



April 25, 2016

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Secretary of State
United States Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

We appreciate your engagement in the fight against human trafficking and in Central Asia. In advance of the State Department's annual report on trafficking in persons, we write to urge the State Department to place Uzbekistan in Tier 3 in the *2016 Global Trafficking in Persons Report*.

The Uzbek government has used forced labor to produce cotton for its entire twenty-five year history, despite having ratified international conventions prohibiting forced labor in 1997 and established laws against forced labor. Over the past year, instead of "serious and sustained efforts to eliminate severe forms of trafficking in persons," the government once again forced more than a million citizens to pick cotton and farmers to grow cotton under menace of penalty. While allowing the International Labour Organization to lead monitoring, the government undermined the ILO's efforts by coercing people to sign consent statements, instructing citizens to lie to monitors, and presenting false records. Furthermore, officials increased the frequency and severity of attempts to silence citizens documenting forced labor.

Viewed against the Trafficking Victims Protection Act Minimum Standards for the Elimination of Trafficking in Persons, the Uzbek government remains one of very few worldwide that continues to directly orchestrate human trafficking. The Uzbek government has not prosecuted any perpetrators of forced labor. In 2015, the government instead punished the victims. For example, the governor of Gallaorol district in Jizzak region ordered the arrest of Dr. Yusuf Esirgetov, chief doctor of the district's central hospital, for not fulfilling the cotton harvest quota assigned to the hospital, and Dr. Esirgetov died of a heart attack days after his release from jail. The government has also not protected victims of forced labor and instead retaliated against complainants. For example, following a kindergarten teacher's complaint, submitted by an independent labor rights monitor to the national trade union federation hotline, the Jizzak district prosecutor threatened to dismiss complainants following the harvest. Additionally, instead of training officials to combat trafficking, the prime minister ordered bailiffs and police to repossess the farmers' property for debts or unfulfilled production quotas. Officials confiscated livestock, tractors, even televisions without court orders or valuation processes.

Progress towards fulfilling a state's duty to protect its citizens' right to freedom from forced labor must start with the state itself not using forced labor. Hence, Tier 3 is the only appropriate placement for the government of Uzbekistan, and it would help lead Tashkent to undertake serious efforts to end the use of

forced labor. Such efforts would include: enforcing laws prohibiting forced labor, including by prosecuting officials who violate them; ending mandatory quotas and penalties against farmers who do not fulfil them; raising and eventually freeing cotton procurement prices, and allowing independent human rights organizations, activists and journalists to report concerns without fear of retaliation.

Sincerely,

The Cotton Campaign

Advocates for Public Interest Law

Alternative Turkmenistan News

American Apparel & Footwear Association

AFL-CIO

Anti-Slavery International

Bennett Freeman, Cotton Campaign Steering Committee and former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Democracy, Human Rights and Labor

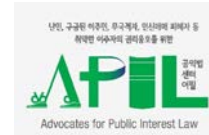
Child Labor Coalition

Daughters of charity, Province of St. Louise

Dignity Health

Eileen Fisher

The Eurasian Transition Group, e.V.



Human Rights Watch



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International Labor Rights Forum



International Partnership for Human Rights



International State Crime Initiative



Mercy Health



Mercy Investment Services, Inc.



National Consumers League



National Retail Federation



No Slavery Australia



Northwest Coalition for Responsible Investment



Open Society Foundations



Portfolio Advisory Board Adrian Dominican Sisters



Retail Council of Canada



Responsible Sourcing Network



Retail Industry Leaders Association



St. Joseph Health



Solidarity Center



Stop the Traffik



Sunshine Coalition



Tashabbus



Textile Clothing & Footwear Union of Australia



U.S. Fashion Industry Association



Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights



Walden Asset Management



Walk Free



CC: Pamela Spratlen, United States Ambassador to Uzbekistan
Thomas E. Perez, Secretary of Labor
Sarah Sewall, Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights, Department of State
Nisha Desai Biswal, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, Department of State
Daniel N. Rosenblum, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Central Asia, South and Central Asia Bureau (SCA), Department of State
Sarah Fox, Special Representative for International Labour Affairs, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, Department of State
Sara Aviel, United States Executive Director, World Bank
Susan Coppedge, Ambassador-at-Large, Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, Department of State