

PRESS RELEASE

World Day Against Child Labour: **New ILO Report Highlights Plight of Children in Domestic Labour**

GENEVA (ILO News): Child domestic labour is a widespread and growing global phenomenon that traps as many as ten million children or more—mostly girls—in hidden forms of exploitation, often involving abuse, health risks and violence, according to a new report issued today by the International Labour Office (ILO).

“Helping Hands or Shackled Lives? Understanding child domestic labour and responses to it” documents the exploitation of these children—some as young as 10—for the first time on a global level.

Prepared by the ILO’s International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), the report examines in detail the plight of children working in sometimes hazardous forms of domestic labour, and was issued on the eve of the third World Day Against Child Labour. Children in domestic labour are usually “invisible” in their communities, toiling for long hours with little or no pay, frequently abused, and regularly deprived of the chance to play or go to school.

Across the globe, communities will commemorate the World Day with a wide range of activities. In Indonesia, the ILO Jakarta Office, through its International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), will launch a book on child domestic workers in Indonesia titled “Flowers on the Rocks” at Perpustakaan Nasional, Jakarta, on Monday, 14 June 2004, from 09.00 am to 13.00 pm.

The launch will be followed by a public debate, presenting panellists such as Siswono Yudohusodo (Vice Presidential Candidate); Dr. Rahmat Santika (Deputy IV of the Ministry of Women’s Empowerment) and Nurul Arifin (Actor). The event will be opened by the State Minister for Women’s Empowerment, H.E. Sri Redjeki Sumaryoto, and Country Director of the ILO in Indonesia, Alan Boulton.

While acknowledging the difficulty of providing precise figures for the number of domestic child labourers worldwide, the report says that they comprise a substantial portion of the more than 200 million children working in the world today. The report cites numerous country estimates, including studies showing that more than two million children are to be found in domestic labour in the Republic of South Africa, 559,000 in Brazil, 250,000 in Haiti, 200,000 in Kenya, 264,000 in Pakistan and 100,000 in Sri Lanka.

According to the report, some 700,000 children work in the Indonesian capital Jakarta alone, 300,000 in Dhaka, Bangladesh and 150,000 in Lima, Peru.

“Millions of children work night and day outside of their family homes, toiling as domestic child labourers. Nearly all are exploited, exposed to hazardous work and subject to abuse...this must stop now”, says ILO Director-General Juan Somavia.

The report defines child domestic labourers as all children in domestic service who are under the legal minimum working age, as well as those above the legal minimum age but under the age of 18 who are in an exploitative situation. Many of these working children are very young: 10 per cent of child labourers in Haiti were under 10 years of age and 70 per cent of children employed “by other households” in Morocco were under 12.

According to the report, all domestic child labourers, without exception, are at risk because of the very nature of child domestic labour, which is not only widely accepted but often considered a “better” alternative for children from poor families.

“They are in a workplace – even if that workplace is someone else’s home – hidden from public view and labour inspection. The children are consequently at risk not only of exploitation but also of abuse and violence”, says Dr. June Kane, the author of the report. “It is vital that child domestic labour, so often neglected because the exploitation and abuse take place behind closed doors, receives attention.”

The report also says that more girls under 16 work in domestic service than in any other category of labour. In countries like Brazil, Guatemala and Costa Rica, more than 90 per cent of children working in domestic service are girls.

According to the report, the status of women and girls, family and child poverty, ignorance of the risks of domestic service, the increasing number of AIDS orphans and the persistence of traditional hierarchies all contribute to pushing children into domestic labour. Factors on the “pull-side” are the perception of domestic service as preparation for marriage, the increasing affluence of parts of the population that reinforce hierarchies, and the need to pay off debt. Also, employers are often seen as benefactors or as an extended family.

Not all child domestics end up without a future, the report says. ILO experience in Asia, Central and South America and Africa shows that with strong social and national institutions, and income or credit options for the parents, children under the minimum working age can be successfully removed from domestic labour.

“Child domestic labour is a waste of human talent and potential. With the help of constructive and sustainable solutions from the ILO technical cooperation programme, governments, employers and workers worldwide stand ready to put an end to this abuse”, says Frans Röselaers, Director of the ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC).

June 12 marks the third World Day Against Child Labour. The ILO launched the World Day in 2002 as a means of raising the visibility of the problem and highlighting the global movement to eliminate child labour, particularly its worst forms.

^{2/} *Helping Hands or Shackled Lives? Understanding child domestic labour and responses to it*, International Labour Office, 2004, ISBN 92-2-115747-4. For a copy of the report go to <http://www.ilo.org/childlabour> or contact communication@ilo.org.