

THE ILO MANDATE

ILO action against forced labour stretches back to its foundation in 1919 - the principles are enshrined in the Constitution.

The ILO maintains that work should be freely chosen and free from threats and penalties. It defines forced labour as work or service exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty, and for which they have not offered themselves voluntarily. Two core Conventions, the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29), and the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105), deal with this issue - it is also part of the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182).

In 1998, the Organization's member States adopted the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work - reaffirming their commitment to eliminating forced and compulsory labour. The Declaration also upholds the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining; the effective abolition of child labour; and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

The most comprehensive examination of the state of forced labour worldwide yet carried out by the ILO was issued in 2001 - a Global Report prepared as part of the Declaration's follow-up.

In the wake of the report, the ILO Governing Body in 2001 established the new **Special Action Programme to Combat Forced Labour**. Its work includes research, awareness raising and technical cooperation, working with governments, employers, workers and others to abolish forced labour.

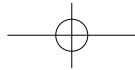
For further information contact:

Special Action Programme to Combat Forced Labour
InFocus Programme on Promoting the Declaration
International Labour Office
4, Route des Morillons
CH-1211 Geneva, Switzerland
Tel : + 41 22 799.80.30
Fax: +41 22 799.65.61
declaration@ilo.org
www.ilo.org/declaration



Special Action Programme to Combat Forced Labour

Declaration on Fundamental Principles
and Rights at Work



Is forced labour a relic of a bygone era? Sadly, it is not. Today, forced labour affects millions of people around the globe. It wears a multitude of faces. A man caught in debt bondage struggling to clear a forest; a domestic worker locked inside her employer's house; a villager forced to build a road; a young woman pushed into prostitution - all are victims of forced labour. And today, new forms of forced labour are menacing children, women and men in developing and developed countries alike.

How extensive is the problem? Precise estimates of the number of forced labourers in the world today are lacking - data are scarce. We do know that, while ancient practices, such as slavery and feudal bondage, seem to be declining, trafficking for forced or compulsory labour is growing rapidly.

The chief destinations include the urban centres of the world's richer countries, together with the capitals of developing and transition countries. Other countries - notably in Asia, Africa and southern Europe, have become points of origin, destination and transit at the same time.

Forced labour is also becoming harder to detect. Increasingly, it is exacted in the illicit underground economy. It is often organized by international criminal gangs, who find trafficking in people less dangerous than trafficking in drugs.

In essence, forced labour occurs when one human being has abusive control over another. It involves denial of freedom, and coercion.

The main forms that exist today include:

- slavery and abductions;
- compulsory participation in public works projects;
- forced labour in agriculture and remote rural areas;
- domestic work in forced labour situations;

- forced labour imposed by the military; and
- forced labour in trafficking in persons.

The victims are men, women and children. Coercive recruitment practices, especially in rural areas, are often used to push people into debt bondage in slavery-like conditions. They toil on farms, plantations, in forestry, brick kilns and fisheries, to name just a few. Indigenous peoples are particularly vulnerable.

Poverty, unemployment, civil disorder, political repression and discrimination all help create fertile recruiting grounds for traffickers. Demand fuels the process. While it is trafficking for sexual exploitation that captures most media attention, trafficking for labour exploitation is also a serious problem. Domestic work, agriculture, carpets, textiles and construction are among the sectors where forced labour is commonly found.

A GLOBAL RESPONSE

What can be done? The ILO set up the Special Action Programme to Combat Forced Labour to lead an intensified programme of activities. Work includes:

Research - to establish the size and the nature of the problem. Forced and compulsory labour is usually hidden, and reliable statistics and information are almost nonexistent. ILO work includes a research programme in Pakistan investigating bonded labour in various districts and industries. Forced labour research is also underway in Brazil. In Europe, action research is focusing on trafficking for sexual and labour exploitation, looking at countries of origin, transit and destination.

Raising awareness - to draw attention to the problem and promote effective responses. Acknowledging that forced labour exists is a vital first step. Creating broad

support for elimination efforts is also key. Government - including law enforcement officials - employer and worker organizations, and civil society all have roles to play in efforts to combat forced labour. Seminars have been held in countries ranging from Mongolia and Viet Nam to Guatemala and Peru.

Technical cooperation programmes - to support governments and social partners working to end forced labour, and help victims rebuild their lives. Examples include an initiative in Nepal to help achieve sustainable elimination of the now-outlawed kamaiya system of bonded labour. In Brazil, a project supports mobile inspection teams, helps safeguard rescued workers against repeated abuse, and works with employers and workers to build stronger industrial relations systems. In India, a project in the State of Tamil Nadu also focuses on bonded labour, with preventive measures including microfinance and skills training, and support for sub-district vigilance committees.

