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21.^a sesión, 10 de junio de 2026, 10.05 horas

21st sitting, 10 June 2026, 10.05 a.m.

21^e séance, 10 juin 2026, 10 h 05

Presidenta: Sra. López

Chairperson: Ms López

Présidente: M^{me} López

Trabajos de la Comisión

El acta relativa a la discusión del PV.14 relativo a la discusión del caso de Uzbekistán sobre los Convenios núms. 100 y 111, se adoptó en su tenor modificado.

Work of the Committee

PV 14 is adopted, as amended.

Travaux de la commission

La commission a adopté le PV 14 tel qu'amendé.

Discusión de los casos individuales (cont.)

Discussion of individual cases (cont.)

Discussion des cas individuels (suite)

Turkmenistán (ratificación: 1997)

Convenio sobre la abolición del trabajo forzoso, 1957 (núm. 105)

Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105)

Convention (nº 105) sur l'abolition du travail forcé, 1957

Presidenta – Señores y señoras tomen asiento, por favor. Vamos a comenzar las labores. Muy buenos días a todos y todas. Es un placer darles la bienvenida a la 22.^a sesión de nuestra Comisión. Agradezco su dedicación y puntualidad y confío en que tendremos un excelente desarrollo de nuestras labores.

Antes de empezar las labores del día de hoy les informo que el proyecto de Informe General, el documento D.4 se encuentra disponible en la página web de nuestra Comisión. También les informo que los proyectos de PV *verbatim* relativos a la discusión de los casos: Federación de Rusia sobre el Convenio núm. 87 y República Árabe de Siria sobre el Convenio núm. 182 están disponibles en la página web de la Comisión. Los miembros de la Comisión pueden presentar enmiendas a sus propias intervenciones en estos proyectos de PV *verbatim* ante la secretaría de la Comisión hasta el jueves 11 de junio a las 10 horas. Les invito a leer el anexo III del documento D.1 sobre el procedimiento de enmienda a los proyectos de actas literales.

Continuamos nuestras labores del día con la discusión de los dos últimos casos individuales en nuestra agenda. Tendremos el examen de: Turkmenistán sobre la aplicación del Convenio sobre la abolición del trabajo forzoso, 1957 (núm. 105) y Uruguay sobre la aplicación del Convenio sobre el derecho de sindicación y de negociación colectiva, 1949 (núm. 98).

Por la tarde, la Comisión adoptará las conclusiones sobre los siguientes casos: Eritrea sobre la aplicación del Convenio núm. 29; Malí sobre la aplicación del Convenio núm. 182; Sudáfrica sobre la aplicación del Convenio núm. 111; Argentina sobre la aplicación de los Convenios núms. 81 129 y 150; Yemen sobre la aplicación del Convenio núm. 87; Colombia sobre la aplicación del Convenio núm. 87; España sobre la aplicación del Convenio núm. 144; Iraq sobre la aplicación de los Convenios núms. 88 y 122; Kirguistán sobre la aplicación del Convenio núm. 87, y Libia sobre la aplicación del Convenio núm. 105.

En lo que respecta a la gestión del tiempo, quisiera recordarles los tiempos máximos de intervención para la discusión de los casos individuales tal y como está previsto en la parte IX del documento D.1 sobre los métodos de trabajo de nuestra Comisión. Estos tiempos máximos de intervención son los siguientes: 15 minutos para el Gobierno cuyo caso se examine, 10 minutos para los portavoces del Grupo de los Empleadores y el Grupo de los Trabajadores, 10 minutos para el miembro empleador y trabajador del país concernido, respectivamente, que se distribuirán entre los diferentes oradores del grupo, 7 minutos para los grupos gubernamentales, 5 minutos para los otros miembros, 15 minutos para las observaciones finales del Gobierno cuyo país examine y 10 minutos para las observaciones finales de los portavoces de los Grupos de los Empleadores y de los Trabajadores. La presidencia en consulta con los demás miembros de la Mesa de la Comisión podrá reducir este tiempo a 3 minutos para los miembros que hablan a título individual en particular cuando haya más de 17 oradores

inscritos en la lista. En tal caso la Oficina intentará informar a los delegados inscritos en la lista de oradores.

También les recuerdo que el Gobierno cuyo caso se esté examinando podrá decidir cómo distribuir los 30 minutos de tiempo que se le ha asignado, de la forma que le resulte más conveniente entre su intervención inicial y sus observaciones finales. Por lo tanto invito a los representantes gubernamentales de los casos examinados a que indiquen con antelación cómo desean distribuir su tiempo de intervención. Para facilitar la labor de los intérpretes se ruega encarecidamente que envíen sus declaraciones con suficiente antelación por correo electrónico a la siguiente dirección can-interpret@ilo.org. También les ruego hablar despacio para facilitar el trabajo de los intérpretes y permitir una buena comprensión de los debates.

En lo que respecta a la adopción de los proyectos de conclusiones y de conformidad con los métodos de trabajo de la Comisión, los proyectos serán transmitidos a una persona designada por el Gobierno interesado 2 horas antes de la adopción del texto en la Comisión. Durante la sesión las conclusiones se visualizarán en la pantalla en el idioma del país o en su defecto en el idioma declarado como idioma de correspondencia con la OIT. Los representantes gubernamentales podrán intervenir después de que la presidencia haya anunciado la adopción de las conclusiones.

El tiempo de intervención asignado será de 3 minutos, además se acuerda con la práctica habitual de la Comisión, la intervención no debe dar lugar a la reapertura del debate. El representante del Gobierno que tenga intención de intervenir deberá inscribirse antes en la sesión correspondiente enviando un correo electrónico a can@ilo.org. Además se reservará un asiento en primera fila para cada representante de los Gobiernos de los países a los que se refieren las conclusiones.

Ahora vamos a iniciar el examen del primer caso, que se refiere a la aplicación del Convenio por Turkmenistán. Para la discusión sobre este caso contamos con 20 oradores inscritos en la lista y sobre esta base la Mesa decidió reducir el tiempo máximo de intervención de los delegados que hablan a título individual de 5 a 3 minutos. Contamos con su comprensión y colaboración para adoptar su discurso al tiempo otorgado.

Invito ahora al representante gubernamental de Turkmenistán, la Sra. Halbib Tachjanova, Viceministra de Trabajo y Protección Social de la Población a tomar la palabra.

Interpretation from Russian: **Government representative, Turkmenistan (Ms TACHJANOVA)** – On behalf of the delegation of Turkmenistan, allow me to thank you for the opportunity to take the floor and to provide information on measures taken by our country to apply the Convention.

Turkmenistan sees the work of the ILO supervisory bodies as a process of partnership and collaboration. Therefore, today I would like to speak candidly not only about the progress achieved, but also about our future plans in this regard.

Turkmenistan ratified the Convention in 1997 and reaffirms its commitment to fully complying with it, both in law and in practice.

The Government, in cooperation with the ILO, is consistently implementing a series of road maps for cooperation for 2023, for 2024–2025, as well as the most recent phase 2026. One of the practical mechanisms for the implementation of the measures covered by the 2023 road map was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Turkmenistan and the ILO on observing recruitment and working conditions during the cotton harvest in Turkmenistan.

Under this mechanism, consistent observance of recruitment and working conditions during the cotton harvest is undertaken with the participation of international ILO experts. On the basis of this Memorandum, in 2025 alone, 40 observers visited Turkmenistan. These comprised ILO observers and international experts.

It should be noted that no national system is perfect, and each system requires further improvement in light of new challenges and accumulated experience. In this regard, I would like to underscore, in particular, Turkmenistan's openness to constructive engagement and consistent cooperation with the ILO and its supervisory bodies, as evidenced by what I have just said.

At the same time, with regard to the report of the Committee of Experts, we would like to note that certain assessments and information contained therein, in our view, do not fully reflect the current situation and the results of work achieved by Turkmenistan in recent years. In this regard, we would, therefore, like to focus on some specific activities and results achieved, which, we hope, will provide a more complete picture.

We highly appreciate the work undertaken by the ILO to observe recruitment and working conditions in the cotton harvest. At the same time, it should be noted that such observations are, by their nature, selective studies aimed first and foremost at identifying potential risks and problematic areas. Therefore, Turkmenistan considers it important to continue working with the ILO in order to collect data that will offer the broadest possible picture of the situation in different regions of the country.

