



UNITED STATES
ASSOCIATION
OF IMPORTERS
OF TEXTILES
AND APPAREL

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U.S. Apparel & Retail Industry Call for the End of Forced Child Labor *Coalition Delivers Letter to Uzbekistan Embassy*

Washington, D.C. (Monday, August 18, 2008) –A coalition of the four trade associations representing the U.S. apparel and retail industries hand-delivered a letter addressed to Uzbekistan President Islam Abduganievich Karimov to Ambassador of Uzbekistan H.E. Abdulaziz Kamilov today in Washington, DC. The group urged the government of Uzbekistan to take decisive and immediate actions to end the use of forced child labor in its cotton fields. According to published reports, Uzbekistan, the world's third largest cotton exporter, is alleged to have allowed children as young as 10-15 years old to be forced to harvest cotton.

The associations are alarmed by recent reports alleging that the Government of Uzbekistan is directly orchestrating the forced employment of child labor in the harvesting of cotton. "Our member companies are firmly committed to sourcing in countries respectful of human and workers' rights," stated the coalition in the letter to President Karimov. "In fact, this commitment is embedded in their supplier codes of conduct which guide them to source in countries and with business partners that follow workplace standards consistent with international labor standards."

A vital sector of the Uzbekistan economy, cotton represents 20 percent of the country's exports, and ultimately accounts for over 15 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). The group reminded President Karimov that a growing number of North American and European companies and retailer brands have already taken measures to exclude Uzbek cotton from their merchandise because of the atrocious abuse of children in the cotton fields, and that more companies would likely follow suit if sweeping improvements are not made soon. Any action taken by companies to limit or exclude the use of Uzbek cotton would have harmful consequences for the Uzbek government and its economy.

The group noted, however, that numerous resources, including the International Labor Organization (ILO), are available to help Uzbekistan resolve this issue as well as ensure that the affected children (and their families) are not displaced without any sort of safety net or transitional assistance.

The retail and apparel coalition members - the American Apparel & Footwear Association (AAFA), the National Retail Federation (NRF), the Retail Industry Leaders Association (RILA) and the U.S. Association of Importers of Textiles and Apparel (USA-ITA) - together represent well-over 90 percent of the U.S. purchases of cotton and cotton-based merchandise. In addition to giving the letter to the Ambassador today, the coalition urged other significant organizations and people to get involved with the issue

of forced child labor in Uzbekistan. The coalition sent letters voicing their concerns to the ILO, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, the British Retail Consortium, the Canadian Apparel Federation, the Retail Council of Canada, the EuroCommerce, the Foreign Trade Association and the European Apparel and Textile Organisation (EURATEX).

The industry associations aren't the only groups to step forward to pressure the Uzbekistan government to stop child labor. A number of concerned influential social responsibility investment and non-governmental organizations are also rallying together and urging specific progressive actions.

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American Apparel & Footwear Association (AAFA) –
<http://www.apparelandfootwear.org>

The American Apparel & Footwear Association (AAFA) is the national trade association representing apparel, footwear and other sewn products companies, and their suppliers, which compete in the global market. AAFA's mission is to promote and enhance its members' competitiveness, productivity and profitability in the global market by minimizing regulatory, commercial, political, and trade restraints.

National Retail Federation (NRF) – <http://www.nrf.com>

The National Retail Federation is the world's largest retail trade association, with membership that comprises all retail formats and channels of distribution including department, specialty, discount, catalog, Internet, independent stores, chain restaurants, drug stores and grocery stores as well as the industry's key trading partners of retail goods and services. NRF represents an industry with more than 1.6 million U.S. retail companies, more than 25 million employees - about one in five American workers - and 2007 sales of \$4.5 trillion. As the industry umbrella group, NRF also represents over 100 state, national and international retail associations.

Retail Industry Leaders Association (RILA) – <http://www.rila.org>

The Retail Industry Leaders Association (RILA) promotes consumer choice and economic freedom through public policy and industry operational excellence. Its members include retailers, product manufacturers, and service suppliers--which together provide millions of jobs and operate more than 100,000 stores, manufacturing facilities and distribution centers domestically and abroad.

U.S. Association of Importers of Textiles and Apparel (USA-ITA) –
<http://www.usaita.com>

USA-ITA is the trade association of the U.S. textile and apparel importing and retailing community, representing their interests before the Congress, the Administration, the business community and the public, and closely coordinating with exporting industries and governments around the world. Currently celebrating its 20th anniversary, with its headquarters in New York City and an office in Washington, D.C., USA-ITA addresses international trade law, negotiation and policy issues, including regulatory and corporate responsibility matters.