



**Message by Juan Somavia
Director-General of the International Labour Office
on the occasion of
World Day against Child Labour**

12 June 2009

Today we focus on girls trapped in child labour: toiling in the fields from sunrise to sunset; unseen in domestic work; or living and working on the streets of the world. Like all children they have the right to be free from child labour, to have an education, to realize their potential.

Yet discrimination, the often hidden nature of their work and the burden of household responsibility, commonly conspire heavily against girls.

On this World Day, we also mark the 10th anniversary of the adoption of ILO Convention No. 182 on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour. We are now only 14 ratifications short of universal ratification by the ILO's 183 member States. It is a remarkable expression of national commitment and intent. This Convention also calls on us to pay attention to the special situation of girls.

The ILO estimates that some 100 million girls are in child labour, with 53 million in hazardous work. Too many suffer multiple handicaps: the shackles of poverty that deprive them of options; traditions that devalue girls and deny them their rights; and education systems and practices that may effectively perpetuate their exclusion.

Investing in girls' education and training is an investment in equality and social progress – a girl with an education is better armed to break the cycle of child labour and poverty. Experience shows that this brings immediate benefits for families. Communities, societies and economies also benefit. Yet women still account for almost two thirds of the 16 per cent of the world's illiterate population – the legacy of persistent structures of inequality and discrimination.

As the present crisis takes its toll, many women and men are being pushed into poverty or deeper into poverty. Hard won progress towards the elimination of child labour is threatened and girls are more vulnerable. We must be vigilant.

Policy choices for recovery and beyond will reflect the nature of the commitment to all the world's children. The values, principles and rights that have been so widely endorsed must be given expression through national and international action to support societies where:

- the rights of girls and boys are equally respected;
- survival strategies do not depend on the labour of children; and
- basic education is accessible to all and choice is not a matter of deciding between educating a boy or a girl.

Sustainable responses call for integrated strategies that also promote jobs for parents and social protection for individuals and families. This is the approach of the Decent Work Agenda.

On this World Day, let us re-commit, individually and collectively, to discharging our responsibility for giving girls a chance and ensuring decent lives for all children.

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