

# **DECLARATION**

## **of the ECOWAS/ILO Symposium on the West Africa Regional Action Plan to Eliminate Child Labour, Especially the Worst Forms Accra, Ghana 27-29 May 2013**

We, the tripartite participants from Governments, Unions and Employers' Associations of the ECOWAS Member States responsible for the elimination of child labour in West Africa, having:

- participated in the ECOWAS/ILO Symposium on the West Africa Regional Action Plan to Eliminate Child Labour, especially its Worst Forms, held in Accra on 27-29 May 2013;
- exchanged experiences and shared views about progress and challenges from our countries;
- reviewed our own roles and responsibilities in the light of the West Africa Regional Action Plan, adopted by Ministers in December 2012;
- discussed the way forward regarding future activities at national and regional level, including with the ECOWAS Commission:

RECOGNISE that:

- i) child labour violates the rights of children, is condemned by international Conventions and is prohibited by our countries' national laws because it harms their development, health, education, morals and future prospects, and exposes them to hazards and other worst forms of child labour;
- ii) despite encouraging progress in some areas, the incidence of child labour in West Africa remains stubbornly high, is not reducing in line with economic growth, and in some

countries may be rising, with higher prevalence in some sectors or localities;

- iii) child labour perpetuates poverty for future generations of adults, that peace and stability can be jeopardised by frustrated youth with few prospects, and that child labour calls into question the governance of development activities in our countries;
- iv) the lack of regular and comprehensive statistics on the prevalence of child labour in West African countries hampers good policy-making and targeting of programmes/interventions;
- v) child labour continues despite the efforts of governments, enforcement agencies, local authorities, unions and employers' organisations, and development partners to end the practice;
- vi) nonetheless, Member States of ECOWAS have diverse experiences implementing actions and interventions to eliminate child labour, with some successes, which can be shared to mutual benefit;
- vii) child labour is normally more prevalent in the informal, unregulated economy, subsistence activities and small-scale family enterprises yet the product of child labour often enters the value chain of the formal sector, through public and private procurement, and to foreign consumers through international trade;
- viii) children are sent to labour predominantly as a coping mechanism by parents from the poorest and most vulnerable sections of society, who generally lack opportunities for decent work, do not benefit from social protection programmes and cannot access essential services;
- ix) the design of social protection programmes can have a significant impact on the incidence of child labour;

- x) free, accessible and good quality universal education is still not available to many children in West Africa, yet the costs of sending children to school are immediate while the benefits are only apparent longer-term;
- xi) child labour undermines our countries' ability to achieve the education and other Millennium Development Goals and that combining school and work is becoming more widespread, with consequences for pupil attendance rates and low educational attainment;

DECLARE the following:

- a) ECOWAS Member States make faster progress and increased efforts towards the goal of eliminating the Worst Forms of Child Labour in West Africa by 2015 and all child labour as soon as possible thereafter;
- b) Member States collect consistent, comparable and regular statistics on child labour as a means of quantifying the problem and creating the empirical conditions for evidence-based policies on child labour, and share data with the ECOWAS Commission;
- c) Member States call upon the ECOWAS Commission to assist them in sharing lessons on effective interventions against child labour, in assessing each other's performance and methods for reducing child labour, and in providing a forum or platform for finding ways to accelerate progress towards the elimination of child labour in the spirit of collaboration between West African countries and in line with the Regional Action Plan;
- d) the peer review mechanism in the ECOWAS Regional Action Plan to Eliminate Child Labour is of great value for sharing good practices and highlighting deficiencies and, in that respect, encourage other Member States to follow the example of Ghana to submit to peer review;

- e) more attention will be given to certain key precursors for reducing child labour, such as:
- i) facilitating comprehensive birth registration;
  - ii) enforcing free, accessible and good quality compulsory education, including transitional and non-formal education or training for adolescents, so all children can benefit from a proper education, and providing children in or at risk of child labour with the necessary means (such as meals, books, uniforms, etc.) to attend school regularly;
  - iii) designing social protection programmes for the poorest families, which remove the financial need and opportunity-cost of sending their children to school;
  - iv) providing decent work opportunities to adults who are susceptible to sending their children to work;
  - v) establishing governance, enforcement and remedial structures in rural and urban communities and in sub-national authorities responsible for creating a child labour-free environment in their localities;
  - vi) providing the leadership, co-ordination and resources at national level, especially amongst relevant ministries and agencies, planning bodies and through building links with civil society institutions and NGOs, so that the objective of eliminating child labour is mainstreamed into their activities and they take responsibility for attaining that goal, and, in that respect, fortify and re-invigorate the role of the National Steering Committees and Child Labour Units (or equivalent) in each country in West Africa;
  - vii) agreeing, amongst governments and social partners in each country, a list of hazardous work in sectors of economic activity that must not be

undertaken by children, and to keep the list up-to-date, in accordance with the full implementation of ILO Conventions;

- viii) further efforts to prevent and interrupt the trafficking of children and to implement fully the protocols and mechanisms of ECOWAS on this issue;
  - ix) ensuring that an adequate system of child protection is in place for children in or at risk of child labour, especially systems for identification, withdrawal and remediation of children in the worst forms of child labour;
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- f) unions nationally and regionally take further steps to raise awareness amongst their members and organise workers, especially in the informal sector, and negotiate agreements with counterparties against child labour;
  - g) employers' organisations nationally and regionally take further steps to raise awareness amongst their members and others, especially small and medium sized enterprises in the informal sector, and avoid using child labour in their operations or anywhere in their value chain of suppliers and collaborators and to audit compliance thereof;
  - h) unions and employers' organisations nationally and regionally cooperate more closely with each other to use their combined voice to achieve these objectives and hold partners to account;
  - i) governments take systematic steps to avoid using child labour inadvertently in the goods and services they procure and review their procurement rules so that suppliers and contractors guarantee they are child labour free, and audit compliance thereof;
  - j) an integrated, co-ordinated approach by all stakeholders in tackling child labour, especially its worst forms, is essential to accelerate progress and that each country will be guided in this by a National Action Plan, endorsed by its government,

overseen by a representative National Committee and accountable to all through regular monitoring of achievements and impact;

- k) all governments of West Africa ratify ILO Convention 138 on the minimum age and other relevant ILO Conventions, fully domesticate the ratified Conventions into national legislation and take necessary steps to implement them in an efficient and effective manner;
- l) our Parliaments monitor progress in the National Action Plans and hold governments to account for adequate progress to meet targets;
- m) bilateral and multilateral development partners and those organisations giving advice on economic and social policies should assess and make explicit the impact of their partnership and advice on the incidence on child labour in our countries;
- n) resources devoted to eliminating child labour are generally insufficient so effective and efficient use must be made of existing public budgets and other resources which are relevant to the elimination of child labour in a co-ordinated and prioritised manner and in a way that accelerates timely implementation of National Action Plans;
- o) cost estimates of the actions and programmes necessary to eliminate child labour will be prepared by each country in order to quantify the budgetary consequences of achieving the objective and, with ECOWAS and ILO together, mobilise resources nationally and internationally for eliminating child labour in the countries of West Africa.

Each year, we will collectively monitor our performance in delivering this Declaration, using the good offices of the ECOWAS Commission.

This Declaration is addressed to the Governments, unions and employer organisations of the 15 Member States of ECOWAS, to the ECOWAS Commission, and to development partners. It will be submitted to the Brazilian hosts of the Global Conference on Child Labour on 8 – 10 October 2013.