

GLOBAL UNIONS  
WORLD CONFEDERATION OF LABOUR

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## International Trade Unions Welcome ILO Child Labour Debate

Brussels, 9 June, 2006 - The international trade union movement today welcomed the holding of a key debate at the International Labour Organisation's Annual Conference, as a key moment for the international community to examine progress in eliminating child labour and ensuring that every child goes to school.

Governments, employers and trade unions are discussing the ILO report "The end of child labour: Within Reach" at the Conference. The report sets out results in implementing ILO Child Labour Conventions, and identifies a number of key challenges for the coming years.

"This debate will we hope be a real turning point, bringing the entire international community to a comprehensive commitment to get the tens of millions of child labourers out of work and into school" said Willy Thys, General Secretary of the World Confederation of Labour.

The report sets a target for the elimination of the "Worst Forms" of child labour, under ILO Convention 182, by the year 2016, and includes figures indicating a major reduction of children suffering the worst forms of exploitation. It also sets out some future reference points for international action, including strengthening the "Worldwide Movement" against child labour and building further cooperation with trade unions and employers.

Trade unions are concerned nevertheless that some may seek to use the ILO report as a justification for focusing on the most egregious forms of child labour, while not tackling the broader problems of insufficient provision of quality education, and poor regulation of labour markets. Such an approach risks merely moving children from very hazardous to less hazardous work, while avoiding tackling the fundamental reasons that children end up in work instead of school. Therefore, the ILO Convention 138 on Minimum Age for Employment must always remain the benchmark for policy and for action.

"We are calling for clear commitment to free, universal, relevant compulsory education, publicly provided and of high quality. Fulltime education provided by qualified/properly trained teachers will break the cycle of poverty by leading to gainful decent jobs. But to really make a difference, education must be inclusive and reach out to disadvantaged groups such as the poor, girls, ethnic minorities, migrants, rural communities, handicapped and AIDS-affected children", said Fred van Leeuwen, General Secretary of Education International, stressing that "the universal right to education is not negotiable".

"Along with education, the other major issue is decent jobs for adults"

said ICFTU General Secretary Guy Ryder. "Where adults in the household have decent jobs, the pressure to allow children to fall out of school and into work is removed. So action on child labour must always be linked to other labour rights, especially those concerning discrimination, forced labour and freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining for better incomes and decent working conditions", he added.

Unions will also be using the Geneva meeting to highlight the work being done by trade unions around the world aimed at eliminating child labour, including community mobilisation for education, action to change the policies of the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and other institutions, agreements with employers, rehabilitation of child labourers, cooperation programmes with the ILO and other groups, and organising adult workers to improve household incomes and combat poverty. Action on the most common forms of child exploitation, in particular in agriculture and domestic service, also features high on the union agenda.

Global Unions comprises of:

- \* the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), representing 155 million workers
- \* the ten Global Union Federations (GUFs), the international representatives of unions organising in specific industry sectors or occupational groups (EI, ICEM, IFJ, ITGLWF, PSI, ITF, BWI, IMF, IUF, & UNI )
- \* the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD

The WCL represents 30 million workers worldwide.

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