The Committee had previously made reference to the need for a clearer and more enforceable ban on forced and child labour. And in this connection, a key response was the amendments made to the Labour Code, which strengthened the legal certainty and enforceability of the ban on forced and child labour in line with ILO recommendations. In particular, in July 2024, amendments were made to the list of work in harmful and hazardous conditions, prohibiting the employment of persons under the age of 18 in such work. This list now includes "cotton-pickers" and "cotton growers".

Also, following the recommendations of the ILO made in November 2024, amendments were made to articles 8 and 23 of the Code with regard to forced and child labour. These changes were not done in isolation. They are part of a broader reform of labour legislation enshrined in the Labour Market Concept for the period up to 2030, which involves the improvement of labour relations, the modernization of remuneration system and labour protection, the development of digital services and the deeper cooperation with the ILO.

In line with ILO recommendations, a draft decree of the President of Turkmenistan has also been prepared, providing for a direct ban on any form of forced mobilization of workers to participate in the cotton harvest and establishing the inadmissibility of forced or compulsory labour.

In addition, the issue of accession to the Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930, as well as the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102), is in the final stages of approval. Progress is also being made on accession to the Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81), and the Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention, 1969 (No. 129).

As such, the recommendations of the Committee of Experts have been transformed into concrete legislative changes and long-term institutional frameworks.

The reform of the labour inspection system is considered one of the central elements of our current policy. The ILO mission in March 2026 confirmed the need to further strengthen institutional capacity, and these recommendations have already been translated into practical work through training activities and a review of approaches to inspection oversight. In particular, in March 2026, with the assistance of ILO specialists, work began to reform the labour inspection system; a tripartite seminar was held on the fundamental Conventions, the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155), and the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187).

On 14 and 15 May 2026, representatives of supervisory and law enforcement agencies attended a seminar on forced labour, which strengthened their capacity to receive and review complaints, conduct investigations, bring perpetrators to justice, as well as protect complainants. It should be underscored that capacity-building activities are viewed by the Government as a systemic and essential part of ongoing reforms which set the basis for subsequent legislative and institutional changes.

At the same time, capacity-building efforts are accompanied by practical measures to ensure state oversight of compliance with labour laws. In 2025, for example, the labour inspectors of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection carried out 3,867 inspections, which revealed violations of labour laws in 2,352 cases. Following the inspections, 3,040 administrative sanctions and other enforcement measures provided for by Turkmenistan's legislation were imposed on the violators.

These activities are part of a broader programme of cooperation with the ILO aimed at strengthening the capacity of law enforcement and supervisory agencies. This will be pursued in 2026–2027 through a series of thematic training sessions and practical activities.

At the same time, work is under way to expand the available mechanisms for workers to seek redress and protect their rights. As part of the implementation of the road map for cooperation with the ILO, particular attention has been paid to improving complaint-handling procedures and ensuring access to effective legal remedies. To this end, ILO representatives undertook special consultations with the Ombudsman's Office and also the judiciary and law enforcement authorities.

A further step was the strengthening of the institutional capacity of the Ombudsman's Office. In 2024, a special sub-office on human rights in the private sector was set up within the Ombudsman's Office, and the authorities of the Ombudsman were broadened to cover the review of complaints in connection with the activities of enterprises and organizations, regardless of their form of ownership. Particular attention has been paid to examining international experience in terms of access to complaint mechanisms, protection of complainants and building workers' trust in complaints procedures. The consultations also explored possible approaches to further developing channels for information and grievance submission, including mechanisms that ensure the confidentiality of complainants and are consistent with international practices for the protection of labour rights.

The comments of the Committee of Experts and the ILO's observations underscore the importance of eliminating structural factors that may cause a risk of involuntary labour. In response, Turkmenistan has undertaken systemic work to reform wage mechanisms in the cotton sector as a key preventive measure. It should be noted that work in this area is being done in close cooperation with the ILO. In particular, on the basis of the ILO's wage analysis and subsequent consultations, work began in 2026 to set up a more transparent and economically sound remuneration system for cotton pickers.

It should also be noted that a significant proportion of seasonal work in the cotton sector is carried out by individuals seeking to earn additional income. This is precisely why the Government is paying special attention to improving the wage system for cotton pickers and creating conditions that make voluntary employment in this sector more attractive. In this context, we would like to point out that in the reporting period, wages in the cotton sector increased twofold over the 2023–24 period.

However, we note that this is not the limit, and the Government will undertake further work gradually to increase this wage figure. We proceed from the assumption that increased wages, improved working conditions and broader opportunities for seasonal employment are the most effective instruments for preventing any risk connected with involuntary labour.

In addition, the mechanization of agricultural work is continuing steadily. We see mechanization as a crucial factor in sustainable reduction in the need for manual labour and minimizing risks connected with recruiting workers during the harvest season. As part of this comprehensive effort, the Government is consistently investing in equipment, implementing reforms in the agricultural sector, and improving procurement policies.

Changing entrenched practices cannot be achieved through legislative amendments alone and must be accompanied by outreach efforts. As such, from the 14 to 20 April 2026, roundtable discussions were held in five velayats of the country under the auspices of the Interdepartmental Commission on Ensuring the Fulfilment of Turkmenistan's International Obligations in the Field of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law, with the participation of approximately 350 representatives of government agencies, the prosecutor's office, relevant ministries, trade unions, and business representatives. These sessions discussed the findings of the 2025 observance of recruitment and working conditions during the cotton harvest and identified areas for further improvement.

Further to this work, representatives of local authorities and relevant agencies organized additional events to raise awareness among the local populations. In addition, in the middle of June this year, similar events are planned in more than 15 etrapas across all five velayats of the country.

Cooperation with the ILO and other international partners remains a key element in implementing the recommendations of the Committee of Experts.

A new ILO-EU project was launched on 13 May of this year to promote decent work and prevent child and forced labour in Turkmenistan for the period 2026–27 serves as further confirmation of international support for ongoing reforms. This project will serve as a valuable complement to the existing road map and contribute to further improving legislation, strengthening institutional capacity, and developing practical mechanisms to prevent child and forced labour.

The Government will continue its technical cooperation with the ILO, remain open to monitoring the application of the provisions of the Convention, and stands ready to consider any constructive proposals to improve this work.

In conclusion, I would like to assure that Turkmenistan will continue to attach particular importance to social and economic justice, guaranteeing fundamental human rights and freedoms. We view our cooperation with the ILO as long term, systemic and based on mutual trust.

Presidenta – Voy a dar ahora la palabra a la Sra. Jacqueline Vandermeulen, portavoz del Grupo de los Empleadores para que realice su declaración inicial.

Employer members – We thank the Government for the information that it has shared. Turkmenistan ratified the Convention, one of ten fundamental Conventions, in 1997. The Convention calls for the eradication of forced labour.

This marks the fifth time that this case has been discussed in this Committee. The Committee of Experts has issued observations on this case nine times. This history highlights the persistent nature of the issue of forced labour in the cotton sector in Turkmenistan.

At the outset, the Employer members want to re-emphasize our commitment to the abolition of forced labour. We have affirmed and continue to affirm our belief that we as social partners cannot turn a blind eye to any form of forced labour. The abolition of forced labour is essential for the promotion of decent and humane work, sustainable economic development and respect for the rule of law.

Before discussing the issues in the case at hand, it is also important to recall the context. Turkmenistan is one of the largest producers and harvesters of cotton in the world. The economy is largely state-driven and as we have observed previously in this Committee, there are concerns about the independence and autonomy of the country's social partner organizations.

The supervisory bodies of the ILO have long expressed concerns about this case. However, we also note that the situation has evolved since this Committee's 2021 Conclusions, which called on the Government to eliminate forced labour in the cotton harvest. The Employer members were initially encouraged that the Government took up this Committee's call for action, including engaging with the ILO on a structured programme of collaboration in 2023 resulting in the first formal framework for joint action, the road map for cooperation.

That road map set out a framework to support the elimination of child labour and forced labour and is structured around four pillars: first, priority action to prevent child labour and forced labour; second, legislative reform; third, strengthened enforcement mechanisms; and, fourth, broader policy measures including research and enhanced social dialogue.

Significantly, the road map also introduced the ability for the ILO to conduct independent observation of recruitment and working conditions in the cotton harvest. This cooperation has enabled the ILO to systematically document practices related to forced labour, child labour and broader working conditions in cotton fields and public institutions.

