

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

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Employers and Unions unite at world forum to condemn “worst form” of child labor in Uzbekistan.

Sunday June 12th – World Day Against Child Labor.

Geneva, Friday, June 10, 2011 (ITUC OnLine): The UN’s labor agency, the International Labor Organisation, this week heard disturbing reports from both workers and employers in regards to millions of children forced into from school into hazardous work in the cotton fields of Uzbekistan.

Unions estimate that in the 2010 harvest, up to 2 million children aged between 10 and 16 years were forced to work in hazardous and dangerous conditions, with heavy lifting, exposure to pesticides and incidences of rashes, respiratory diseases, and cases of meningitis and hepatitis.

The ILO also heard that children and families who refused to take part were punished by Government officials with economic sanctions such as the removal of welfare subsidies or the cutting off of gas and electricity.

“This Sunday is World Day Against Child Labor, and the international union movement calls on Uzbekistan respect fundamental labour rights and to allow an independent committee under the auspices of the ILO to observe the next harvest,” the General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation, Ms. Sharan Burrow said today.

Ms. Burrow said that Uzbekistan was one of the world’s biggest cotton exporters.

“We will continue to highlight this state abuse of young people, and the profiteering by world cotton buyers on the backs of children forced from their school to work in appalling conditions,” Ms. Burrow said.

“We ask responsible retail clothing companies to find out where their cotton is coming from, because we will be working with international groups to track this terrible trade,” Ms. Burrow said.

The Government of Uzbekistan argued that it had put in place laws to prohibit child labor, and that they were monitoring the situation. But the Committee at the ILO, comprised of unions, employers and Governments from around the world expressed its serious concerns about the continuation of the organised child labor in the cotton fields, and called on the Governments on Uzbekistan to allow a high level international observer mission to investigate the child labor issue.

For more information, and to arrange interviews comments by the ITUC General Secretary, Sharan Burrow, please contact Mathieu Debroux on +32 476 621 018 or +32 2 224 0204 or email mathieu.debroux@ituc-csi.org or press@ituc-csi.org

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