

Remarks by Raluca Dumitrescu  
Cotton Campaign Coordinator, GLJ-ILRF

Press Conference:  
Cotton Campaign and Uzbekistan Government on  
Labor Conditions in Uzbekistan's Cotton Sector

Tashkent, Uzbekistan  
March 10, 2022

**Building on my colleagues' remarks, I am pleased to let you know that the Cotton Campaign is shifting to a new direction.**

While we had called on global brands and retailers to stay away from Uzbekistan for over a decade, we are now encouraging them to look at Uzbekistan as a potential new partner for sourcing yarn and cotton textiles.

**But sourcing must be done responsibly, in a way that benefits the cotton workers of Uzbekistan.**

The textile industry has an enormous potential to create much needed jobs here.

We know that every year, during the harvest, over 1,5 million people pick cotton.

On top of that, there are already 400,000 people working at the other stages of cotton production, and we know that the number will increase as the sector is quickly developing.

But we must ensure these are decent jobs - with fair pay, safe working conditions, and respect for workers' rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining.

**Together we can build the mechanisms needed to provide these protections and create a new kind of supply chain.**

**A supply chain in which labor rights are respected and protected at all stages of cotton production.**

We know that despite tremendous efforts by international civil society, human rights advocates, and academics, the global cotton supply chains remain incredibly opaque.

We often cannot trace where our clothing, bed sheets or towels are produced and in what conditions.

On top of that, irresponsible purchasing practices are pushing labor standards down in many garment producing countries over the world.

This, in combination with weak national labor legislation, has led to millions of garment and cotton workers globally working in unsafe conditions, at risk of losing their lives every day on the job, or in forced labor, both by private or state actors.

**Global brands and retailers, Uzbek cotton producers, and the Government of Uzbekistan now have the chance to create a new model for producing and sourcing cotton goods.**

A model that ensures full transparency about labor practices, at all stages of production, including the cotton farms, spinners, fabric mills, and manufacturing units.

We are therefore calling on all brands interested to begin sourcing from Uzbekistan, on Uzbek cotton producers, and the Government of Uzbekistan to work with civil society and labor partners - both international and national, independent partners to establish and maintain strong labor practices in the Uzbek supply chain.

We must work together to create robust mechanisms for monitoring, capacity building and grievance, which are essential to ensure decent work.

**Uzbekistan has the potential to become a key sourcing country for sustainable textiles.**

But all stakeholders must play their part to create the conditions for responsible sourcing and an enabling environment for labor rights so that workers, independent worker organizations, independent trade unions, and independent NGOs can advocate for decent working conditions.

Our Cotton Campaign Coalition members - human and labor rights NGOs, independent trade unions, responsible investors and brand associations – stand ready to provide expertise and resources to build capacity and create an enabling environment for labor rights in Uzbekistan.

Thank you