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Children Speak

Vol 2, No. 4, April - May '04

A Newsletter of the Organization for the Protection of Children's Rights

Message from the President

This issue of Children Speak focuses on one of the most pervasive and detrimental situation endangering the proper physical and mental development of children worldwide: child labour.

The ILO estimates that some 246 million children – or one in every six children in the world today - are currently involved in child labour worldwide and that, of these, 179 million – or one in every eight children – were engaged in the worst forms of child labour, including trafficking (1.2 million); forced and bonded labour (5.7 million); armed conflict (0.3 million); prostitution and pornography (1.8 million); and illicit activities (0.6 million).

While child labour is most concentrated in the developing countries, in Asia (127 million) and Africa (48 million) in particular, it is also more prevalent in developed countries than official data would account for. According to the ILO, there are about 2.5 million child labourers in the industrialized countries and at least two of the worst forms of child labour, hazardous work and prostitution, remain relatively widespread throughout these countries.

Child labour has serious health, education and developmental risks for children: 1) Children may be injured or made ill by their work, a problem exacerbated by their developmental susceptibility with possible lifelong repercussions; 2) Excessive work often prevent children from attending school and/or lower their performance in school, which affects them as well as the society at large; 3) Work may impinge on the freedom of children to explore and play, either by taking away too much time or by prematurely exposing children to the harshest aspects of life, 4) Finally children also run the risk of being exploited since employers can typically pay lower wages to children and demand from them tasks that adults would refuse to perform.

The incidence as well as the consequences of child labour highlight the fact that workers under the age of 18 play an essential economic role in most of the countries of the world, including the developed world, and that no country has been successful in protecting these children from physical, social, or economic harm. Much work remains to be done to sensitize the general public on the urgency of addressing this issue and to generate sufficient momentum to protect the rights and interests of our children over and above any other considerations. Together we can and will make a difference!

FOR THE LOVE OF OUR CHILDREN!



Riccardo Di Done



Child Labor in Pakistan

By Muhammad Amin with inputs from SPARC, Pakistan

Until August 1998, Abdul Rashid worked as a carpet weaver outside Lahore. It was when the Pakistani government, under increasing international pressure, agreed to work toward phasing out child labor. Although Abdul and many of his friends managed to escape the clutches of their employers, it is estimated that at least 3.3 million children in the age group of 5-14 years are still employed as laborers in Pakistan. The Federal Bureau of Statistics and the ILO, which conducted the survey, believe that this figure is only a conservative estimate. According to the State of the World's Children Report 2004, nearly 61% of the 250 million child laborers worldwide, are from Asia.

Child labor is all across Pakistan. Millions are employed in informal sectors. Most of them work in auto workshops, cottage industries, sweatshops, provision stores, tea stalls and small restaurants. About 70 percent work in the agriculture sector, but that is unpaid labor as most children work with their families on their own farmlands or till someone else's land.

According to International Conventions, any child who is economically active at the expense of his or her health and education, before attaining the age of 18 years, is a child laborer. The minimum age to enter into employment varies from country to country and is governed by national laws. In

Pakistan, the child labor threshold is 14 years under the ECA (Employment of Children Act 1991). However, the country is obliged to bring its laws in conformity with the CRC (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child), which says that every person under 18 years of age is a child.

The RWG-CL (Regional Working Group on Child Labor) makes a distinction between child work and child labor. Child work includes activities that are not harmful, and may even contribute to the child's development; child labor consists of all types of work, performed by children up to the age of 18 years, that is damaging to their health or their physical, mental, intellectual, moral or social development, and interferes with their education. Established in June 1998 and based in Bangkok, the RWG-CL is a joint effort of the International Save The Children Alliance, World Vision International, IPEC Sub-regional Office for Southeast Asia and the UNICEF Thailand Regional Office.

In Pakistan, child labor is not seen as a problem. Instead, it is viewed as a western propaganda to undermine the country's economy by imposing a new form of trade barrier. Till the early 1990s, the government of Pakistan had been denying even the existence of child labor in the country. The threat of trade sanctions from the west, however, acted as a catalyst in building a momentum against child labor. The Harkins's Bill introduced in March 1998 and the Sanders' Amendment unanimously approved by the US

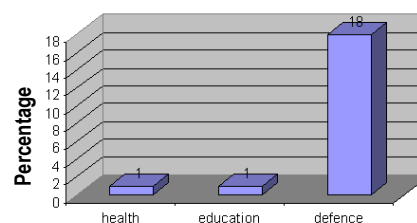


A girl child working in a brick kiln in Peshawar

House of Representatives in 2002, called for a complete ban on imports of such goods to the United States in which child labor has been used at any stage of manufacturing. Pakistan suffered from loss in trade in carpets, surgical instruments and sports goods when strict measures were taken under an ILO-IPEC program beginning June 1994 to combat child labor in soccer ball, carpet manufacturing and surgical instruments.

