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Thirteenth sitting, 7 June 2024, 6.55 p.m.**Treizième séance, 7 juin 2024, 18 h 55****Decimotercera sesión, 7 de junio de 2024, 18.55 horas**

Chairperson: Mr Różycki

Président: M. Różycki

Presidente: Sr. Różycki

Discussion of individual cases (cont.)**Discussion des cas individuels (suite)****Discusión de los casos individuales (cont.)****Turkmenistan (ratification: 1997)****Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105)****Convention (nº 105) sur l'abolition du travail forcé, 1957****Convenio sobre la abolición del trabajo forzoso, 1957 (núm. 105)**

Chairperson – The fourth case on our agenda for today is Turkmenistan, on the application of the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105). I invite the Government representative of Turkmenistan, Mr Vepa Hajizev, ambassador and permanent representative of Turkmenistan.

Government representative (Mr HAJIYEV) – Turkmenistan's case has been repeatedly considered by the Committee during its annual sessions on the implementation of the provisions of the Convention, during which our country accepted the number of recommendations made, including the invitation of the ILO high-level technical assistance mission. Since the high-level mission, we have embarked on a substantial programme of cooperation with the ILO and numerous visits have been undertaken by the ILO to Turkmenistan, including high-level missions.

The ratification by Turkmenistan of the two Governance Conventions of the ILO in 2019 and 2021, the ILO Constitutional Amendment Act in 2022 and the adoption and full implementation of the Roadmap for cooperation with the ILO for 2023 are significant results of close cooperation.

The implementation of the activities of the Roadmap was carried out in close collaboration and cooperation with ILO staff, in particular on reviewing the policy and administrative structure governing cotton harvesting; improving labor inspection; promoting full and freely

chosen employment in the cotton sector; developing and raising awareness, and promoting social dialogue in the cotton production and processing sectors.

As part of ILO activities, a qualitative survey of hiring practices for cotton harvesting was conducted in selected regions of Turkmenistan, with visits to the cotton fields during the harvesting period to monitor working conditions. At the same time, a quantitative survey of households was conducted by the state statistic authorities to assess the trend of cotton harvesting over the last five years.

In September 2023, the Government and the ILO signed the Memorandum of Understanding concerning the observance of working conditions during the 2023 cotton harvest in Turkmenistan. In accordance with the Memorandum, a delegation of ILO specialists made phased visits to Turkmenistan in September–October 2023, consisting of seven ILO teams.

During the visits, the ILO teams traveled to the regions of the country to visit cotton harvest fields, met and held interviews with cotton harvest participants, tenants, farmer associations and representatives of farms.

A report of the ILO was prepared based on the results of the monitoring conducted within the framework of the Roadmap and was discussed among stakeholders in Turkmenistan in February 2024.

The report describes Turkmenistan's cotton industry, results of visits to cotton fields, information on hand-picked cotton, wages and working hours at the cotton ginner, regulation of fair and voluntary recruitment of workers and their replacement during the cotton harvest, and organization of inspections of working conditions of cotton pickers.

The report also presented recommendations on continuing to improve legislation on the prevention and prohibition of forced labor, raising awareness of employers and local

authorities on the prevention of the use of forced labor, including child labor, on the mechanism for handling complaints and other recommendations.

The report also made recommendations on accession to a number of ILO Conventions, in particular the Labor Inspection Conventions, the Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labor Convention, 1930 (No. 29) and a number of Occupational Safety and Health Conventions.

During the ILO high-level mission in February 2024 with the active participation of the social partners, the issues of the next stage of cooperation were discussed. During the visit, meetings were held with Deputies of the Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers, representatives of the Parliament, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Office of the Ombudsman, leading Ministers and departments, as well as local authorities.

As a result of ILO recommendations and our constructive cooperation, and in consultation with social partners, the Roadmap for cooperation with the ILO for 2024–2025 was adopted. We have shared the Roadmap with the Committee and you can find it on the ILO website. The main areas of the Roadmap include priority actions to strengthen the policy framework to – prevent mobilization and child labour through:

- improvement of the legislative framework on forced and child labor, in accordance with the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29), Convention No. 105, Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182);
- Provision of technical assistance by the ILO to support progress towards ratification of the Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81), the Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention, 1969 (No. 129), the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155), the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187), Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102), and the Protocol of 2014 to Convention No. 29;

- Signing a Memorandum of Understanding on the organization of analysis of the review of working conditions in Turkmenistan and the undertaking by the ILO of an observance of the cotton harvest;
- Development and implementation of feedback/complaints mechanisms during the 2024 harvest, and improvement of complaints mechanisms for the 2025 harvest.

Enforcement includes technical assistance to improve access to effective remedies for victims, Ombudsman's Office, law enforcement and judiciary at central and regional levels.

The Roadmap also envisages broader reforms, such as learning from international experience to establish a recruitment system and job matching mechanism for cotton harvesting, promoting social dialogue in cotton production, and identifying possible structural reforms to improve the productivity and sustainability of cotton production and to support decent work opportunities along the entire cotton value chain. It is important to note that we have already started working to implement this Roadmap with the ILO.

In particular, the first meeting between the Office of Ombudsman, ILO and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) experts was held a few days ago, on 4 June, with the aim to discuss the upcoming actions on implementation of the mentioned Roadmap. A day later, a meeting was held between ILO experts and representatives of the Minister of Labour, Justice, Agriculture and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan. By the end of June, we are also expecting the ILO experts in Ashgabat with a working visit.

In addition, recently, we also received some proposals from the ILO on concrete actions and measures within the implementation of our new Roadmap for 2024–2025, related again to the Office of the Ombudsman, to the awareness-raising campaign, to the observance of the cotton harvest in the current year etc., which were already discussed during the mentioned meetings.

At the present time Turkmenistan is undergoing crucial reform of the agrarian sector of the country and further improvement of its management. By the decree of the President of Turkmenistan, the Ministry of Agriculture was reorganized early this year in February.

In order to increase crop yields, develop livestock and poultry farming, create modern facilities for the production of high-quality agricultural products, and introduce modern technologies in production, sectoral agricultural structures, (concerns and associations) in specific areas, including the State Concern "Turkmenpagta", were established and separated from the Ministry of Agriculture of Turkmenistan.

An important step in the context of the topic under consideration today is the decision of the Government to significantly increase the purchase price of cotton from 1.5 to 5 Manat, which is linked to the cotton harvest period. Such an increase was due to the need to provide farmers with greater incentive and income, as well as to increase payment to cotton pickers for each kilogram of cotton harvested, depending on the time of harvesting this crop and its quality.

Effective contribution to the implementation of priority actions of the Roadmap for 2024–2025 was the ILO technical mission in May this year, which aimed at realizing the activities of the above-mentioned Roadmap, including the development of instructions of the Government on recruitment and working conditions during the 2024 cotton harvest. During the mission, a round table was organized with the participation of all stakeholders. A second round-table was also organized to discuss the inclusion of cotton picking in the list of jobs, professions and positions with harmful and dangerous working conditions that are not allowed for the employment of persons under the age of 18. Work is already underway in close coordination with the ILO in follow up to these roundtables.

A meeting of the tripartite Commission of social partners is currently being planned. One of the key issues on the agenda is the consideration of the action plan of the Roadmap for 2024–2025, in particular the issue of improving the list of dangerous and hazardous work by inclusion of cotton pickers.

