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Business & Human Rights Resource Centre

Berlin, 22 Januar 2019

Dear Ms Skybenko,

On behalf of the Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights (UGF), I am writing to draw your attention to the systemic use of forced labour by the Uzbek-Spanish joint ventures Maxam-Chirchiq and Ammofos-Maxam, located respectively in the cities of Chirchiq and Almalyk in the Tashkent region of Uzbekistan.

Every year, employees from Maxam-Chirchiq and Ammofos-Maxam are forcibly sent to pick cotton for up to two months during the harvest. This often involves living and working in inappropriate conditions, away from their families, with inadequate food, water and sanitary facilities.

Employees risk dismissal from their jobs for refusal to pick cotton and many who speak to journalists and human rights activists are unwilling to reveal their names for fear of reprisals by their employers.

Our research has found that forced labour at Maxam-Chirchiq and Ammofos-Maxam is not limited to picking cotton. In the summer of 2018, 120 employees of Maxam-Chirchiq were forced to go to the city of Akhangaran every day (located 82 km from Chirchiq) to work on demolishing buildings and clearing construction waste.

Employees of Maxam-Chirchiq and Ammofos-Maxam have been forcibly mobilised to harvest cotton every autumn for many years under orders of the Government of Uzbekistan. We are aware of two deaths of employees of Maxam-Chirchiq and Ammofos-Maxam related to work in the cotton fields during the harvests of 2014 and 2018.

Death of Sohijjon Mutalibov (24), October 5, 2018

On September 26, 2018, 24-year-old Sohijjon Mutalibov, an employee of Ammofos-Maxam was forcibly sent to pick cotton. On October 5, Sohijjon died, 200 km from his home in hospital in the Dustlik district of the Jizzakh region, after his skull was fractured in a fight with a local resident. Sohijjon had been working at the Ammofos-Maxam chemical plant for five years and every autumn was forced to pick cotton. The family does not know what caused the fight with the local resident and a court case is currently ongoing. Sohijjon Mutalibov was the only working member of his family and therefore could not refuse the company's demand to pick cotton. Refusal to do so would have meant risk of dismissal from his job.

Death of Narimon Mustafayev (53), October 10, 2014

Narimon Mustafayev, a 53-year old employee of Maxam-Chirchiq, located in the town of Chirchiq, died on October 10, 2014 in the Arnasay district of the Jizzakh region. Mr. Mustafayev and other workers from the company had been sent to pick cotton in Arnasay where they had rented rooms from local residents. On October 7, Mustafayev did not go to the field, because he was feeling ill. At ten o'clock in the evening, he made his way to the toilet but there was no electricity, making it impossible to see the stairs. Mustafayev slipped in the darkness and fell from the second floor to the first. He died in hospital from injuries sustained in the fall on October 10. Mustafayev worked as a mechanic and had a small son. A *hokimiyat* representative of the Arnasay district confirmed to Radio Ozodlik, the Uzbek service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, that 500 workers of Maxam-Chirchiq had been sent to pick cotton from the beginning of September 2014.

In light of these tragic events we are calling for:

- An independent investigation into the use of forced labour at both Maxam-Chirchiq and Ammofos-Maxam and that the findings of the investigation are made public;
- Measures to be implemented that prevent the use of forced labour of employees of companies in future;
- Meetings with the families of the deceased to agree payment of appropriate compensation for their losses.

UGF is an independent non-governmental organization with an extensive network inside Uzbekistan and years of experience of monitoring and reporting on forced labour in the Uzbek cotton sector. UGF is a frontline partner of the Cotton Campaign, a global coalition of human rights, labour, investor and business organizations dedicated to eradicating child and forced labour in cotton production.

For more information about the Uzbek government's policy of forced labour in the cotton sector, please visit UGF's website:

http://uzbekgermanforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/We_pick_cotton_out_of_fear.pdf

Watch the video report about death of Ammafos-Maxam worker Sohibjon Mutalibov:

<http://uzbekgermanforum.org/uzbek-spanish-company-implicated-in-forced-labour-with-tragic-consequences/>

Thank you for attention to this important matter. We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Umida Niyazova

Director, Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights



Appendix

Publications Regarding Forced Labour in the Uzbek Media:

“We work at the Maxam-Chirchiq enterprise in Chirchiq city in the Tashkent region. Despite the fact that we are graduates, we are forced to go out to pick cotton on weekends. Even a 60-year-old woman was not exempt and was sent to the field. Those who are not going to pick cotton should hire a replacement worker for 50,000 *soum* (approximately \$6 US) per day. And the average monthly salary is 700,000 *soum* (approximately \$87 US)! Are we slaves? We were told that we would make money picking cotton, and now they counted the cost of food and made us debtors.

If it rains, or if stones are pouring from the sky, we still have to go to the fields. There are no facilities. It is impossible to wash, there is no water, even to wash the dishes. The food we are fed is of poor quality. They even deduct for 25,000 *soum* (approximately \$3 US) for food. Most of us get sick from the harsh conditions. We demand to be freed from forced labor so that we can return home.”

Source: Radio Ozodlik October 10, 2018

<https://www.ozodlik.org/a/paxtagram-maxam-chirchiq/29569864.html>

Every day, from July 13, 2018, 120 employees of the Maxam-Chirchiq enterprise are sent to clean up construction waste in the city of Ahangaran. They work in the heat without drinking water. Administration officials of Maxam-Chirchiq confirmed sending workers to clean construction debris.

“Every day, including Saturday and Sunday, three buses leave at seven am stuffed with people. Due to the lack of seats, half of the bus passengers travel standing up for one and a half hours. We are demolishing buildings that have been scrapped. There is not even water here. The work is hard and we are threatened with dismissal if we refuse to go.

A brick fell on one employee and he was taken to the hospital. A nail went into the hand of another employee, and he was also taken to the hospital's emergency room. We do not have appropriate qualifications to work in construction. We are driven as if we are in a concentration camp; a special person observes and demands that no photos or videos are taken. We are treated like animals.”

Ikrom Kurbonaliyev, head of the press service of Maxam-Chirchiq, claims that workers are going to clean construction debris voluntarily and that the management acts in accordance with a decision of the administration of the Tashkent region.

Source: Radio Ozodlik, July 21, 2018

<https://www.ozodlik.org/a/uzbekiston-majburiy-mehnat-maxam-chirchiq/29380925.html>