



September 20, 2013

Atiqul Islam  
President  
Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA)  
BGMEA Complex  
23/1 Pantha Path Link Road  
Kawran Bazar, Dhaka 1215  
Bangladesh

Dear Mr. Islam:

On behalf of the undersigned associations, which represent the companies that account for over 90 percent of U.S. and Canadian purchases of cotton and cotton-based merchandise, we are writing to request information with respect to published reports that BGMEA plans to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Government of Uzbekistan to source a large amount of cotton from Uzbekistan for the Bangladesh ready-made garment (RMG) industry.

As you know from recent events, brand reputation is a vital part of the success of our members in the competitive RMG industry. Not only does this include quality, style, and value, but it also includes how the products are being made.

Our members have an interest in ensuring that the garments they produce and sell are manufactured under lawful and humane conditions.

It has been widely reported that every year the Government of Uzbekistan forcibly mobilizes over one million children, teachers, public servants, and private sector employees for the manual planting and harvesting of cotton.

In fact, the U.S. government downgraded Uzbekistan to the lowest level possible in its 2013 Annual Trafficking in Persons (J-TIP) Report, because “Internal labor trafficking remains prevalent during the annual cotton harvest, in which children and adults are victims of government-organized forced labor<sup>1</sup>.”

This government-sanctioned and government-controlled use of forced labor and child labor violates the labor laws of Uzbekistan and international laws ratified by the Uzbek government, including International Labor Organization Conventions No. 105 on the Abolition of Forced Labour and No. 182 on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

In response, many retail and brand companies have independently implemented policies against the use of Uzbek cotton by their suppliers; some have signed the Responsible Sourcing Network’s Cotton Pledge<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> p. 389, 2013 Trafficking in Persons Report, U.S. State Department, June 2013, <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2013/index.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Cotton Pledge, Responsible Sourcing Network, Updated May 2013, <http://www.sourcingnetwork.org/the-cotton-pledge>

In light of the proposed MOU with the Uzbek government, we hereby request information on what BGMEA is doing to ensure that any cotton procured through the MOU is free of forced labor and child labor. Once supplied, we would then share this information with our members for their individual consideration.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

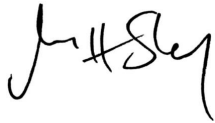
Sincerely,



Kevin M. Burke  
President & CEO  
American Apparel & Footwear Association (AAFA)



Bob Kirke  
Executive Director  
Canadian Apparel Federation (CAF)




Matt Shay  
President & CEO  
National Retail Federation (NRF)



Diane J. Brisebois  
President and CEO  
Retail Council of Canada (RCC)



Sandra L. Kennedy  
President  
Retail Industry Leaders Association (RILA)



Julia K. Hughes  
President  
U.S. Association of Importers of Textiles  
and Apparel (USA-ITA)