



August 15, 2008

President Islam Abduganievich Karimov
Office of the President
Uzbekistan Street 43
Tashkent, UZBEKISTAN

President Islam Abduganievich Karimov
Embassy of Uzbekistan
1746 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036-1903

Dear President Karimov,

As the trade associations representing the companies that account for over 90 percent of U.S. purchases of cotton and cotton-based merchandise, we respectfully request your immediate attention regarding published reports alleging the forced use of children as young as 10 to 15 years old in harvesting cotton in Uzbekistan.

Reports by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the news media allege children are forced to work in cotton fields under hazardous conditions in clear violation of international labor standards as well as in violation of the children's basic human rights. The reports allege that the Government of Uzbekistan is directly orchestrating the forced employment of child labor in the harvesting of cotton.

We recognize that the national laws of Uzbekistan prohibit the use of forced and child labor and that Uzbekistan is a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the two ILO (International Labor Organization) Conventions on abolition of forced labor (Conventions 29 and 105). As an ILO member State, Uzbekistan is obligated to respect the principles of the ILO *Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*, which include the abolition of forced child labor. In addition, we have learned with enthusiasm that Uzbekistan is now a signatory to the ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labor (Convention 182) and is in the process of becoming a signatory to the Convention on Minimum Age (Convention 138). We commend you and the Parliament of Uzbekistan for taking these actions. Given these recent steps, we look forward to your extension of an invitation to the ILO to offer assistance in implementing these newly-ratified conventions.

Clearly, the legal framework against the use of forced child labor exists in Uzbekistan. Despite this fact, there are continued reports of the systemic and persistent use of forced child labor in the cotton fields of Uzbekistan.

Our member companies are firmly committed to sourcing in countries respectful of human and workers' rights. In fact, this commitment is embedded in their supplier codes of conduct which guide them to source in countries and with business partners that follow workplace standards consistent with international labor standards.

As such, the organized use of forced child labor to harvest cotton in Uzbekistan is completely unacceptable. In fact, a growing number of North American and European retailers and brands have already taken measures to exclude Uzbek cotton harvested by forced child labor from their merchandise. Others will likely soon follow if this situation remains unchanged.

Uzbekistan is the third largest cotton exporting country in the world. Annually, Uzbek cotton exports generate over U.S. \$1 billion through the export of over 900,000 tons of cotton. This income is vital to the Uzbekistan's economy, representing around 20 percent of the country's exports. Cotton, in this context, has accounted for over 15 percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in recent years. Consequently, any action by our member companies to limit or exclude the use of Uzbek cotton harvested by forced child labor in the production of merchandise could have dire consequences for the Uzbek government and its ability to meet the social and economic needs of Uzbekistan and its people.

Therefore, we urge the Government of Uzbekistan to take decisive and immediate actions to end the use of forced child labor in the cotton fields of Uzbekistan as well as ensure that the affected children (and their families) are not displaced without any sort of safety net or transitional assistance. We recommend your government work closely with the ILO to develop and implement forced child labor eradication targets and action plans. We also hope to work together with your government to address this important issue in a positive and constructive manner for all parties involved.

Thank you in advance for your immediate attention regarding the allegations of forced child labor in Uzbekistan's cotton production. We will be contacting your embassy in the near future to confirm the receipt of our letter and to discuss measures and actions to address this situation and ensure that all cotton from Uzbekistan is harvested free of forced child labor.

Sincerely,



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About Our Organizations

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American Apparel & Footwear Association (AAFA)

<http://www.apparelandfootwear.org>

The American Apparel & Footwear Association (AAFA) is the national trade association representing apparel, footwear and other sewn products companies, and their suppliers, which compete in the global market. AAFA's mission is to promote and enhance its members' competitiveness, productivity and profitability in the global market by minimizing regulatory, commercial, political, and trade restraints.

National Retail Federation (NRF)

<http://www.nrf.com>

The National Retail Federation is the world's largest retail trade association, with membership that comprises all retail formats and channels of distribution including department, specialty, discount, catalog, Internet, independent stores, chain restaurants, drug stores and grocery stores as well as the industry's key trading partners of retail goods and services. NRF represents an industry with more than 1.6 million U.S. retail companies, more than 25 million employees - about one in five American workers - and 2007 sales of \$4.5 trillion. As the industry umbrella group, NRF also represents over 100 state, national and international retail associations.

Retail Industry Leaders Association (RILA)

<http://www.rila.org>

The Retail Industry Leaders Association (RILA) promotes consumer choice and economic freedom through public policy and industry operational excellence. Its members include retailers, product manufacturers, and service suppliers--which together provide millions of jobs and operate more than 100,000 stores, manufacturing facilities and distribution centers domestically and abroad.

U.S. Association of Importers of Textiles and Apparel (USA-ITA)

<http://www.usaita.com>

USA-ITA is the trade association of the U.S. textile and apparel importing and retailing community, representing their interests before the Congress, the Administration, the business community and the public, and closely coordinating with exporting industries and governments around the world. Currently celebrating its 20th anniversary, with its headquarters in New York City and an office in Washington, D.C., USA-ITA addresses international trade law, negotiation and policy issues, including regulatory and corporate responsibility matters.