

## HEAVY LOAD OF "WHITE GOLD" – UZBEK COTTON

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### Abstract

The article describes the stages of the origin and development of cotton growing in Uzbekistan. During the years of Soviet power, it was reported that it was turned into a raw material base. Cases of the use of forced labor in cotton picking and the announcement of a boycott by the world's largest cotton-textile campaigns against it and its consequences are also covered. Thanks to the reforms implemented in the cotton industry of the republic, in subsequent years the use of forced labor in picking cotton was stopped, and as a result, the boycott of Uzbek cotton was canceled.

**Keywords:** Uzbek cotton, forced labor, child labor, boycott, Cotton Campaign, Uzbek Forum, cotton textile factories, clothing and knitting industry.

### 1. Introduction:

From the first days of autumn, the cotton picking campaign begins, in which groups of assistants, consisting of schoolchildren, students of higher education, healthcare system, employees, employees of banks and state-owned organizations, are mobilized for cotton picking in a "volunteer" manner. Such a situation continued in Uzbekistan until independence and after that until 2017.

The older part of the population remembers well, markets are closed, weddings and other events are stopped during the cotton harvest, this process continued until the end of December, and all the forces and possibilities were mobilized for the cotton harvest. All the attention of the people of the country would be focused on the information about the daily cotton harvest given through the mass media. Due to the state's efforts to use forced and child labor in the field of cotton production, the standard of living of the Uzbek people worsened and did not improve at all.

### 2. Materials and Method

The homeland of cotton is India. Mil. avv. In 3000 years ago, in the valley of the Indus river, for the first time in the world, cotton yarn was spun and cloth was produced from it.

According to historical data, cotton cultivation in Central Asia. avv. It developed from the VIII-VII centuries. From this period, the peoples of Central Asia started trade with many countries.

It is noted in the sources that in the following centuries, cotton cultivation was widely developed in Zarafshan and Marv oasis, as well as high-quality cotton fabrics were produced, which were sold in large quantities in the markets of Samarkand and Bukhara, and cotton fabrics reached Tashkent and Khorezm.

During the archaeological excavations conducted near Samarkand in 1933-1934, mil. avv. When the tomb of 720 was opened and studied, the remains of raw cotton were found. The main cotton-growing regions of this period were Bukhara, Fergana, Samarkand and lower Syr Darya regions. The most developed cotton cultivation is recorded in Tashkent region. Here, the abundance of water for

irrigating cotton crops and the population density were the main factors in the development of cotton cultivation [1].

Even during the time of the Khans, cotton cultivation was the leading place in the agriculture of our ancestors. One of the main goals of Cotton Russia in its occupation of Turkestan was to supply its textile factories with raw materials and to acquire more fertile lands for growing cotton. Turkestan cotton was sent to Orenburg via Tashkent and Kazalinsk, and from Bukhara and Khiva khanates to Kozalinsk via the Aral Sea. Cotton reached Orenburg in 5-6 months. Shipping was expensive. Previously, trade and industrialists of cotton Russia were limited to buying cleaned cotton in the markets. In order to ensure the development of production, quick ripening varieties of medium-fiber cotton were brought to our country from Mexico, and this led to the construction of many factories and the establishment of large cotton companies.

The first Russian cotton ginning factory in Turkestan was built in 1874 in Tashkent. Later, it was built in the cities of Andijan, Kattakorgan, Samarkand, Margilon, Kokan and Namangan. In these enterprises, most of the cotton cleaning work was done by hand.

Intermediary companies were engaged in buying cotton raw materials from farmers and delivering them to cotton mills. They advanced loans to additional farmers through agents for future harvests. The borrower had to hand over the grown cotton only to his creditor at a fixed price. 3/4 of all raw cotton grown in Turkestan was bought in this way. In this way, cotton growers in our country will become dependent on Russian capital.

In 1913, cotton was planted on an area of 424,600 hectares in Turkestan, and there were 208 cotton ginning factories in Fergana, Syrdarya and Samarkand regions, which employed more than 8,000 people [2].

Even during the years of Soviet power, the Union government set the strategic task of turning Uzbekistan into the main cotton base of the USSR. More than 90% of the cotton grown in Uzbekistan was transported to the textile centers of Russia. For example, in 1922, 2,697 wagons from Turkestan to the center in the direction of Krasnoyarsk, 1,150 wagons (63,470 bales of cotton), in the direction of Orenburg, 1,547 wagons (85,030 bales of cotton), a total of 2,697 wagons (148,500 bales cotton) cotton fiber was sent. Thanks to the efforts of the Soviet government to achieve cotton independence, the production of cotton in Uzbekistan increased year by year, which allowed the Soviet government to save hundreds of thousands of rubles of gold that were spent on buying cotton from abroad. By 1928, in exchange for the 543,700 tons of cotton that Uzbekistan handed over to the state, the Soviet state took the 4th place in the world in terms of cotton production and achieved cotton independence [3].