Despite the Government's initial progress, we note with concern that the Committee of Experts highlighted in its 2025 report a persistent violation of the Convention, specifically Article 1(b) of the Convention, which prohibits the use of forced and compulsory labour as a method of mobilizing and using labour for the purposes of economic development.

For example, the Committee of Experts cited the ILO's 2025 report on observance of recruitment and working conditions during the cotton harvest in Turkmenistan, which noted that public sector employees, prisoners, military conscripts and others continue to be forcibly mobilized to harvest cotton or pay for a replacement worker.

In fact, the ILO's 2025 observance report found that more than 90 per cent of the cotton-pickers surveyed were women, in contrast to the gender profile for farmers interviewed, of whom only 32 per cent were women.

The Committee of Experts also took note of the International Trade Union Confederation's (ITUC) observations regarding poor working conditions including being forced to work in extreme temperatures, a lack of personal protective equipment, limited written contracts and wages below the living wage. The Committee of Experts further noted the observation that

there was no Presidential decree that had been issued explicitly prohibiting forced mobilization.

The Employer members welcome the continued engagement of the Government with the ILO under the road map. In particular, we take note of the extension of the road map until the end of this year and the ongoing cooperation of the Government in preparing for the ILO observance of recruitment and working conditions during this year's harvest.

We also note from the Government's written response to this Committee that it has amended its Labour Code to address forced labour and child labour issues. We further acknowledge that the Government and the ILO have collaborated on and engaged in bilateral discussions, high-level missions, regional awareness-raising initiatives, political dialogue and technical assistance activities.

We look forward to the Government's continued cooperation with the ILO and its cooperation with the European Union (EU) on the recently announced project promoting decent work and preventing child and forced labour in Turkmenistan, which further aims to address the issues we are discussing here today.

However, we express ongoing concern and regret about the observations of the Committee of Experts, especially in light of the ILO's 2025 observance report which included the following findings: a finding of a persistent pattern of public employee involvement in cotton-picking; a noted increase in individuals saying that they would face negative consequences for refusing work in 2025 as compared to 2024; despite possible progress compared to the 2024 harvest, the practice of paying to avoid cotton-picking conscription continues to affect a notable share of cotton-pickers; perhaps most concerning from the report is the increase in the percentage of field visits which observed children workers being present. This number increased from 23 per cent in 2024 to 38 per cent in 2025. While the Government has recognized cotton-picking and growing as harmful and hazardous work that is prohibited for people under 18, children continue to participate whether incited by challenging economic conditions or hired or sent as replacement workers; and lastly, a particular concern is the documented increase in interference with the ILO observance activities in 2025. Notably, interference was reported in approximately one-third of national visits. The Employers note that Government interference undermines collaboration with the ILO and with the social partners.

While we note the positive outcomes of the report, such as an increase in wages and reports of higher access to water and food for workers, we remain deeply concerned that initial progress is regressing. These improvements cannot offset the concerns raised by the regression in core indicators of forced labour and interference. The persistence of these practices indicates that additional efforts are needed to ensure that legal and policy reforms translate into concrete results in practice. Government cooperation is welcome, but it must be attended by concrete results. We look forward to hearing the views of the other groups in this case.

Presidenta – Ahora voy a dar la palabra al Sr. Stephen Russell, portavoz del Grupo de los Trabajadores para que realice su declaración inicial.

Worker members – Our Committee is once again called upon to examine the application by the Government of the Convention. Two years ago, we stressed the seriousness of the situation and called for urgent measures. This return of the case for our further consideration shows that this is not an isolated incident, but rather a structural problem rooted in the very organization of cotton production.

Two years later, it is clear that, despite the commitments made and the efforts undertaken, particularly with the involvement of the ILO, the indicators of forced mobilization in the cotton harvest remain significant.

We recognize that important steps have been taken in the recent period. The 2024–25 road map, now extended until the end of this year; the ILO's technical missions; awareness-raising activities in the regions; exchanges with the Ombudsman, judicial authorities and law enforcement bodies; as well as direct observations conducted during the 2024 and 2025 harvests, testify to a framework of cooperation that is now structured and sustained.

This framework has the merit of having clearly identified the areas in which action is required: prevention of forced mobilization, improvement of recruitment and working conditions, access to remedies, and strengthening of institutions and social dialogue.

The additional written information provided by the Government also confirms the extent of the work underway: amendments to the Labour Code adopted in November 2025, reflection on the reform of labour inspection, preparation of a draft Presidential decree, discussions on wages, training of supervisory and prosecution authorities, new regional round tables in 2026, and launch of a cooperation project supported by the EU. However, these are largely processes, preparations or capacities under construction rather than results demonstrated on the ground.

Compliance with the Convention depends not only on ad hoc adjustments, but on a review of the political and administrative framework that governs the cotton harvest. As long as production targets continue to be implemented at all levels, and regional and local authorities – and those responsible for public institutions – remain involved in their implementation, there is still a risk of pressure on the workforce. Each link in this chain must therefore be clearly associated with the prohibition of forced labour and must be held to respect it in practice. This is the heart of the problem.

While the Government highlights legislative, institutional and methodological progress, the observations of the Committee of Experts and the findings collected by the ILO both continue to report, in 2024 as in 2025, indicators of forced mobilization at a similar level.

The 2025 report of the ILO observance of recruitment and working conditions in the cotton harvest in Turkmenistan, recently published, on 1 June, highlights in this respect that important challenges remain to eliminate practices of forced mobilization in the cotton harvest. This ILO report confirms the findings of the latest report of the *Cotton Campaign* released on the 12 May this year which highlighted a deterioration of the situation in 2025 compared to 2024.

Public sector workers were still mobilized or forced to pay to be replaced. Allegations also concerned conscripts, detainees and persons administratively sanctioned, and adverse consequences would have continued to threaten those who refused to participate in the harvest. In other words, the announced reforms are not yet producing the corrective effect expected in practice.

Admittedly, some adjustments are reported. particularly in terms of remuneration and, according to Government's written information, a relative improvement in access to personal protective equipment and water supply. These developments must be noted, but they cannot obscure the essential point: the working and living conditions of cotton-pickers remain deeply worrying, written contracts remain rare, remuneration remains insufficient to guarantee truly free and decent work, and the very existence of pressures to participate in the harvest undermines any partial improvement in material conditions.

In addition, there is another major reason for concern, i.e., the persistent interference in data collection noted during the ILO's observance missions in 2024 and again in 2025. When the documentation of facts remains impeded, it compromises not only transparency but also the very ability to assess the progress announced.

The Government indicates that a draft Presidential decree on the organization of the cotton harvest has been prepared. But as it stands, what matters is not the existence of a project, it is the rapid adoption of a clear, public and effectively applied act, expressly prohibiting any forced mobilization.

The case of Turkmenistan has been coming back to the Committee repeatedly for several years, having been discussed in particular in 2016, 2021, 2023 and 2024. The persistence of this problem cannot be ignored. It shows that we are no longer faced with a one-off implementation deficit but with a long-standing and persistent structural problem that now requires verifiable results.

In this context, the extension of the road map to 2026, the ongoing technical assistance and the new European funding are important levers, but they also reinforce the Government's requirement for accountability for the concrete effects of this cooperation.

That is why we urge the Government to immediately transform commitments, consultations, training and projects into effective guarantees for workers. The explicit prohibition of any forced mobilization for the cotton harvest must be adopted and implemented, pressure and paid substitutions must be put to an end, labour inspection and complaint mechanisms must be strengthened, effective investigations and sanctions must be guaranteed, and cooperation with the ILO and the social partners must finally lead to the full implementation of the Convention in practice. It also implies promoting genuine freely chosen employment, continuing and expanding awareness-raising activities at all levels, and including reforms in a real tripartite social dialogue, which is the only way to produce lasting solutions.

The lack of tangible results may be explained by the absence of fundamental freedoms in the country. This remains an obstacle to ending forced labour. The free exercise of fundamental freedoms in Turkmenistan could serve as a catalyst for change. Yet, civil society cannot freely engage in monitoring the situation in the country and workers are still denied their fundamental rights to organize independent trade unions. We invite the Government to change its policies towards the exercise of fundamental rights and freedoms in the country as a way towards the elimination of forced labour.

