



FULL STORY

Child labour exposed

Eliminating the scourge in the Caribbean's top offenders

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Pamphlets and information on display at the World Day Against Child Labour exhibit held on the Brian Lara Promenade, Port of Spain, last Friday.

THIS IS not the image that the Caribbean has of itself," said Leslie Bowrin, International Labour Organisation (ILO) Regional Child Labour Project Manager.

Bowrin, who was delivering remarks at Friday morning's launch of the public display for the World Day Against Child Labour on the Brian Lara Promenade, would go on to reveal some hideous truths about child labour - a well-kept secret of the Caribbean region.

"Children have been found to be engaged in urban street work, such as vending, loading, transporting, begging, engaged in agricultural activities using hazardous materials and exposed to harsh elements, found scavenging on landfill sites, being exploited for illicit activity, whether for commercial sexual activity or the drug trade, and exploited as domestic servants," said Bowrin, referencing the ILO's pioneering child labour research in seven Caribbean territories.

The downtown Port of Spain event was part of the World Day Against Child Labour, established in 2002 to highlight the global movement to eliminate the practice of child labour, particularly in its worst forms. Other displays were carded for Mid-Centre Mall, Chaguanas and NIB Mall, Tobago.

A press release dispatched from the ILO's Sub-regional Office for the Caribbean to all major Caribbean media houses, supports Bowrin's statement. According to the release, rapid assessment studies done by the ILO in 2001 and 2002 in Belize, Barbados, Bahamas, Jamaica, Guyana, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago revealed the worst forms of child labour. Other than national surveys done in Belize and Jamaica, the release conceded, there were no studies effectively quantifying the magnitude of child labour in the region.

"While there are no extensive statistics on child labour in Trinidad and Tobago, a rapid assessment study done by the ILO in 2002 in particular occupational areas reveals that there is in fact evidence of what is regarded as the worst forms of child labour in this country," said the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro-Enterprise Development representative when his turn came to address the audience on the Promenade.

The Summary Fact Sheet from the ILO's report on the Trinidad child labour situation entitled, "Trinidad: The Situation of Children In Landfill Sites and Other Worst Forms of Child Labour-A Rapid Assessment (December 2002)" paints an even more grim picture.

"Children involved in scavenging, agriculture, commercial sexual activity and domestic work were exposed to harsh and dangerous situations," states the Summary. "All child labourers except those engaged in commercial sexual activity worked long hours on a daily basis for minimal remuneration."

These four occupational areas are considered to be the worst forms of child labour. A total of 93 child and young workers were interviewed, 24 of which were 18 years and older but who had been child labourers, 42 of whom were scavenging, agriculture (22), domestic (17) and sex work (12). Drawing from the UNICEF-sponsored Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey of Trinidad and Tobago in 2000, the Report estimated that overall 4.1 per cent of children in Trinidad were involved in child labour.

The Labour Ministry has played a significant role in the fight to eliminate and prevent child labour in Trinidad. Shanmatee Singh, Director of Research and Planning (Ag) at the Labour Ministry chairs the Cabinet-appointed, multi-sectoral National Committee for the Prevention and Elimination of Child Labour in Trinidad.

In other Caribbean territories, national child labour committees have also been established, comprising members of non-governmental organisations, employers' and workers' organisations, labour ministries and other major social ministries such as education, youth and health. The child labour committees are charged with policy formation and programme development toward the elimination and prevention of child labour.

To date, twelve Caribbean member states have ratified ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour and ten member states have ratified ILO Convention No. 138 on the Minimum Age for Employment. (See www.ilocarib.org.tt)

Here in Trinidad, the child labour Committee has spearheaded the ongoing pilot rehabilitative programmes in the Beetham, Forres Park and Aripo landfills.

"The YMCA was contracted to work with children on Beetham Estate to offer them alternative options in terms of training and counselling," explained Bowrin, adding that the programme, which started in the 2004 long vacation, targeted 40 children for direct withdrawal from child labour and targeted a further 90 for prevention.

For more information on World Day Against Child Labour, the Regional Child Labour Project or ILO Conventions No. 138 and 182, one may visit the child labour webpage on the website of the ILO sub-regional office for the Caribbean, which was carded to be launched this weekend: www.ilocarib.org.tt/childlabour.