In addition, as part of the discussion of the action plan, the issue of improving the legal framework governing the relationship between employers and cotton pickers is being considered. In addition, at the same time, work is under way to prepare a draft Memorandum of Understanding between the Government and the ILO concerning the independent observance of working conditions during the 2024 cotton harvest in Turkmenistan.

The Government is currently considering accession to the Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, and consultations are being held with the ministers, departments and social partners concerned.

At the same time, we would like to note our commitment to studying international experience in the prevention of forced labour, including child labour in all its forms. This is evidenced, in particular, by the participation in March this year of a delegation of Turkmenistan in a study tour to Uzbekistan, Tashkent, within the framework of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) project on safe migration in Central Asia, during which the delegation studied Uzbekistan's experience in the abolition of forced labour, including child labour in the cotton sector of the country.

We highly value the cooperation with the ILO in achieving global fair labour goals and are committed to continue this cooperation to address recommendations of the supervisory bodies.

Taking into account all State target programmes, constant work to improve Turkmenistan's legislative and institutional framework and the results of practical activities in

the area of labour, employment and social protection of the population, Turkmenistan has a high potential for ratification in the future of a number of other priority ILO Conventions and effective implementation of their norms.

In conclusion, I would like to express confidence that Turkmenistan will continue to pay special attention to the problems of social and economic justice, ensuring fundamental human rights and freedoms.

Chairperson – I give the floor to Mr Michael Congiu, Employer member to make his statement.

Employer members – We have noted with interest the information shared by the Government. We wish to encourage Turkmenistan to continue its efforts to better investigate and remediate the issues regarding forced labour in cotton harvesting that have led Turkmenistan's compliance with the Convention to become a regular subject here in the Committee.

About that history, Turkmenistan ratified the Convention in 1997. ILO Convention No. 105 is a fundamental Convention that calls for the abolition of forced labour.

This case was discussed in the Committee in 2016, 2021, 2023, and again now in 2024. There were observations issued by the Committee of Experts on this case in 2015, 2016, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, and again now in 2024.

To be clear, the Employer members wishes to stress their deep commitment towards the eradication of forced labour. We stand united in our belief that there should be no place for forced labour in our world of work, especially forced labour that is mandated or facilitated by a sovereign state. We further stand ready in our commitment to exercise any authority we may have as a social partner to assist in the eradication of forced labour, whether in Turkmenistan or anywhere else in our world.

Context, as always, is critical, and here it is of significant note that Turkmenistan's economy is largely state-driven, with its private sector remaining relatively small and closely regulated by the State. We also take note that Turkmenistan is – depending on the source that is consulted – the 13th or 14th largest cotton producer in the world, and that Turkmenistan's cotton harvest is of material importance to its economy. Although more can be said about the political context, we wish to reiterate here that the Committee has raised serious questions about the independence of the country's trade union and employer organizations.

By way of legal context, and in addition to ratifying the Convention, we note that the Constitution of Turkmenistan (article 33), guarantees the right to freely choose a profession, occupation and place of work, as well as to healthy and safe working conditions. As the Roadmap for cooperation activities between the ILO and the Government for 2024–2025 has noted, forced or compulsory labour is prohibited under national law, which includes:

- "any practice of compelling or forcibly mobilizing persons working in enterprises, regardless of form of ownership, or any other person under or over 18 years of age to pick cotton;
- "collection of cotton by employees of enterprises (organizations, institutions) of all forms of ownership during the working week in the working hours established by the schedule;
- "any practice that requires public or private sector employees or any other person to pick cotton or hire pickers or pay for replacement pickers or otherwise finance the picking of cotton."

The existence of regulation is quite different from the respect and enforcement of that regulation. It is, of course, a benefit to have existing regulation and, most relevant here, a country that has voluntarily ratified the Convention. There nonetheless appears to be a continued and unfortunate enforcement gap and we should all recall and continue to be

mindful that the work of this esteemed Committee is to explore and seek to ensure compliance with certain voluntarily ratified Conventions, like Convention No. 105.

To that end, we note that the Committee of Experts has repeatedly identified multiple abusive practices that conflict with the Convention, in particular Article 1(b) of the Convention prohibiting forced or compulsory labour as a method of mobilizing and for purposing of economic development, with a focus on the practices within the Turkmen cotton industry.

These concerns led to ILO high-level missions, and then a Roadmap for cooperation between the ILO and Turkmenistan that was adopted in March 2023. The 2023 Roadmap covered the following six areas:

1. A review of the policy and administrative framework.
2. Improvement of labour inspection and law enforcement.
3. Promotion of full, productive and freely chosen employment in the cotton sector.
4. Improvement of cotton production and harvesting.
5. Design and implementation of awareness-raising activities.
6. Promotion of social dialogue in cotton production.

We appreciate any progress towards this 2023 Roadmap, and note here that the Government has indicated that: (i) An analysis has been carried out of the current legislative framework, and draft legislative acts were submitted to Parliament; (ii) Meetings were held with the participation of the relevant ministries and agencies, social partners and the ILO representatives; (iii) There are ongoing efforts to produce a qualitative study of recruitment practices for the cotton harvest; (iv) A technical workshop was held during the ILO mission in July 2023 to discuss seasonal and casual employment; (v) In 2021–22, more than 200 awareness-raising meetings, workshops and round tables were held to address fair

employment issues; and (vi) Finally, the Government has indicated that national employers' and workers' organizations are actively involved in implementing all the measures set out in the 2023 Roadmap.

In addition, another ILO high-level mission, led by the ILO Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia, took place from 19 to 23 February 2024, which focused on certain discrete items, including a round table discussion with government authorities and representatives of the national employers' and workers' organizations to discuss the next phase of cooperation under a two-year Roadmap for 2024–2025, and a report to synthesize all research activities and observations from the 2023 cotton harvest. A technical ILO mission took also place on 14–16 May 2024, just several weeks ago.

The new joint two-year Roadmap was approved by the Government just weeks ago, on 13 May 2024. This 2024–2025 Roadmap contains four main components: (i) Priority actions aimed at strengthening policy framework, to be taken immediately and ahead of the 2024 cotton harvest that begins in just two months. This has included, for example, the preparation of a presidential decree as a first step towards legislative reform, as well as a public awareness campaign; (ii) A further improvement of legislative framework; (iii) Strengthening of enforcement of legislation and international labour standards; (iv) Other and complementary reforms and assistance, including various measures of the ILO technical assistance.

Here, the Employer members wish to emphasize that component (iv) of the Roadmap recognizes that the sustainable elimination of forced labour in cotton production requires the active participation and monitoring of the process by independent employers' and workers' organizations. Critically relevant here, is that the Committee of Experts has raised serious legal issues regarding State control over employers' and workers' organizations in last year's observation on Turkmenistan on the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to

Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87). The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) further questioned the independence of the trade union movement in the country and the Employer members have similar concerns about the independence of employers' and business organizations in Turkmenistan. The Employer members thus wish to emphasize that freedom of association and independent employers' and workers' organizations are not only fundamental principles in themselves, but also guarantors of compliance with other ILO standards, such as Convention No. 105. We trust that a thorough mapping and assessment of the organizations representing employers and workers in Turkmenistan and a review of the legal and institutional framework for these organizations will be carried out, as foreseen in the Roadmap and in line with any guidance provided by the ILO standards supervisory bodies.

We also note that the 2024–2025 Roadmap requires a Memorandum of Understanding to be signed between the Government and the ILO to better observe and report on actual working conditions.

