



International
Labour
Organization

AN END TO CHILD LABOUR IS IN SIGHT

By Juan Somavia

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The ILO has just launched a major new global report on child labour.

We have some encouraging news to share. Despite the difficulty of the struggle, we are beginning to see signs of a reduction in child labour – especially its hazardous forms – in many parts of the world.

Our report indicates that the number of child labourers globally has fallen by 11 per cent over the last four years. That's 28 million fewer children at work. And the sharpest decline is in the area of hazardous work by children where we have seen a 26 percent reduction.

Far more than a compilation of statistics, this report is a story of dignity and hope. It tells us that more girls and boys around the world are on the path from workrooms to classrooms: out of exploitation toward real opportunity.

That is the rightful path for every child. But paving it hasn't been easy. There has been denial, doubting and indifference along the way. Many claimed progress was not possible. Child labour, they said, is just a fact of life. Well, it is not. And, a growing community of conscience has pressed on. Courageous women and men spurring grassroots movements for action. Committed communities joining hands to say child labour has no place where we live. Visionary leaders who have committed the resources to make things happen. Consumers rejecting products made by the hands of children. Employer and worker organizations contributing their voices and full support.

Children and youth in schools mobilizing in solidarity and becoming one of the biggest social forces of all to expose and end child labour. Together, they represent the emergence of a genuine worldwide movement against child labour. And they are the real heroes. Their efforts have been coupled with increased political will.

The ILO Convention on the worst forms of child labour has seen the most ratifications in the shortest time for any Convention in ILO history — 159 ratifications in seven short years. And at last year's UN World Summit, global leaders endorsed the elimination of child labour as a major element in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. It is a sound investment. Research indicates that the benefits of eliminating child labour exceed the costs by six to one.

Now is not the time to relent. It is the time to redouble our efforts. It is the time to take our work to the next level. That is why our report sets out the goal of eliminating the worst forms of child labour in the next ten years. It can be done. In fact, more than 30 countries have already set similar or even earlier target dates.

Decent work for parents. Quality education for children. Real opportunity for young people. Dignity for all. Getting there is difficult and complex. But this report signals hope. In this 21st century, no child should be brutalized by exploitation or be placed in hazardous work. No child should be denied access to education. No child should have to work for his or her survival.

We all have a responsibility to build that future. And we are on the right track. Let's keep up the momentum. Let's resolve to keep investing in the struggle for the right of every child to their childhood.

I invite you to take an active part in this struggle. We must overcome obstacles with persistence and conviction.

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