



Statement from the Cotton Campaign on the Start of the Cotton Harvest in Uzbekistan

Today the Government of Uzbekistan declared the start of the annual cotton harvest. To meet the government's national quota officials are again this year forcing farmers to fulfill state-established production quotas and forcing children and adults to pick cotton under threat of punishment. Income from Uzbek cotton sales will again disappear into the extra-budgetary Agriculture Fund, to which not even the Uzbek parliament has access. This is modern-day slavery that only the Uzbek government can end by finding the political will to do so.

Last year, the Uzbek Government demonstrated that it does respond to international pressure by accepting International Labour Organization (ILO) monitoring of the 2013 harvest and reducing the number of children under age 16 forced to pick cotton. The Government's demonstrated ability to change practices unilaterally reminds us that forced and child labor are state policy, not the result of poverty or other forms of exploitation.

So far this year, the Uzbek government's decisions are not encouraging. Officials again [imposed](#) production quotas on farmers, [forced](#) citizens to weed and prepare the cotton fields, [ordered](#) teachers to sign up to work the harvest or resign, and [required](#) parents to sign statements that their children would pick cotton or be expelled from high school. Uzbek officials have told foreign counterparts that this year the government has decreed that no children under age 18 will be mobilized to pick cotton. Yet the government, which completely controls all public media, has [failed to inform](#) the population or local officials.

The time to end state-orchestrated modern-day slavery in Uzbekistan is now. We urge the Uzbek government to take the following steps immediately:

1. Instruct government officials and citizens acting on behalf of the government that coercing anyone to pick cotton is prohibited and anyone who violates this prohibition will be prosecuted;
2. Allow farmers the ability to recruit labor by setting the price for raw cotton above production costs, including labor; setting minimum wages for work in the cotton sector sufficiently high to attract voluntary labor; and publicly advertise, on behalf of farmers, to recruit unemployed citizens to work the harvest;
3. Allow independent human rights organizations, activists and journalists to investigate and report on conditions in the cotton production sector without the threat of retaliation;
4. Permit unfettered access for the ILO to conduct a survey of the application of ILO Convention No. 105 on the Abolition of Forced Labour throughout the Uzbek economy, with the participation of the International Organisation of Employers, International Trade Union Confederation and International Union of Food Workers; and
5. Establish and implement time-bound reforms of the cotton sector, including reporting all state expenditures and revenues from the cotton sector in national accounts that are provided to the

Uzbek Supreme Assembly (Oliy Majlis), ending the practice of re-allocating agricultural lands as a penalty against farmers who do not fulfill cotton quotas, replacing quotas with incentives, and de-monopolizing agriculture input markets and sales markets.

Throughout the 2014 cotton harvest, Uzbek citizens will be monitoring and reporting regularly, and we will support them. Reports will be posted online at:

<http://uzbekgermanforum.org/category/cotton-chronicle/> & <http://www.cottoncampaign.org/reports/>.

The Cotton Campaign:

Advocates for Public Interest Law



American Apparel and Footwear Association



American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations



American Federation of Teachers



Anti-Slavery International



Association for Human Rights in Central Asia



Australian Council of Trade Unions



Boston Common Asset Management



BOSTON COMMON
ASSET MANAGEMENT, LLC

Calvert Investments



Child Labor Coalition



Dignity Health



Eileen Fisher



Environmental Justice Foundation



The Eurasian Transition Group, e.V.



Inkota netzwerk e.V.



International Labor Rights Forum



National Consumers League



National Retail Federation



Open Society Foundations



Responsible Sourcing Network



Retail Council of Canada



Retail Industry Leaders Association



Shareholder Association for Research & Education



Solidarity Center



Stop the Traffik



Textile Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia



United States Fashion Industry Association



Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights



Walden Asset Management



Walk Free



The [Cotton Campaign](http://www.cottoncampaign.org) is a global coalition of trade unions, human rights NGOs, socially responsible investors, and business associations coalesced to end forced labor in Uzbekistan's cotton sector.