STATEMENT

68th Session of the United Nations General Assembly - Third Committee

STATEMENT BY

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Agenda Item 65: Rights of children

Chair,

Protecting the rights of children has been an integral part of the ILO’s work from its inception. In 1919, one of the ILO’s first actions was the adoption of an international standard on child labour: Convention (No. 5) that set the minimum working age in industry.

The elimination of child labour remains central to the ILO’s mission and standard setting activities. The ILO’s International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) has activities and projects in 90 countries that provide technical support to and raising awareness in countries at very different stages in their response to child labour.

To mark this year’s World Day Against Child Labour (12 June), the ILO published a new report, entitled “Ending Child labour in domestic work”, that outlined the abuses suffered by millions of children working in family homes. The report stated that an estimated 17.2 million children worldwide – most of them under age – are working as domestic workers in people’s homes, and many in hazardous and sometimes slavery-like conditions. Nearly 7.5 million of these child labourers are between the ages of five and 11 years-old and more than 67 per cent are girls.

The report states that children, working in the homes of a third party or employer, are vulnerable to physical, psychological and sexual violence and abusive working conditions. They are often isolated from their families, hidden from the public eye and become highly dependent on their employers.

Unfortunately, child domestic work is currently not recognized as a form of child labour in many countries because of the blurred relationship with the employing family. This familial and legal “care vacuum” disguises an “exploitative arrangement”, often characterized by long working hours, lack of personal freedom and sometimes hazardous working conditions.
The report calls for improved data collection and statistical tools so that the true extent of the problem can be ascertained. It also presses for governments to ratify and implement Convention 138, concerning the minimum age for admission to employment, Convention 182, on the worst forms of child labour and Convention 189 concerning decent work for domestic workers.

Another innovative initiative, the Child Labour Platform (CLP) was launched at the recent Global Compact Leaders’ Summit which helps the private sector identify and tackle obstacles they face in honoring their commitment to eliminate child labour.

The CLP – a joint initiative by the ILO, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), the International Organization of Employers (IOE) and the UN Global Compact – identifies obstacles to the implementation of ILO Conventions in supply chains and the surrounding communities, as well as providing solutions to these obstacles and ways to catalyse collective action.

Our engagement with the private sector has already resulted in a number of large multinational enterprises developing tangible strategies to combat child labour in their global supply chains.

Chair,

As the world leaders gathered for the 68th Session of the UN General Assembly, the ILO launched a new report entitled “Marking progress against child labour” which announced an important milestone in our efforts to combat child labour. The report stated that the global number of child labourers has declined by one third since 2000: from 246 million down to 168 million.

Although the improved rate of decline is not enough to achieve the goal of eliminating the worst forms of child labour by 2016, we are moving inexorably in the right direction.

The ILO Director-General applauded the international community’s efforts to reduce the prevalence of child labour. He asked that we remain vigilant in our efforts to end the scourge of child labour because “there are 168 million good reasons to do so.”

The Third Global Conference on Child Labour held in Brasilia last week demonstrated the on-going commitment of Member States, workers’ and employers’ organizations, NGOs, civil society and international organizations to eliminate the worst forms of child labour by 2016.

The Conference participants recognized that an immediate stepping up of national and international efforts is needed. Among more concrete actions, they called upon governments to create child labour free zones, ensure child labourers access to justice, guarantee a child’s right to education and provide rehabilitation programs as a means to promote and protect their well-being and dignity and fulfil their rights.

The Conference Declaration called for an integrated, coherent and effective use of public services and policies in the fields of labour, education, agriculture, health, vocational training and social protection as a means for building capacity and empowerment. It was
stated that measures to promote decent work and full and productive employment for adults are essential for families to eliminate their dependence on income generated by child labour.

In conclusion, the ILO reaffirms its commitment to the rights of the child and will continue to play a strong leadership role within the UN framework to support the implementation of relevant international labour standards through technical cooperation and advisory services.

The ILO will continue to develop knowledge and analysis on child labour, support capacity building and institutional development to address child labour and to facilitate the exchange of good practices.

We are of the firm belief that together we can have a world free from child labour.

Thank you.