

# News

## US funding Jamaica's programme to eliminate child labour

JIS

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THE government's programme to reduce and ultimately eliminate child labour in all its forms -- the International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour -- is being funded by the United States Department of Labour at a cost of US\$562,687.

Approximately 600 children are targeted under the two-year programme, which is being implemented in collaboration with the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

Child labour is defined as work being carried out by a child under the age of 18 years and which jeopardises his or her development, compromises the child's education and which is hazardous to the child's health and moral well-being.

Daniel Gordon, national programmes manager at the Ministry of Labour and Social Security told JIS News that the programme, which began last October, involving withdrawing children from child labour as well as rehabilitating and preventing other children at risk from engaging in the practise.

He noted that there are four basic components to the programme. These include improving the knowledge base to determine the extent of the problem; strengthening partner organisations such as government agencies, employer and worker organisations, educational institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGO's) and other relevant groups "to apply a multi-phase strategy to

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eliminate child labour, especially its worst forms"; heightening public awareness and implementing action programmes aimed at the withdrawal and prevention of children falling victim to child labour.

He said that the action programmes would involve efforts to reinstate children into the formal education system as well as providing literacy programmes, health care and recreational activities. It would also provide for skills training and income-generating opportunities for the parents of working children to discourage the children's return to the workplace and to prevent younger siblings from following suit.

Gordon said the number of the nation's children are involved in child labour and its worst forms.

He said that a baseline study conducted last year in the fishing areas of Rocky Point in Clarendon, Old Harbour Bay in St Catherine, the informal sector of Spanish Town and the tourism areas of Montego Bay and Negril, indicated that more boys than girls were involved in child labour but more girls than boys were engaged in the worst forms of child labour, in particular prostitution and pornography.

The International Labour Organisation said the worst forms of child labour refers to "slavery, debt bondage and other forms of forced labour; forced pornography; recruitment for use in armed conflicts, prostitution and illicit activities".

Gordon said the study found that approximately 500 children in the tourist areas of Montego Bay and Negril were involved in activities such as prostitution and pornography, working on the wharves, modelling, pushing handcarts in the markets and babysitting.

Work in the fishing villages involve the cleaning of boats, disposal of garbage and venturing into the open seas to spear fish and to retrieve pots and pull in nets.

The study revealed that in Spanish Town area there were over 1,220 working children. These children are involved in exotic dancing, domestic service, street vending and handcart pushing.

He said, however, that not all work carried out by children could be considered child labour, adding that many children in different national circumstances carried out work that was entirely consistent with their development.

It is acceptable therefore for a child to help parents at

home outside of school hours with tidying the house, caring for siblings, and to perform light work on the family farm or in the family business.

At the same time Gordon said he hoped that the public awareness component of the programme would help to sensitise persons to the gravity of the problem and to encourage more NGOs to get involved to assist in the solution of the problem. He added that the International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour had made provision for funding for such groups and indicated that at least two proposals were being considered by the ILO.

Meanwhile, he said that other poverty alleviation programmes by the government such as the Programme for Advancement Through Health and Education (PATH) and the Possibility Programme for street boys would complement the International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour and ensure its sustainability.

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