The cotton harvest in Uzbekistan started on September 14, 2019. According to contracts with the State Agency for Employment, customers from the Ministry of Emergency Services were asked to provide lists of cotton pickers. Large enterprises were ordered to provide lists of cotton pickers. Feruzbek Matyokubov, head of the electricity company for the Bagat district, wrote a letter on August 6 to the head of the electricity company of the Syrdarya region.

However, UGF has received reports that the coercion of employees of state organizations continues. In the Andijan region, the head of the Khanabad district writes in a letter to the head of the Syrdarya region: “Every year it is the same situation. Nothing has changed”, said a fireman in conversation with us to the cotton fields and we should tell everyone who asks that we are locals who don’t go to the cotton harvest we should quit. They (the factory management – Ed.) eat our cotton across the country. We need cotton.”

The cotton harvest is considered a form of forced labor, and the government of Uzbekistan has been under international pressure to improve conditions for workers. Despite protests and reports of forced labor, the government continues to push workers to pick cotton.

The prosecutor of Baysun district, Kholmat Kuliyev, is demanding that the heads of district departments resign. In the Surkhandarya region, Muzrabat district, a thousand soum for cotton picking was deducted from their monthly salary of 900 thousand soum. Oil depot workers are being forcibly sent to pick cotton. In addition, they say that 200 thousand soum for cotton picking was deducted from their monthly salary of 1,000 thousand soum. According to information received from UGF monitors, police officers across the country are under pressure to force local residents to go to the cotton fields.

According to a UGF monitor in the Fergana region, there was an order at the beginning of the month for officials to receive a 50 thousand soum per day. However, UGF has received reports that the coercion of employees of state organizations continues. In the Bukhara region, a third of firefighters are forcibly mobilized to pick cotton. Employees of the Main Department of Economy of the Syrdarya region wrote a letter to the head of the district. According to the employee, the money is false. Every year it is the same situation. Nothing has changed, said a fireman in conversation with us to the cotton fields and we should tell everyone who asks that we are locals who don’t go to the cotton harvest we should quit. They (the factory management – Ed.) eat our cotton across the country. We need cotton.”

According to Order 492 from September 27 signed by the Acting Minister of Emergency Services, the mobilization of security personnel and cadets of the Ministry of Internal Affairs Academy in Tashkent was announced. Employees of all organizations in the Bagat district were sent to pick cotton. Every year the government sends fire service employees to the cotton harvest. It is worth mentioning that every year the fire service employees are forced to pick cotton.

The 2-hour audio recording (obtained by UGF) describes how an overall mobilization for the cotton harvest was announced. The district chief said: “Put your people on all six roads. You must work as well if you don’t work I will fire you. You must work as well if you don’t work as a volunteer, you must work as a volunteer. If you lose your job, I will not allow you to go to a wedding or attend other objects: “There is a difference between the current situation and the state of emergency, they need to pick cotton because of the “state of emergency”, to which one of the officers said.”

The audio recording reveals Oybek Kholboyev admonishing and insulting heads of organizations: “Get the hell out of here, I cannot see your damn face… I need a cotton picker.” One of the farmers sent an audio recording of the meeting to Radio Ozodlik.

Starting from September 15, employees of all organizations in the Bagat district were sent to pick cotton. “There are six roads leading out of our district. I was told that people leave on these roads,” a resident of the Bagat district shared information with Radio Ozodlik.

A monitor from UGF in Karakalpakstan interviewed employees of four banks located in the Shurtan gas chemical complex. They confirmed that they have received an order from the district chief to form groups of pickers. When asked who was responsible for hiring the pickers, the employee had to hire two persons each for cotton picking or give 2 million soum each.

Employees of the Main Department of Economy of the Syrdarya region wrote a letter to the head of the district. “There is a difference between the current situation and the state of emergency, they need to pick cotton because of the “state of emergency”, to which one of the officers said.”

Employees of the Bukhara region: A third of firefighters in the Bukhara region are forcibly mobilized to pick cotton. As a source in the Fergana region's internal affairs department, a firefighter told Ozodlik: “Agriculture does not concern us. We only take care of the maintenance of public order.”

Radio Ozodlik has published a letter sent by farmers from the Asaka district of the Andijan region. A farmer of Bagat district wrote to UGF on October 2. “Everything is the same; forced labor continues in Bagat district,” the head of the Khanabad district has not stopped. "Everything is the same; forced labor continues in Bagat district."

The head of the Bagat district and found that the district’s hokim had “violated labor laws.” As a result, Oybek Kholboyev was punished with 20 thousand soum. However, UGF has received reports that the coercion of employees of state organizations continues. In the Bukhara region, a third of firefighters in the Bukhara region are forcibly mobilized to pick cotton. Every year the government sends fire service employees to the cotton harvest. It is worth mentioning that every year the fire service employees are forced to pick cotton.

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