

Cotton Farmers & Workers demand freedom from forced labor



Cotton continues to be **the essential starting point of diverse global supply chains**, from apparel to medical supplies, automobiles to dollar bills. Its production employs millions of farmers and field workers, with the potential to support their livelihoods.

Yet cotton farmers and field workers alike are **subjected to exploitative practices, deprived of their rights to decent work.**

The most egregious cases of labor abuses in cotton production are in **Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan**, where the governments force farmers to grow cotton and more than a million people to pick it, all under threats of punishment and in violation of national laws and universally recognized labor rights.



As the International Labour Conference opens discussion of labor standards in global supply chains, the people of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan continue to document state-led forced labor in the cotton sector and to campaign for freedom.

State-led Forced-Labour Cotton Production in Uzbekistan & Turkmenistan

Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan operate the largest **state-orchestrated forced labor systems** of cotton production in the world.

Annually, the Uzbek government forces farmers to grow cotton and **more than a million** school teachers, doctors, nurses and other citizens to harvest it, all under threat of punishment. The Turkmen government also forcibly mobilizes tens of thousands to work in cotton fields.

Both governments **threaten, detain, assault and imprison** citizens who attempt to report this human rights crisis. The practice violates the rights of Uzbek and Turkmen citizens under national and international laws.

Profits from cotton sales solely benefit the government elite in these two Central Asian nations, and the forced-labor cotton ultimately ends up in brand-name retail and apparel stores and therefore, in the **majority of clothes we buy and wear.**



Uzbek & Turkmen Governments are Silencing Labor Rights Monitors

Officials increased the frequency and severity of attempts to silence citizens documenting forced labor this past year. In Uzbekistan, police arrested, beat and filed charges of “disorderly conduct” against **Dmitry Tikhonov**, the same day his home office was destroyed by arson, eventually forcing him to flee the country. Officials arrested **Uktam Pardaev**, confiscated his computer and files used for monitoring, then detained him for two months and subjected him to beatings, and released him on probation and the condition he would no longer report human rights concerns. Officials arrested Ms. **Elena Urlaeva** five times, subjected her to body-cavity searches twice, and are now forcibly detaining her in a psychological hospital. In Turkmenistan, officials intimidated many human rights monitors into silence by arbitrarily arresting and imprisoning journalist **Saparmamed Nepeskuliev**, who reported on state corruption and human rights abuses, including forced labor in the cotton sector.



Dmitry Tikhonov



Uktam Pardaev



Elena Urlaeva



Saparmamed Nepeskuliev

Denial of freedom of association and repression of human rights monitors enables forced labor

As essential elements of their coercive systems of cotton production, the **governments of Uzbekistan & Turkmenistan deny freedom of association and repress human rights monitors.** There are **no independent trade unions** in either country. The Uzbek government has not ratified ILO Convention 87 on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise and represses independent organizing. In 2014 the government imprisoned and tortured independent union organizers **Fahriddin Tillaev** and **Nuriddin Jumaniyazov**.



Fahriddin Tillaev



Nuriddin Jumaniyazov

Forced-labor cotton in global supply chains

Two-thirds of cotton from Uzbekistan is manufactured into apparel in Bangladesh and China. 80% of cotton from Turkmenistan is manufactured into apparel in Turkey. **The forced-labor cotton goods line retail shelves worldwide**, their trade facilitated by companies knowingly supplying forced-labor goods and others managing opaque supply chains, falling short of human rights due diligence responsibilities.



COTTON CAMPAIGN

END FORCED LABOR IN CENTRAL ASIA

The **Cotton Campaign** is a global coalition of human rights, labour, investor and business organizations dedicated to eradicating child labour and forced labour in cotton production.

NO

 to cotton tainted with human rights abuses!

At the International Labour Conference:

- **We demand the Uzbek and Turkmen governments to enforce laws prohibiting forced labor, cease retaliation against human rights monitors, and reform their cotton sectors.**
- **We call on workers and employers groups to press the Uzbek and Turkmen governments to permit citizens to report rights concerns without fear of reprisal, and to support independent human rights defenders and freedom of association in the two countries.**
- **We call on companies to avoid cotton from Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan until the respective governments' end forced labor and to establish independent monitoring and reporting of human rights impacts in their operations in the two high-risk countries, in compliance with the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.**

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