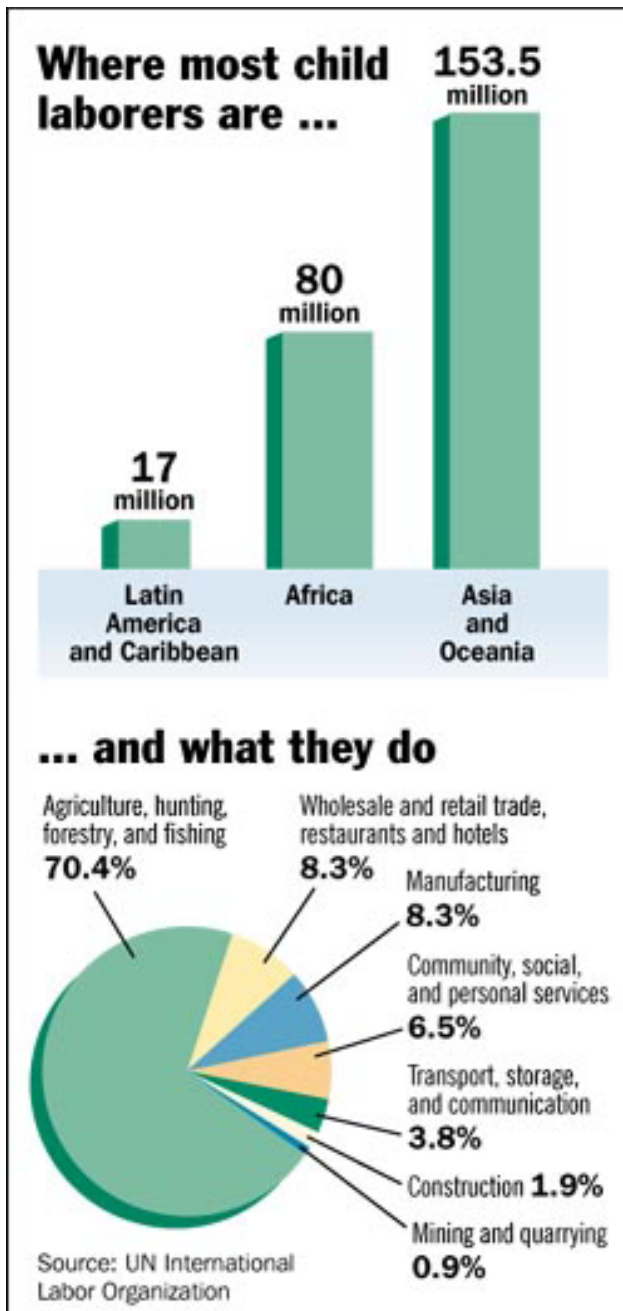
The Government blamed NGOs and journalists for waging an economic warfare against Pakistan allegedly at the behest of foreign agencies. Nevertheless, the incident compelled the Pakistani government to admit that child labor was a problem that needs to be dealt with. However,

Percentage of Govt. Expenditure, 1992 - 2001





PAKISTAN, 1998: Abdul Rasheed worked as a carpet-weaver outside Lahore last August, months before Pakistan agreed to work toward phasing out child labor.



despite a set of laws prohibiting child labor, there is no explicit will on the part of the government and the society to deal with the problem, and the employment of children continues because of the callous attitude of some unscrupulous employers who seek cheap labor for menial jobs and justify their deeds by claiming to bail the children's families from wretched poverty.

The attitude of masses as well as decision makers and government officials is influenced by the poverty argument. They subscribe to the view that it is natural for poor children to work and supplement their family's income rather than go to school. Social science studies indicate quite the contrary. Child labor breeds from poverty and even acts as a catalyst to perpetuate it. A child who starts working at a young age is unable to obtain education and improve his or her skills, thus continuing to be part of a low-paid unskilled workforce throughout his or her life. In fact, poverty is a result of bad governance and wrong policies pursued by successive governments in Pakistan. The whole gamut of state policies and governance is tilted in the favor of the affluent class and those close to the Center of power. People on the periphery of State remain poor and have little or no access to basic services like health, sanitation, clean drinking water and education.

ILO Convention 182 on worst forms of child labor:

While the anti-child labor campaigners all over the world want a complete ban on all forms of child labor, the ILO Convention on worst forms of child labor is a starting point to urgently save children from jobs that are detrimental to their health, safety and morals. Interventions in other sectors can be made at a later stage.

