

November 7, 2013

Statement of His Excellency

Mr. Selim Jreissati

Minister Of Labour

**at the Launch of the National Action Plan to Eliminate
the Worst Forms of Child Labour in Lebanon by 2016**

7 November 2013

Presidential Palace – Baabda, Lebanon

Your Excellency, President of the Republic,

Attention and care given to labor issues, workers and relevant legislations should not be limited to adult workers or to mediation in conflicts between employers and workers or regulation of the migrant labor force but should be much more comprehensive, wide and deep as these issues involve more elements, details and approaches.

Social Justice cannot be reached only by ensuring decent work for male and female workers or by promoting and implementing the basic work principles and rights such as eliminating discrimination in the employment and occupation, acknowledging the rights of collective bargain and freedom of association and eliminating forced labor unless another high goal is achieved which is the elimination of child labor in all its forms namely the worst forms thereof. How can social justice be achieved in a society where children are living in the most abominate and server conditions, where children are abandoned in a labor market full of risks and malpractices that snap at their bodies, degrade their morals, shatter their hopes, destroy their future and even steel their life?

When Lebanon ratified international and Arab conventions related to children, namely “Combating Child Labor”, it wasn’t a coincidence but a

commitment to the respect of human rights based on Lebanon's extensive knowledge of such rights.

However, Combating the Worst Form of Child Labor cannot be achieved through legislations alone but it certainly cannot be achieved without them.

The Ministry gave this issue a special attention based on the fact that each child or juvenile committing an act detrimental to his upbringing and morals is a disgrace for whoever's in charge of providing decent work conditions. How can work be decent if the worker is a child or juvenile exploited at so many levels? How can we reconcile between the requirements of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the dignity and rights of working juveniles or children namely in light of the severe work conditions that affects the core of the human values and rights of children and juveniles in a sound upbringing? That is why we adopted in our work and plan the slogan: "Together towards a society free from the Worst Forms of Child Labor".

Our children are the center of our attention today as the child of today is the juvenile of tomorrow and the man of the future and as his life path starts with the respect of his age, his privacy, his fragility and his feeling.

The Ministry of Labor strived and is still striving to give this issue the priority it deserves based on the provisions of two international labor conventions, Convention No 138 on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment and Convention No 182 on the Worst Form of Child Labor.

Committed to applying these conventions, the Ministry, and with a remarkable encouragement of H.E. President of the Republic, General Michel Suleiman and a rapid response from H.E. Prime Minister and their Excellencies the Ministers, issued decree No 8987 dated on 29/12/2012 prohibiting the employment of minors under the age of 18 in works which are likely to harm their health, safety or morals.

But the very difficult economic and social situation that Lebanon is currently witnessing has negative impact on the behavior of children, whether Lebanese, displaced or refugees, not to mention the exploitation that they are being subjected to in their daily life as thousands are living in severe conditions stealing away their

childhood and health and obliging some to use weapons and cause riots and acts of violence, which is a dangerous perversion in the behavior of children and juveniles totally disregarded by adults and even encouraged by them.

Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning that the slogan did not remain just a slogan as it was translated into action. A specialized national committee was established, comprising members of public administrations and civil society as well as representatives of international organizations. This Committee was in charge of combating and confronting this phenomenon. And as the elimination of child labor is a national responsibility, it was necessary to activate the role of the National Committee to Combat Child Labor in the Ministry of Labor with the continuous cooperation and collaboration of the ILO Regional Office for the Arab States to whom we would like to express our thanks and appreciation for all the programs that helped the Committee raise awareness and engage all concerned parties such as the media that helped communicating with the various segments of the society, raising their awareness on the risks of this negative phenomenon that affects the life of juveniles and children in its core.

Among the Ministry's concrete achievements demonstrating that the project is not just ink on paper and that decrees are not mere theoretical texts, the Ministry of Labor took the initiative of holding regular and systematic meetings with the National Committee to Combat Child Labor, and provided a platform for working children in the ministry, where children and juveniles can come, on their own and by their own initiative, accompanied by whoever's adopting their case and witnessing the cruelty of their work, to express their agony, pain and sorrow in a place where they can be heard, and where fact finding can be initiated by the labor inspection department in order to take appropriate measures and protect the child and the juvenile from any exploitation or abuse. These concrete achievements also include the establishment of an interactive website to raise awareness and report cases of exploitation, so that the ministry does not remain secluded from the child or the juvenile working in harsh conditions conflicting with ordinances, and it doesn't drift away from its mission of preserving the dignity of the Lebanese regardless of their age. In addition, the Ministry prepared a guide with the collaboration of the International Labor Organization and in conjunction with the American University in Beirut, available to all employers, workers and citizens of all segments of the society, who care for children and juveniles, just like a Father

who watches over his children. The ministry, and through the National Committee to Combat Child Labor and in collaboration with the International Labor Organization, also elaborated a national awareness strategy to combat the worst forms of child labor in Lebanon, which relies on gradually raising awareness over a period of 3 years in order to achieve the desired goal which complies with Lebanon's international obligations to eliminate the worst forms of labor for children under the age of eighteen in Lebanon. I don't want to forget to thank the German Government that expressed its willingness to finance this project and help us achieve its goals, being the government of a country that ideally respect human rights.

This national plan entitled "Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor in Lebanon by year 2016" was adopted by the National Committee to Combat Child Labor in collaboration with the International Labor Organization. This plan seeks to accomplish realistic and achievable goals provided that all concerned parties join efforts, in a presidential term and in light of a government that gave human beings priority over anything else.

Thank You.

Selim Jreisati

Minister of Labor