

November 2, 2010

Guy Ryder
Deputy Director General
International Labour Organization

Dear Mr. Ryder,

We are writing to request your attention, as well as the attention of the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Committee of Experts, to the review of Uzbekistan's implementation of the forced labor conventions, Nos. 29 and 105, and the implementation of Convention No. 182 on worst forms of child labor. We appreciate your attention to the problem of forced child labor in cotton harvesting in Uzbekistan. As you may be aware, a broad coalition of interested stakeholders, including trade unions, human rights organizations, investors, and brands and retailers of cotton apparel, noted with interest the review of this case by the Committee on the Application of Standards at the June 2010 International Labour Conference (ILC) in Geneva.

The Standards Committee conclusions recommended that an ILO observer mission take place this year. Unfortunately, the Government of Uzbekistan has rejected the possibility that such a mission occur before the next ILO Committee of Experts review. We note with concern that the cotton harvest is now underway in Uzbekistan, and there have been a number of reports that child labor continues to be used. Human rights observers within Uzbekistan have issued spot reports indicating that children as young as 11 are being mobilized by local authorities in several regions. Village schools have been closed in these regions and children are required to participate in the cotton harvest.

We were encouraged by the Government of Uzbekistan's participation at the ILC, but remain concerned with its continuing unwillingness to acknowledge its direct role in mobilizing children on a massive scale to work during the fall cotton harvests. We believe an important opportunity for progress on this issue has been missed. As noted, the Committee on the Application of Standards recommended to the Government of Uzbekistan that it invite an ILO observation mission during the 2010 cotton harvest. Acceptance of such a mission by the government might have established the basis for much needed assistance in addressing the issue. In the absence of such a step, we have not seen any other indicator of meaningful attention to this abuse.

We continue to support an ILO review of measures taken by the Government of Uzbekistan, to date, to address continuing labor rights violations, and we hope an ILO mission would provide further recommendations to the Government of Uzbekistan on appropriate additional measures.

We call these matters to the attention of the Committee of Experts in hope that this information may be of some interest in light of the continued review of Uzbekistan's compliance with conventions it has signed.

American Apparel & Footwear Association



As You Sow



American Federation of Teachers



Business Social Compliance Initiative



American Federation of Labor Congress and Industrial Organizations



Calvert Investments



Anti-Slavery International



Center for Reflection, Education and Action



Ethical Trade Initiative



National Retail Federation



GES Investment Services



Retail Industry Leaders Association



Human Rights Watch



United States Council for International Business



International Labor Rights Forum

