



October 17, 2013

The Honorable Cui Tiankai
Ambassador
Embassy of the People's Republic of China
In the United States of the America
3505 International Place, NW
Washington, DC 20008
FAX: 202-495-2138

RE: Proposed MOU to Purchase Cotton from Uzbekistan

Dear Ambassador Tiankai:

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 the Government of China plans to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Government of Uzbekistan to source a large amount of cotton from Uzbekistan for the Chinese textile and apparel industry.

As you know from recent events, brand reputation is a vital part of the success of our members in the competitive apparel 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 labor¹."

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.

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

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 Pledge².

In light of the proposed MOU with the Uzbek government, we hereby request information on what the Government of China 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)

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