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联合国教育、  
科学及文化组织

**Message from Mr Koïchiro Matsuura,  
Director-General of UNESCO,  
on the occasion  
of World Day Against Child Labour**

**12 June 2008**

It is unacceptable and shameful that over 200 million children between the ages of 5 and 17 are forced to work. They are being deprived of their childhood, their potential and their dignity. Their physical and mental development is also at risk.

An even graver concern is that over three-quarters of child labourers are under the age of 15, even though the ILO's Minimum Age Convention of 1973 states that no child under the age of 15 should work. This violates the fundamental right to education and constitutes a major obstacle to school participation. Child labour not only keeps millions of children out of school, but also means that many more, while enrolled in school, cannot attend full time, drop out early, or are unable to learn because they are too tired or have lost their interest in academic achievement.

A majority of the world's governments have recognized the value of education as a human right and a development imperative. In 2000, at the World Education Forum in Dakar, 164 countries, together with partner organizations from around the world, made a collective commitment to dramatically expand learning opportunities for all children, youth and adults by 2015. However, despite important progress, we are far from reaching the Education for All (EFA) goals. According to the most recent data from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 75 million children of primary school age do not attend school – 55% of whom are girls. Many of them are forced to work because they are poor and because their families cannot afford to send them to school.

There is a clear link between access to education and the elimination of child labour, as the theme of this year's World Day Against Child Labour reminds us. Education – The Right Response to Child Labour: this message highlights the

strategic role of education in breaking the vicious cycle of poverty, ignorance and inequality which forces so many children into work. It also recalls the plight of those children who, because they are forced work, are deprived of their right to basic education and the promise of empowerment it offers. The drive to end child labour and the quest to provide Education for All are interdependent and must be worked for together.

In this regard, and as a first step, it is vital that appropriate legal and policy frameworks are in place to ensure access to quality education with equal opportunities for all children. Special support must be given to the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children to protect them from the need to work and to facilitate their attendance at school.

With its partners, UNESCO is firmly committed to combating child labour, including through its role in monitoring the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In particular, UNESCO is working with Member States to formulate policies to increase access to education and improve its quality through both universal and targeted measures. This action aims to find tailored responses to child labour through education, with a particular focus on marginalized and vulnerable groups. UNESCO is also a founding member of the Global Task Force on Child Labour and Education for All, and will continue to collaborate with all stakeholders in this key initiative to keep child labour on the global agenda and mobilize action to tackle this urgent problem.

Over the coming months, UNESCO will use every opportunity to advocate against child labour, including at: the High-Level Event on the Millennium Development Goals (New York, 25 September 2008); the 48<sup>th</sup> Session of the International Conference on Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future (Geneva, 25-28 November 2008); and the Eighth Meeting of the High-Level Group on Education for All (Oslo, 16-18 December 2008).

This World Day Against Child Labour is an occasion to raise awareness of the importance of education to eliminating child labour and ensuring that the rights and dignity of all children are upheld.



Koichiro Matsuura