



August 15, 2008

Diane Brisebois
President & CEO
Retail Council of Canada
1255 Bay Street, Suite 800
Toronto, Ontario M5R 2A9 Canada
Fax: (416) 922-8011
djbrisebois@retailcouncil.org

Dear Ms. Briesebois:

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 the forced use of children in harvesting cotton in Uzbekistan.

Reports by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), and the news media allege that 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.

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. We are certain that your member companies have similar standards, and we invite you to join with us to challenge the situation in Uzbekistan.

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 have urged the Government of Uzbekistan to take decisive and immediate actions to end the use of forced child labor in the cotton fields of Uzbekistan. Our associations recently wrote directly to President Karimov of Uzbekistan, Ambassador Kamilov of Uzbekistan, International Labor Organization (ILO) Director-General Somavia, and U.S. Secretary of State, Dr. Condoleeza Rice. Copies of those letters are included for your reference. We urge you to contact the Uzbek Government directly regarding the Uzbekistan forced child labor violations. We hope that you will engage your government and your membership in urging the immediate elimination of the use of forced child labor in the harvesting cotton in Uzbekistan

We look forward to hearing from you on any plans that your association may have for engaging the Uzbek Government to finding a solution and thus ensuring that all cotton from Uzbekistan is harvested free of forced child labor. We look forward to working together to eliminate the use of child labor in Uzbekistan.

Sincerely,



Kevin M. Burke
President & CEO
AAFA
1601 N. Kent St.
Suite 1200
Arlington, VA 22208
703-524-1864



Tracy Mullin
President & CEO
NRF
325 7th St. NW
Suite 1100
Washington, D.C. 20004
202-783-7971



Sandra L. Kennedy
President
RILA
1700 N. Moore St.
Suite 2250
Arlington, VA 22209
703-841-2300



Laura E. Jones
Executive Director
USA-ITA
13 E. 16th St.
Sixth Floor
New York, NY 10003
212-463-0089

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.