

New law on cards to tackle child labour

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Children selling in downtown Kingston on May 6, 2005. Jamaica has recorded a decrease in the number of child labourers here according to a 2004 local survey. - NORMAN GRINDLEY/DEPUTY CHIEF PHOTOGRAPHER

GOVERNMENT IS moving to draft new legislation to eliminate child labour locally, despite progress in reducing the incidence of abuses here.

Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, Alvin McIntosh, insisted the country needed to stamp out the practice before it escalates.

"... And even though the figure may be low for Jamaica, the potential still exists for the whole situation to balloon so that every effort has to be employed now to control it," he said, while addressing the opening ceremony of national consultation on tackling child labour at the Courtleigh Hotel in New Kingston, yesterday.

The consultation was organised by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Sub-regional Office for the Caribbean in collaboration with the ministry.

Reports from the ILO reveal that there was a reduction in child labour globally, with the Latin America and the Caribbean only having five per cent of the region's children engaged in employment.

SLIGHT DECLINE

Locally, the ministry's 2004 survey showed that 2.2 per cent of the population, or 16,000 children between five and 17 years, were engaged in some economic activity. This is a decline from a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) report in 1998 which stated that 22,000 children were involved.

Mr. McIntosh said the Government would be putting in place additional legislation to prevent children from being illegally put to work. One such legislation being considered to eliminate this problem is the long-awaited Occupational Health and Safety Act, which is currently with the Chief Parliamentary Counsel.

Marva Ximinnies, director of the International Programme for Elimination of Child Labour, told **The Gleaner** that the legislation would empower the Labour Ministry's inspectors to go on to private premises.

"... Children who are engaged in child labour are recruited through the informal sector and at present our labour inspectors are not so empowered. There is the need to invite them on to private premises but the new Occupational Health and Safety Act would empower them to do so," she said.

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