

(Manila, Philippines) Every day Rodel Morcozo had to bend his back to carry a heavy wooden pan filled with sand and gold. His skin was sun-burned while his tiny hands were constantly soaked in muddy water. He had to work for 8-12 hours to earn no more than US\$2 a day, searching for gold or selling cigarettes and candies around a small-scale gold mining site. The work was heavy, particularly so for Rodel because he started work as a child labourer at 10 years old.

"Back then, I was aware of the dangers of handling mercury-based chemicals with bare hands. But I thought it was not so hazardous because many were using mercury-based chemicals without any protection at all. I was so tired, so weak since I had to work at night and go to school the next day. I reached the point of having to work full time, when my parents could not afford to send me to school anymore," he recalls.

Of the 215 million children involved in child labour worldwide, 115 million are involved in hazardous work, according to the International Labour Organization's (ILO) most recent estimates, and their plight is the focus of the 2011 World Day against Child Labour. Hazardous work is defined as being likely to harm children's health, safety or morals by its nature or circumstances. For example, in mining, children like Rodel might face the risks of mine collapses, have to use poisonous chemicals or work with explosives. Hazardous work is also classified as one of the worst forms of child labour (others being slavery, forced labour, illicit activities including drug trafficking and prostitution, and involvement in armed conflict) that the international community has targeted for elimination by 2016.

The problem of child labour is closely linked to poverty and the ILO has warned that the global economic crisis could "further break" progress towards the 2016 elimination target. The intention of the World Day Against Child Labour, marked on June 12, is to highlight the need for urgent action in identifying and tackling hazardous child labour; encouraging global, national and local efforts to combat all forms of child labour and engaging governments, employers' and workers' organizations with the issue. The strategy combines education, social protection and the promotion of decent and productive work for youth and adults.

Of the 2.4 million working children in the Philippines, 60 per cent are estimated to be in hazardous work. "Poor families have no choice but to send their children to work in order to survive, and as such, child labourers are often forced to drop out of school," said Lawrence Jeff Johnson, Director of the ILO Country Office for the Philippines. "The global economic crisis has had an impact on the efforts to reduce poverty at a global level, causing hardship and increased vulnerable employment. Without social protection, many people who lose their paid employment do not have the option of unemployment. They have little choice but to accept whatever work they can find just to survive," said Mr Johnson.

In a bid to make the plight of child workers in the Philippines more visible and encourage the public to combat child labour, the Philippines Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) recently launched a new internet site that allows people to report child labour cases, or child labour perpetrators, find information and data and join discussions. The Child Labor Knowledge Sharing System (CLKSS) site can be found at <http://www.clkss.org.ph>

Rodel, who comes from Camarines Norte, had to disobey his parents to get out of child labour. At 14 years old he joined the Summer Youth Camp of the ILO-International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) and the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement. A few years later he was elected as President of all child advocates in the Bicol region.

"My number one advocacy [goal] was to end child labour in the Philippines. I joined the first ever Global March against Child Labour. I marched on the streets holding a banner on Let's Work Together against Child Labour," said Rodel. After the Global March, Rodel had the chance to go back to school. With the help of ILO-IPEC, he received a full scholarship from Philippines' Senator Loren Legarda that allowed him to move from high school to college and complete a course on Computer System Design and Programming.

Rodel now works on the staff of Senator Legarda. He regularly goes back to his hometown to continue the fight against child labour. He also sends his younger siblings to school to help them stay out of child labour.

The Philippines has committed to reduce the worst forms of child labour by 75 per cent by 2015. It's hoped that the new CLKSS will support this by promoting knowledge sharing, collecting evidence to support analysis on child labour, publicising successful child labour interventions, and monitoring progress towards ending the worst forms of child labour.

"The new Child Labour Knowledge Sharing System is not merely a knowledge sharing tool," said Mr Johnson. "If people sign up and join the call to put an end to child labour, then the network of partners and

advocates will continue to grow. Each of us has a role to play to effectively use this tool in the fight against child labour”.