

June 28, 2011

Honorable Hillary Clinton  
Secretary of State  
US Department of State  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton,

We represent a broad spectrum of stakeholders that share a continued concern over the widespread use of forced child labor in the cotton sector in Uzbekistan. We thank you and your staff for your attention to this issue in recent years, and for the very helpful reporting on this issue in the annual Human Rights Report and the Trafficking in Persons Report.

We were disappointed to note that despite strong language in the interim report, the annual Trafficking in Persons Report, issued today, fails to downgrade Uzbekistan to Tier 3, despite the clearly documented and egregious nature of the country's state-sanctioned and widespread use of forced child labor. Representatives from our stakeholder coalition met with Ambassador CdeBaca and his staff on May 26. We understood that in order for a country to remain on the Tier 2 Watch list, the State Department would require credible evidence that the country had a written plan that, if implemented, would demonstrate significant effort and dedication of resources to this problem. In this case, there appears to be no such evidence.

The only development of note was the government's initiative announced in April 2011 to form another inter-ministerial working group to focus on child labor issues, but our assessment is that this is purely a gesture designed to avoid a downgrade to Tier III rather than a genuine effort to actually address the problem. This view is very much in line with the conclusions reached earlier this month by the authoritative international body in this field, the ILO Committee on the Application of Standards. After discussions at the annual International Labor Conference (ILC), the Committee reported that:

“While noting the establishment of a tripartite interministerial working group on 25 March 2011, the Committee observed that the Committee of Experts had already noted the establishment of an earlier interdepartmental working group on 7 June 2010, for on-the-ground monitoring to prevent the use of forced labour by school children during the cotton harvest. It noted with regret the absence of information from the Government on the concrete results of this monitoring, particularly information on the number of children, if any, detected by this interdepartmental working group (or any other national monitoring mechanism) engaged to work during the cotton harvest. In this regard, the Committee regretted to note that the significant progress that had been made regarding economic reform and growth had not been accompanied by corresponding progress with regard to combating the use of children for cotton harvesting. The Committee expressed its serious concern at the insufficient political will and the lack of transparency of the Government to address the issue of forced child labour in cotton harvesting.”

At the ILC, the representative of Uzbekistan acknowledged that his government has a significant credibility problem on the issue of child labor. It is for this reason that we have long argued that only by allowing a tripartite ILO mission to visit Uzbekistan during the harvest period can the government in Tashkent truly demonstrate its will to address the problem. Since the administration chose not to downgrade Uzbekistan this year, despite the Uzbek government's continued rejection of any ILO engagement, we urge the administration to make clear to the Uzbek government that full cooperation with the ILO, including acceptance of an ILO mission, is the minimum requirement for it to avoid being downgraded to Tier III in the next Trafficking in Persons report.

Thank you for your attention to our concerns and for your leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,

American Apparel and Footwear  
Association (AAFA)

American Federation of Labor and  
Congress of Industrial Organizations  
(AFL-CIO)

American Federation of Teachers

Calvert Investments

Center for Reflection, Education and  
Action (CREA)

Child Labor Coalition

GlobalWorks Foundation

Human Rights Watch

International Labor Rights Forum

Media Voices for Children

National Consumers League

National Retail Federation

Not for Sale Campaign

Open Society Foundations

Responsible Sourcing Network

Retail Industry Leaders' Association

Solidarity Center

United States Association of Importers of  
Textile and Apparel (USA-ITA)