Tashkent, Uzbekistan.
9. **Abdujalil Boymatov,** citizen of Uzbekistan, Society of Human Rights in Uzbekistan, resident of Ireland.
10. **Dilsora Fozilova,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of the USA, member of the Democratic Youth Movement 'Uighon Uzbekiston' (Awaken, Uzbekistan')
11. **Farmon Hamroyev,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of the USA, member of the Democratic Youth Movement 'Uighon Uzbekiston' (Awaken, Uzbekistan')
12. **Rafick Ganiyev,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Sweden, former representative of 'Ezgulik' Human Rights Society in Ferghana,
13. **Nuriddin Nizom,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of the Netherlands, member of the Democratic Youth Movement 'Uighon Uzbekiston' (Awaken, Uzbekistan')
14. **Nigina Malikova,** citizen of USA, representative of the Association 'Human Rights in Central Asia' in the USA
15. **Kudrat Babadjanov,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Sweden, Freedom of Press Group of Uzbekistan, Timro,
16. **Bahodyr Isamuhamedov,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Sweden, Chair of the 'Mahalla' Project for supporting citizens' local self-government institutions, Stockholm
17. **Surat Ikramov,** citizen and resident of Uzbekistan, Chair of the Initiative Group of Independent Human Rights Defenders of Uzbekistan
18. **Safar Bekjan,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Switzerland, member of the International PEN, Lozano
19. **Dustnazar Hudoinazarov,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Sweden, Chair, Society for protection of refugees from Uzbekistan
20. **Kamoliddin Rabbimov,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Kazakhstan, political scientist
21. **Hatam Hadjimatov,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Norway, author of the Project 'Vatandosh, http://jakob.clan.su/ ,
22. **Maksud Bekjan,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Norway, writer, member of the Norway Helsinki Committee, Oslo
23. **Alisher Taksanov**, citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Switzerland, freelance journalist
24. **Vitaly Krasilovsky,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of the USA, lawyer
25. **Ulugbek Zainobiddinov,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Ukraine, human rights activist
26. **Mufaffarmirzo Iskhakov,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Norway
27. **Shavkat Gaziyev,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Sweden
28. **Bakhtior Tuichiev,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Ukraine
29. **Gelsem Adelshina,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Sweden
30. **Nasrullo Saidov,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Canada, former Member of Parliament (Supreme Council of Uzbekistan)
31. **Avaz Fayazov,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Ukraine, representative of 'Birlik' party in Ukraine
32. **Oleg Marutik,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Norway, representative of the movement 'For Democratic Reforms and Minority Rights in Uzbekistan' in Norway
33. **Sergey Goron,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Norway, representative of the movement 'For Democratic Reforms and Minority Rights in Uzbekistan' in Scandinavia
34. **Anvar Khasanov,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Sweden
35. **Ma'ruf Abdugafforov,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Sweden, representative of 'Erk' party in Stockholm
36. **Yuldash Ochilov,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Sweden, representative of 'Erk' party in Sweden
37. **Feruza Mirzakulova,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Sweden, member of 'Erk' party
38. **Mashhura Salohiddin,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Sweden, journalist
39. **Alexander Urinov,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Sweden, Asian ex-champion of weightlifting
40. **Yan Be'fer,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Sweden,
41. **Andrey Zhidick,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Sweden,
42. **Nabijon Akibayev,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Sweden,
43. **Flora Gorohova,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Sweden, activist of 'Erk' party,
44. **Akmal Gaziyev,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of France, Muslim activist
45. **Anvar Boboev,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, member of ERK Democratic Party, resident of Sweden, Kadskrona, Sweden.

46. **Natalia Bushueva,** Citizen of Uzbeksitan, journalist, resident of Sweden, Solefftio, Sweden.

47. **Zakirjon Ibragimov,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, journalist, resident of Sweden, Kalmar, Sweden.

48. **Sukhrob Rahmatov,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, member of ERK Democratic Party, resident of Sweden, Gavle, Sweden.

49. **Shokhista Djuraeva,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, member of ERK Democratic Party, resident of Sweden, Stockholm, Sweden.

50. **Fazliddin Nurmukhmammedov,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, member of ERK Democratic Partt, resident of Sweden, Stockholm, Sweden.

51. **Maruf Abdugaffarov,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, member of ERK Democratic Party, resident of Sweden, Stockholm, Sweden

52. **Gulchekhra Pirnazarova,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, member of ERK Democratic Party, resident of Sweden, Stockholm, Sweden

53. **Varid Gadirov,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, member of ERK Democratic Party, resident of Sweden, Sundsval, Sweden

54. **Shukhrat Babajanov,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, journalist, resident of Sweden, Prague, Czech Republic

55. **Khurmat Babajanov,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, journalist, resident of Czech Republic, Prague, Czech Republic

56. **Alezander Simonenko,** Born in Uzbekistan, person without nationality, activist of the civil rights movement, resident of Sweden, Vernamy, Sweden

57. **Yuldash Khalilov,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, member of ERK Democratic Party, resident of Sweden, Stockholm, Sweden

58. **Avaz Isakov,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, member of «Ezgulik», human rights society, resident of Kyrgyzstan

59. **Shaira Dzhuraeva,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, member of Birlik party, resident of Sweden, Helsinburg, Sweden

60. **Isomiddin Shamsiddin,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, member of Birlik party, resident of the USA

61. **Shokhruh Halikulov,** Citizenn of Uzbekistan, resident of Egypt, Alezandria, Egypt.

