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## UZBEKISTAN RATIFIES CONVENTION ON FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

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Uzbekistans acting president Shavkat Mirziyoyev has ratified the International Labour Organizations Convention No. 87, formally recognizing freedoms of association and the protection of the right to organize.

Tashkents prior resistance to adopting the convention has been linked to repressive practices in the countrys cotton industry, which involves the forcible annual mobilization of state workers for weeks of grueling labor in the fields during harvest season.

On the face of it, Uzbekistan adoption of this international standard fits into Tashkents ongoing charm offensive following the death of President Islam Karimov in September. The government has been working hard in recent years to persuade the international community that it is attempting to address some of its more unsavory practices.

Still, the significance of a largely bureaucratic move should not be overstated before results are seen and Karimovs passing was likely only incidental to the development. Uzbekistans adoption of Convention No. 87 has been a few years in arriving. Tashkent signed a memorandum of understanding with the ILO in April 2014 committing it in principle to ratification this year.

In July, even prior to Karimovs death, Mirziyoyev told a government meeting that during this years cotton harvest campaign, no school or university students were to be sent out into the fields. The remarks were intended in part to salve the concerns of the ILO, which is now implementing a inspection regime designed to detect abuses. But there is strong evidence to suggest that despite those exhortations, many students were press-ganged into cotton-picking all the same.

One actual achievement has been to greatly curtail the much-criticized practice of deploying children during harvest time. But that has had the effect of transferring the burden onto adults, many of whom do not work in the agricultural sector.

Indeed, advocacy groups pushing for the eradication of abuses in Uzbekistans cotton industry insist not just on adoption of international conventions, but also on their implementation. The former without the latter would patently be mere public relations and deception.

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Kaynak/Source: