



Roundtable on forced labour and child labour in Central Asia

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IUF –global trade union representing workers throughout the food chain. Membership - 374 affiliated organizations in 120 countries, including Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, not in Uzbekistan, Tadjikistan, etc.

Over 132 million children aged 5 to 14 worldwide work in agriculture and they make up to 70 per cent of all working children. These child workers are exposed to dangerous work and toxic pesticides, work long hours, sometimes in extreme temperature, and can end trapped in forced or bonded labour. Work generally interrupts or ends children schooling. So while we welcome retailer interest in ending forced child labor, we think they have to have a wider commitment to assist in improving conditions generally in agricultural supply chains.

Coming on to the specific items for this meeting forced labour and child labour in Central Asia:

In 1997, IUF has committed to work on the elimination of child labour, in 2007 recognising the particular problems in agriculture we joined the global partnership on child labour in agriculture set up on WDAFL 2007.

Our affiliates in Central Asia region are calling on global action on elimination of all child labour in cotton growing and we know that it is widespread in other crops that don't attract as much media attention. Our actions should not be driven by cotton retailers interested at worst in protecting their image or at best only in cleaning THEIR supply chains. Our priority is what is best for the children and what will ensure not just quick-fix solutions in cotton but what will ensure long-term, sustainable action to eliminate child labour in Central Asia and in other parts of the world. Given the weight of child labour in the sector, few products can confidently be confirmed to be child labour-free.

Retailers need a long-term commitment to clean their supply chains.

However, we recognise that the Uzbekistan state is in breach of ILO Conventions, specially the ILO C. 105 on the Abolition of Forced Labour

Convention and measures have to be taken to correct it. This year report of the Committee of experts has noted the observations of the Trade Union Council of Uzbekistan from 2004, regarding the practices of mobilization of public sector workers, schoolchildren, and university students for purposes of economic development in cotton production.

Forced labour is unacceptable.

The IUF mission to Central Asia in 2007, found out that there is CL in all regional countries. There is decent work deficit in agriculture, bad OHS and low wages that make many adult workers move to work to urban areas or migrate to other countries for better payment and are replaced by children in the field.

Therefore, improving the living and working conditions of adult workers is key to the elimination of forced and child labour, which means enforcing employment rights and strengthening the position of trade unions in the sector.

But, we recognise special measures should be taken in Uzbekistan in regard to government mobilisation of children for cotton picking.

IUF supports the call of the Workers Group spokesperson in the ILO debate on the forced labour report that the Government should follow the example of the Government of Brazil and acknowledge the existence of forced labour thus opening the door for supportive action by the international community.

One solution would be the replacement of forced child labour by unemployed adults who receive fair wages and have decent working conditions.

THANK YOU!