There has been no shortage – in our view – of contemplated protocols or suggested actions to help end the use of forced labour in Turkmenistan's cotton harvest. Much ink has been spilled. It would nonetheless appear that this scourge continues to persist. It is our belief and wish that every available effort be taken to step past protocols and road maps to ensure better and more meaningful access to the facts and circumstances on the ground and, moreover, to ensure that forced labour be eradicated in Turkmenistan.

The Employer members have not and will not tolerate forced labour in contravention of the Convention, particularly forced labour that is mandated or facilitated by a sovereign state. Forced labour is an unconscionable practice that is harmful from all perspectives, even from a commercial perspective. It is starkly unethical and bad business in all senses.

Although we encourage the Government to continue engaging in cooperation with the ILO within the framework of the 2024–2025 Roadmap, we again stress an emphasis on implementation and tangible results. We stand ready as Employer members to assist in any way that we can. We look forward to hearing the views of other groups on this case.

Chairperson – I give the floor to Ms Nina Mjoberg, worker spokesperson.

Worker members – This is the fourth time our Committee has examined the application of the Convention by the Government. This year will be the second consecutive time.

In 2021, our Committee invited the Government to receive a high-level mission. This mission took place in November 2022. Contacts between the Government and the ILO led to the adoption of a Roadmap in March 2023. A further ILO high-level mission was then held in February 2024, resulting in an updated Roadmap, approved on 13 May 2024, by the Government.

This Roadmap provides for activities in a number of areas that will enable progress to be made towards greater compliance with the Convention and a considerable improvement in the situation of many workers in Turkmenistan. This is a positive step forward, but we are still far from the objective, of eradicating forced labour in Turkmenistan. We urge the Government to now make every effort to effectively implement this Roadmap.

Despite all these initiatives, forced labour practices in cotton production are still present on a large scale in Turkmenistan according to reports done by independent monitors taking great risks investigating in the country. Absence of fundamental freedoms remains an obstacle to ending forced labour, and workers are still denied their fundamental rights to organize an independent trade union.

In 2022, the managers of state-owned enterprises came under greater pressure to mobilize workers for the cotton fields. In particular, tens of thousands of public sector

employees, including teachers, doctors, cultural workers and civil servants, were mobilized to pick cotton to meet the targets of the state cotton harvest plan. We understand, however, that in 2023 teachers and doctors were not involved anymore in cotton picking but thousands of other public workers were still mobilized.

Cotton pickers were forced to work in dangerous and unhealthy conditions, including temperatures ranging from -10 degrees in December to +40 degrees in August, in direct sunlight and without sufficient quantities of drinking water.

Cotton pickers were exposed to chemicals without warning and were not provided with any protective equipment or medical follow-up.

They were also required to pay for their own food, water, transport and accommodation. Some were forced to use replacement pickers whom they paid out of their own pockets to avoid taking part in the cotton harvest themselves.

The UN Human Rights Committee also expressed concern in its 2023 Concluding Observations about the widespread use of forced labor by civil servants during the cotton harvest, under threat of sanctions such as termination of their employment contracts or loss or reduction of wages.

It also emerged that an independent ILO observance mission on the working and recruitment conditions of cotton pickers, made up of ILO staff and independent consultants, took place during the harvest in October 2023. The initial findings of this mission show direct and indirect evidence of the mobilization of civil servants in all but one of the regions visited. We regret that the full report of this observance mission is not yet available to the Committee.

It is positive to note that the cooperation of the Government with the ILO in implementing the recommendations of our Committee, enables the ILO to have a clearer view of the situation

on the ground, and thus to be able to provide the most appropriate assistance to the Government.

However, we can only share the Committee of Experts' deep concern about the continuing practice of forced labor in the cotton sector.

We can therefore only invite the Government to redouble its efforts to pursue all the initiatives it has put in place in collaboration with the ILO.

These initiatives have clearly identified the areas in which time-bound action needs to be taken.

First of all, the political and administrative framework governing the cotton harvest needs to be re-examined. We have seen in the past that the national harvest plan and the objectives assigned to it are implemented at regional and local levels.

It is therefore important that every link in this chain be involved in efforts to bring the situation into line with the Convention.

An ILO technical mission was set up in May 2024 to help the Government formulate clear instructions on recruitment and working conditions for the next cotton harvest, the revision of the list of hazardous work for children, the setting of a living wage for the cotton harvest, the establishment of complaints mechanisms, the strategy and actions for awareness-raising campaigns, and the parameters for ILO observations during the 2024 cotton harvest.

The labor inspectorate obviously has a fundamental role to play in resolving the problems encountered during the cotton harvest. The Government needs to work to improve labor inspection and enforcement. The concrete initiatives taken to prepare for the ratification of Conventions No. 81 and No. 129 are to be welcomed, and we encourage the Government to continue resolutely along this path.

The promotion of productive and freely chosen employment, the development and implementation of awareness-raising activities and the promotion of social dialogue in cotton production will also be areas in which efforts will need to be made.

We note that over 200 awareness-raising meetings, workshops and roundtables have been held over the 2021-2022 period. Given the entrenchment of forced mobilization practices in Turkmenistan's cotton harvesting campaign, it is absolutely essential to continue and multiply this type of activities so that all strata of society are made aware of this issue.

Cotton production and harvesting conditions need to be improved to make up for the lack of decent work in many places. The next cotton harvest will be decisive in assessing the concrete progress made by the Government.

We expect the Government to make public, high-level policy statements condemning forced labour, to instruct officials at all levels not to use coercion to mobilize anyone to work. Furthermore, we expect unimpeded operation of independent labour monitors to document and report labour conditions without fear of reprisal and ensure that their findings are integrated in the monitoring.

In addition to maintaining close collaboration with the ILO, it is important that the Government allow independent national and international social partners to participate in the process. Their participation will ensure transparency, better compliance with the Convention and close follow-up of the implementation of the Roadmap agreed. It is only through tripartite social dialogue that lasting solutions can be found to the challenges facing Turkmenistan. It is therefore of outmost importance that Turkmenistan also guarantees an environment conducive for freedom of association in order to resolve the non-compliance with the Convention.

Chairperson – There are 20 speakers registered to take the floor. In this regard, I would like to inform all delegates that the officers of the Committee have decided to reduce the speaking time for individual government delegates of the Committee from five to three minutes. Now I would like to give the floor to Ms Elise Lizin, the Representative of Belgium, speaking on behalf of the European Union.

Government member, Belgium (Ms LIZIN) – I have the honour to speak on behalf of the **European Union (EU) and its Member States**. The candidate countries **North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania**, and the EFTA country **Norway**, member of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

The EU and its Member States are committed to the respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights, including labour rights. We promote universal ratification and effective implementation of fundamental ILO Conventions and support the ILO in developing and promoting international labour standards and supervising their application.

Human rights are an essential aspect of our bilateral relations with Turkmenistan. The EU and Turkmenistan hold an annual Human Rights Dialogue, allowing for discussions on issues related to this topic.

In June 2023, the Committee deplored the persistence of widespread use of forced labour in relation to the annual state-sponsored cotton harvest and the Government's failure to make any meaningful progress on the matter since the discussions of the case in 2016 and 2021.

In this context, we welcome the recently increased cooperation between the Government and the ILO to address this long-standing concern related to the effective implementation of the Convention. We thank the Office for its active engagement in the promotion of labour rights and the abolition of forced labour in Turkmenistan and welcome that the Government

has availed itself of ILO technical assistance, including several ILO missions in this regard. We call on Turkmenistan to translate this engagement into concrete progress.

