



***ILO Convention No.182:**
A decade of commitment
to end the worst forms of child labour.*



International Labour Organization
Organisation internationale du Travail
Organización Internacional del Trabajo

Keynote Speech
10th Anniversary of the ILO Convention No. 182 and
World Day against Child Labour
12 June 2009

“Giving all Children a Chance: End Child Labour in Thailand”

Mr. Guy Thijs

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International Labour Organization

Good morning,
Honorable

Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Labour,
Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security
Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education
Distinguished representatives from Embassies
Representatives of Employer and Employee Organizations
Directors of the National Council for Child and Youth Development and the
Foundation for Children’s Development
Other representatives of non-governmental agencies and concerned agencies
Ladies and gentlemen

It gives me great joy and pleasure to be able to address you on the occasion of the World day Against Child Labour- a very special day in my agenda and I hope also in yours.

Ten years ago in June 1999 the International Labour Conference unanimously adopted the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, No. 182 to tackle and eliminate the worst forms of child labour as a priority of national and international action. As a personal member of the Committee Secretariat that supported the drafting of this Convention I can assure you it was a very glorious moment and the culmination of many years of

preparation. Just the year before a global march against child labour that had started in over 80 countries culminated in Geneva during the 1998 International Labour Conference and brought the importance of the issue right to the doorstep of the ILO and UN Offices in Geneva. Seeing some of the kids that joined the March from all over the world enter the halls of the UN Palais des Nations with their banners was a moment I will never forget.

After such a successful start - rapid progress followed quickly. The Convention has recorded an unprecedented rate of ratification and is close to reaching universal ratification. As of today the Convention had been ratified by 169 countries or over 90 % of the member states. In Asia and the Pacific almost all countries have ratified C 182, including Thailand, with a few exceptions such as new member states in the Pacific, Burma, and so on.

Obviously ratification is only one step in the process. It is a demonstration of commitment of Governments to tackle the problem- nothing less nothing more. The real work that follows is implementation to ensure conditions in the country match requirements set by the convention. Through its International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour, ILO has assisted over 80 countries in the last decade to put measures in place to get member states closer to meeting the obligations of the Convention. Many donors- some of which are represented here today joined us on this path. Millions of child workers benefited from initiatives inspired by the Convention's drive against practices such as the use of children in slavery, forced labour, trafficking, debt bondage, serfdom, prostitution, pornography, forced or compulsory recruitment for armed conflict and all forms of work that are likely to harm the safety, health or morals of children.

The convention called upon ILO member States to **take immediate and effective measures** to secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour as **a matter of urgency**. This focus on the most extreme forms of child labour was pursued- not because other forms of child labour were considered more acceptable - but because priorities had to be set to make progress- the motto was basically –first things first. Has this strategy paid off? The answer to this question is obviously debatable as so many actors and factors are at play in efforts to eliminate child labour.

The most reliable indicators of performance are hard facts and figures. What do the figures show? Well, the most recent ILO global report on child labour in 2006, pointed to an 11 per cent fall in the numbers in child labour world-wide over the previous four years- but even more importantly - the number of children in the worst forms of child labour decreased much more sharply, by 26 per cent overall, and by 33 per cent for children in the 5-14 age group. Thus the number of children in the worst forms of child labour decreased more rapidly than the over all decline in all forms of child labour.

Measures that have made a difference included new or enhanced legal frameworks to tackle the worst forms of child labour, enforcement mechanisms that included sanctions against those who break laws, national plans and programmes that set specific timeframes for action, direct action and assistance for the affected children and their families, including education and training as well as monitoring mechanisms to track progress. Moreover efforts to tackle poverty and expand access to education have to go hand-in-hand with action against child labour to make gains in addressing the problem sustainable.

Indeed, the goal of eradicating child labour is closely linked to other international development efforts. Recent progress reports suggest that the international community is a long way from reaching the development targets set in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). If the present trends continue it is estimated that by 2015 there will still be 29 million children not enrolled in primary school at risk of drifting into the labour force and hence risk exposure to the worst forms of child labour.

This year the World Day against Child Labour Campaign 12 June 2009 marks the celebration of the 10th Anniversary of the ILO Convention No. 182 and combines this with specific attention to the vulnerabilities of girls in the light of the global economic crisis.

The campaign “*Giving Girls a Chance: End Child labour*” is being undertaken on a global scale. Why this specific focus on girls you may ask? Girls face multiple disadvantages - many of which are embedded in cultural practices. While there is proportionally little difference between girls and boys in terms labour force participation - girls are often doubly burdened combining household chores and other economic activities with school and as a result having their schooling jeopardized. This combined with the already limited access to education and skills training opportunities for girls puts them at a real disadvantage.

The ongoing economic crisis threatens girls in many ways and is likely to aggravate this discrimination and erode some of the recent advances that have been made. We know that higher levels of poverty generate child labour. When families faced with hardship have to choose between educating a boy or a girl, the girl often loses out. Investing in girls' education is however very important to our long-term development efforts because the benefits trickle down from generation to generation. Educated girls marry later, have fewer and healthier children, and ensure their own children are educated. Taking girls out of work and putting them into school is therefore one of the best investments any country can make.

Here in Thailand, we have seen recent progress made by the government and partners as reflected in the “*National Policy and Plan to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labour for the period 2009-2014*” passed by the Cabinet in January 2009. This plan shows the commitment to tackle the worst forms of child labour within a set timeframe. The 15 years free education for all policy is a significant measure in this respect. Thailand is on the right track to reach the global goal of eradicating the worst forms of child labour by 2016.

However, challenges remain among the most vulnerable groups of children such as children of ethnic minorities, children of migrant workers, migrant children who enter to the country without parents, and stateless children. Opportunities for education, access to health services, and adequate protection is limited for them. Thus the campaign against child labour in Thailand needs to expand its coverage to all children that reside in the country regardless of their nationalities, ethnicity or gender. The economic crisis also brings with it additional challenges with high joblessness and thus less capacity for Thai parents to adequately care for their children, and for youth to find decent jobs and not be subject to exploitation. The risk of backtracking on progress made so far is real so our efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labour simply cannot waiver at this time.

With financial support of the United States Department of Labour, **ILO-IPEC Thailand** - in coordination with the Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, the Ministry of Education, the National Council for Child and Youth Development, the Foundation for Children's Development, the Child Media Network, and the Health Promotion Fund have organized this special event to raise public awareness and cooperation in efforts to eradicate child labour in Thailand. I am hopeful it will harness our combined resolve to expand and strengthen initiatives to

eradicate child labour – particularly its worst forms in Thailand by the year 2016 at the latest.

On 12 June we call for:

- Policy responses to tackle the causes of child labour, with particular attention to girls as well as children of ethnic minorities, children of migrant workers, and stateless children.
- Urgent action to tackle the worst forms of child labour.
- Greater attention to education and training needs of adolescent girls and all vulnerable children that reside in Thailand, and
- Targeted measures to protect poor households from the impact of the economic crisis.

I hope you will all join us in this worldwide movement against child labour and give girls a chance to make their rights a reality.

Thank you