



Member of the European Parliament

Karel De Gucht  
Member of the European Commission  
BE-1049 Brussels

Dear Trade Commissioner,

We, the undersigned, call for the European Commission to open a thorough investigation into Uzbekistan's continued benefit from preferential tariff arrangements (GSP), which we believe should be withdrawn in light of evidence of serious and systematic violations of human rights.

Around 90 per cent of Uzbek cotton is harvested by hand with approximately half of all cotton picked by state-sponsored forced child labour. Human rights groups estimate that hundreds of thousands of children are involved each year. Each September the cotton harvest begins. Many rural schools are closed down by government officials as children, some as young as nine, are forced to pick cotton by hand for up to three months in order to fill the shortfall in voluntary adult labour. They receive little, if any, pay. This is an extreme form of child labour, a modern day form of slavery, as children who fail to meet their targets (up to 50kg a day), or who pick a low quality crop, are reportedly punished by beatings, detention or told that their grades will suffer. Children who run away from the cotton fields, or who refuse to work, are threatened with expulsion from school.

Forced labour within the sector does not only affect children. Local administration employees, teachers, factory workers and doctors are commonly forced to leave their jobs for weeks at a time and pick cotton with no additional compensation. In some instances refusal to co-operate can lead to dismissal from work.

We are aware that a joint letter addressed to you and dated 11<sup>th</sup> April 2011, signed by Anti-Slavery et al, sets out evidence from relevant international monitoring bodies, the basis for which an investigation can be opened under the GSP Regulation.

We look forward to the Commission announcing of the opening of an investigation.

Yours,

Leonidas Donskis MEP  
Tokia Saïfi MEP  
David Martin MEP  
Bernd Lange MEP  
Niccolo Rinaldi MEP  
Robert Sturdy MEP  
Catherine Bearder MEP