



NEWS FEATURE

EMBARGO: For publication on or after Thursday 12 October 2006

New UN Report calls for zero tolerance of violence against children who work

A new United Nations report^{*/} on violence against children will be presented to the UN General Assembly this week. Part of the study is devoted to violence against children who work. The authors call for a policy of zero tolerance of violence against children who are working – whether legally or in child labour. Frans Roselaers, Director of the ILO’s Department of Partnerships and Development Cooperation was on the report’s editorial board.

Question: A global challenge to emerge from the new report is to make workplace violence against children more visible. Why has this not been given higher priority?

Frans Roselaers: Violence has not, up to now, been given much attention by programmes against child labour. We have nonetheless experience with many existing programmes related to child labour in dealing with abuse and violence. Most such programmes are multi-pronged, addressing economic and cultural causes, the promotion of education and alternative occupations, and social mobilization to change attitudes towards the acceptability of child labour.

Q: Experience has shown that when under-age children are withdrawn from the formal workplace, they often end up in more hazardous, informal work.

FR: This happens if there are no provisions in place to redirect the children’s lives. The range of interventions required includes legislative and enforcement measures, efforts with families and communities to reduce the need for and likelihood of parents sending boys and girls to work, removal of children from workplaces that expose them to violence, hazard and exploitation, and social mobilization by civil society to promote the right of children not to be treated with violence in the workplace, and for all children to have access to quality education.

Q: According to the report, successful enforcement of child labour legislation is rare

FR: More than 80 per cent of the world’s children now live in countries which have ratified the two key ILO Conventions. Since its adoption in 1999, Convention No.182 targeting the most hazardous and exploitative situations in which children are found, has enjoyed a rapid pace of ratification, which in turn has helped to double the rate of ratifications now enjoyed by the Minimum Age Convention, No.138. This reflects a strong political consensus and many governments have undertaken reviews of their legislation.

On the other hand, many impediments to the enforcement of laws continue to exist: one is the lack of an effective and universal birth registration system, another is

that the labour inspectorates which helped remove children from the workplace in industrializing countries in the West have generally not proved as effective in the developing world. Enforcement can only work if there are workplace regulations, inspectorates, stiff legal sanctions against the employment of under-age workers, and crack-downs on criminal activities involving children with child rehabilitation.

Q: Can you give an example of somewhere enforcement has been effective?

FR: One example is the agreement with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in May 2005 concerning the release and repatriation to their countries of origin of 3,000 young boys employed as camel jockeys and stable boys. This initiative illustrates the complementary roles that can be played by campaigning and international organizations in bringing an end to the trafficking and employment of children in an abusive occupation.

Another good example is an ILO/IPEC project in Tanzania which supports an NGO that identifies children who have been suffering from physical, psychological or even sexual violence as child domestic labourers and takes them to a centre, where they undergo psychosocial counselling, attend school and receive vocational skills training. Later on, some of these children may start their own business with support from the ILO.

Q: What role do education and schooling play in ending child labour?

FR: Universal access to schooling is a key component of ending child labour and their exposure to violence in the work place. Basic education should be made compulsory for both boys and girls, including the requirement on the state to increase educational investment. For example, in both the Indian state of Kerala, and in Sri Lanka, progress towards universal education was accompanied by the departure of children from full-time work despite little effort to implement child labour laws.

Q: ...and violence against children?

FR: Schooling itself provides an opportunity for the promotion of self-protection, non-violence and peaceful conflict resolution.

Q: What role can children play in protecting themselves against violence?

FR: One of the most important steps towards enabling children to remove themselves from exploitative work and abuse in the workplace is to facilitate their participation in programmes to reduce and eliminate child labour. Children and young people are often their own best advocates and should be given a prominent role as spokespersons on their own behalf, to policy-makers, employers, trade unions, communities, legislators, media and society at large.

Q: How can we prevent violence against children before it takes place?

FR: Larger-scale programmes like the ILO's 'Time-Bound Programmes' (TBPs) to eliminate child labour comprise a package of interventions covering prevention, withdrawal, rehabilitation and future protection. So far, over 20 countries have opted for this comprehensive approach, while several more countries are preparing similar programmes. As an example, Tanzania set out to reduce the number of children involved in the worst forms of child labour by 75 per cent. Mid-term evaluation found these objectives are on course.

Q: A worldwide movement against child labour has emerged during the last decade. What more needs to be done?

FR: There has been a failure to acknowledge sufficiently working children's varied experience of violence – physical, psychological and sexual – and take it fully into account when developing plans and programmes. There is still a need to give greater attention internationally and nationally to those forms and situations of work that are intrinsically hazardous and violent, especially those in remote, illicit or hidden locations. There is also a need to work with trade unions and employer organizations to improve protections for the youngest members of the regular workforce. A wide-range of measures is needed to address workplace violence against children. The problem has to be tackled as a livelihood, human rights, labour, health and safety, and law enforcement issue, starting with efforts to prevent under-age children entering the workplace in the first place. The key departure point has to be a zero tolerance of violence against working children wherever they work.

[1,055 words]

^{*/} *The United Nations Secretary General's Study on Violence Against Children.* The report is available on-line at: www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/study/SGSVAC.pdf. The full text of the study's findings will be published in *World Report on Violence against Children*, by Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, November 2006, (advance launch on 12 October).