Under the convention, the worst forms of child labor include:

- Slavery and practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, forced or compulsory labor, debt bondage and serfdom;
- Child prostitution or child pornography;
- Use of children in illegal activities, such as drug trafficking;
- Work that is likely to jeopardize the health, safety or morals of children;

Among the major causes of worst forms of child labor are:

- Deep-rooted poverty and vast disparities between the rich and the poor; children help

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their families to survive;

- Traditional attitudes and practices in relation to child and their duties to parents; they often contribute to perpetuating exploitative child labor;
- Poor quality and irrelevant education system;
- Family breakdown;
- Preference for child laborers: a reality in some enterprises and industries;
- Weak enforcement of law and inspection systems, combined with the problem of corruption;
- Macro-economic trends, and the impacts of the economic crisis.

The convention requires ratifying countries to apply the Convention to children under 18 years of age even where national legislation defines childhood as ending earlier. It also calls on states to take action to prohibit and immediately eliminate the worst forms of child labor, designate monitoring mechanisms, adopt action programs, ensure effective enforcement, take measures for prevention, removal, rehabilitation and social reintegration of child workers, and take account of the special situation of girls. Member states must also report regularly to the ILO regarding the application of the Convention and be accountable for allegations of violations.

On June 10, 2001, the Federal Minister for Labor enhanced the age limit for worst forms of child laborers to 18 years from the present limit of 14 years. The government also constituted a committee to study the matter and identify hazardous jobs for children after consulting the provincial governments. The committee's recommendation, after due consideration, would be sent to the cabinet for approval.

On August 15, 2001, the Pakistani government ratified the ILO Convention 182, already

ratified by over 100 countries worldwide. It identified 18 areas where children are involved in 'worst forms of labor' and is working out a package to help parents whose children will be withdrawn from work places. Funds to the tune of Rs 100 million have been allocated for this purpose. Representatives of trade unions, employers and NGOs will supervise the project in its implementation phase. The government is embarking upon a policy to end poverty, withdraw children from the workplace and improve the quality of education.

SPARC, an NGO working on child rights in Pakistan has welcomed the Government's ratification of the Convention but has pointed out that it will remain useless without enabling legislation as in the case with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It states that although laws exist that make certain jobs for children in the age group 14 and below, illegal, they continue to proliferate due to lack of legislation. Moreover, there are as yet no laws dealing with the children working in the informal sector i.e., agriculture, domestic work and small menial jobs on the street including begging.

Elimination of Hazardous jobs by 2005:

The government is also working on a plan aimed at putting an end to all hazardous occupations of child labor by December 2005. Countrywide educational and vocational programs would be launched, besides establishing multipurpose complexes to educate children. The NPA (National Policy and Plan of Action) notes that children suffer readily from hazards of chemical,



Child workers are still preferred in the carpet industry owing to their nimbleness

bacterial contamination, radiation, unnatural work postures, unhygienic environments, extreme temperatures, inhaling of noxious fumes, dust gases etc. It also points out that the younger children and girls are more vulnerable to workplace hazards and economic exploitation. Moreover, because of their work being often hidden, they are denied access to education making them suffer from detrimental socio-cultural practices.

Domestic Child Labor:

Child domestics' or domestic workers are defined by UNICEF as children under the age of 18 who work in other people's households, doing domestic chores, caring for children and running errands, among other tasks. Domestic child workers are an invisible workforce. Each child is separately employed, cannot leave the premises without the permission of the employer and thus is difficult to be counted or contacted. The invisibility of child domestic workers also derives from the fact that the majority are girls. Doing domestic work in a household other than their own is seen as merely an extension of their duties; the concept of employment is missing.

In 2001, the ILO-IPEC conducted interviews of 400 child domestic workers in the twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The results showed that most of the domestic workers were females (69.75%), the highest percentage, (53.52%) being that of age group 10-15 years. The average entry age into a profession was 13 years. A majority of children (74%) had a family size of 5-10 member and the average family size was 6.2. Almost 69% of the surveyed child domestic workers were found to be illiterate. Out of literate respondents, a majority (68%) had primary or lower level education, only 7% had completed the tenth grade. More than 69% of the mothers were working, almost 61% as domestic workers. While stating reasons for work, the highest response (44%) related to low family income, 31% gave large family as a reason, while 21% said that they wanted to be free from the stressful situation in the family. A majority of children (45%) had been working for less than two years and 29% had been working for 2-4 years. Most of the respondents (34%) were doing cleaning, 30% were washing dishes, and 22% washing clothes. As regards working hours, 75% of children worked for less than eight hours; 9% worked for more than 8 hours whereas 15% worked around the clock.