We took note of the written information provided by the Government, including on the priority areas of the adopted Roadmap for cooperation activities between the ILO and Government for 2024–2025. We welcome that priority is given to the abolition and prevention of child labour and forced or compulsory labour during the cotton harvest through policy, administrative and legislative measures.

In line with the Roadmap, we expect the Government to ensure the adequate protection of all individuals who file complaints, as well as provide appropriate support services and effective access to remedies for victims. We acknowledge the planned involvement of the Ombudsperson Office in monitoring the situation and handling complaints related to forced labour. It is essential that the Government ensures decent employment and working conditions, including fair and decent pay for cotton pickers through social dialogue. Continued collaboration with the ILO is important in this regard, including in view of the ratification of Conventions Nos 81 and 129, fundamental OSH Conventions Nos 155 and 187, Convention No. 102, as well as the Protocol 29 to Convention No. 29.

We welcome the collaboration with the ILO with regard to preparing a draft Memorandum of Understanding on a survey of working conditions during the 2024 cotton harvest in Turkmenistan and express our strong call for the planned improvements in the legislative framework in the country to take place. We took note of the information, provided by the Government, on the engagement of the Parliament of Turkmenistan in awareness-raising activities on forced and child labour and encourage the Government to continue the activities in this regard.

Whilst welcoming the initiatives undertaken by the Government, we note with great concern the observations by the ITUC on increased pressure on heads of State-owned enterprises to mobilize workers for cotton harvesting, including public sector employees, to meet the State's cotton harvest plan. We are also deeply concerned by the hazardous conditions under which the work is performed, the practice of imposing fees for replacement pickers and the fact that the majority of civil servants subject to forced labour are women.

We regret that the findings of the independent ILO observance mission, carried out during the harvest in October 2023, also show direct or indirect evidence of a widespread mobilization of public servants for cotton harvesting.

We reiterate the Committee of Experts' call and urge the Government to further strengthen its efforts to engage with the ILO and the social partners to fully implement the Convention in practice, thereby ensuring complete elimination of the use of compulsory labour of workers, particularly from the public sector, in cotton production. We expect the Government to continue to provide information on concrete measures taken to fully implement the Roadmap.

The EU and its Member States welcome the Government's recent openness on the issue of eradication of forced labour in the country and its readiness to continue cooperation with the ILO. We hope it is followed by concrete progress soon. We stand ready to support Turkmenistan in meeting its obligations under the ratified Conventions and we will continue to follow closely the situation in the country.

Chairperson – Now I give the floor to Ms Meriel Buxton, representative of the United Kingdom, speaking on behalf of group of countries.

Government member, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (Ms BUXTON) – I am speaking on behalf of Australia, Canada and my own country, the United Kingdom. The UK has been engaged directly on this issue in Turkmenistan for several years.

We thank the Government for the recent information provided on its implementation of the Convention. We note the information highlights several measures undertaken by the Government with the aim of addressing the observations of the Committee of Experts, including via the Roadmap for cooperation activities between the ILO and the Government for 2024–25, which was adopted after the ILO high-level mission in February 2024.

We note the Government's plans to enshrine in law provisions that prohibit forced or compulsory labour during the cotton harvest, including the draft Presidential Decree. We look forward to its swift adoption.

Regarding child labour, we are encouraged that the inclusion of activities relating to the cotton harvest will be included in legislation for the prevention of child labour, and the broad public awareness campaign on the prevention of the mobilization and involvement of child labour. We hope that these initiatives will be rolled out swiftly.

We also note the developments in other areas beyond the immediate scope of the Convention, such as providing technical assistance to increase victims' access to effective remedies. Even as we note progress, we still remain deeply concerned and we strongly urge the Government to take immediate and effective action to:

- adopt its legislative proposals and roll out its awareness raising activities expeditiously;
- continue to work constructively and collaboratively with the ILO, the UN Resident Coordinator, independent social partners and other development programmes;

- continue to avail itself of ILO technical assistance for the Convention, the other relevant Conventions outlined in the Roadmap, and its accession to the 2014 Protocol to the Forced Labour Convention.

We believe that with committed action, Turkmenistan can, once and for all, eliminate forced labour, and improve recruitment and working conditions, in the cotton sector.

We sincerely hope that the Government's next report to the Committee of Experts will highlight the full implementation of the Roadmap and further positive developments towards the elimination of forced labour in Turkmenistan.

Chairperson – Now I give the floor to Ms Laura Gimenez, Employers' delegate from Argentina.

Miembro empleador, Argentina (Sra. GIMÉNEZ) – El sector empleador argentino ve con agrado que las autoridades de Turkmenistán hayan aceptado la asistencia técnica de la OIT, así como recibido a las misiones de alto nivel que se han sucedido en estos años, en particular las misiones que tuvieron lugar durante la cosecha de octubre de 2023 y durante febrero de 2024.

Sin embargo, considerando los resultados informados por estas misiones, lamentamos encontrarnos nuevamente en una sesión de la Comisión donde no es posible acreditar un progreso consolidado en el cumplimiento de las obligaciones que surgen del Convenio.

En consecuencia, nos hacemos eco del pedido de los expertos, solicitando al Gobierno que prosiga sus esfuerzos para garantizar la eliminación del trabajo forzoso en Turkmenistán.

En particular, queremos poner en valor el punto 4.3 de la hoja de ruta 2024-2025 y destacar la importancia de contar con asistencia técnica dirigida a garantizar el diálogo con organizaciones de empleadores y trabajadores, representativas e independientes.

El diálogo con las organizaciones representativas de empleadores y trabajadores permite abordar las causas y los factores de riesgo asociados al trabajo forzoso, y monitorear efectivamente la implementación de las políticas diseñadas.

En este aspecto, consideramos que debe entenderse este caso en vinculación con las recomendaciones de la Comisión de Expertos sobre la aplicación del Convenio en Turkmenistán.

Queremos enfatizar que la libertad de asociación, incluyendo la libre elección de representantes de trabajadores y empleadores, además de ser principios fundamentales, son elementos que definen las condiciones necesarias para el adecuado cumplimiento de las otras normas internacionales del trabajo, como es el Convenio.

Como se ha dicho en otras sesiones de esta Comisión, la efectividad y la sostenibilidad de las medidas diseñadas para combatir el trabajo forzoso son inseparables del entorno regulatorio y económico de los países.

Por ello, esperamos que a la luz de este debate, el Gobierno lleve adelante las medidas incorporadas a la hoja de ruta 2024-2025 y comprometa sus mayores esfuerzos para garantizar el funcionamiento de los mecanismos de diálogo social institucionalizados y transparentes, y que continúe apoyándose en la asistencia técnica de la OIT para hacer un adecuado seguimiento en la ley y en la práctica de la hoja de ruta para eliminar el trabajo forzoso en el país.

Chairperson – Now I give the floor to Mr Yusif MADATOV, the representative of Azerbaijan.

Government member, Azerbaijan (Mr MADATOV) – Azerbaijan expresses its gratitude for provided detailed information on current situation related to the implementation of the Convention. We would like to note the efforts made by the Government on implementation of

the Convention in close cooperation with the ILO. Observation missions of the ILO in 2023 and planned mission during the cotton harvest current year indicate openness and readiness of the Government to cooperate and solve existing issues.

