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State Dept. Trafficking Report Fails to Hold Uzbekistan to Account for Forced Child Labor

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US Government Should Downgrade Uzbekistan's Status for Continued Exploitation in Cotton Fields

See a sign-on letter ^[2] endorsed by ILRF to Secretary Clinton related to Uzbekistan's status in the 2011 Trafficking in Persons report.

Despite the continued widespread state-sanctioned forced child labor in Uzbekistan's cotton fields, the annual Trafficking in Persons Report released by the US Department of State today failed to downgrade Uzbekistan to Tier 3 which highlights countries that do not fully comply with the minimum standards and are not making significant efforts to do so. After finding that the government of Uzbekistan continues to force its citizens to harvest cotton for the government through a rigid quota system, the State Department chose not to downgrade Uzbekistan stating that it was their belief that Uzbekistan "has a written plan that, if implemented, would constitute making significant efforts to bring itself into compliance with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is devoting sufficient resources to implement that plan."

The Government of Uzbekistan has not introduced significant new efforts, beyond public relations initiatives, to end the egregious abuses occurring in the nation's cotton production and the government quota system. Rather, government officials continue to deny the problem while at the same time force children to leave schools across the country in order to pick cotton during the harvest season, during the annual conference at the International Labor Organization (ILO).

Earlier this month, the authoritative international body in this field, the ILO Committee on the Application of Standards, noted the lack of progress in addressing forced child labor and "expressed its serious concern at the insufficient political will and the lack of transparency of the Government to address the issue of forced child labor in cotton harvesting." The ILO also called for a special high-level mission of experts to monitor the cotton harvest to ensure that forced labor is not employed, and also to assist in the development of a meaningful action plan. The Government of Uzbekistan has rejected the assistance of the ILO.

Brian Campbell, Director of Policy and Legal Programs at the International Labor Rights Forum said, "This year's Trafficking in Persons report fails to hold the Government of Uzbekistan accountable for its continued exploitation of children to produce cotton. Though the State Department claims that Uzbekistan has a plan of action and is providing resources to fulfill that plan, the Trafficking in Persons report fails to take into account the continued insistence by the government of Uzbekistan that forced labor does not exist in Uzbekistan. Nor does the report describe the plan of action or explain the

basis for its finding that Uzbekistan is devoting sufficient resources to the plan. All of this begs the question: how can there be a plan to eliminate forced labor in the cotton fields of Uzbekistan when the official policy of the Uzbekistan government continues to be that no forced labor exists in the first place? The US Government must do everything in its power to push for an end to forced child labor in Uzbekistan, beginning with an ILO mission to observe to country's quickly approaching fall harvest season."

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The International Labor Rights Forum is an advocacy organization dedicated to achieving just and humane treatment for workers worldwide. For more information, please visit www.LaborRights.org.

Source URL: <http://www.laborrights.org/stop-child-forced-labor/cotton-campaign/news/12529>

Links:

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[2] <http://laborrights.org/stop-child-forced-labor/cotton-campaign/resources/12530>