In the light of the findings presented to us, our message must be clear: the commitments, the road maps and the support missions cannot hide the urgency of the situation. There is no longer time for intention or experimentation; it is time to be effectively compliant. Workers in Turkmenistan need concrete results now.

The next step should not be measured solely by the initiatives announced, but by the actual changes on the ground, in the fields, in public institutions and in the lives of the workers concerned.

Presidenta – Voy a pasar ahora el uso de la palabra al Sr. Yusup Gylychdurdyev, quien habla en representación de los empleadores de Turkmenistán.

Interpretation from Russian: **Employer member, Turkmenistan (Mr GYLYCHDURDYEV)** – Allow me, on my part, to provide some comments on the information of the Committee of Experts with regard to Turkmenistan's implementation of the provisions of the Convention. I should note that cotton-growing is one of the traditional and economically significant sectors

of Turkmenistan. In recent years, there has been consistent expansion of the private sector and farm holdings involved in this production. In order to increase the efficiency of agricultural production, the State is creating favourable conditions for agricultural producers, including the free provision of land plots for a period of up to 99 years, as well as access to preferential credit lines for the development of farm holdings and the acquisition of equipment, with interest rates of around 1 per cent per annum for up to ten years. As a result of these measures, entrepreneurs and farm holdings have been actively investing in the development of the cotton sector.

Currently, a significant amount of modern equipment is used in agriculture, including more than 3,000 units of agricultural equipment acquired by entrepreneurs. At the same time, the expansion of the fleet of modern equipment continues alongside the equipment procured by the State.

In addition, the private sector is actively involved in the modernization of agricultural production. Investments by entrepreneurs in modern equipment and technology are aimed not only at increasing labour productivity but also at further reducing the need for manual labour.

In the country, there is a system for exempting agricultural producers from a number of taxes and fees when growing the main agricultural crops, including cotton and wheat. Currently, around 340 dayhan associations are operating in the country, which are being consistently transferred to the management of the private sector. This reflects a consistent policy to develop entrepreneurship in the agricultural sector. For private agricultural producers, efficiency of production, crop quality and business sustainability in the long term are of key importance. With this in mind, employers are interested in attracting motivated workers on a voluntary basis, putting in place the conditions to enable their labour resources to be retained. In such conditions, the economic activity of private agricultural producers is based on economic efficiency, long-term investment and sustainable development of production, which objectively does not presuppose the use of forced forms of labour recruitment, but rather creates demand for regulated and contractual labour relations. Private employers do not have any administrative powers to mobilize workers and are interested in establishing stable labour relations based on voluntary employment and compliance with labour legislation.

The use of seasonal labour takes place on the basis of labour contracts. Workers are guaranteed appropriate working conditions, including personal protective equipment, food, transportation and, where necessary, temporary accommodation.

Employers themselves are interested in further improving the conditions of work and wages of workers, since competitive conditions of employment are the basis for attracting the labour force needed during the season of agricultural work.

As a representative of the Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs of Turkmenistan, I would like to emphasize that the country's private sector consistently adheres to the principles of social partnership and participates in the implementation of national labour reforms. The union brings together a significant part of the country's private employers and has mechanisms for considering requests and complaints received from members of the union and concerning members of the union, which contributes to an additional level of internal control over compliance with labour legislation and the principles of good-faith business practice.

Through the regional structures of the union, employers have the opportunity to seek consultations on matters with regard to implementation of labour legislation and to receive clarifications on matters concerning compliance with international labour standards.

It is necessary to note the union's involvement in awareness-raising activities among employers, including explanatory work within the framework of the tripartite commission on regulation of social and labour relations. As part of this work, particular attention is paid to the inadmissibility of child and forced labour, compliance with legislative requirements in the field of employment and occupational safety and health, as well as raising employers' awareness of international labour standards.

The Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs of Turkmenistan is also actively involved in the implementation of activities provided for under the road map of cooperation between Turkmenistan and the ILO, including participation in monitoring and information activities in the field.

Employers' representatives have participated in meetings and consultations with ILO experts, training activities and discussions of practical measures aimed at improving labour conditions in the cotton sector. We see this type of cooperation as an important element in the further development of social partnership and in strengthening a culture of compliance with labour rights. Thus, representatives of the private sector see cooperation with the State bodies and the ILO as an important instrument for further improving labour relations and strengthening the principles of decent work in the country.

The Employers of Turkmenistan affirm their readiness to continue participating in the implementation of joint activities with the Government, trade unions and the ILO aimed at improving working conditions, developing voluntary employment and strengthening the principles of decent work in the agricultural sector.

Presidenta – Pasamos ahora la palabra al Sr. Mekan Ovezov, quien hablará en representación de los trabajadores de Turkmenistán.

Interpretation from Russian: **Worker member, Turkmenistan (Mr OVEZOV)** – On behalf of the National Centre of Trade Unions of Turkmenistan, I express appreciation to the ILO for its consistent work to promote the principles of decent work, social justice and fundamental rights in the sphere of labour. As is well known, trade unions in all countries of the world, while maintaining common goals and tasks in protecting the rights and interests of workers, carry out their activities taking into account the national specificities of each country.

Historical, cultural and socio-economic conditions determine the forms and directions of their work, while their commitment to international labour standards remains unchanged. The National Centre of Trade Unions of Turkmenistan has consistently been in favour of the goals and principles of the Convention and considers the ensuring of free and voluntary labour as an essential condition for sustainable development and social stability.

During the reporting period, the trade unions of Turkmenistan continued their work to strengthen social dialogue, develop social partnership and promote international labour standards in close cooperation with the Government, employers' organizations and the ILO. A mechanism of great importance, in this regard, was the tripartite commission for regulation of social labour relations, whose activities contribute to constructive dialogue between the social partners and the development of agreed solutions on current issues in the field of labour and employment.

Trade union organizations of Turkmenistan carry out public oversight of compliance with labour legislation, the conditions of collective agreements and occupational safety and health requirements. Significant attention is paid to the legal education of workers and to raising their awareness of labour rights and guarantees. Collective agreements are in force in most enterprises and institutions in the country and constitute an instrument for regulating social and labour relations and ensuring social guarantees for workers. An important area of activity of the National Centre of Trade Unions of Turkmenistan is participation in the implementation of the road map of cooperation between Turkmenistan and the ILO. As part of this work, trade unions participate in information and awareness-raising activities, training programmes and consultations aimed at raising awareness among workers and trade union activists of the inadmissibility of any form of forced labour, with particular attention paid to the Convention. Round tables and seminars took place in 2025, and the National Centre of Trade Unions, together with Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV), carried out 15 such events. Further development of cooperation between the trade unions of Turkmenistan and the ILO may take new forms of partnership.

For the first time in the history of the trade union movement in Turkmenistan, ACTRAV and our trade union centre signed and successfully implemented a joint activities plan, and this work is being pursued this year on the basis of what has already been done. A series of activities have been undertaken, including various events in cooperation with the States of Central Asia and elsewhere.

In April 2026, our centre was involved in an occupational safety and health event together with counterparts from Central Asia. Further such events are also planned, not only in Central Asia but also beyond our region, involving our members. Continuation of this work is part of the joint action plan between ACTRAV and our union centre through 2027, which sets out future areas of work involving, for example, training of trade union activists and workers on fundamental labour principles.

In recent times, trade unions have also been involved in training at the International Training Centre of the ILO in Turin. This is the first time for us.

We particularly value the support of the ILO and ACTRAV which is making a major contribution to strengthening the rights of workers and their upholding in law and practice. Particular attention is paid to labour protection and public oversight, particularly in potentially hazardous conditions in agriculture.

In the run up to the cotton harvest campaign, we have sought to take additional measures to protect workers in this area, to protect them from hazardous conditions in the cotton fields including various forms of personal protective equipment, masks, etc., to ensure that their health can be preserved and also to uphold the basic labour rights of workers in this branch.

We believe that upholding the Convention can be achieved through mutual trust and cooperation between partners to ensure that all basic fundamental rights and freedoms are observed. The National Trade Centre of Turkmenistan reaffirms its commitment to the principles and values of the ILO and expresses a willingness to actively participate in promotion of decent work, social justice and the fundamental rights of workers. We also stand open to further dialogue with the ILO and international configurations and invite them to ask about this purpose as appropriate.

Presidenta – Pasamos el uso de la palabra al Sr. Stefanos Baloutas, representante gubernamental de Chipre quien habla en representación de la Unión Europea.

