

WORLD DAY AGAINST CHILD LABOUR 2007

NEW GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP AGAINST CHILD LABOUR IN AGRICULTURE

GENEVA (ILO News) – The International Labour Organization (ILO) today joined forces with five key international agricultural organizations to launch a new landmark global partnership to tackle child labour in agriculture.

Members of the new partnership signed into existence during the ILO's annual International Labour Conference are: the ILO, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP) and International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF).

"I very much welcome this partnership with these international agricultural organizations because it is only by mainstreaming child labour issues into mandates and policies and by working together that we can strengthen the worldwide movement to eliminate child labour," said ILO Director-General Juan Somavia. "Through a concerted effort, we can reach the target of ending the worst forms of child labour by 2016."

Worldwide, agriculture is the sector where by far the largest number of working children can be found - an estimated 70 per cent, of whom 132 million are girls and boys aged 5-14. These children are helping to produce the food and beverages we consume. Their labour is used for crops such as cereals, cocoa, coffee, fruit, sugar, palm oil, rice, tea, tobacco and vegetables. They also work in livestock raising and herding, and in the production of other agricultural materials such as cotton and cottonseed.

Agriculture is one of the most dangerous sectors and is especially perilous for children. Exposed to the same hazards as adults in agriculture, the risks to children are even greater because their bodies and minds are still developing and they lack valuable work experience. In some cases, work begins for children as young as five, and children under 10 years account for 20 per cent of child labour in some rural areas, according to estimates by the ILO-International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC).

At the same time, the ILO stressed that not all work that children undertake in agriculture is bad for them or would qualify as work to be eliminated under Convention No. 138 or Convention No. 182. Tasks appropriate to a child's age and that do not interfere with a child's schooling and leisure time can be a normal part of growing up in a rural environment.

Many children carry out which can threaten their lives, limbs, health and general well being. The hazards they face run the gamut from the mixing, handling and applying of toxic pesticides to using dangerous cutting tools, to working in extreme temperatures, operating powerful farm vehicles and heavy machinery and working long hours.

Child labour limits children's access to proper education. Lack of, or poor education, reduces their hopes for a better future. The problem is exacerbated as many agricultural child labourers are from rural families who constitute two-thirds of the world's poorest people.

Girls working in agriculture carry a special burden. Girl child labourers are often an invisible part of the agricultural workforce, they are particularly disadvantaged as they often undertake household chores prior to going to work in the fields as well as upon returning from them. The

long hours of work can lead to physical and mental exhaustion, negatively impacting the health and well being of girl child labourers.

Key areas of cooperation for the new partnership are policies and activities to:

- promote the application of laws on child labour in agriculture, especially to ensure that children do not carry out hazardous work in agriculture,
- improve rural livelihoods, and mainstream child labour into national agricultural policies and programme,
- reduce the urban, rural and gender gap in education,
- promote youth employment opportunities in agriculture and rural areas.

"We realize that these organizations provide a unique conduit to national-level decision- and policy-makers in agricultural ministries and agricultural advisory services etc, and in building stronger links with farmers and agricultural workers, and their communities," explains Michele Jankanish, Director of the ILO's IPEC. "This partnership is particularly exciting in terms of the opportunities for greater cooperation on field-level projects, and is a really great step forward in helping these children in agriculture, their families and communities."

ILO-International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)

The International Labour Organization's goal with regard to child labour is the progressive elimination of all its forms worldwide. The worst forms of child labour, which include hazardous work, commercial sexual exploitation, trafficking of children and all forms of slavery, among others, should be abolished as a priority.

The ILO seeks to strategically position child labour elimination at the macro-level in socio-economic development and poverty reduction strategies of its member countries in order to encourage mainstreaming and integration of child labour issues and concerns. In doing so, the ILO – through its International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) – emphasizes the need for assessing and monitoring the extent and nature of the problem, the strengthening of institutional capacities and the provision of assistance for the development and implementation of national policies.

It is clear from IPEC experience that parents and families who are given a viable choice prefer to keep children out of the workplace. Thus, the ILO's strategies have put increasing emphasis on poverty alleviation particularly through the promotion of opportunities for decent work for parents as well as expanding and improving institutional mechanisms for education and law enforcement, among other key areas of work. As such, the work of IPEC fits into and supports various development frameworks, such as the Millennium Development Goals, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and the Education for All Initiative.

For more information, please contact the ILO Department of Communication in Geneva at +4122/799-7912 or visit the IPEC website at: www.ilo.org/childlabour