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INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS & WORLD CONFEDERATION OF LABOUR

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080/040506

New ILO report: Making the link between poverty and decent work in the fight against child labour

Brussels, 4 May, 2006 - The ICFTU and WCL today welcomed the key findings of the ILO's Global Report "The end of child labour: Within Reach".

"The world's children deserve nothing less than a total global commitment to eliminate child labour. Just like the ILO, we recognize that more can and should be done. At the same time, the international trade union movement is proud to have been one of the main players in the struggle to eliminate child labour, as the report rightly recognises", Guy Ryder, the General Secretary of the ICFTU said today.

The report points to a reduction of child labourers by 11 per cent over the last four years, with the number of children in the worst forms of child labour falling most rapidly by 26 per cent. However, the increase by 15.6 million in the number of children engaged in other forms of child labour is worrying as it may point to a trend where children have shifted one form of child labour to another.

According to Willy Thys, the Secretary General of the WCL, "We must remain vigilant in ensuring that as the worst forms of child labour are eliminated we do not lose sight of the so-called invisible children, who mostly work in the agricultural and domestic sectors. The tragedy of the denial of childhood that these children experience is just as grave and requires even more effort to tackle given the pressing need to organise workers in the informal economy in general."

The report clearly identifies that the success of the strategies employed by the ILO, with its employer, trade union and government constituents, lies in its holistic approach linking the demand for education for all and the pursuit of decent work to ending child labour.

The report also points to the role child labour plays in the vicious cycle of poverty and recognises that child labour elimination and economic growth do not have an automatic correlation but instead must be supported by coherent national-level policies to address the myriad of issues that contribute to the problem.

"It is essential that there is policy coherence between all international institutions, such as UN agencies, the Bretton Woods institutions and the WTO if the good work done by the ILO in promoting the eradication of child labour is to not be undermined by negative trade and finance policies," Thys commented.

"If we ever needed proof that a rights based approach which focuses on equality and human rights is the best mechanism for eliminating child labour, this report delivers it. Moreover, there is a positive

correlation between the reduction in child labour and the ratification of ILO Conventions. This debunks the myth that universal labour standards are somehow anti-development.", Ryder commented.

"However, with 20 ILO members still to ratify ILO conventions on child labour and 218 million children still working, there must be no diminution of efforts to combat this problem. Any programme of action must consider more support to the right to organize and to labour inspection," commented Thys.

The report clearly identifies that the solution to the problem of child labour is found in the nexus between the right of unions to collectively bargain to improve parents' working conditions and engage in strengthened forms of social dialogue.

"The report rightly recognizes that a focus on ensuring access to quality education is key, and with that in mind we support the ILO's call for further integration between efforts at the national and international level to attain the Millennium Development Goals and child labour eradication programs. Within that framework, the discrepancy between the first MDG, universal access to primary education, and the minimum age of employment being 14 as determined by ILO Convention 138 must be urgently addressed to ensure all children under the age of 14 are in formal education," Thys added.

"The international trade union movement stands ready to answer the ILO's call to maintain and intensify our efforts to end child labour. We commit ourselves to doing that within the context of our efforts to eliminate poverty, ensure universal education and decent work for all. National implementation is the key to eliminating child labour and we call on all governments and employers to take the next urgent steps with us." Ryder concluded.

The ICFTU represents 155 million workers in 236 affiliated organisations in 154 countries and territories. <http://www.icftu.org>. ICFTU is also a partner in Global Unions.

The WCL represents 30 million workers worldwide.

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