



November 19, 2015

Ms. Laura Tuck, Vice President for Sustainable Development
Mr. Cyrill Muller, Vice President for Europe and Central Asia
The World Bank
1818 H St, NW
Washington, DC 20433

Dear Ms. Tuck and Mr. Muller:

We write to express serious concerns of ongoing forced labor in World Bank project affected areas in Uzbekistan. The Uzbek government has not fulfilled its commitments to enforce laws prohibiting forced and child labor in the areas in which it is implementing Second Rural Enterprise Support Project (P109126) and Additional Financing for Second Rural Enterprise Support Project (P126962), South Karakalpakstan Water Resource Management Improvement Project (P127764), and the Horticulture Development Project (P133703). Given the Uzbek government's violations of national laws, international laws and the World Bank's own project agreements, we strongly urge the World Bank to suspend disbursements until the government ends the use of forced labor in all project-affected areas.

The World Bank appropriately identified independent, third-party labor rights monitoring, a grievance redress system, and commitments to enforce laws prohibiting forced and child labor as needed mitigation measures for projects in Uzbekistan. These mitigation measures were cited to secure Bank Board approval of new projects and the Inspection Panel's decision to not investigate links between forced labor and the RESP II project. Unfortunately, none of these measures have been fully implemented.

First, throughout 2015 the Uzbek government has forced farmers to fulfil production quotas and other citizens to fulfil cotton harvest quotas under threat of penalty, as detailed in [Annex 1](#). This conduct violates Uzbek national laws and international conventions prohibiting forced labor. Officials assigned annual production quotas to farmers in the first quarter and enforced them, including with threats of imprisonment and seizure of crops. From April through August, officials forced thousands of citizens to weed cotton fields. Since September 8, the government has forced citizens to harvest cotton under threat of penalty nationwide. Under orders from district and regional officials, administrators have mobilized teachers, nurses, doctors and other public sector workers by threatening to fire them. Neighborhood associations (mahallas) have carried out orders from local officials and mobilized retirees and mothers by threatening to cut their pensions and child-care payments. Heads of universities and high-schools have mobilized students under threat of expulsion, including children in the Boz district of Andijan, Pakhtakor district of Jizzak, and Khazarasp district of Khorezm.

The Uzbek government's enforcement of production quotas assigned to farmers and enforcement of field-work quotas assigned to citizens are the very definition of forced labor,ⁱ which, as the ILO Committee of

Experts has explained, includes forms of coercion such as physical violence, psychological coercion and the loss of rights or privileges.ⁱⁱ Furthermore, the government uses forced labor to generate income from cotton sales, in violation of its commitment to not use forced labor for economic development.ⁱⁱⁱ

Second, while the ILO is essential to support the application of labor conventions in Uzbekistan, it is incorrect to characterize the monitoring led by the ILO in partnership with the Uzbek government of state-led forced labor as “third-party.” Further, instead of cooperating with the ILO, the Uzbek government has taken extraordinary measures to cover up its use of forced labor.

Prior to the cotton harvest, officials required teachers and students to sign statements that they participate in the harvest “voluntarily” and instructed teachers to tell foreigners that they pick cotton voluntarily. The presence of Uzbek government representatives with ILO monitors reduces the likelihood that any citizen will report coercion to the ILO. Citizens reported that they have seen advertisements of a forced-labor complaint hotline but would never use it, because they fear retaliation by officials.

Police have repeatedly arrested, attacked, and intimidated citizens documenting forced labor, in violation of their rights, and undermining the ability of the ILO to obtain all information concerning forced labor. For example, police arrested Elena Urlaeva and subjected her to a body-cavity search on May 31. In August the prosecutor’s office threatened to press criminal charges against a human rights monitor in Karakalpakstan, under the criminal code article 244, Establishment, Direction of or Participation in Religious Extremist, Separatist, Fundamentalist or Other Banned Organizations, which carries up to 20 years imprisonment. Police arrested Elena Urlaeva with her family in Kuyichirchik district, Tashkent region on September 19, and police arrested and beat Mr. Tihonov in Angren city, Tashkent region on September 20. Police arrested Elena Urlaeva and Malohat Eshankulova on September 29 and ordered body-cavity searches of the two women during their 14-hours of detention. On October 20, police opened charges against Dmitry Tihonov, and the same day his home office was burned down, destroying his archive of evidence of forced labor, and additional materials stored were confiscated from a room in his house untouched by the fire. On November 16, police arrested Uktam Pardaev, confiscated his files, computer and camera, and presented him with charges that carry a penalty of up to five years in prison.