Government member, Cyprus, speaking on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its Member States (Mr BALOUTAS) – I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States. The candidate countries North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, the Republic of Moldova, and the European Free Trade Agreement (EFTA) country Norway, member of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

The EU and its Member States are committed to the promotion, protection, respect and fulfilment of human rights, including labour rights and the abolition of forced or compulsory labour in all its forms, as enshrined in the Convention. 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.

The EU is dedicated to supporting the Government's efforts to transition towards a more sustainable, green economy while simultaneously enhancing its business environment. This is one of the reasons why the EU actively supports the Government's dialogue with the ILO and the Organization's activities in monitoring the cotton harvest in the context of forced and child labour. We are also ready to support further the implementation of the road map of cooperation between the ILO and the Government, extended until the end of 2026, which focuses on the strengthening of legal and policy frameworks, labour inspection, awareness-raising and the promotion of an enabling environment for effective social dialogue.

Our support has been concrete, in the form of the ILO–EU project “Promoting Decent Work and the Prevention of Child and Forced Labour in Turkmenistan”. The €2 million project until 2027 was launched on May 13. Implemented in partnership with the Government, the project will support ongoing efforts to strengthen the legislative framework, enhance institutional capacity and advance the ratification and implementation of key ILO instruments, including the Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930, the labour inspection Conventions, the occupational safety and health Conventions, and social security Convention No. 102. We look forward to the project's contribution to the effective prevention and elimination of forced labour and child labour in line with international labour standards.

While the EU and its Member States recognize the commitment and cooperation of the Government in this important endeavour, we must also note with serious concern the ILO's 2025 observance of recruitment and working conditions in the cotton harvest in Turkmenistan report, published on 1 June 2026. Both the Committee of Experts and this report illustrate how many major challenges in the elimination and further prevention of child labour and forced labour remain.

We note that the Committee of Experts has pointed to persistent forced labour in cotton production and called for its elimination in law and practice. We urge the Government, in cooperation with the ILO and social partners, to ensure the full elimination of forced and compulsory labour in the cotton sector.

We remain concerned by reports that public sector employees, including school, hospital and enterprise staff, were mobilized during the 2024 and 2025 harvest or pressured to pay for replacement pickers. We are also concerned that women were disproportionately affected, and by allegations concerning the mobilization of prisoners and military conscripts. No person should face coercion or penalties linked to forced mobilization in cotton production.

We recall the importance of eliminating the compulsory quota system and ensuring that no one is punished for failure to fulfil production quotas. We therefore urge the Government to issue, as a priority, the Presidential decree prohibiting coerced mobilization for the cotton harvest and to ensure its implementation at all levels.

We are also concerned by interference during data collection affecting the ILO observance teams, while they were gathering information during the cotton harvest monitoring exercise.

We also note with concern the difficult and dangerous conditions faced by cotton pickers, including extreme temperatures, lack of food and water, poor sanitary conditions, limited access to protective equipment, insufficient written contracts, and remuneration that does not ensure a living wage. We call on the Government to improve recruitment and working conditions and to ensure that all labour in the cotton harvest is genuinely voluntary. We also urge the Government to strengthen labour inspection, law enforcement and complaints mechanisms, and to ensure effective remedies and protection against retaliation.

We further underline the importance of accountability. We urge the Government to investigate allegations of forced labour, to prosecute and sanction appropriately any public official involved and to ensure that enforcement mechanisms operate effectively in practice. We also encourage continued awareness-raising and meaningful engagement with independent employers' and workers' organizations.

The EU and its Member States will continue to follow the situation closely and remain committed to supporting the effective application of fundamental labour standards. And in this context, we would like to recall the Forced Labour Regulation, which introduces a ban on products made with forced labour, ensuring they cannot be sold in the EU market, which will enter into full force in December 2027.

We take note of the additional written information provided by the Government and of its stated intention to cooperate with the ILO. We call on the Government to translate this cooperation into concrete progress. We urge the Government to intensify this engagement within a cooperation framework, extended to 2026 to implement the recommendations of the Committee of Experts and ensure compliance in law and practice with the Convention.

Presidenta – Pasamos la palabra ahora a la Sra. Emily Potts, quien habla en representación del Reino Unido de Gran Bretaña Irlanda del Norte y el Canadá.

Government member, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (Ms POTTS) – I am speaking on behalf of the United Kingdom and Canada. We have been engaged directly on the issue of forced labour in Turkmenistan's cotton harvest for several years.

We thank the Government for the recent written information provided on its implementation of the Convention. We note that the information highlights several measures undertaken by the Government with the aim of addressing the observation of the Committee of Experts, including via the road map for cooperation activities between the ILO and the Government for 2024 to 2026, which was adopted after the ILO high-level mission in February 2024.

The Parliament of Turkmenistan's prohibition of child labour in the cotton harvest is commendable and highly encouraging. This must be backed by thorough implementation and enforcement of this and other labour laws to ensure that all employees are adults, participating by their own choice, and are paid a fair wage. This action, along with steps to increase the price paid to farmers and salaries of farm workers, is an essential step to ensure that all cotton harvesters are working in the sector by their own volition.

We also note the wider developments outside the scope of the Convention, such as technical assistance to increase victims' access to effective remedies, and Turkmenistan's National Action Plan on Combating Trafficking in Persons for 2025 to 2029.

While we are pleased to see progress, we still remain deeply concerned and we strongly urge the Government to take immediate and effective action to:

- ensure that legislative protections for workers are enforced across all farms, ensuring labourers are adults working by their own choice, under the correct working conditions and receiving correct fair payment;
- continue to work constructively and collaboratively with the ILO, the United Nations (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 road map, and its accession to the Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930.

With committed action and support from partners including the ILO, the Government can eliminate forced labour and improve recruitment and working conditions across all sectors, including in the cotton sector.

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

Presidenta – Pasamos el uso de la palabra al Sr. Michael Congiu, quien habla en representación de los empleadores de los Estados Unidos de América.

Employer member, United States of America (Mr CONGIU) – It was my distinct honour to serve as our Employer spokesperson for the case involving Turkmenistan during the 2024 discussion at the Committee. I was heartened that, during the discussion of the case, the Government expressed its understanding and acknowledgement of the scale of the problem in its country. They gave every indication that its engagement was meaningful and real, and that it wished to take measured steps to better investigate and remediate the issues regarding forced labour in its cotton harvesting.

We continue to welcome that engagement, both past and present, and we wish to thank the Government for its participation in this Committee and with the ILO more broadly. We nonetheless and respectfully request the Government do more to transform its substantial engagement into more concrete results. This is, of course, a complex problem that is made much more complex by Turkmenistan's critical reliance on cotton exports for its country.

The United States took a direct step to ban the import of Turkmen cotton in 2018. There is also much more occurring with the private sector to ensure that cotton associated with retail and other goods is not the product of forced labour.

We take no pleasure in recounting economic sanctions against a State like Turkmenistan, but acknowledge that such steps can manifest positive change, or at least facilitate policy that is designed to further compliance with the Convention.

So where to from here? Governments and the social partners will almost certainly continue to press until material and measured steps can be reported. With this in mind, we recall the 2024-2025 road map contained, among other components: first, the preparation of a presidential decree is a first step towards legislative reform, as well as public awareness; second, strengthening the enforcement of legislative and international labour standards, including the contemplation of an industry-wide grievance mechanism.

At the risk of being prescriptive, we note that the combination of public pronouncements from leadership, in combination with further public awareness and legitimate grievance

mechanisms, can be powerful first steps. Indeed, to this end, we note the Government's department for the protection of human rights and our wish to better understand any obstacles and whether complaints from public sector workers, which would include workers in the cotton industry, have been or could be taken.

Beyond these steps, we would further ask that the Government allow the ILO to independently and fully collect data or information and to fully support workers from engaging with the ILO.

Presidenta – Pasamos el uso de la palabra al Sr. Talgat Ashetov, quien habla en representación del Gobierno de Kazajstán.

Government member, Kazakhstan (Mr ASHETOV) – Kazakhstan expresses its support for the Government's efforts to ensure the effective implementation of the Convention.

We take note of the issues raised by the Committee of Experts and welcome the Government's constructive engagement with the ILO supervisory bodies. Kazakhstan recognizes the importance of eliminating all forms of forced or compulsory labour.

At the same time, we believe that the implementation of international labour standards should take into account national legal systems, institutional capacities, and socio-economic conditions.

