

## Students call on European Parliament to postpone the EU-Uzbekistan textile protocol vote

Dear UK Members of the European Parliament,

**CC to:** Chairs of the International Trade, Foreign Affairs and Human Rights Committees

**We are Student's Unions and Societies from five major UK universities representing over 57,000 students, writing in solidarity with the students of Uzbekistan who find themselves hit particularly hard by state-led forced labour in this year's cotton harvest. We urge you not to give consent at this time to the EC-Uzbekistan partnership and cooperation agreement and bilateral trade in textiles (EU-Uzbekistan textile protocol).**

**From the reports we have seen, the Uzbek government has made up for a reduction in child labour by forcing more young adults to pick cotton.** The Uzbek Forum for Human Rights has documented that thousands of students from all over Uzbekistan were mobilised en masse.<sup>1</sup> The administrators of universities are responsible for ensuring that students meet quotas which are set by the highest levels of government.<sup>2</sup> Screenshots of text messages from Kokand College and Gulistan State University show summons ordering students to the harvest.<sup>3</sup>

**Evidence shows that students who refuse to participate are threatened with poor grades or expulsion.** Four students were expelled from Kokand Pedagogical University for not participating in the harvest. One student was forced to sign a statement saying: "I guarantee that I will participate fully in the 2016 cotton harvest, pick 80 kilograms of cotton per day, and fulfil all other rules of the cotton harvest. If I do not fulfil these requirements, I agree to be expelled."<sup>4</sup> (Source: *Uzbek German Forum for Human Rights*). **We are concerned that students are unable to voice their objections** and have seen several reports of independent Uzbekistan activists monitoring the harvest being routinely harassed and detained by the authorities, making it difficult for them to advocate for vulnerable students.<sup>5</sup>

**We are also disturbed by the poor, crowded and unsanitary living conditions students reportedly endure.** One female student at Andijan Agricultural Institute, living temporarily in a school whilst picking cotton, reported to independent monitors in Uzbekistan: "I am scared and so I am wearing warm clothes. [...] Every day, we collect 50-60 kg of cotton. What we earn covers only food expenses. You work like a slave from morning till night, not enough food, and should sleep and wake up hungry again."<sup>6</sup>

**We are alarmed by the effect this has on the learning of our Uzbek counterparts,** who should be allowed to continue with their studies, rather than being kept in the fields for up to 60 days and deprived of two months of education. They are not paid to pick cotton and denying them their education is a **clear breach of their human rights**.

**Priti Patel, the UK Secretary for the Department of International Development, recently echoed Prime Minister Theresa May in calling on the global community to go further and work faster to stop modern slavery and child exploitation.**<sup>7</sup> Patel stated, "as a member of the first ever Government taskforce on modern slavery I will replicate the leadership already shown in the UK to work with international governments, multilaterals, civil society, religious leaders and businesses to stamp out modern slavery..."<sup>8</sup> **The system of forced labour in Uzbekistan appears to be a form of modern slavery.** Considering this, we expect UK MEPs, in their role as elected representatives, to continue to uphold the highest standards when dealing with the issue of forced labour in Uzbekistan.

Adopting the textile protocol now, before any demonstrable evidence of the government's willingness to eradicate forced labour and to allow independent activists to participate in harvest monitoring, will effectively condone

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://harvestreport.uzbekgermanforum.org/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://harvestreport.uzbekgermanforum.org/d-r-makhmudovs-official-reply-to-elena-urlaevas-complaint/>

<sup>3</sup>

[http://www.antislavery.org/includes/documents/cm\\_docs/2016/5/5\\_points\\_to\\_consider\\_before\\_allowing\\_uzbek\\_cotton\\_into\\_european\\_markets.pdf](http://www.antislavery.org/includes/documents/cm_docs/2016/5/5_points_to_consider_before_allowing_uzbek_cotton_into_european_markets.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Statement of Samarkand State University student [name withheld] to dean Sh. U. Umidullaev, September 9, 2016.

<http://eltuz.com/ru/?p=1105>.

<sup>5</sup> <http://harvestreport.uzbekgermanforum.org/uzbekistan-fearless-human-rights-activists-continue-to-monitor-cotton-harvest/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://harvestreport.uzbekgermanforum.org/you-work-like-a-slave-from-morning-till-night-not-enough-food-and-should-sleep-and-wake-up-hungry-again/>.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-steps-up-support-to-end-modern-slavery-and-child-exploitation-globally>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-steps-up-support-to-end-modern-slavery-and-child-exploitation-globally>

modern slavery and permit the human rights violations of Uzbek students in further harvests. **We therefore ask you to withhold your consent until such evidence has been produced.**

Yours sincerely, in solidarity with the students of Uzbekistan:

**Oxford Against Slavery, Oxford University**

**Oxford University Student's Union sabbatical officers:**

Jack Hampton - SU President

Eden Bailey - VP Access & Academic Affairs

Bethany Currie - VP Charities & Community

Marina Lambrakis - VP Graduates

Orla White - VP Women

Sandy Downs - VP Welfare & Equal Opportunities

**School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) Against Human Trafficking**

**Sweatshop Free, Oxford University**

**Tainted Goods, Oxford University**

**University College London Student's Union, representing 37,000 students**

**University College London Amnesty International Society**

**University of the Arts Raising and Giving (RAG) Society**

**University of the Arts Student's Union, representing 20,000 students**