

STATEMENT
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My name is Laziz Kudratov, and I am pleased to have this opportunity to share with you the perspectives of the Republic of Uzbekistan on the GSP country practices review of "child labor" in Uzbekistan.

First of all I would like to state that there are no legal, economic or social conditions and prerequisites in Uzbekistan for the use of forced child labor and any other form, attributed to "the worst forms of child labor."

Since the early days of independence, Uzbekistan has begun to establish an up-to-date regulatory framework that is responding to generally recognized international principles. The first step was the adoption of the Constitution, and enshrining in it the full range of human rights and freedoms. One of the international acts to which the Republic immediately joined after the adoption of the Constitution was the Convention on the Rights of the Child, on December 9, 1992.

In 2008, the parliament of Uzbekistan ratified two major ILO Conventions: "Concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment" (№ 138) and "On the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor" (№ 182). According to Convention 138, minimum age should not be less than the age for completing compulsory schooling; in general, not less than 15 years old.

Under the Act of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Amending the Labor Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan" and "On Guarantees of the Rights of the Child," the minimum age for employment is 16 years. In preparation for work, young people - secondary school students, academic lyceums, and professional colleges - who have reached the age of 15, can be employed in their free time with the written consent of a parent or person *in loco parentis* (Art. 77, Labor Code).

The state makes a great effort in ensuring the rights of children and youth. Among the four major producers of cotton, Uzbekistan is the only country that has accepted the fundamental ILO conventions on child rights.

In addition, public spending on social services has increased by more than five times since independence. Every year, approximately 60 percent of the state budget goes to health, education, municipal services, social protection, and other spheres to ensure the health, well-being, and advancement of the country's young citizens.

Educational reforms taking place in Uzbekistan deserve special attention; today, they meet all international standards. Annual spending on education in Uzbekistan represents 10-12 percent of

GDP, while this figure does not exceed 3-5 percent in the rest of the world. The country has implemented a unique national training program, and in 2009, introduced compulsory education for 12 years. More than 1,600 modern professional colleges and academic lyceums have been created. A compelling fact is that in 20 years of independence, there has been more than a threefold decline in infant and maternal mortality in Uzbekistan. This is another indicator that the country pays great attention to children and their health, as well as the right to qualified medical services.

UNICEF, in turn, has acknowledged Uzbekistan as a regional model of maternal and child health. The measures that are being taken in Uzbekistan are finding a positive response not only from such prestigious international organizations as the United Nations, but also among other independent organizations.

This is confirmed by the recently published report by the international organization to protect children's rights, "Save the Children." The report contains an analysis of the situation in children's health, in which Uzbekistan ranks ninth among 161 countries. This once again affirms Uzbekistan's commitment to universal values to protect the rights of children.

In order to fulfill the obligations undertaken by Uzbekistan in the framework of the International Labor Organization (ILO), the Interagency Working Group (IWG) on the preparation and submission of information on implementation of ILO Conventions ratified by Uzbekistan was created in Uzbekistan on March 25, 2011.

The IWG includes representatives from the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, the Chamber of Commerce, the Federation of Trade Unions, the Farmers Association, the National Center for Human Rights, the Ministries of Justice, Internal Affairs, National Education, Higher and Secondary Special Education, Foreign Affairs, Health as well as the Women's Committee and youth movement "Kamolot."

On September 7, 2011, the Action Plan of the IWG for cooperation with ILO on the period of 2011-2012 was approved. The plan includes 34 measures; among them, special attention will be given to activities aimed at improving the effectiveness of the obligations of Uzbekistan within the framework of the ILO; informing the public about its commitments; increasing public scrutiny; and, in particular:

- Creating a roundtable with representatives from the Parliament of the Republic of Uzbekistan on "Conventions and recommendations of the International labor conference and the issues of their implementation in the legal system of Uzbekistan";

- Enhancing and improving public authorities, civil society and nonprofit/international organizations in order to rigorously and effectively implement the ILO conventions ratified by Uzbekistan;
- Introducing legislation to combat the worst forms of child labor to the teaching programs of the systems of general, specialized secondary and higher education;
- Developing the joint comprehensive action plan by the Chamber of Commerce and Association of Farmers on the participation of employers in the implementation of ILO conventions on child labor;
- Developing systematic measures to ensure public control of trade union bodies to comply with the requirements of ILO conventions;
- Conducting outreach among the farmers of Uzbekistan to enforce the law in the employment of persons under the age of 18 years; and
- Engaging in ongoing interaction with the diplomatic corps in Tashkent, as well as with representatives of international organizations accredited in Uzbekistan, emphasizing broad coverage of the implementation of the ratified ILO Conventions.

On September 16 2011, a meeting with Mr. Jean-Michel Delmont, the Head of Uzbekistan's UNICEF Office, was held in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan. During the meeting, the representative of the Fund was informed that the Uzbek side is ready to assist in conducting observations of sites selected by UNICEF, of children picking cotton in any region of Uzbekistan.

Unfortunately, representatives of some Western community often prefer to ignore the efforts of Uzbekistan on the establishment of an open, democratic, civil society, and tend to exaggerate unsubstantiated and questionable facts, planted by partisan NGOs.

I would like to bring to your attention one fact. Among 17 countries in which, according to the U.S. Department of Labor, child labor is used to produce cotton, only Uzbekistan has been heavily and consistently criticized by the United States and the European Union. Moreover, among all 17 countries, only Uzbek cotton and its products were put under boycott by American and European companies.

This suggests bias and exploitation of this issue by some representatives of American non-governmental sector in their own narrow political, opportunistic purposes.

We believe that any adverse decision against Uzbekistan will be totally unconstructive and may harm the positively developing relations between Uzbekistan and the United States.

Thank you.