

April 24, 2012

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton:

We write to ask that, as part of your ongoing advocacy on behalf of human rights around the world, you urge the government of Uzbekistan to immediately take the appropriate steps to abide by its international commitments to end state-sponsored forced labor and child labor, beginning with an invitation to the International Labour Organization (ILO) to monitor the 2012 cotton harvest.

Once again in 2011, the government of Uzbekistan fully implemented its state-controlled forced labor system for cotton production. As in previous years, the Uzbek government required farmers to grow cotton, and local provincial government offices (khokimiyats) mobilized students from elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, trade schools and universities to plant, weed and harvest to meet their assigned quotas. According to reports by the the Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights, local observers, UNICEF and reporting by the State Department, the khokimiyats forcibly mobilized labor, including children as young as age 10 in the provinces of Andijan, Bukhara, Djizzak, Fergana, Kashkadarya, Khorezm, Namangan, Samarkand, Surkhandarya, Syrdarya and Tashkent. State-sponsored forced labor in Uzbekistan has consistently included adults as well. City and district administrators instruct business owners to send their employees to pick cotton. Last year, employees from the General Motors plant in Andijan reportedly were forced to take “voluntary vacations” to harvest cotton. Local rights activists such as Gulshan Karaeva, Nodir Akhatov, and Elena Urlaeva who attempted to monitor the use of forced labor during the 2011 cotton harvest in various regions of Uzbekistan were arbitrarily detained and in some cases threatened with prosecution.

The State Department’s *2011 Trafficking in Persons Report* identified negligible progress by the government of Uzbekistan to end the practice of forced labor, and it identified the government quota system as a root cause of the forced labor system of cotton production. Uzbekistan remained on the Tier 2 Watch List in 2011 for the fourth consecutive year, presumably because the Uzbek government had “a written plan that, if implemented, would constitute making significant efforts to comply with the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act’s (TVPRA) minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is devoting sufficient resources to implement the plan” (22 USC § 7107). However, according to Ambassador George Krol, with whom we met recently at the Global Chiefs of Missions Conference, the Uzbek government has not accomplished much. The 2011 TIP report also recommended that the government of Uzbekistan invite a mission of the ILO to monitor the 2011 cotton harvest. This did not happen.

In 2012, the government of Uzbekistan has demonstrated no progress toward eliminating forced labor and child labor in cotton production. The most recent plan adopted by the Uzbek government essentially calls for self-policing, including a government-organized monitoring of the upcoming harvest. At the January 25, 2012 public hearing on the Uzbek government’s continued eligibility for

trade benefits under the U.S. Generalized System of Preferences, Ambassador Ilhom Nematov again denied openly to U.S. government representatives that there was any forced labor, stating, “It's not forced labor because, you know, today literacy in Uzbekistan is 100 percent.” He also denied the existence of the cotton production quota system and confirmed that the Uzbek government had no plans to invite a mission of the ILO to monitor the 2012 cotton harvest. Given its continued denials that forced labor exists and its role in organizing the forced labor cotton production system, the Uzbek government’s self-monitoring plan cannot possibly constitute “significant efforts” to eliminate forced labor, as required by the TVPRA (22 USC § 7107). As a result, there are no grounds for granting another waiver of the legislatively-required downgrade of Uzbekistan to Tier 3 status in the 2012 TIP report.

We understand that on May 2-3, 2012, the Uzbek government will convene representatives of the United Nations Children’s Fund, the ILO Moscow Office and the European Commission in Tashkent to discuss Uzbekistan’s compliance with its international treaty obligations. While the meeting is a welcome dialogue, it can only be considered an indication of progress if it results in a formal invitation from the Uzbek government to the ILO to conduct unfettered monitoring of the 2012 cotton harvest. We strongly urge that in conjunction with this meeting the U.S. government inform the authorities in Tashkent that the only way the State Department can justify waiving a downgrade of Uzbekistan to Tier 3 in this year’s TIP report is if Uzbekistan commits to invite the ILO to conduct unfettered monitoring of this fall’s cotton harvest.

We thank you again for your support and advocacy in promoting human rights and eliminating forced labor and forced child labor. We understand that you have a number of important issues to consider with respect to Uzbekistan, but we firmly believe that human rights, including forced labor and forced child labor, are fundamental concerns that cannot be ignored.

Sincerely,

The Cotton Coalition:

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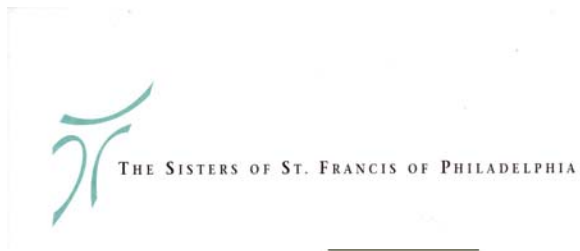


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cc: Hilda L. Solis, Secretary of Labor  
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Michael H. Posner, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor  
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