We welcome the successful implementation of the Roadmap for cooperation between Turkmenistan and the ILO for 2023, as well as the development and adoption of the new Roadmap for 2024–25 with the concrete action on implementation of the mentioned Convention, as well as creating a necessary legislation base.

I would like also to highlight the measures taken by the Government on maintaining the dialogue with the social partners. As mentioned by the delegation, the meeting of the tripartite commission of social partners is a good example of commitment of the comprehensive approach of the Turkmen side.

Chairperson – Now I give the floor to Mr Tjalling Postma, Workers' delegate from the Netherlands.

Worker member, Netherlands (Mr POSTMA) – This statement is also on behalf of the German and Austrian workers and the Russian workers from the Confederation of Labour of Russia (KTR). Year after year during the cotton harvest, which takes place between August and December, the Turkmen Government forces tens of thousands of public sector workers, to pick cotton or pay for replacement pickers under threat of penalty, including loss of employment, reduction of work hours or pay, and extorts money from the same workers to pay expenses related to the harvest.

In Turkmenistan, harvesting cotton using forced labour is not an anomaly, but an integral part of a command system of agricultural production that drives both rural poverty and child labour.

Forced labour of public sector employees to pick cotton was widespread and systematic in all regions that were monitored by independent researchers. Many civil servants reported mobilizations by mid-August. By December, despite temperatures below freezing, about 25 per cent of public sector employees were forced to pick cotton or pay for replacements during the week, and even more employees were sent to the fields on the weekend.

We welcome the recently signed Roadmap for 2024–25 and the intention of the Government to work with the ILO. We consider the Roadmap contains important and necessary steps to be taken by the Government to abolish all forms of forced labour in the country.

However, when working on solutions, independent workers' organizations must be involved in the whole process. Unfortunately, this has not been the case so far. Therefore, we emphasize, it cannot be that Government representatives of Turkmenistan formulate and execute plans with the ILO, without involving social partners, key constituents of the same institution.

As previous speakers, we also urge the authorities from Turkmenistan to fully cooperate with and implement recommendations from the ILO supervisory mechanisms. Under the framework of ILO technical advice, the Government should establish, monitor, and report on clear benchmarks to fulfil its obligations under all fundamental labour Conventions of the ILO.

Chairperson – I give the floor to the distinguished representative of Belarus.

Interpretation from Russian: **Government member, Belarus (Mr LIADNIOU)** – I would like to thank the Government for providing detailed information on the matter before us, and we note the commitment of the Government and workers' and employers' organizations to the principles of tripartite dialogue and the active participation of the ILO, including in the development of the Roadmap for 2024–25. We welcome the Roadmap's recommendations to

include in national law provisions relating to banning forced labour, prohibiting the work of minors in hazardous enterprises and also creating a safe working environment. We welcome the Government's work to cooperate with social partners and increased awareness relating to the unacceptability of using forced labour and child labour. We welcome the ILO's work and invite it to continue providing technical assistance, particularly in accordance with the Roadmap for 2024–25, and also to continue to ensure further progress and to protect the rights and interests of workers.

Chairperson – Now I give the floor to Mr Eric Gottwald, Workers' delegate from the United States of America.

Employer member, United States of America (Mr GOTTWALD) – The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) was a founding member of the Cotton Campaign, a multistakeholder coalition dedicated to ending the use of forced labour in the annual cotton harvests in several Central Asian countries.

As a member of this campaign, we welcomed the US Government's 2018 decision to ban the importation of products containing Turkmen cotton for the systematic use of state sponsored forced labour. As others have noted, there has been important progress since this body discussed this case last year.

Critically, the Government no longer denies the existence of forced labour during its annual cotton harvest, as evidenced by the recently signed 2024–2025 Roadmap. But this is just the beginning of the journey toward ending the systemic use of forced labour in the cotton harvest. As this body knows all too well, the Roadmap is only a first step and real progress depends on its effective and transparent implementation with the full participation of the social partners.

As a recent independent monitoring report shows, the Government run forced labour system is alive and well in the Turkmenistan cotton harvest.

- Public employees were once again mobilized en masse and forced to pick cotton or pay for replacement workers,
- Children are still in the cotton fields, hired as “replacement pickers” or helping a parent meet a quota.
- Independent monitors and journalists are still persecuted and face great risk in reporting on the annual harvest.
- Workers are still denied their fundamental rights to organize an independent trade union and bargain collectively.

The action plan is an important first step, but now we need to see it implemented in an inclusive and transparent fashion.

This means the ILO social partners must be fully consulted in evaluating compliance and understand the methodologies that form the basis of any ILO report conclusions.

This is the only way to build trust that durable progress is being made and the state is tackling the root causes of this entrenched forced labour system.

Only then will Turkmenistan eventually be able to produce and market cotton that is free from the taint of forced labour.

Chairperson – I give the floor to Mr Ilyas Akhmetov, the representative of Kazakhstan.

Government member, Kazakhstan (Mr AKHMETOV) – The Kazakh delegation thanks the Government representative of Turkmenistan for the report. We welcome the Government’s recent engagement with the ILO.

We note the commitment on the part of the Government to implement the Roadmap for cooperation between the ILO and the Government for 2024-2025, which includes concrete measures, as well as the enhancement of dialogue between the Government and the ILO.

We encourage the Government to continue to pursue its efforts to ensure the complete elimination of the use of compulsory labour in cotton production.

Chairperson – I give the floor to Mr Stephen Russell, Workers' delegate from the United Kingdom.

Worker member, United Kingdom (Mr RUSSELL) – Cotton infiltrates supply chains everywhere. We know that some cotton from Turkmenistan comes directly to the UK, but far more worrying is the vast amount that goes to Türkiye, a major supplier of finished textiles to the UK market. But the moment that this cotton becomes a Turkish-made product and is exported to our shops, its origins become harder to trace.

We know that companies have a responsibility to respect human rights in their supply chains, as set out in the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) and – increasingly – in national and transnational legislation. Free and independent trade unions, sometimes through multi-stakeholder initiatives like the UK and Ireland's Ethical Trading Initiative, play a role in both improving the rights of workers in supply chains, and also of verifying those improvements, providing a vital element of the necessary due diligence that no visiting auditor could ever supply.

The situation in Turkmenistan represents a challenge to that model, however. Cotton, produced through forced labour, finds its way into the complexity of supply chains of companies that might otherwise be behaving ethically. As such, it can best be challenged and remedied at source. But unions cannot operate freely in Turkmenistan, and therefore cannot

currently play a role in verifying whether that cotton, some of which will inevitably end up in UK supply chains, is free from the taint of forced labour.

It seems on the face of it that there has been some progress in Turkmenistan, and that it to be welcomed. However, the face is all we are allowed to see, and until things change on the ground we will continue to fear that reforms are piecemeal and fail to address the significant concerns stemming from previous investigations and from those independent assessments that are available from the 2023 harvest, which indicate that although latterly doctors and teachers were finally exempted from cotton picking, other public employees were still compelled to work on cotton farms, with no effective government intervention recorded to hold those responsible to account. Those faced to work faced the harsh, unhealthy and dangerous conditions described earlier by my fellow workers.

Ending forced labour requires a comprehensive strategy that extends far beyond merely reducing the number of individuals compelled to pick cotton. To ensure that reforms are sustainable, it is crucial to broadly enable labour rights, including the freedoms of association and to collective bargaining. Independent social partners can play a vital role in the development, implementation and – crucially – verification of substantial and lasting reforms aimed at eliminating state-imposed forced labour and the exploitation of farmers in the cotton sector.