The Uzbek government’s continued use of forced labor and use of violence to suppress efforts to monitor labor rights in World Bank project areas demonstrate a lack of commitment to the agreements it signed with the World Bank. We urge the Bank to suspend all disbursements of finance to the Uzbek government under the RESP II, Karakalpakstan, and Horticulture projects until the government fulfils its commitments not to utilize forced or child labor on World Bank project affected areas. The World Bank should require the government to take the following steps toward this goal:

1. Instruct all government officials and citizens that act on behalf of the government to not use coercion to mobilize anyone to work, including farmers, children, students, public-sector workers, private-sector workers, pensioners, mothers and others receiving public welfare support, and the unemployed;
2. Initiate fair judicial processes that conform to international standards against government officials found to have forced citizens to pick cotton and hold accountable those found guilty with penalties that reflect the severity of the crime and serve as a deterrent for future crimes;

3. Allow independent journalists, human rights defenders, and other individuals and organizations to document and report concerns about the use of forced labor without fear of reprisals; and
4. Initiate a time-bound plan to reform root causes of forced labor in the agriculture sector, including:
 - a. Increase financial transparency in the agriculture sector, including by ensuring national budgets reviewed by the Oliy Majlis include expenditures and income in the agriculture sector, eliminating the Selkoyfond, ensuring taxes paid in the sector go to the national budget, and replacing the dual system of credit and banking operations with a transparent system of banking that provides farmers' access to cash and credit;
 - b. Abolish mandatory production quotas and grant farmers autonomous management of agricultural land;
 - c. Ensure the state-established procurement prices for cotton, wheat and silk reflect the costs of production, including costs of voluntary labor, and over time abolishing the state monopoly on cotton, wheat and silk purchasing;
 - d. De-monopolize agricultural input suppliers; and
 - e. Conduct a complete survey of the condition of agricultural land to create an updated inventory and use the results to guide the optimization of the tax system for participants in the chain of cotton production—cultivation, production, processing, and sale—to distribute the tax burden equitably along the chain.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and have appreciated our discussions with your staff regarding forced labor in Uzbekistan and World Bank programming over the last two years. We would like to meet with you to discuss our concerns further.

Sincerely,
 The Cotton Campaign:
 Advocates for Public Interest Law



American Apparel & Footwear Association



AFL-CIO

Anti-Slavery International



Association for Human Rights in Central Asia



Bennett Freeman, Cotton Campaign Steering Committee Member and former U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor

Brian Campbell, Legal Adviser to the Cotton Campaign

Center for Reflection, Education and Action



Child Labor Coalition



Dignity Health



Environmental Justice Foundation



Protecting People and Planet

The Eurasian Transition Group, e.V.



Fair World Project



Farmworker Association of Florida



Food Chain Workers Alliance



Human Rights Watch



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International Labor Rights Forum



International Partnership for Human Rights



International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations



Mercy Investment Services



National Consumers League



Northwest Coalition for Responsible Investment



Open Society Foundations



Pesticide Action Network Asia and the Pacific



Responsible Sourcing Network



Rotarian Action Group Against Child Slavery



Sisters of Charity Health System



Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia



Solidarity Center



Stop the Traffik



Sunshine Coalition



Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, Uniting Church in Australia



Textile, Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia



Trusted Clothes



Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights



Walk Free



Warehouse Worker Resource Center



CC: World Bank Board of Executive Directors

Annex 1: [Chronicle of Forced Labor 2015](#)

Endnotes:

¹ ILO Convention No. 29 concerning Forced or Compulsory Labour (Forced Labour Convention), adopted June 28, 1930, 39 U.N.T.S. 55, entered into force May 1, 1932, Article 2, stating “forced or compulsory labour shall mean all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily.”

ⁱⁱ ILO, “Giving Globalization a Human Face,” 2012, ILC.101/III/1B, http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_norm/@relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_174846.pdf, at paragraph 270.

ⁱⁱⁱ ILO Convention No. 105 concerning Abolition of Forced Labour, adopted June 25, 1957, entered into force, January 17, 1959, at Article 1b, stating “Each Member of the International Labour Organisation which ratifies this Convention undertakes to suppress and not to make use of any form of forced or compulsory labour...(b) as a method of mobilising and using labour for purposes of economic development.”