In this regard, we encourage the Government to continue strengthening its legal and institutional framework, in cooperation with the technical assistance of the ILO and social partners, where appropriate.

We are confident that the Government will continue its constructive cooperation with the ILO to ensure the effective implementation of the Convention.

Presidenta – Pasamos el uso de la palabra al Sr. Mads Emil Juul Erritsø Buur Heitsel, quien habla en representación de los trabajadores de Dinamarca.

Worker member, Denmark (Mr HEISEL) – I will be speaking on behalf of the Nordic, the French, and the Italian workers, as well as the workers of the General Union of Workers (UGT), Spain.

Forced labour is one of the most serious violations of fundamental rights at work. The Convention requires the abolition of forced or compulsory labour, including where it is used as a method of mobilizing labour for economic development.

In Turkmenistan, this issue remains deeply concerning. The Committee of Experts has once again expressed concern about the continued use of compulsory labour in cotton production.

When workers in other professions are forced to either pick cotton or to pay for replacement pickers, under threat of consequences at work or in their daily life, this can never be considered voluntary employment.

The situation is, of course, made even more serious by the reported involvement of children in the cotton harvest. Children should be in school and protected from hazardous work.

Forced labour cannot be ended only through general commitments. There must be clear regulations prohibiting coerced mobilization, effective complaint mechanisms, labour inspection, and real sanctions where officials or institutions impose forced labour.

Furthermore, workers, farmers, journalists, human rights defenders, and labour rights monitors must be able to speak freely and report violations without fear of retaliation.

Cotton produced through forced labour does not remain only a domestic issue; it also creates serious risks for global supply chains. It can enter textiles, garments, and other products sold internationally. This means that violations committed in the fields may be carried through supply chains and reach consumers and companies far beyond Turkmenistan.

This is why Governments are increasingly taking action. For example, the United States of America has banned products made with Turkmen cotton; Canada and Mexico have banned goods made with forced labour. In the EU, the Forced Labour Regulation will fully apply from 2027, prohibiting forced labour goods on the EU market.

These developments send a clear message: no company, buyer, or government should or will benefit from cotton produced through forced labour. Global supply chains must be based on decent work, transparency, and respect for fundamental labour rights.

For this reason, eliminating forced labour in Turkmenistan's cotton sector is not only important for the workers directly affected. It is also necessary to ensure that international markets are not built on coercion and exploitation.

We urge the Government to take immediate and effective measures to ensure the complete elimination of forced labour, to protect children and workers from exploitation, to cooperate fully with the ILO and independent social partners, and to ensure that cotton from Turkmenistan is produced in full respect of the Convention. Workers must not be forced to pick cotton. They must not be forced to pay others to pick cotton. And they must not face punishment for refusing forced labour.

Presidenta – Pasamos el uso de la palabra al Sr. Samir Yeddes, quien habla en representación del Gobierno de Suiza.

Membre gouvernemental, Suisse (M. YEDDES) – La Suisse soutient la déclaration faite par l'Union européenne et souhaite faire part des points suivants.

La Suisse prend note des mesures annoncées dans le cadre de la feuille de route 2024-25, notamment la coopération avec le BIT et certaines initiatives visant à améliorer les conditions de travail dans le secteur du coton. Nous relevons également des développements institutionnels, y compris en matière de prévention du travail forcé.

Toutefois, la Suisse exprime sa profonde préoccupation face à la persistance d'un recours généralisé au travail forcé dans la production de coton, comme relevé par la commission d'experts ainsi que par la Commission en juin 2024. Des indicateurs de mobilisation forcée ont continué d'être observés lors des récoltes de 2024 et 2025, notamment la participation contrainte de travailleurs du secteur public, de conscrits, de détenus et d'autres groupes vulnérables.

La Suisse déplore également les informations faisant état de pratiques coercitives, telles que l'obligation pour les travailleurs de payer un remplaçant afin d'échapper à la récolte, ainsi que les menaces de sanctions en cas de refus de participation. Nous sommes en outre préoccupés par les conditions de travail difficiles, notamment l'exposition à des températures extrêmes, l'absence d'équipements de protection adéquats et l'accès limité à des conditions de vie décentes.

La Suisse note avec inquiétude que, malgré les priorités établies dans la feuille de route, aucun décret présidentiel interdisant explicitement la mobilisation forcée de travailleurs pour la récolte du coton n'a été adopté à ce jour. Nous soulignons également les préoccupations

relatives à l'ingérence dans les activités d'observation et à l'absence de plaintes enregistrées, ce qui soulève des questions quant à l'effectivité des mécanismes de recours.

Dans ce contexte, la Suisse appelle instamment le gouvernement à redoubler d'efforts afin d'éliminer totalement le recours au travail forcé, conformément à la convention, notamment en promulguant un décret présidentiel interdisant explicitement la mobilisation forcée de travailleurs pour la récolte du coton. Nous encourageons en particulier les autorités à supprimer le système de quotas, à garantir que nul ne soit contraint de participer à cette activité et à renforcer l'inspection du travail.

Enfin, la Suisse encourage le gouvernement à poursuivre et à renforcer sa coopération avec le Bureau et les partenaires sociaux, dans un esprit de transparence et de dialogue, afin d'assurer la pleine application de la convention dans la pratique.

Presidenta – Pasamos el uso de la palabra a la Sra. Anja Ibkendanz quien habla en representación de los trabajadores de Suiza.

Worker member, Switzerland (Ms IBKENDANZ) – The Committee of Experts has once again rightly raised the issue of violations of the Convention in the cotton sector in Turkmenistan.

Public sector employees continue to be required to pick cotton or to pay for replacement pickers, under threat of penalties such as wage cuts, termination of employment or other sanctions.

Women are disproportionately impacted by the forced labour system in Turkmenistan. More than 90 per cent of cotton pickers surveyed in the ILO's 2025 observance mission report were women.

Women make up the majority of workers in healthcare and education. Women are also overrepresented in low-wage civil service jobs – such as caretakers in residential buildings, school janitors or hospital orderlies. They are thus less able to afford payment for replacement pickers than male public sector employees.

It has also been reported that police have forced women accused of prostitution to work in cotton fields.

Women in Turkmenistan face restrictions in public life and lack representation. This increases the risk of gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, during cotton picking. There are no independent women's rights organizations able to raise such complaints openly.

Cotton pickers do not have safe and healthy working conditions. In August, temperatures frequently reach 40 degrees Celsius. In open fields without shade, workers often lack adequate access to safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, protective equipment, as well as information and warnings regarding the use of chemicals.

We also note with concern that child labour continues to be documented, despite strengthened legal prohibitions introduced by the Government in 2024.

The ILO's 2025 observance report states that the share of field visits during which observers reported the presence of children increased from 23 per cent in 2024 to 38 per cent in 2025.

Child labour in cotton picking is directly linked to the forced labour system, as many children pick cotton to earn income as replacement pickers for mobilized workers, to replace their relatives, and to support their families in meeting assigned quotas.

We recognize that the Government has accepted engagement with the ILO to address forced labour and has allowed the ILO to monitor the harvest. However, Turkmenistan continues to severely restrict civic freedoms, which makes it impossible for civil servants themselves to challenge the forced labour system.

We therefore call upon the Government to take all necessary measures to ensure the complete elimination of compulsory labour, in particular with regard to public sector workers in cotton production, and to protect children from related child labour.

Presidenta – Pasamos el uso de la palabra al Sr. Victor Novikov, quien habla en representación del Gobierno de Belarús.

Interpretation from Russian: **Government member, Belarus (Mr NOVIKOV)** – At the outset, I would like to thank the Government for the information supplied. We welcome the effort of Turkmenistan to apply the Convention and the measures being taken to improve national legislation and its application in accordance with international labour standards.

We note the constructive cooperation between the Government of the country with the supervisory bodies of the ILO and the Office, including the implementation of the joint road map and strengthening of technical dialogue with the ILO. We see this as a good example of the openness and responsibility of the Government in its implementation of the international obligations. We note with appreciation the efforts of the authorities aimed at preventing forced labour, increasing awareness among workers and employers with regard to labour rights and also the development of national oversight and monitoring mechanisms in the labour sphere. Gradual development of the national labour system and the strengthening of institutional capacity will require time, consistency and support from the ILO.

