



**Message by Juan Somavia
Director-General of the International Labour Office
on occasion of
World Day against Child Labour**

12 June 2008

Despite global progress in many areas, it is unacceptable that so many children must still work for their survival and that of their families.

On this World Day against Child Labour the focus is on: *Education - the right response to child labour*. For too many children, particularly children of poor families across the world, the right to education remains an abstract concept, far from the reality of daily life. More than 70 million primary school aged children are not enrolled in school. Many of these and other out of school children start working at an early age, often well below the minimum age of employment. And when a family has to make a choice between sending either a boy or girl to school, it is often the girl who loses out.

Our challenge is to offer hope to the child labourers of the world by making their right a reality, ensuring that they have quality education and training which can lead them towards a future of decent work. This is essential to break the cycle of child labour and poverty. And it is a sound investment for individuals and society.

The United Nations Millennium Development Goals have set targets for achieving universal primary education and eliminating gender disparity in education. Meeting these goals also means tackling child labour.

In recent years, a number of countries have introduced innovative initiatives linking efforts to eradicate poverty with the extension of children's access to education. This is a welcome step.

However we also continue to see the vulnerability of poor families to economic shocks. The global food crisis threatens to generate further pressures which could lead to more children dropping out of school and into work. The toll of HIV/AIDS and natural disasters also heighten vulnerability to child labour.

We must be clear that fighting child labour calls for action on many fronts. From the perspective of the ILO it means employment policies to ensure that parents have jobs that allow families to enjoy a decent life; social protection that permits families to withstand and move beyond poverty and crisis; and the enjoyment of rights at work that drive empowerment and transformation: fighting child labour is part of an integrated agenda for decent work. But policies beyond the world of work must also converge around this goal.

On this World Day against Child Labour, as we focus on the educational dimension - let us pledge to work together for:

- Education for all children at least to the minimum age of employment.
- Education policies that reach out to child labourers and other excluded groups.
- Properly resourced quality education and skills training.
- Education for all children, and decent work for adults.

I urge you to lend your voice and action to the worldwide movement against child labour.

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