



July 17, 2009

**Delivered Electronically Via Email**

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Dear Mr. Rutledge,

As the trade associations representing the companies and retailers that account for over 90 percent of U.S. purchases of cotton and cotton-based merchandise, we are concerned about reports indicating that the Dubai Multi Commodities Centre, via the Dubai Cotton Centre (DCC), has entered into a contract to sell cotton which may have been harvested with the use of forced child labor in Uzbekistan. The four undersigned trade associations sent a letter to President Islam Abduganievich Karimov on July 21, 2008 “[urging] the Government of Uzbekistan to take decisive and immediate actions to end the use of forced child labor in the cotton fields of Uzbekistan.” Our letter was in response to numerous published reports and news articles alleging the coercive use of children as young as 10-years old in harvesting cotton in Uzbekistan.

Reports by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), a video story featured on BBC and articles by the news media have alleged that children are working in cotton fields under hazardous conditions in clear violation of international labor standards and, more importantly, in violation of the children’s basic human rights. Additionally, the reports and articles allege that the Government of Uzbekistan is directly orchestrating the use of child labor in the harvesting of cotton.

We are concerned about the agreement between the Government of Uzbekistan and the Dubai Cotton Centre as it appears to circumvent the efforts of a growing number of retailers and brands to exclude Uzbek cotton in products until independent organizations can certify that cotton from Uzbekistan is no longer harvested with forced child labor.

Our member companies have established standards and industry principles to encourage their entire supply chain to adhere to international labor standards. By doing so, our member companies strive to ensure that all of the merchandise they sell is made under socially responsible conditions.

Because of these efforts, apparel companies and retailers refrain from doing business in countries or with organizations that are the originators or facilitators of labor rights violations, such as the use of forced child labor. In fact, a growing number of North American and European retailers and brands have already taken measures to exclude Uzbek cotton from their merchandise and others will likely soon follow if this situation remains unchanged.

**In light of the above described situation, we urge the Dubai Cotton Centre, and other organizations responsible for importing and selling cotton, to take decisive and immediate actions to ensure that it does not facilitate the sale of cotton harvested with forced child labor.**

We thank you in advance for your immediate attention to this issue. We hope we have alerted you to legitimate concerns by retailers and brands that Uzbek cotton is being worked into the supply chain from multiple sources, and that our member companies will oppose any efforts to facilitate such illicit commerce, will motivate your organization to take prompt action.

Sincerely,



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# **About Our Organizations**

**July 2009**

## **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 20<sup>th</sup> 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.*