By this time, Uzbekistan began to supply 68% of the cotton grown in the USSR. In 1925, the Soviet state imported 103,100 tons of cotton, and in 1930, 57,900 tons of cotton, while in 1933, the Soviet state bought only 24,3 tons of cotton. Thanks to the hard work of Uzbek growers, the coveted country did not buy cotton from abroad, but took second place in terms of cotton production. This is how the former Soviet state achieved cotton independence [4].

In the years after the Second World War, the heavy burden of growing cotton - "white gold" became heavier for our people. For example, Uzbekistan produced 7 million 729 thousand tons of cotton in 1946-1950, 12 million 270 thousand tons in 1951-1955, and 28 million 617.6 thousand tons in 1981-

1985. These numbers show that cotton production in Uzbekistan increased by 1.5 times in 1951-1995 and by almost 4 times in 1981-1985 compared to 1946-1950 [5].

### 3.Results

Uzbekistan ranks among the top ten countries in the world in terms of cotton production, and it is one of the top five countries in terms of the quality of cotton fiber. Products made of Uzbek cotton are especially popular in the countries of the Eastern Hemisphere. Cotton products are very environmentally friendly. Cotton fabrics are always of very high quality, and clothes made from them are the safest for human health. Natural cotton fibers allow the fabric to "breathe" and at the same time absorb moisture. Therefore, cotton fabrics have great advantages over synthetic fabrics [6].

Forced and child labor has been used in cotton harvesting in Uzbekistan for many years. Against this, human rights defenders - activists of the Uzbek Forum on Human Rights - repeatedly appealed to the government for many years, but the situation has not changed.

In 2009, activists of "Uzbek Forum" turned to Cotton Campaign (Cotton Company), an international coalition of labor and rights defenders, investors and business organizations, with a petition calling for a boycott of Uzbek cotton. The main goal of this company is to make the process of cotton production completely free of child labor and forced labor, and it calls on international companies working with cotton raw materials to announce a boycott of Uzbek cotton. Large companies such as C&A, Gap, H&M, Levi Strauss&Co, Tesco and Walmart joined this call, but later the world's largest clothing companies refused to buy Uzbek cotton [7].

The boycott of Uzbek cotton will continue in the following years, for example, in 2010 there were 60 boycott participants, this year Uzbekistan exported 2.5 million bales of cotton, and by 2019 the number of boycott participants will be over 300. increased, Uzbekistan's cotton export decreased to 700 thousand bales. "Major markets such as the USA, Europe and Canada have been closed to Uzbekistan's cotton exports, and the boycott has paid off," says Nate Herman, senior vice president of the supply chain of the American Apparel and Footwear Association, which includes more than a thousand brands. [8].

After the announcement of the boycott, the Uzbek government developed a "Reform Road Map" with the support of the Cotton Campaign international coalition. Within its framework, measures were implemented to eliminate all forms of forced labor in accordance with Uzbekistan's obligations. A law has been adopted that establishes criminal liability for the use of forced labor aimed at ensuring the fulfillment of these obligations. "Strategy for the development of agriculture of the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2020-2030" was approved. According to him, the role of the state in the agrarian sector has been reduced.

### 4.Discussion

On March 6, 2020, the Decision of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PQ-4633 on "Measures for the widespread introduction of market principles in the cotton industry" was adopted. According to the decision, the state order for the production of raw cotton starting from the 2020 harvest was canceled [9].

In 2019, systematic work was carried out in Uzbekistan in order to put an end to forced labor during the cotton harvest season. As a result of the observations, several officials were punished for engaging

in forced labor and not creating the necessary working conditions for the pickers. Among them are 3 district governors, 15 deputy district governors, as well as district finance, off-budget pension fund, medicine, cadastral departments, bank offices, water supply offices, development departments, "Youth" in all regions of the republic. union" Council, there are heads of farms.

1282 messages related to forced labor have been received by the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations and the State Labor Inspectorate (hotline 1176, [www.dmi.mehnat.uz](http://www.dmi.mehnat.uz) website, @mehnathukuqbot telegram bot). Studies have revealed that in 259 of them, citizens were actually involved in forced labor, therefore, 118 of them took place during the cotton picking season. The culprits were brought to justice and fined in the amount of 772 million soums [10].

From the report of the International Labor Organization on the 2020 cotton harvest. The International Labor Organization, which conducted 9,000 interviews across the country during the 2020 cotton harvest, found that "systemic child labor has been eradicated and child labor is no longer a serious problem."

The International Labor Organization also found no evidence of systematic forced labor targeting adults, as the country was able to step up its fight against child and forced labor during the 2020 cotton campaign. This is a great achievement considering the challenges the world is facing due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2020, the share of pickers engaged in forced labor decreased by 33% compared to 2019. Changes over time across the country are dramatic: the share of forced labor in cotton picking, which was 14 percent of the total labor force in 2015, has declined to 4 percent in 2020. "ILO worked with 17 independent civil society monitoring groups, involving equal numbers of men and women to conduct research and monitor signs of forced labor at all levels, including punishing perpetrators," the report states [11].