Conclusion:

The percentage of central government expenditures on education is hardly 1% while that on military is almost 18%, a clear indication of how national priorities are influenced by redundant development models. What is critical to the development of a nation is not the number of nukes it possesses, but the quality of life of its people. The future of a community depends on how it values its children and cares for their needs.

One of the major hurdles in eliminating child labor is the mentality that a child helping out his or her parents in chores on the farm, for example, is doing his duty as generations have done in the past, to labor for their parents and support them. Thus Millions of children have to toil in their childhood just to get a loaf of bread. For them there is no play and no education but a hostile world of work and exploitation that drives them into perpetual poverty and misery throughout their lives.

Child labor cannot be and should not be condoned in any situation. It is a scourge on the face of humanity and cannot be justified even where it seems temporarily beneficial for children and their families. It cannot be beneficial to anyone. It denies a child's basic right to equal opportunities in life. Children everywhere must be given opportunities to expand their horizons of knowledge through education. It is only such an enlightened society that can lead humanity out of the mantle of darkness. □

India, U.S. and ILO join hands to fight child labour

The Government of India, on 16 February 2004, in cooperation with the US Department of Labor and the International Labour Organization (ILO) launched a US\$ 40 million programme aimed at eliminating child labour that targets directly some 80,000 children in ten hazardous industries. This is the largest child labour programme ever undertaken by the ILO at the country level.

Indian Minister of Labour, Dr. Sahib Singh Varma, US Deputy Under-Secretary of Labor, Arnold Levine, and ILO Executive Director, Kari Tapiola, participated in the joint launch event of the programme that will seek "the prevention and elimination of hazardous child labour by enhancing the human, social and physical capacity of target communities".



CHILD WORK OR CHILD LABOR? Ten-year old Israt sells cosmetics in the ladies compartment of local trains in Mumbai in the morning and attends school in the afternoon.

The programme is jointly funded by the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) and the Government of India which are providing equal amounts of the total cost of the plan. The ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) will be the executing agency.

The project for the elimination of child labour in selected hazardous sectors is a collaborative effort to provide programme support in a co-ordinated manner to on-going efforts undertaken by the Government of India towards a progressively child labour free country.

During a meeting with ILO Director-General Juan Somavia in January, government officials confirmed their

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Children and the Environment

The United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) 2004 and Tunza International Children's Conference have issued a call for children between the ages of 10-13 years old to apply as delegates for a major international event, which is being held in New London, CT from July 19 to 23, 2004.

Organized by the International Coalition for Children and the Environment, the Conference is a signature event of the United Nations Agency for the Environment (UNEP). The Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation is the founding sponsor. The International Children's Conference is the largest U.N. event dedicated to bringing children from around the world together to discuss the environment and learn about their rights and responsibilities as stewards.

"It will be a meaningful event which will help the children see the importance of protecting the environment and how they, in their local communities, can work towards ensuring that the earth is preserved for future generations," said Barbara Morgan, Executive Director of the ICC04.

First initiated as a result of the

1992 Rio Earth Summit when governments advocated the participation of children in the decision making process on issues of the environment and sustainable development, the conference has been held 4 times already (twice in England, once in Kenya and in Canada.) Beginning with the 2004 conference, the event was renamed Tunza International Children's Conference on the Environment. "Tunza" in Kiswahili means "to care with affection." Kiswahili is a

CONFERENCES

language spoken in East Africa.

ICC04 is open to children who will be between 10 to 13 years old by the conference's opening day, July 19th. The conference is scheduled to take place at Connecticut College in this historic seaport city. In addition to the age requirements, delegates must be nominated by a school or community group and be involved in an environmental project or interested in environmental issues. For more details, contact Barbara Morgan, info@icc04.org, 1-860-437-0757. Complete details can be found on the Conference website: www.icc04.org.

(UNEP)

(ILO)

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Joining hands to fight child labour

resolve to eliminate child labour and announced that India's National Child Labour Project coverage was to be extended from 100 districts to 250.

The new project against child labour in selected hazardous sectors is one of the biggest initiatives against child labour to be undertaken in India, a country with an estimated 11.2 million working children, according to official government estimates.

The project targets directly 80,000 children below 18 years of age working in hazardous industries such as manufacturing fireworks, beedi cigarettes, footwear, locks, matches, bricks, silk, glassware.

The immediate objectives include the identification of children working in selected hazardous occupations in selected zones; the withdrawal of children from hazardous work and providing them with transitional and prevocational education and social support to prevent relapse; economic security for the families who withdraw their children from hazardous work; monitoring and tracking of children who have been released from hazardous work; and strengthening of institutional capacity at national, state, district and local level to combat child labour.



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