

1 M Kenyans are child labourers --Capital FM - February 17 2009 -BY
CATHERINE KARONG'O

The number of children in the labour market remains unacceptably high despite a 55 percent decline by end of last year, according to a new government survey. A report by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics released on Tuesday indicated that there were one million child workers by end of 2008, down from 1.9 million in 1999. It stated that 800,000 of these children in the child labour market were found in the worst forms of employment like sexual exploitation. "The problem with this Ministry (Labour) is that it doesn't have enough resources, it doesn't have enough officers so we can't reach out," stated Labour Minister John Munyes. "That is a matter I have raised with Cabinet. We are now undertaking the labour reforms and we can't operate without money," he added. Mr Munyes said although the free primary education programme was a major contributor to the decline, there were still one million children out of school, who remained vulnerable to joining the labour market. The Minister said a four-year project dubbed 'The time bound Project of Support' due to come to a close in April this year had enabled the government to fulfill its obligations on the eradication of worst forms of child labour. The project, he said, was implemented with support from the United States Department of Labour and targeted children who were in child labour or at risk of joining it. He said the project had benefited 25,000 children who were either withdrawn or prevented from the worst form of child labour. "Children who enter the labour market without appropriate skills end up being overworked, underpaid and exploited and this subsequently curtails their ability to grow out of poverty," he remarked. International Labour Organisation (ILO) Africa Region Director, Charles Dan said the organisation was considering an increase to its current aid of about Sh400 million to the Ministry of Labour. "The global financial economic crisis threatens to generate further pressure which could undermine the progress made and could lead to more children dropping out of school and into work," said the ILO boss. "We should reaffirm our common goal, decent work for all in a fair globalisation." Mr Dan said that national policies should be enforced to monitor cases of child labour and put in place programmes for children rescued from child labour. A children representative, Joseph Wanyama Obaba called on the government to consider and provide food to the needy children. "Nothing is really happening. We have raised these issues in many forums and today we are also here talking about the same things but we cannot see any action, we can't," he commented. "Is that every time there is a conference, we will just talk and then after talking no action is taken? Please we need action, words with action are good," he pleaded. Master Obaba ended by saying, "Let us curse only two things and apply one, let us curse poverty as citizens of Kenya, let us automatically curse discrimination of people and let us build a network of solidarity."

Wangui Irimu
Senior Programme Officer
TBP Support Project
OCHA House
United Nations Crescent, off UN Avenue
P. O. Box 40513, 00100 Nairobi - KENYA
Tel: +254 20 2135031/2135032/2135033
Fax: +254 20 2135034
Skype: wirimu2