

PRESS RELEASE

ASIA-PACIFIC MARKS WORLD DAY AGAINST CHILD LABOUR WITH FOCUS ON EDUCATION

World Day Against Child Labour (**12 June**) will be marked with a focus on the role of education in combating child labour, and particularly the need to improve children's access to schooling.

Taking the theme: "Education: the right response to child labour", the Asia-Pacific region will mark the day with numerous events in at least 12 countries. Around the world, many countries will organize rallies, exhibitions and meetings, and the International Labour Office (ILO) in Geneva is releasing a report on child labour and education based on data gathered in 34 countries.

World Day Against Child Labour has special significance in Asia-Pacific because the region is home to the largest number of working children in the world. The ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour estimates that of the 166 million working children between 5-14, 122 million are in Asia-Pacific. Millions are either denied educational opportunities that would give them a better future or must balance work with education. In Asia and the Pacific, more than 27 million children of primary school age are not enrolled in school, out of a global total of 75 million.

This may be because of the costs involved, because their families rely on their work, or because there are no available school facilities. But without education children enter the labour force young, often well below the legal 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.

"The Asia-Pacific region enjoys a reputation as a vibrant economic region, but it is also home to more working children than any other region in the world," states Mr. Guy Thijs, Deputy Regional Director, ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. "Without access to free quality education, child labourers become youth with poor employment prospects who cannot lift their families out of a poverty trap, become parents who cannot give their children a better life, and cannot contribute effectively to national development."

In Asia-Pacific, activities to mark World Day are taking place in at least 12 countries, including Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, **Sri Lanka** and Thailand.

Sri Lanka enjoys one of the region's highest literacy and numeracy rates, emphasised Ms. Tine Staermose, Director ILO Sri Lanka. To support this, the World Day Against Child Labour activities in **Sri Lanka** have been designed to raise general awareness on the importance of education to keep children in school and out of child labour. A training programme for journalists, supports a month long multi media campaign on child labour issues. Using local language translations of the resource materials developed by the ILO for World Day Against Child Labour (2008) and the ILO Teachers Training Kit on Child Labour, a series of events have been organised by a group of teachers unions covering schools in the districts of Colombo, Kalutara, Trincomalee, Kandy, Nuwara Eliya, Puttalam, Batticaloa, Anuradhapura, Galle, Matara, Badulla, Moneragala, Polonnaruwa, Ampara and Hambantota to motivate teachers to accept the responsibility of keeping children in school. This activity will culminate in a national inter-school competition on measures adopted by schools to prevent children from dropping out of school and to enrol back to school those children of compulsory school education age of children who are not in school.



The Women and Children's Division of the Department of Labour has been provided with all the ILO resource materials to be used to focus their own national awareness raising campaign to commemorate World Day Against Child Labour towards education as the right response to child labour. The ILO poster has been distributed to schools and institutions around the country and will be on display in public places.

Among the specific events are lessons given by teachers in schools about the plight of migrant children and their vulnerability to child labour in the border areas of **Thailand** where they live in significant numbers. In **Kunming, China**, they are celebrating "Education Day" and activities include a media campaign to prevent trafficking of ethnic minority girls. In **Mongolia**, the focus will be on teachers, involving them in efforts to stop child labour and promote the importance of free compulsory education. A new programme which uses education and training to combat child labour will be launched in the **Pacific**. In **Bangladesh**, there will be children's rallies and a national seminar jointly organized by ILO, UNESCO, and UNICEF, in which new findings of their joint research on child labour and education linkages will be discussed. Along with a national media campaign, there will be a theatre performance about child labour in the carpet industry and a march of rag picking children in **Pakistan**. In **Nepal**, events will include a mass rally to promote compulsory free education, street dramas, speech and art competitions, a bicycle rally, a school debate and radio and TV spots. This will be held in conjunction with a regional technical consultation of the **UN Girls' Education Initiative** to strategize on how best to achieve gender equality in education in Asia-Pacific.

The new ILO new technical report on child labour and education based on surveys conducted in 34 countries worldwide report finds that:

- Child labour is associated with a lower rating on the Education Development Index, which measures a country's performance in universal primary education, adult literacy, quality of education and gender parity;
- There is strong evidence that when children try to combine school with work, school attendance falls as the number of hours worked increases;
- Working makes it more likely for a child to have to repeat a school year, and having to repeat a grade often leads to children dropping out of school altogether;
- Girls often carry a double burden of work inside and outside the home, putting their schooling at risk.

To tackle child labour the ILO is calling on countries to provide:

- Education for all children at least to the minimum age of employment;
- Education programmes that reach out to working children and other excluded groups through properly resourced quality education and skills training; and
- Education for all children and decent work for adults.

The Director
ILO Colombo Office
202-204, Baudhaloka Mawatha
Colombo 7.
Tel: 2592525