Thus, as a result of the work carried out to cancel the boycott in our country over the past five years from 2017, in the cotton harvest season of 2021, as a result of the observation carried out by the "Uzbek Forum on Human Rights", for the first time in the republic confirmed the abolition of systematic forced labor.

In this regard, on March 10, 2022, an international press-briefing meeting was held at the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations with representatives of the Cotton Campaign international coalition that visited our country. The current state of bilateral cooperation and prospects for its development were discussed at the meeting.

The Cotton Campaign international coalition announced the end of the boycott of Uzbek cotton. It was noted that this decision was adopted by the "Uzbek Forum on Human Rights" based on the results of independent monitoring conducted in cotton harvesting in 2021.

"Between Uzbekistan and the international coalition of the Cotton Campaign, our bilateral mutually reliable cooperation has been steadily developing in recent years," said the chairman of the National Commission for Combating Human Trafficking and Forced Labor, the chairman of the Senate of the Oliy Majlis, who participated in the press briefing. Tanzila Narbayeva.

Noting that the efforts made by the National Commission for Combating Human Trafficking and Forced Labor in combating forced labor are practical and systematic, and its results are recognized not only within the country, but also by the wider international community, the head of the Cotton Campaign international coalition B. Freeman "As a result of the reforms of recent years, a completely

new environment has been formed in Uzbekistan. Not only our coalition, but also representatives of civil society and international organizations recognize the fact that forced labor is not used during the cotton harvesting season and it has been completely abolished," he noted [12].

"After urging hundreds of companies to divest from Uzbek cotton over the past 12 years, we are pleased to announce that the time has come to end the boycott of Uzbek cotton," said CEO of Responsible Sourcing Network and Cotton Campaign. Patricia Yurevich, one of the founders. - Now the companies themselves must evaluate the observance of labor rights and make a decision on the purchase of cotton from Uzbekistan" [13].

It was noted in the press briefing that Uzbekistan has the potential to become an attractive country that supplies cotton and textile products, offering transparency and traceability in the production chain through enterprises equipped with new modern equipment.

The Cotton Campaign called on brands interested in purchasing products from Uzbekistan to conduct due diligence to ensure labor and human rights are respected at all stages of production, including cotton farms, textile mills and manufacturing facilities.

"We are President Sh. We highly appreciate Mirziyoyev's initiative of the historic reforms necessary to end forced labor by the state and to reform the cotton sector of Uzbekistan and his activities in its implementation, - says one of the founders of the Cotton Campaign, the US Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor assistant former Deputy Bennett Freeman. - Now we call on the government of Uzbekistan to open space for civil society institutions and create an environment for cooperation with responsible suppliers that attract global brands and protect labor and human rights" [14].

President Shavkat Mirziyoyev congratulated the cancellation of the boycott imposed on Uzbek cotton by the Cotton Campaign international coalition. removed from the black list. This is also a huge opportunity for us, it means new markets. Due to this, by bringing raw materials of consumer products and processing them, it is possible to easily export an additional 1.5 billion dollars worth of products" [15].

"This achievement in ending systematic forced labor organized by the state was due to Uzbek labor and human rights defenders who showed courage in identifying human rights violations in the field of cotton production. Their fearless observation and reporting over the years encouraged the whole world to take action to protect the rights of Uzbek workers," says Umida Niyozova, director of the Uzbek Forum on Human Rights [16].

After the ban imposed on Uzbek cotton by international textile campaigns was canceled in 2022, wide opportunities for further development of the industry opened up. The main tasks in this direction are the measures adopted by the President on January 10, 2023, "Measures to support the activities of cotton-textile clusters, fundamentally reform the textile and sewing-knitting industry, and further increase the export potential of the sector to was defined in the Decree on It is noted in the decree that in recent years, as a result of the implementation of comprehensive measures to develop the textile and sewing-knitting industry in our country, to support the investment and export activities of industry enterprises, cotton fiber and yarn produced in the republic 45 percent of kalava is processed, and the annual export potential of the industry has exceeded 3.2 billion dollars.

In the next five years, through deep processing of cotton fiber, high value-added finished products, textile products will be increased by 2.1 times and the export rate will be increased by 2.6 times.

takeout provided. To increase the export potential of the industry to 5 billion US dollars by the end of 2023, using the production capacities of sewing and knitting products, through the large-scale state support of the textile and sewing-knitting industry of the "Uztoqiliksanoat" association. the task was to increase the level from 65% to 81%, to fill 35,000 vacancies, including providing employment to the population entered in the social registers [17].

## 5. Conclusions

Today, the cotton and textile industry of Uzbekistan is about to complete the process of transition from the export of raw materials to the export of finished and semi-finished products. In the concept developed by the government for the development of the textile and sewing-knitting industry in 2019-2025, it is planned to increase the export volume of textile products to 7 billion US dollars by 2025. This means 10 times more than the income from the export of raw cotton. The abolition of forced and child labor in our country was a great achievement of rights activists. With this, our people got rid of the heavy burden of cotton, which lasted for many years.

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