



Interpretation from Spanish

**Statement by His Majesty King Juan Carlos of Spain  
at a special session to commemorate the tenth anniversary  
of the participation of Spain in the  
International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour  
(ILO, Geneva, 8 March 2005)**

Chairperson of the ILO Governing Body, Director-General of the International Labour Organization, Your Excellencies, Ambassadors, ladies and gentlemen, Queen Sofia and I are very happy to be able to participate today at this special session where the International Labour Organization is commemorating the tenth anniversary of Spain's participation in the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour. I should particularly like to express my thanks for the very kind and warm words addressed to us by the Chairperson of the Governing Body and by the Director-General of this Organization. Those words were, I believe, full of kindness and warmth for the Spanish people, because it is the Spanish people who defend the values of social justice and solidarity incarnated by this noble institution.

I am very happy to be here in the headquarters of the ILO, the oldest organization of the United Nations system. Spain was a founding Member of this Organization during the reign of my grandfather, King Alfonso XIII. In June 1979, when the Spanish people had just adopted a new Constitution with a very progressive and detailed social dimension, I had the honour of addressing the International Labour Conference. I then highlighted the tireless work done by this Organization to create a more humane and just international order.

Since it was established, this Organization has seen its work widely admired because of its true dedication to serving the individual and his or her freedom, dignity, rights and well-being.

The ILO's dedication to the welfare of children has been both steadfast and impressive. Since the Organization was set up and faithful to its constant search for greater social justice and equity, the Organization and the International Labour Conference have been in the vanguard of protecting the rights of children and young people and in laying down the first criteria on the minimum age for work.

The pioneering work of the ILO was the start of the work done by the overall United Nations family to defend freedoms and basic fundamental rights. The combination of this process was the recognition of the rights of children to special care and assistance, and the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of the Convention on the Rights of the Child on 20 November 1989.

I should like to congratulate the Director-General and the tripartite constituents, governments, workers and employers who make up the membership of this Organization on the excellent initiative of the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour. These congratulations are well deserved not only because of the success which you have been obtaining in eradicating child labour but also because of the success you have had in contributing to

overcoming the causes of child labour, particularly poverty and marginalization. This is no doubt essential, and a core task for the ILO. As the ILO Director-General has repeated on many occasions, people worldwide totally reject the scourge of child labour, which all too often is accompanied by cruelty and exploitation.

Children of school age working is something which should be rejected totally and fought at all costs, not only because it is harmful to the children themselves and to their education but also because it is the violation of their most basic rights, their dignity and their freedom. Poverty is the origin of child labour and poverty makes child labour nothing less than forced labour.

Ladies and gentlemen, as we seek to eradicate child labour we should remember that what is at stake is the future well-being and survival of children and therefore the future of the society to which those children belong. As our Spanish Nobel Prize winner, Jacinto Benavente said: "Every time a child is born, mankind is born over again". Rehabilitating working children and replacing child labour by education must be our ultimate objectives and we must spare no effort to achieve those objectives.

More than 240 million boys and girls worldwide go to work every day instead of going to school. That is no doubt a shocking figure. Spain, which, along with the rest of the international community, seeks to promote respect for and defence of human dignity, equity and equality, could hardly close its eyes to such a horrendous situation. That is why Spain became involved with this ILO programme. The programme has had a very particular impact in Latin America and that is partly because of the close historical and cultural links and ties of affection between Spain and the countries of that region. It was in Brazil in 1992 that the idea of setting up a programme to meet the needs of millions of children in the region with the support of various donor countries was actually born. Those boys and girls needed help and care urgently because they were being forced to do various types of work, mainly in the informal economy and in rural areas where they had little opportunity for access to education.

Our cooperation with the ILO has included financial contributions and it has also included institutional cooperation. After the international programme was signed in 1995 the programme entitled Programme to Eradicate Child Labour in Latin America was set under way. The Spanish International Cooperation Agency provided resources for that programme which seeks to eradicate child labour for children under the age of 15. More than 16.5 million euros has been spent through that programme between 1995 and 2004.

At the same time, and since 2001, the second phase of the international programme has been in operation. That includes specific action to combat the worst forms of child labour and to promote the ratification of the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) by all the governments of the region.

This cooperation which began with the Spanish International Cooperation Agency has helped us to develop the institutional structure which is required in countries affected by child labour. This will help society to become more aware of how serious the child labour problem is and encourage it to participate actively in eradicating the causes of child labour. The action being undertaken was strengthened by the signing of regional agreements to fight child labour – here I should mention the Panama Declaration adopted at the Tenth Ibero-American Heads of State and Government Summit, and more recently the San José Declaration which was signed during the 14th Ibero-American Summit. That Summit was held in parallel with the Ibero-American Conference on Children.

Ladies and gentlemen, mankind has learned that no man is an island, therefore, through this Organization and with the support of its Director-General we must continue to contribute with

programmes such as that we are commemorating here today to ensure that economic globalization becomes the positive social factor for everybody who lives in this world. This is a programme which Spain intends to continue to contribute to. We are, and this is why, strongly committed to the Millennium Declaration and to the Millennium Development Goals. We would not like to see globalization concentrated only on economic and/or financial matters. We would like to see globalization with a human dimension which will pay particular attention to the dignity of the individual, one which ensures respect for the individual, his or her family, and the wider community.

When you have social justice there should be no room for child labour or for forced labour. There should be no room for work done in unsafe conditions or work done in unhealthy conditions. Neither when you have social justice should there be room for any kind of work or any kind of labour which discriminates against workers for reasons of sex, race, belief or nationality.

Spain intends to continue to contribute to the spread and strengthening of human rights worldwide. Strengthening the values of Spanish pioneers such as Francisco De Vittorio or Friar Bartolome de las Casas. We believe it is essential to bring this about to support a worldwide commitment to the inviolability of fundamental rights at work such as those proclaimed by the ILO in the Philadelphia Declaration and in the many ILO Conventions and Recommendations.

Mr. Chairman, Director-General, ladies and gentlemen, before I conclude I would like to reiterate the importance of the fact that today, 8 March, is International Women's Day. This is a date of particular importance for the International Labour Organization and indeed for all of us. Spain will continue to provide its support and experience to the work we do together in this Organization on the basis of our steady commitment to contribute to building a better future for the whole of mankind day by day.

I would like to conclude by thanking you for your kind attention and by thanking you for honouring the Queen and myself by giving us the opportunity to come here and share this commemoration with you.

Thank you very much.

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