62. **Rashid Atajanov,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, human rights defender, resident of Canada, Toronto, Canada

63. **Bakhrom Hamraev,** Born in Uzbekistan, human rights defender, citizen of Russia, Moscow, Russia

64. **Tulkin Karaev,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, human rights defender, resident of Sweden, Timro, Sweden,

65. **Tumaris Dadajanova,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, member of «Wake Up, Uzbekistan», youth movement, resident of Sweden, Helsinburg, Sweden

66. **Sevara Kamolova,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, member of «Wake Up, Uzbekistan», youth movement, resident of Sweden, Stockhol, Sweden

67. **Nigora Dadajanova,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, member of «Wake Up, Uzbekistan», youth movement, resident of Sweden, Helsinburg, Sweden

68. **Utkur Dzhuraev,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, member of Birlik, resident of the USA, St Lois, Missuri, USA

69. **Anvar Karimov,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, member of Birlik party, resident of the USA, California, USA

70. **Avaz Karimov,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, member of «Wake Up, Uzbekistan», youth movement, resident of the USA, California, USA

71. **Djamshid Bokiev,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, member of Birlik party, resident of Ukraine, Kiyev, Ukraine

72. **Makhbuba Azimova,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, member of Birlik party, resident of Ukraine, Kiyev, Ukraine

73. **Bakhodir Bokiev,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, member of Birlik party, resident of Ukraine, Kiyev, Ukraine

74. **Murod Rakhimov,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, member of Birlik party, resident of Ukraine, Kiyev, Ukraine

75. **Turgun Shamsiev,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, member of Birlik party, Uzbekistan

76. **Inom Bobokhonov,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, member of Birlik party, resident of Ukraine, Kiyev, Ukraine

77. **Rafik Eshmatov,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, member of Birlik party, resident of the USA

78. **Dilmurod Isakov,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, member of Birlik party, resident of Kyrgyzstan

79. **Alim Ataev,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of France, former Chairman of «Uzkhlebprodukt» association, Le Mans, France

80. **Gafur Yuldoshev,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, journalist, resident of Canada, Toronto, Canada

81. **Anvar Sadriev,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, journalist, member of «Ozod Dekhkon» party, Kyrgyzstan

82. **Evgeni Dyakonov,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, editor of www.uzbek-people.narod.ru, resident of Norway, Oslo, Norway

83. **Matlyuba Azamatova,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, journalist, resident of Sweden, Stockholm, Sweden

84. **Mukhiddin Kurbanov,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, member of the Central Council of Birlik party, resident of Sweden, Orebro, Sweden

85. **Khabibullo Narbutaev,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, member of the Central Council of Birlik party, resident of Sweden, Yuppsala, Sweden

86. **Jahongir Siddikov,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, member of ERK Democratic Party, resident of the UK, London, UK
87. **Bayramli Yusupov,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Denmark
88. **Bakhtiyar Kuzibaev,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, member of ERK Democratic Party, resident of Norway, Honnefos Norway.
89. **Kahramon Atayev,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of France
90. **Rakhmatulla Alibaev,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, human rights defender, resident of Sweden, Timro, Sweden
91. **Bakhtior Khasan,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of Ukraine
92. **Avazhon Muhtarov,** citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of the USA, former MP
93. **Tursunboy Nazarov,**Citizen of Uzbekistan, member of ERK Democratic Party, resident of the USA.
94. **Mashrab Murodi,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, member of ERK Democratic Party, resident of the USA.
95. **Ramil Gafullin,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of the USA.
96. **Anvar Akramov,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of the USA.
97. **Ilkhom Erkin,** Citizen of Uzbekistan, resident of the USA.

About the Coalition

The Coalition Against Forced Child Labour in Uzbekistan was established in order to raise awareness within the international community about the scope and the scale of forced child labour in Uzbekistan's cotton industry.

The Coalition has been initiated by three Europe-based non-governmental organizations: Uzbekistan Initiative London (UK), the Association "Human Rights in Central Asia" (France) and the International Working Group for Peace-building (Germany). Apart from these three NGOs, the Coalition consists of 140 Uzbek activists and additional NGOs who signed the most recent petitions in support of a boycott of Uzbek cotton. The Coalition is open to new members and welcomes those who want to join.

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