We are convinced that continuing constructive dialogue and cooperation will contribute to Turkmenistan's further progress in implementing the Convention and achieving decent working conditions for all workers.

Presidenta – Pasamos el uso de la palabra al Sr. Tjalling Postma, quien habla en representación de los trabajadores de Países Bajos.

Worker member, Kingdom of the Netherlands (Mr POSTMA) – I speak on behalf of Dutch and Belgian workers.

The Government maintains comprehensive control over the cotton production system. Forced labour is a direct outcome of the State organization of production. The State owns agricultural land and leases it to farmers, determines which crops must be cultivated – primarily cotton, wheat, and rice – and sets annual production quotas. It also fixes the prices at which it purchases cotton from farmers and controls the cost and availability of essential agricultural inputs, including machinery, irrigation water, fuel, fertilizers, pesticides, seeds, and defoliants.

During the 2025 cotton season, tenant farmers continued to face serious obstacles in accessing agricultural inputs and machinery. These difficulties, driven by entrenched corruption, abuse of authority, and preferential treatment of politically connected landholders, affected farmers throughout the production cycle – from sowing to harvesting – and undermined their ability to meet State-imposed quotas.

In addition to State-controlled pricing that often fails to cover production costs, some farmers faced arbitrary deductions at State cotton collection points. In the Mary region, for example, officials reportedly reduced the recorded weight of delivered cotton by 90 to 160

kilograms per tonne, citing moisture content or impurities without conducting any verifiable testing. As a result, many farmers received even lower payments for their harvests.

Debts accumulated during one season are frequently carried over to the next, trapping farmers in a cycle of dependency and economic vulnerability. Often, they must sell their livestock to pay off the debts.

Following the 2025 harvest, reports indicated an increase in the number of farmers who returned their leased land to the State and sought work abroad, including in Uzbekistan, Russia, Belarus, Poland, and Türkiye. Their decision reflects the growing inability to sustain their livelihoods under the current cotton production system.

We urge the Government to build on the initial measures taken during the 2023 and 2024 cotton harvests to address State-imposed forced labour. These efforts should be expanded through comprehensive reforms that tackle the structural causes of coercion, strengthen the rights and economic security of farmers and workers, ensure fair access to agricultural inputs and markets, and permit independent monitoring, reporting, and accountability throughout the cotton sector. Only by addressing these root causes can Turkmenistan create a cotton industry that is fair for farmers, permitting a sustainable livelihood and that is free from forced labour.

Presidenta – Pasamos el uso de la palabra al Sr. Yury Varlamov, quien habla en representación de los trabajadores de Alemania.

Worker member, Germany (Mr VARLAMOV) – I speak on behalf of workers in Germany, Canada, and the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO).

We remain gravely concerned about the State-imposed forced labour of public sector employees in cotton picking, which continued on a widespread and systematic basis during the 2025 harvest.

The Government has also prohibited and banned all mechanisms of oversight, all sources of objective and independent information. There are no legal mechanisms to challenge forced labour, as prosecutors and courts are not independent. The Government continues to restrict civil space and freedoms, including freedom of expression and freedom of association. In such an environment, civil servants have no possibility to refuse to either pick cotton or pay for replacement pickers.

Reporting on forced labour in the cotton harvest, as well as taking photos or videos thereof, remains highly dangerous. In one documented case from 2025, a citizen filming State employees weeding cotton fields was arrested for several hours by an officer of the Ministry of National Security and released only after his phone was searched and the video deleted.

The Government has made no public statement prohibiting forced labour. No complaint mechanisms exist for workers or farmers, and no officials responsible have been held accountable.

The country's only trade union structure, the National Centre of Trade Unions, does not protect workers from forced labour. On the contrary, it is part of the system itself, providing lists of potential victims of forced labour and collecting money from State employees to hire replacement pickers. This State-controlled body monopolizes trade union activity in Turkmenistan.

Ending forced labour requires urgent reforms that empower workers and farmers to exercise their rights and enable the establishment of independent trade unions beyond the

National Centre of Trade Unions. It also requires independent media and Initiatives for Human Rights, that can operate freely and report violations without fear of retaliation.

We therefore call on the Government to initiate such reforms to eradicate forced labour. Independent labour monitors, independent trade unions, journalists, and human rights defenders should operate freely to document and report labour conditions without fear of reprisal. We further urge the Government to involve international social partners in the reform process, in line with the 2024 Committee conclusions and the full application of the Convention.

Presidenta – Pasamos el uso de la palabra al Sr. Yury Ravavoi, quien habla en representación de los trabajadores de Polonia.

Worker member, Poland (Mr RAVAVOI) – On behalf of the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union "Solidarność" from Poland, I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this discussion. Our intervention is grounded on the objective findings of the independent monitoring of the 2025 cotton harvest in Turkmenistan.

The evidence demonstrates that the State-imposed forced labour system remains deeply embedded, driven by authoritarian control and institutional corruption. In 2025, the State mobilized public sector employees – including teachers, doctors, and workers at utility organizations – and conscripts to pick cotton or extorted them to pay for replacement cotton pickers. At the same time, State production quotas do not reflect the harsh realities of climate change, rising temperatures, and water scarcity. Instead of receiving structural support, farmers are forced to pay bribes to local officials just to access irrigation water to meet these rigid State mandates.

We welcome the fact that in 2024 and 2025, the Government allowed the ILO to monitor the harvest. This is a vital step toward formal engagement. However, persistent interference remains a critical challenge. In 2024, independent monitors reported instances where public healthcare employees were prevented from meeting with the ILO, while those permitted to speak were coached to falsely claim that no mobilization had occurred. This exemplifies what the ILO itself has recognized, that State-imposed forced labour operates within a "pervasively coercive wider social context" where a lack of civic freedoms renders victims unlikely to speak freely. Furthermore, in Turkmenistan, independent domestic monitors face immense personal risk to document forced labour conditions.

The 2025 harvest also demonstrated that purely "technical" solutions, such as mechanization, cannot resolve the root causes of forced labour. Lacking the ability to challenge forced labour by State authorities, public sector workers were still forced to clean harvesting machines and handpick the cotton left behind. As the regional experience of Uzbekistan has shown, economic and technical adjustments fail to achieve decent work without the expansion of workers' fundamental rights.

Progress requires addressing the root causes. We urge the Government to deepen its cooperation with the ILO by prioritizing fundamental rights – specifically freedom of association, freedom of expression and collective bargaining. True reform must empower workers, grant genuine autonomy to farmers and allow independent monitors to operate freely without fear of retaliation.

Presidenta – Pasamos la palabra al Sr. Ruslan Myatiev, quien habla en representación de la Organización Sindical Mundial Alimentaria Agrícola Hotelera y otros.

Observer, International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF) (Mr MYATIEV) – I am speaking on behalf of

the IUF, the Education International and the Cotton Campaign, a global coalition working to end forced labour in cotton production in Central Asia.

We welcome the Government's engagement with the ILO and its willingness to participate in dialogue. However, the Government's written information focuses heavily on process – roundtables, draft measures, and future consideration – rather than on concrete action to end the long-standing State-imposed forced labour system. This gap between process and implementation was clearly reflected in the 2025 harvest.

Despite ongoing cooperation with the ILO, officials continued to mobilize school teachers, kindergarten staff, nurses, utility workers and other public institution employees to pick cotton or pay for replacement pickers. Workers continued to face pressure and threats, including loss of wages, disciplinary consequences or fear of losing their jobs.

The ILO's 2025 observance report confirms that forced mobilization of workers in the harvest continues. We are also concerned by the increase in interference during the ILO observance mission. This raises questions about the Government's political will to cooperate with the ILO and end forced labour.

We are deeply concerned that, despite legal prohibitions introduced in 2024, child involvement in cotton picking in fact worsened in 2025. Children often end up in the fields because they replace adults mobilized to pick cotton or because poverty pushes families to rely on their labour.

The Government reports the preparation of a draft Presidential decree on organizing the cotton harvest in 2026. To meaningfully address State-imposed forced labour, such unequivocal decree must make it clear that the use of forced labour in the harvest or money extortion are prohibited. Political statement is already envisaged in the road map that the Government signed with the ILO, but this commitment remains unimplemented.

Effective implementation of the road map requires the development of grievance mechanisms, protection from retaliation, and accountability for officials responsible for forced mobilization. The Government has failed to implement any of these steps. Finally, in Turkmenistan, trade unions do not protect workers from forced labour. Instead, they are often involved in the forced labour system by collecting money from workers or drafting mobilization lists in the workplace.

