

September 11, 2020

Ella Skybenko
Eastern Europe & Central Asia Senior Researcher & Representative
Business & Human Rights Resource Centre

Via email: skybenko@business-humanrights.org

Dear Ms. Skybenko,

We appreciate the interest of the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre in the work that Xenophon Strategies, Inc. is undertaking for the Export Promotion Agency of the Republic of Uzbekistan. We welcome the BHRRC's inquiry because a recent story by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (to which you referred) was inaccurate in many respects. We can partially attribute those inaccuracies to the outlet's failure to reach out to Xenophon for comment or an interview which we would have gladly given. Most importantly, the story fails to recognize and accept the dramatic reforms and significant changes that have taken place in Uzbekistan in less than four years and the commitment and actions of the Government to end the forced labour practice.

As the International Labour Organization noted in its 2019 report, [Third-Party Monitoring of Child Labour and Forced Labour in the 2019 Cotton Harvest in Uzbekistan](#), systemic forced labour has ended in Uzbekistan. As they wrote: *"Systematic forced labour did not occur during the 2019 cotton harvest. Reforms are implemented step-by-step and continue to have an impact"*. This is due to a sweeping program of reform led by the government that has rapidly reshaped the country.

The commitment of Uzbekistan to modernize the nation's economy is profound and ending forced labour is a key part of that commitment. In fact, in 2020 the country built upon its past reforms and took additional meaningful actions to ensure that forced labour is permanently and completely eradicated. These actions include criminalizing the practice and enforcing strong financial penalties and even jail time for violations. The government is also helping to set a fair minimum wage that will allow workers to earn up to 6x more than a mere five years ago. There is a hotline to report violations and an advertising campaign to proactively inform workers of their rights. The international monitoring community and the trade groups within Uzbekistan are all working to ensure these new measures are successful and permanent. The President, the leader of the Senate, and the heads of key Ministries regularly make personal visits to the cotton growing regions to ensure the message of reform is delivered.

Moreover, the country continues to work in cooperation with international organizations like the United Nations, and NGOs like the Better Cotton Initiative and the Cotton Campaign, among others, to fight forced labour and promote human rights in Uzbekistan.

Xenophon Strategies works closely with Uzbekistan's Export Promotion Agency to promote economic development and international trade to help create and support modern, well paying, jobs for millions of workers across Uzbekistan. A key part of our work is to focus attention on the dramatic economic, social and political reforms that Uzbekistan has undertaken over the past several years. The best way to quantify these reforms and their impact on Uzbek society to the international community is with facts

about what has been done, the on-going reform efforts and to openly discuss remaining work and challenges. To that end, we are working closely with Uzbekistan's government to produce an Environmental, Social and Governance report that will provide a detailed assessment of the country's progress on key issues, including the fight against forced labour. We would be happy to provide you a copy after it is published in the coming weeks.

Finally, Xenophon Strategies has openly talked about our work for Uzbekistan and issued a [press release with the details of our work](#) on June 24, 2020 which read:

Uzbekistan Launches Economic Development Campaign *Central Asian Nation Seeks to Attract Investment, International Trade*

Washington – The Republic of Uzbekistan's Export Promotion Agency has hired Xenophon Strategies, Inc. to launch a campaign to promote economic development and international trade. The campaign will focus on the attractive business climate brought about by sweeping governmental and societal reforms undertaken by the Administration of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, who was elected in 2016.

"Uzbekistan has been undergoing profound changes over the past four years and the nation is open for business," said Xenophon CEO David Fuscus. "Xenophon is honored to help this great nation bring their message of change and development to audiences in the United States and Europe." The European portion of the campaign will be handled by Cometis AG, Xenophon's sister agency in Wiesbaden, Germany.

The campaign will be branded as *Journey of Change* and will focus on economic development across the economy that has created a favorable investment climate. At the core of the campaign will be an Environmental, Social and Governance report which will look at all sectors of the economy and the impact of the government's wide-ranging reforms. The campaign will be centered on the website www.ChangeInUzbekistan.com which will be launched by the end of summer.

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Again, thank you for your interest and feel free to reach out to us if you have further questions or concerns or visit our website at www.XenophonStrategies.com.

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