Unions are ready to engage with the ILO-led Roadmap, noting that strong accountability structures are required to help sustain progress towards agreed destinations and avoid a return to the ILO's supervisory systems in a few years' time. That engagement needs to be meaningful, involving independent unions at all stages, and ultimately making sure they can play the role they do elsewhere, and both contribute to, and verify, the progress hopefully sought by all sides.

Chairperson – I give the floor to Mr Ermek Turgunaliev, the distinguished representative of Kyrgyzstan.

Government member, Kyrgyzstan (Mr TURGUNALIEV) – The Kyrgyz delegation extends its gratitude to the Government for providing its written report. We commend Turkmenistan for its dedication to upholding the ILO Conventions and acknowledge the progress made in addressing the ILO's recommendations.

We appreciate the efforts made to support workers' rights and the national initiatives fostering social dialogue. Turkmenistan's commitment to dialogue and cooperation with the ILO is particularly noteworthy. In February of this year, the Government engaged in comprehensive discussions with the high-level ILO delegation, resulting in the adoption of the 2024–2025 Roadmap for cooperation with the ILO.

Turkmenistan is actively taking measures to prohibit forced labour and child labour, aligning its legislation with ILO Convention on child labour prohibition, and working towards acceding to key ILO Conventions on labour inspections and social security. Additionally, Turkmenistan hosted an ILO technical mission in May, several weeks ago.

We believe in the importance of dialogue and cooperation, as emphasized in the ILO Constitution. Maintaining constructive dialogue is crucial for the benefit of workers, employers, and the economy as a whole.

In conclusion, we express our sincere gratitude to the Government for its commitment to constructive dialogue with the ILO and call for the continuation of active engagement with ILO bodies for the common good.

Chairperson – Now I give the floor to Mr Tristan Chevalier, Workers' delegate from France.

Membre travailleur, France (M. CHEVALIER) – Je m'exprime au nom des travailleurs français.

Le Turkménistan est le 14^e producteur mondial de coton et le recours au travail forcé pour assurer sa récolte y est organisé par les autorités publiques. Pour opérer la récolte, les autorités publiques établissent des quotas coercitifs, mobilisent toutes les ressources humaines disponibles et font donc appel, sous la contrainte, aux agents de l'État, aux fonctionnaires, dont la tâche n'est pas du tout habituellement l'agriculture. Des sanctions frappent celui ou celle qui voudrait échapper à ce système. Les autorités créent ainsi un environnement propice aux abus et à la corruption tout au long de la chaîne de production.

Les conditions de travail sont très difficiles. Ils n'ont pas assez d'eau potable, doivent trouver à se loger et à se nourrir. Ils ne reçoivent pas les équipements de protection appropriés, sont exposés à des produits chimiques et à des engrais.

Les travailleurs ne peuvent échapper à cette mobilisation forcée: soit ils vont travailler dans les champs, soit ils trouvent et payent quelqu'un pour se faire remplacer, soit ils versent une contribution à leur responsable hiérarchique sur leur lieu de travail habituel qui se chargera ensuite de recruter des remplaçants et de prélever au passage sa dîme.

Ce système frappe surtout les employés du secteur public et singulièrement les femmes, qui constituent la majorité de cette main-d'œuvre payée au lance-pierre et mobilisée de façon quasi forcée dans des métiers qui ne sont pas les leurs.

Selon les observateurs indépendants, si pour la récolte 2023 deux catégories des agents publics – les enseignants et les médecins – n'étaient plus forcés à travailler ou à payer des remplaçants, ce système a perduré pour d'autres catégories d'agents publics moins qualifiés tels les aides-soignants, infirmiers, personnels techniques, cantonniers, etc.

L'intention du gouvernement de travailler avec l'OIT, qui s'est concrétisée par des missions sur le terrain et la signature de la feuille de route 2024-2025, est une étape importante et nécessaire pour mettre fin à cette pratique de travail forcé. Toutefois, l'absence de liberté d'association, l'inexistence de syndicats indépendants, l'absence de liberté de la presse rendent très difficiles le contrôle et l'application des recommandations de l'OIT et rendent incertain et fragile tout progrès éventuel. L'intention d'éradiquer le travail forcé ne pourra être couronnée de succès que si le pays met véritablement en œuvre les conventions fondamentales de l'OIT.

Chairperson – Now I give the floor to Mr Quentin Durig, the representative of Switzerland.

Membre gouvernemental, Suisse (M. DURIG) – La Suisse soutient la déclaration faite par l'Union européenne et souhaite partager les points suivants.

Tout comme l'OIT, la Suisse accorde une importance particulière à l'abolition du travail forcé à travers le monde. À cet égard, la Suisse regrette de devoir à nouveau discuter du non-respect de la convention n° 105 – une convention fondamentale – par le Turkménistan.

Le recours au travail forcé dans la production de coton à travers la mobilisation et l'utilisation généralisées de main-d'œuvre, y compris des fonctionnaires, semble être toujours une pratique courante et répandue au Turkménistan. Ces travailleurs, principalement des femmes, sont menacés de sanctions, telles que la résiliation de leur contrat de travail, la réduction de leur salaire ou d'autres pénalités s'ils ne se soumettent pas à cette obligation de travail. En outre, les travailleurs forcés de cueillir du coton travaillent généralement dans des conditions dangereuses et insalubres.

La Suisse rappelle que ce cas a déjà fait l'objet de discussions devant la Commission à trois reprises au cours des dernières années: en 2016, 2021 et 2023. Ces discussions ont toutes abouti à des appels clairs et répétés au gouvernement de mettre un terme à ses pratiques systémiques de recours au travail forcé dans le cadre de la récolte et production de coton.

La Suisse prend note et salue le fait que, après plusieurs missions d'assistance technique de haut niveau du BIT, une feuille de route pour la coopération entre le BIT et le gouvernement, incluant des mesures tangibles pour améliorer les conditions des travailleurs, a été adoptée en mars 2023. La Suisse regrette toutefois que ces mesures ne soient pas systématiquement mises en œuvre par le gouvernement – certains groupes de travailleurs du secteur public semblant en effet être exclus du champ d'application de celles-ci.

Dans ce contexte, la Suisse réitère instamment son appel au gouvernement de mettre en place des mesures concrètes et effectives pour éliminer, en droit et en pratique, le travail forcé pour tous les travailleurs, conformément à la convention.

Enfin, la Suisse soutient les conclusions et recommandations de la commission d'experts enjoignant le Turkménistan à communiquer activement sur les mesures prises et les résultats concrets obtenus, ainsi que de continuer à utiliser l'assistance technique du BIT pour améliorer les conditions de recrutement et de travail dans le secteur du coton.

Chairperson – Now I give the floor to Mr Isaac NSUBUGA, the representative of the United States of America.

Government member, United States (Mr NSUBUGA) – The United States thanks the Government for providing additional information to this Committee in response to the recent observations of the Committee of Experts. We welcome the approval and publication of the Roadmap for cooperation between the ILO and the Government for 2024–25, focusing on: measures and awareness campaigns to combat forced and child labour and ensure workers a minimum wage and a safe and healthy working conditions; improving the legislative framework for the prevention and prohibition of forced labour; technical assistance for the Government to accede to additional ILO Conventions; technical assistance for prosecution of those accused of depriving others of labour rights; technical assistance for the development

and analysis of databases to analyse hiring practices and child and forced labour and to promote social dialogue, decent work and a just transition in the cotton sector and; holding periodic round-tables to inform the formulation of policies to prevent mobilization and the use of child labour in cotton.

