

May 11, 2010

Assistant Secretary Robert Blake
Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia
United States Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Assistant Secretary Blake,

As you know, it has been widely documented that each autumn the Government of Uzbekistan systematically mobilises hundreds of thousands of children to pick cotton in the country's cotton fields. We are working within a broad network of garment brands and retailers, NGOs, trade unions, industry associations and others, in a joint effort towards eradicating this practice.

Although Uzbekistan has recently signed two ILO conventions on child labour, Nos. 182 and 138, and issued a decree ostensibly prohibiting the practice, information from around the country demonstrated that the government continued to rely on the state-orchestrated mass mobilisation of children to bring in the 2009 cotton harvest.

Under ILO procedures, international employers and trade unions have brought forward information related to the use of forced labour in Uzbekistan's cotton sector and requested an ILO review of the country's compliance with its commitments to ILO conventions on forced labour (Nos. 29 and 105).

This year the ILO's Committee of Experts has requested that Uzbekistan supply full particulars to the International Labour Conference on its implementation of Convention No. 182 at its next session in June. We therefore urge the Government of the United States to do everything it can to ensure that the Government of Uzbekistan fully participates with the Conference in Geneva in June.

We hope that the Government of the United States will raise this issue bilaterally with the Government of Uzbekistan, and will specifically recommend that:

1. The Government of Uzbekistan fully participate in the upcoming International Labour Conference in Geneva in June 2010;
2. The Government of Uzbekistan invites an ILO observer mission that will have full freedom of movement and timely access to workers and civil society actors, to assess the implementation of Conventions 138 and 182 during the 2010 cotton harvest.

In order for the Government of Uzbekistan to fully appreciate the importance of participating in the Conference in June, and subsequently inviting the ILO to Uzbekistan for technical assistance, it must be encouraged to do so by a range of national governments. Therefore, stakeholders are making similar requests to the governments of Belgium, France, Germany, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

Due to the approaching date of the International Labour Conference, we encourage you to raise this issue bilaterally with the Government of Uzbekistan in a timely manner, so they have adequate time to consider this issue before the conference commences in June.

We would also like to request a meeting with you, to discuss the issue in more detail. Please contact Bama Athreya at (202) 347 4100 ext. 106 or bama.athreya@ilrf.org at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

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Executive Director
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