

WRITTEN QUESTION E-3853/08
by Glenys Kinnock (PSE)
to the Commission

Subject: Child labour in Uzbekistan

Following the uprising in the Eastern Uzbek city of Andijan on 13 May 2005, which was brutally suppressed by the army and resulted in the deaths of hundreds of unarmed protestors, the EU responded by partially suspending its partnership and cooperation agreement with Uzbekistan, enacting an embargo on arms exports and a visa ban on some government officials.

However, in June 2005, the EU granted Uzbekistan GSP (generalised system of trade preferences) status exempting the country from tax duties for exports to the EU. Would the Commission please provide clarification for the continuation of Uzbekistan's GSP status, given widespread and continuing concerns about its human rights record?

Of particular concern is the practice of forced child labour in Uzbekistan, which has been well documented by a number of NGOs and civil society groups, while many retailers in the UK have acknowledged the problem and have agreed to cease the sale of Uzbek cotton as a result. From September to December, it is standard practice that schools are closed by local officials so that tens of thousands of children can be sent to the cotton fields to bring in the harvest. Little attention is afforded to the conditions in which children and students work. International Crisis Group (ICG) and UNICEF have both long expressed concerns about the exploitative nature of the Central Asian cotton industry and the endemic problem of forced child labour in Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan does not abide by ILO Conventions 138 and 182 banning the use of child labour. Indeed the International Labour Organisation (ILO) has recently reported that forced child labour remains a key concern across all five Central Asian states – Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

In light of these concerns would the Commission please provide its position on the issue of forced child labour in Uzbekistan? Would the Commission also provide details of its assessment of the wider human rights situation in Uzbekistan?