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United States Mission to the OSCE

**Reply to Uzbekistan regarding Response to
the OSCE Project Coordinator in
Uzbekistan, Ambassador John MacGregor**

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 23, 2016

I'd like to thank our distinguished colleague from Uzbekistan for his update on recent interactions with respect to the cotton harvest and longstanding concerns about forced child labor and forced labor in the cotton harvest, and I'd also like to acknowledge his point that in this forum we should raise concerns that connect directly to OSCE principles and commitments, which are our shared foundation and which we have a shared obligation to uphold.

Just to clarify, I have tracked the issue of the Uzbek cotton harvest for a number of years, since before I was in this job, and I understand that the ILO process is a separate process. I just want to reread the paragraph from my statement to clarify:

“We urge Uzbekistan to continue its ongoing actions to eliminate forced child labor and take substantive action to end the use of forced adult labor during the annual cotton harvest, and to grant independent civil society groups full, unfettered access to monitor the annual cotton harvest.”

So, just to reassure our distinguished colleague from Uzbekistan, the focus there is on matters that relate to our commitments. Obviously we have commitments within the OSCE that pertain to trafficking in human beings, and we also have commitments that pertain to freedom of association and assembly, and to freedom of expression. So I would note that the paragraph encourages Uzbekistan to continue – thereby acknowledging that there are efforts underway, as we heard some account of from our colleague today – but it also encourages full respect for the commitments pertaining to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly and association, that would allow civil society access, as well as for our shared commitments on trafficking in human beings.

But I thank him very much for the detailed reply.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.