We encourage the Government to continue to actively pursue its efforts to ensure the complete elimination of the use of compulsory labour in cotton production. We welcome the Government's cooperation with the ILO to develop legislative standards that will align with the Convention while addressing forced labour in the cotton sector.

We also note that the independent workers' representatives will be essential partners for the development of new legal and policy approaches that eliminate the root causes of forced labour in the cotton sector. To that end we urge the Government to amend provisions in the trade union law and the law in public associations that enable the Government to exact undue control over union activities including over the selection of trade union leadership. We welcome the Government's willingness to have ILO representatives observe the cotton harvest. We note with concern, however, the continued credible reports of forced labour in the sector and policies that perpetuate the mobilization of workers for forced labour. We look forward to the Government's continued cooperation with the ILO and full implementation of the 2024–25 Roadmap to eradicate child labour and forced labour. The United States remains committed to engaging with the Government to advance workers' rights in Turkmenistan.

Chairperson – I give the floor to Mr Kirill Buketov, the representative of the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations.

Observer, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF)
(Mr BUKETOV) – In regards to the case which we discuss, the reports of the Cotton Campaign

and Central Asia Labour Rights Monitoring Mission show that using various forms of coercion of workers to harvest cotton continues to be massive and systematic in Turkmenistan.

Large groups of public sector workers, including employees of schools, preschool institutions, health-care institutions and state enterprises are still sent to the fields.

The Government consistently denies the mass coercive nature of forced labour on the grounds that the authorities do not receive complaints. At the same time, the country has not created conditions for public control by non-governmental organizations and the media, as well as independent trade unions, which could respond to such information and, in cooperation with international organizations, carry out activities to protect the workers.

In this regard, we positively assess the recently signed Roadmap, which shows the intention of the Government to cooperate with the ILO on the eradication of forced labour. A number of measures envisaged in the document can indeed have a serious impact on the situation, if the work is done in a transparent manner and open to consultations with the independent social partners, in particular international global unions such as ours, the IUF and the ITUC.

We call on the Government to continue meaningful cooperation with the ILO on bringing legislation and law enforcement practice into line with the provisions of the ratified Convention.

This should be carried out within a broader framework which will bring the country to the real implementation of all the fundamental ILO Conventions, above all the right to freedom of association.

Chairperson – We have received a request from the floor from the Employers' delegate from Turkmenistan, so the Office is now considering this request. So now I give the floor to the workers' delegate from Turkmenistan.

Interpretation from Russian: **Worker member, Turkmenistan (Mr HAITOV)** – We would like to express our happiness at being able to speak at today's meeting. As has been said, under the Convention, the case of Turkmenistan has been discussed many times. I'd like to particularly focus on how trade unions have acted during this period, what they have done, what achievements have been made, and what outcomes have been reached. As experts have noted, and other speakers have also said, the trade unions of Turkmenistan have been actively involved in the process of tripartite social dialogue. We have been actively participating in the discussions, after the signing of the Roadmap for 2024–2025. In the beginning of this year, we have participated in the high-level mission, which was led by many high-level representatives of the ILO. Furthermore, the delegation of trade unionists and their leaders have had close cooperation with ACTRAV throughout this process. During this period, the trade unions have been doing significant work. Our legislation is undergoing review. It will clearly define definitions such as forced labour. In 2016, the new version of the Constitution included the provisions relating to the prohibition of the worst forms of child labour and the banning of forced labour. That's a big success in our country. We now have these principles enshrined in the highest legal act, the Constitution. There have been other new laws and amendments to existing laws, which now reflect the principles of the labour standards that we have been discussing. As things stand today, there is a range of legislative measures to prohibit forced child labour and legal liability for the breaking of these laws is in place. There have been positive changes over these years.

There is more clear influence on the development of legal principles, the legal framework and occupational safety and health. Furthermore, the possibilities available to social partners in terms of oversight are greater. The effectiveness of labour inspection is greater and involves the trade unions, which indicate public opinion serving as a feedback mechanism for the State, which enables it to correct its social policy. The trade unions regularly undertake work to assess

the implementation of Convention No. 105 and other Conventions in accordance with the Labour Code.

The constitution of the trade unions has enshrined the principles of labour inspection which take place whenever there is a concern about violations of labour standards and collective agreements. The trade unions stand together alongside the social partners. We have adopted a law on a tripartite commission and as things stands today Turkmenistan has ratified the fundamental Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976 (No. 144). The social dialogue between the Government, employers' representatives and workers is bearing fruit. As a part of the social partnership, there is a general agreement on tripartism at the moment, that started this year and exists for three years. We visit the regions and carry out awareness-raising work amongst workers, farmers, leaseholders, local authorities, and we carry out workshops and seminars providing information on the ILO Conventions.

In May and June, our labour inspectorates carry out campaigns relating to harvest, particularly with the participation of farmers and agricultural workers. We also carry out reviews of the effectiveness of observants of labour standards. Information sessions and workshops take place. We inform our colleagues in the regions, keeping them up to date, as well as farmers about the Roadmap 2024–2025 and its provisions, including the information about the wide range of measures which are directly linked to resolving the issues relating to the prohibition of forced labour and child labour and the implementation of the Convention.

The seminars that we carry out include the materials from international experts gathered from the active work of the last few years. We have been actively participating in all of this with the institutions of international labour.

In 2024, the ILO and the Government agreed upon and signed the Roadmap. Within its framework, the trade unions are working on the improvement and enhancement of the labour legislation and their own regulations. We are members of the Working Group in Parliament for the development of a new Labour Code, and we very much hope that in light of these efforts there will be corresponding amendments to the Labour Code.

As a result of a visit of international experts in May 2024, trade unions are considering the issues relating to the measures on improving the working methods during the harvest, hiring and conclusion of contracts with harvest workers. The high-level mission has sent a positive signal as it reflects the intention of the Government to work with the ILO. This is an important step towards putting an end to the practice of forced labour and I would also like to say that in recent years there has been increasingly active cooperation not only with the ILO, but also with the regional trade union organizations. We have concluded an agreement with the Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan. We know that Uzbekistan has also been along a difficult path, so we are looking at the experience of our neighbours and learning how we can overcome the issues that we face.

Furthermore, I would also like to say that we are also working on two questions related to the review of the list of professions and the inclusion there of activities related to the harvest of cotton.

We would like to say that this constitutes not only an effecting part of social partnership but also results from the effective work with the ILO as well.

Chairperson – I give the floor to Employers' delegate from Turkmenistan.

Interpretation from Russian: **Employer member, Turkmenistan (Mr DURDYLYYEVA)** – As already noted in the report of the Government, an agreement on cooperation between Turkmenistan and the ILO has been signed, relating to working conditions during the

harvesting of cotton. The employers of our country took part in the high-level mission of the ILO, which led to the adoption of the Roadmap for 2024–2025. This all reflects the willingness of the Government and the private sector to work together in close cooperation with such an authoritative organization, as the ILO. Workers' and employers' organizations are willing to pursue this cooperation in all sectors of the economy and to ensure that the conditions for the hiring and payment of workers during the cotton harvest are fair and the inclusion of minors is restricted.

