

End Uyghur Forced Labour

November 23, 2021

Dear apparel industry leaders:

We are writing to call your attention to the findings of a recent [study](#) published by Sheffield Hallam University, *Laundering Cotton: How Xinjiang Cotton is Obscured in International Supply Chains*. Through analysis of link-by-link supply chain connections identified through shipping records, the research shows how cotton from the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (“Uyghur Region”) circumvents certain supply standards and import bans to end up on clothing racks around the world.

As you know, the government of China is perpetrating human rights abuses on a massive scale in the Uyghur Region. These abuses include arbitrary mass detention of an estimated range of 1 million to 1.8 million Uyghurs and other Turkic and Muslim-majority peoples, and running an “ethnic cleansing” program that includes forced labour.

The study identifies well-known international brands, including your company, that are very likely using cotton that is produced or processed in the Uyghur Region. The brands named in the report source from one or more of 53 intermediary manufacturers (from Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Vietnam, India, Pakistan, Kenya, Ethiopia, China, and Mexico) that purchase unfinished cotton goods from five leading Chinese manufacturers that have sourced Uyghur Region cotton.

Operating in the Uyghur Region in accordance with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights has become a practical impossibility. Due to the mass surveillance and repression of fundamental freedoms and human rights by the Chinese government, there are no valid means for companies to verify that any workplace in the Uyghur Region is free of forced labour or to prevent the use of forced labour in these workplaces in line with human rights due diligence. Prominent multi-stakeholder initiatives including the Ethical Trading Initiative and Fair Labor Association have recognised this fact.

This is why lawmakers around the world are increasingly considering bans on products from the Uyghur Region altogether. The only way to ensure supply chains are free of Uyghur forced labour is to eliminate reliance on the Uyghur Region entirely.

For apparel brands and retailers that have not yet made the commitment to take the necessary steps to cut the Uyghur Region out of their supply chains, this report must become a wake-up call that spurs action. The researchers behind the report were able to uncover links between Uyghur Region cotton and dozens of apparel brands with far fewer resources than large companies have available. Brands can no longer plead ignorance or point to a lack of resources as the reason for the continued presence of materials sourced from the Uyghur Region in their supply chains.

Beyond the inherent ethical responsibility companies have to ensure they are not contributing to the perpetuation of state-sponsored forced labour, prohibitions in the US, Canada, and potentially soon in other places mean that brands could face serious legal and financial consequences for importing goods that include materials from the Uyghur Region. To avoid enforcement action and get ahead of further regulations on the horizon, it is in your company's best interest to do a deep dive into your suppliers and start now to take the necessary steps to ensure that the Uyghur Region has no role in your supply chain. As evidenced by *Laundering Cotton*—which draws entirely on publicly available information—this can be done.

We applaud the ongoing efforts of the [apparel brands](#) that have already publicly committed to take the necessary steps to ensure their supply chains are free from Uyghur forced labour. **We implore you to act now by joining with them in signing the [Company Commitment to Exit the Uyghur Region](#).** Part of this process must entail reaching out to each of your suppliers identified in the report and creating a plan to ensure cotton sourced from the Uyghur Region and facilities that use workers forcibly transferred from the Uyghur Region are cut out of your supply chain.

Sincerely,

The Steering Committee of the Coalition to End Forced Labour in the Uyghur Region:

Campaign for Uyghurs
Free Uyghur Now
Uyghur American Association
Uyghur Human Rights Project
World Uyghur Congress
AFL-CIO
Anti-Slavery International
Clean Clothes Campaign
Cotton Campaign
Freedom United
Global Labor Justice – International Labor Rights Forum
Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility
Worker Rights Consortium