The Government should take urgent steps to introduce meaningful reforms that address root causes of forced labour, reforms that emphasize fundamental rights, especially freedom of association, freedom of expression and collective bargaining rights.

Presidenta – No veo más solicitudes de palabra, por lo cual invito ahora a la representante gubernamental de Turkmenistán, Sra. Halbib Tachjanova, Viceministra de Trabajo y Protección Social de la Población a que formule sus conclusiones.

Interpretation from Russian: **Government representative, Turkmenistan (Ms TACHJANOVA)** – Allow me on behalf of the delegation of Turkmenistan to thank all those who have taken part in this discussion for their statements, proposals and recommendations. We have listened carefully to the representatives of governments, workers' and employers' organizations, and all the comments made in the course of the discussion will be objectively studied and considered from the point of view of their practical use in future work.

Turkmenistan reaffirms its commitment to the obligations arising from the Convention and stands ready to continue consistent work for its practical application in cooperation with the ILO. We have taken on board the assessments expressed during the discussion with regard

to the further improvements of mechanisms to prevent forced labour, the strengthening of law enforcement practices, the enhancement of the efficiency of complaint handling, and the expansion of access to legal remedies. These areas of work are already covered by the current cooperation between Turkmenistan and the ILO, and they will remain among our priorities.

We would also like to underscore that Turkmenistan continues to work further to bolster the legal and institutional guarantees aimed at preventing any form of forced labour. In this connection, measures are being consistently implemented to improve the legal framework, including draft regulations aimed at further reinforcing the prohibition of forced labour in cotton harvesting. At the same time, work continues to develop mechanisms for submitting and reviewing complaints, ensuring access to legal remedies, and strengthening the capacity of competent authorities to respond to potential labour rights violations. We would like to underscore that the road maps for cooperation between Turkmenistan and the ILO are not just formal documents, but an effective mechanism to define joint priorities and practical steps.

We stand convinced that for sustainable results to be achieved, there is a need for consistent and long-term work. Further progress can only be achieved through the ongoing constructive cooperation by all interested parties on the basis of the objective data, the results of practical work and mutual trust.

Presidenta –Muchas gracias, señora Viceministra por su participación en las labores de la Comisión y por toda la información suministrada. Es el turno de los dos portavoces. Voy a dar la palabra al Sr. Stephen Russell, portavoz de los miembros trabajadores para que realice su declaración final.

Worker members – We thank the Government for the information that they have provided, and likewise all the distinguished colleagues who contributed to this discussion.

Our Committee has returned repeatedly to the case of Turkmenistan, and this recurrence confirms that the problem is not episodic but structural. While we recognize the steps taken by the Government in cooperation with the ILO, the findings before us show that indicators of forced mobilization in the cotton harvest remain present at a troubling level.

The observations of the Committee of Experts and the ILO's 2025 observance report both make clear that progress in process and cooperation has not yet translated into sufficient change in practice. Public sector workers continue to be involved in the harvest, some workers still report pressure or adverse consequences for refusing to participate, and the practice of paying for a replacement has not been eliminated.

The Government must now turn commitments into enforceable guarantees.

First, it should urgently adopt and implement a clear, public Presidential decree expressly prohibiting any coerced mobilization for the cotton harvest. This is a central recommendation of the Committee of Experts and a priority that also appears in the 2025 observance report.

Second, the Government should address the structural drivers of coercion by ensuring that no worker is threatened with punishment, loss of wages, salary cuts, job-related consequences, or social penalties for refusing to pick cotton, and by ending the practice whereby workers must pay to avoid participation or send a replacement in their stead.

Third, the Government should continue to review the production system that creates pressure throughout the cotton chain. As long as production targets and administrative expectations continue to weigh on regional authorities, institutions and farmers, the risk remains that this pressure will be transferred to workers. The recommendations of the Committee of Experts regarding the quota system therefore remain highly relevant.

Fourth, clear instructions must be issued and enforced at every level of administration, and any public official involved in forced mobilization must be effectively investigated, prosecuted and sanctioned. Strengthening labour inspection, law enforcement, complaints handling and access to remedies is essential if the prohibition of forced labour is to be effective in practice.

Victims of forced mobilization must have access to confidential complaints mechanisms, protection against retaliation and effective remedies. At the same time, the Government should ensure that labour monitors and observance teams can operate without interference, since transparency is indispensable to measuring real progress on the ground.

The 2025 observance report also shows that improvements in wages and some welfare conditions have not yet been matched by adequate contractual and occupational safeguards. The Government should therefore improve recruitment and working conditions through wider use of written contracts, better wage protection, stronger occupational safety and health measures, and reliable provision of food, water and personal protective equipment.

We are also bound to express serious concern at the increase in children's presence in the cotton fields, recorded in 2025. The Government should strengthen enforcement of the prohibition on child involvement in cotton picking, research and address the root causes identified, and ensure that preventive action is integrated into the broader implementation of the road map.

Finally, continued cooperation with the ILO and genuine engagement with employers' and workers' organizations must remain at the centre of the response. Awareness-raising, social dialogue, fair and transparent recruitment systems, and stronger protection frameworks for complainants and victims should all be pursued as part of a coherent effort to secure full compliance with the Convention in law and in practice.

In short, the Government has before it a clear set of priorities: prohibit coerced mobilization explicitly, remove the pressures that sustain it, protect workers who refuse, investigate abuse, improve recruitment and working conditions, prevent child labour and ensure transparent implementation with the support of the ILO and the social partners.

The message of this Committee should therefore be clear: the time has come for tangible, verifiable and lasting results. Road maps, missions and legislative discussions are important and these efforts must be maintained; the Government should keep engaging with them, but they must now lead to measurable changes in the fields, in public institutions and in the daily lives of workers in Turkmenistan.

To implement all these recommendations, we call on the Government to accept an ILO technical advisory mission with the support of the ITUC and the IOE. We indeed feel that the persistence of the issues in Turkmenistan demands a multi-stakeholder approach where both international workers' and employers' organizations need to be involved in a sustained and recurrent institutionalized ILO effort to work towards the definitive elimination of forced labour in the country.

Presidenta – Pasamos ahora la palabra a la Sra. Jacqueline Vandermeulen, portavoz de miembros empleadores para que realice sus conclusiones finales.

Employer members – The Employer members would like to thank the speakers who took the floor for their interventions. We also thank the Government for the information it has provided, its ongoing commitment to cooperation with the ILO supervisory system and to the eradication of forced and child labour in Turkmenistan.

In closing, we would like to stress once again that Employer members consider unacceptable any forms of forced labour and other abusive practices amounting to forced labour, notably when they target the most vulnerable categories of the society or are orchestrated by central authorities. Thus, our position is aligned in this regard with the Committee of Experts.

While we welcome the Government's willingness to collaborate with the ILO, we remain concerned about the persistent gap between this stated willingness and tangible on-the-ground results.

The Employer members thus request the Government to: first, ensure the complete abolition of all forced labour in Turkmenistan by enforcing national laws that prohibit the use of forced and child labour in alignment with ILO Conventions, including through effective enforcement and accessible complaints mechanisms; to continue taking measures to raise public awareness on the prevention of forced mobilization in cotton picking and to improve the recruitment and working conditions of cotton pickers; to continue engaging with the ILO to ensure the full application of the Convention in law and in practice, including full implementation of the outstanding elements of the road map of cooperation. This includes issuing a public statement condemning forced labour in the cotton sector, including the practice of paying for replacement pickers.

We further request the Government to meaningfully involve international independent social partners in the reform process, in line with the 2024 Conclusions of this Committee, and to fully cooperate with ILO during the 2026 observance of recruitment and working conditions, including removing any Governmental interference.

We trust that the Government will implement such recommendations in a timely manner to achieve full conformity with the Convention, in both law and practice.

Presidenta - Damos por concluida la discusión de este caso. Agradezco la participación de la señora Viceministra y de todos los oradores que hicieron uso de la palabra. Las conclusiones serán adoptadas por la Comisión la mañana del jueves 11 de junio.

Antes de pasar al siguiente caso, haremos una breve pausa de 2 minutos.

Se interrumpe la sesión a las 11.50 horas.

The sitting was suspended at 11.50 a.m.

La séance est suspendue à 11 h 50.