

UN Human Rights Council, 39th Session, September 2018

**Item 6: UPR Outcome
TURKMENISTAN**

Oral statement submitted by Anti-Slavery International and Alternative Turkmenistan News

SPEAKER: RUSLAN MYATIEV

Mr Vice President, while the law in Turkmenistan indeed bans the use of forced labour, in practice it is not implemented and instead is outrageously violated.

Anti-Slavery International together with the Alternative Turkmenistan News welcomes Turkmenistan's support of the recommendation by the UK to work in partnership with the ILO to eliminate forced labour in connection with state-sponsored cotton harvesting.¹

However, the adoption of Turkmenistan's UPR outcome comes as the annual cotton harvest is now underway in the country. I deeply regret to inform the Council that, as I speak, public and private sector workers, including from hospitals, schools, factories, and banks, are in the fields, picking cotton under threat of punishment, under government orders.

Each year during the harvest, the Government forces tens of thousands of public and private sector workers to pick cotton, or pay a bribe, or hire a replacement worker to pick cotton instead. They work long hours in the fields, in poor conditions, to meet mandatory daily quotas of cotton. Their forced participation in the harvest is organised and enforced by the Government. People are intimidated, publicly censured, and threatened with wage deductions and loss of jobs in order to ensure compliance with the order to pick cotton. Pressure to fulfil quotas leads to child labour, with children picking cotton alongside parents, or even alone.

Mr Vice President, activists who monitor and report on forced labour in the cotton harvest do so at great personal risk. The Government takes extensive measures to prevent documentation. The cotton fields are under strict surveillance by the police and security services.

One of the activists, Gaspar Matalaev, has been in prison now for almost two years, arrested just days after publishing a report on the extensive use of forced labour during the 2016 harvest. He confessed under torture to politically motivated charges. The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has declared his detention arbitrary and urged the Government to remedy his situation without delay.

I urge the Government to live up to the commitments it has made during this UPR cycle. To end its use of forced labour in the cotton sector. To immediately release Gaspar Matalaev, and to allow independent monitoring of the cotton harvest.

Thank you

¹ Recommendation 114.50