The role of the private sector in agriculture has increased and it is getting close to 90 per cent. Trade unions and employers' organizations are seeking to improve the conditions for farmers, for example by providing loans and access to equipment. We are also working on the issue of hiring minors. At the moment we are carrying out efforts to improve the legislation on working conditions during the harvest, including conclusion of agreements between employers and cotton pickers and wages. In this context, I think it is particularly important to note that, in February of this year, with a view to further improvement of farming in this sector, the President of Turkmenistan signed a decree to reorganize the Ministry of Agriculture. The reform of the Ministry will not only lend impetus to the whole reform of the agricultural sector and improve the productiveness in the country, but create better conditions for the participation of the entire country in the agricultural sector. The President has signed a decree relating to the increased purchase price of cotton and those measures will be put into place in 2024. It will stimulate the work of farmers and increase the attractiveness of the sector. Employers in Turkmenistan actively participated in the Roadmap for 2024-2025 and have been called upon to implement certain elements. Our organization is doing huge work to enhance the activities of our members. We would like to express once again our dedication to acquiring international experience and to face the issues of forced labour and child labour in this sector. In conclusion, I would like to express our confidence that we will pay particular attention to

socio-economic justice issues in the future, ensuring fundamental rights and freedoms for individuals.

Chairperson – There are no more requests for the floor so I would like to invite the Government representative of Turkmenistan, His Excellency, Ambassador Vepa Hajiyevev to make his concluding remarks.

Government representative (Mr HAJIYEV) – On behalf of the Government delegation of Turkmenistan, let me express gratitude to the Committee for the work that has been done, as well as to the of employer members and worker members and the delegations of the countries for their statements, proposals and recommendations. We took note of all these recommendations.

I would like to express my gratitude for the constructive approach to the dialogue and for studying the materials provided by the Turkmen side in preparation for this meeting. At the same time, I would like to call on representatives of Workers and Employers, and individual governments to consider the materials and comments provided by the Government in a more objective and unbiased manner.

As noted in our main statement, with the active support of the ILO, Turkmenistan is working consistently on this important issue and implementing the norms of the Conventions, both at the legislative level and enforcement practice. I would like to assure you that all concerted proposals and recommendations made by international experts in the context of the issue and consideration will be carefully studied and analysed, not only at the ministerial level, but on the high government level. It should be noted that the Roadmaps of our partnership with the ILO are not just formal acts, but are procedural documents aimed at providing practical solutions for specific issues concerning labour.

With regard to improving the legislative framework, I would like to note that in the previous Roadmap for 2023, we had a technical discussion on the review of legislation which was implemented. The current stage – the new Roadmap – provides directly practical steps in this direction. At the moment, the Parliament of the country is working on the recommendations and suggestions received from the group of Government, Workers and Employers to improve the regulatory framework. In terms of awareness-raising, in the run up to the cotton harvesting works this year, the Ministry of Labour, in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, has started relevant work with local self-government bodies to prevent cases of forced labour.

I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate the Government's commitment to honouring its obligations under the ILO Conventions and Protocols to which Turkmenistan has acceded.

Chairperson – Now I will leave the floor to Ms Nina Mjøberg, Worker spokesperson, to make her final remarks.

Worker members – While we must acknowledge the encouraging signs in the case of Turkmenistan, we remain deeply concerned by the persistence of forced mobilization in the context of the cotton harvesting campaigns. We hope that we will soon be able to see the tangible results of all the initiatives put in place in the meantime.

We can therefore only encourage the Government to pursue its efforts to put a definitive and lasting end to the practice of forced mobilization during cotton harvesting campaigns. This will involve implementing the Roadmap adopted following the ILO's high-level mission to the country. To this end, the Government must draw up a precise timetable of actions to be taken to achieve the definitive and lasting elimination of forced labour of public and private sector workers, as well as students, in the context of the state-organized cotton harvest.

The Government will also proactively implement the measures recommended by the ILO technical mission to improve recruitment and working conditions in the cotton sector in line with international labour standards.

We are aware that the national cotton harvesting campaign involves a system of compulsory quotas, which is at the root of many of the abuses observed. We maintain that the Government must put an end to the system of compulsory quotas, and that failure to meet quotas should not result in sanctions or threat of sanctions.

We expect the Government to make public, high-level policy statements condemning forced labour, to instruct officials at all levels not to use coercion to mobilize anyone to work. Any person, including public figures, involved in the forced mobilization of workers for the production or harvesting of cotton should be prosecuted and appropriately punished. Victims of these forced mobilizations must also have access to effective reparation mechanisms. The Government will ensure that inspection services are strengthened, including by continuing its efforts to ratify Conventions Nos 81 and 129.

We believe it is important that the legislative reform initiatives currently under consideration should be implemented to ensure that national legislation complies with the Convention. Without pretending to give an exhaustive account of the legislation still posing problems, we can cite the State of Emergency Act, the Emergency Intervention Act, the Turkmenistan Mobilization Preparation and Implementation Act and article 19 of the Labour Code.

Finally, the Government will promote an environment conducive for freedom of association in the country, promote social dialogue in the cotton sector, strengthen its collaboration with the ILO and allow the participation of independent national and international social partners in the process to ensure that the Convention is applied in practice,

including within the framework of the Roadmap, and to document all evidence of the use of forced labour in the cotton harvest.

Furthermore, we expect unimpeded operation of independent labour monitors to document and report labour conditions without fear of reprisal, and ensure that their findings are integrated in the monitoring.

We ask the Government to continue its collaboration with the ILO within the framework of the initiatives currently undertaken and underway, including the Roadmap, and to communicate full reports on the implementation of these recommendations and the results arising from these initiatives to the Committee of Experts by 1 September and to continue reporting on the progress until the Road map is fully implemented.

Chairperson – Now I give the floor to Mr Michael Congiu Employer spokesperson to make his final remarks.

Employer members – Thank you, Chairperson, as well to all those that spoke today, in particular thank you to the Government for the information it shared and moreover for the commitments that it made.

In closing we would like to stress once again that the Employer members consider unacceptable any forms of forced labour and other abusive practices that amount to forced labour. Notably when they target the most vulnerable categories of the society are orchestrated by central authorities, our position thus aligns in this regard with the Committee of Experts' report and with the workers. While we welcome efforts undertaken to address the issues that were raised by the Committee of Experts and the commitments in the 2024–25 Roadmap including those commitments that were made today, we also note with regret the unfortunate reports that forced labour by the state continues in the cotton harvesting sector.

The Employer members thus request the Government to:

1. Ensure the complete elimination and use of compulsory labour;
2. Continue engaging in cooperation with the ILO and independent social partners to ensure the full application of the Convention in practice, including within the framework of the 2024–25 Roadmap;
3. Provide information on concrete measures taken in this respect, including on the activities indicated in the 2024–25 Roadmap and to further report on tangible results from the same.

We trust that the Government will implement such recommendations in a timely manner to achieve full compliance with the Convention.

Chairperson – We have now concluded the discussion of this case and the conclusions will be adopted on Wednesday, 12 June in the afternoon. We have finished our work for today and I would like to thank you for your cooperation and good spirit. We will meet again tomorrow at 10 a.m. for the examination of the following cases: Algeria, Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98); Australia, Employment Policy Convention, 1964 (No. 122); and the Netherlands – Sint Maarten, Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87).

The sitting closed at 8.35 p.m.

La séance est levée à 20 h 35.

Se levantó la sesión a las 20.35 horas.