

ON TRACK TO END CHILD LABOUR!

**News on the latest trends and achievements
worldwide**

**Address by Frans Roselaers,
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Let me first of all thank the Government of Portugal for convening this important Conference and for extending to us its traditional hospitality. We are particularly gratified to witness, once again, the commitment of the Portuguese authorities, especially of H. E. Mr. José Vieira da Silva, Minister of Labour and Social Solidarity, to address, in this country and worldwide, the problem of child labour and to contribute to finding constructive and sustainable solutions. I also salute the social partners and civil society institutions which have spearheaded and supported action against child labour with determination.

I have the pleasure of conveying to you all the delegations of Portuguese-speaking member States of the International Labour Organization the greetings and wishes of full success of Mr. Juan Somavia, Director-General of the ILO. He would have liked to

be present here today, but was unfortunately prevented from participating due to other commitments. He looks forward to meeting with the Ministers and delegations of all the countries represented here today during the forthcoming International Labour Conference.

As we meet, you are celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Portuguese Commonwealth, and I should like to commend all the participating countries for the achievements of this young and vibrant organization, under the able leadership of its Secretary-General, Ambassador Luis Fonseca. We are proud to be part of this important cooperation initiative between Portuguese countries, as exemplified by the Protocol of Cooperation signed by Ambassador Fonseca and our Director-General Mr. Somavia.

Last time I spoke, in this wonderful city of Lisbon, about child labour, I started off with the then latest estimates of the problem worldwide: 246 million children were exploited by child labour in its different forms in the year 2000. Of those, 179 million were involved in the worst forms of child labour. The figures had scarcely changed since the International Labour Office first published a global estimate in 1996.

Today, I am happy to present a different picture, and more than a glimmer of hope that the world can indeed be rid of this sad and irrational phenomenon in the foreseeable future. Just last week, the ILO has published a new set of global estimates on child labour which show that the numbers are decreasing between 2000 and 2004. That the actions taken by countries in all regions are paying off! And that, if the drive and dynamism applied to eliminating child labour are kept up, we may succeed in ending all worst forms of child labour over the next decade, with only moderate numbers of children in child labour to be assisted thereafter, to find their way to school rather than having to work for a living.

Allow me to give you the specifics of this new situation and then to analyze what, in our view, has brought about this trend.

The new global estimates confirm that fewer children are working: a total of 218 million. Their numbers have decreased by 11 % over the last four years. And in hazardous forms of child labour, the figures have decreased by as much as 25 %! Moreover, children in the age group from 5 to 14 years involved in hazardous work are now 33 % less than in 2000. These are welcome findings, considering what it means for every

girl and boy to have a chance to go to school rather than to work prematurely.

The new estimates show how much progress is being made in different regions: Latin and Central America have the biggest reduction in child labour, followed by Asia and Central and Eastern Europe. Africa is still grappling with the problem and the number of working children on that continent is not going down yet.

The case of Brazil is worth mentioning in this context: thanks to determined and comprehensive action on the part of the government, the social partners and civil society, a lot of progress has been made in reducing the incidence of child labour, under often difficult circumstances. The approach taken by Brazil to come to grips with child labour has been analyzed and commended by many over the years and has since been taken as an example by a number of countries. I should add that it has also inspired us, at the ILO, when we undertook a global cost-benefit analysis of eliminating child labour, the results of which were published in 2004. In fact, we used the much publicized Brazilian model of conditional cash transfers to families financing their children's schooling to simulate a worldwide application of this approach and found that it would yield enormous

benefits. While the cost of getting every child to school is high, and it will take some twenty years to achieve this, the benefits it will bring to individuals, families and societies are staggering: about seven times more than the capital outlay required. This is one of the most productive investments a society can make, not to mention the positive effects on personal income, satisfaction and well-being of the girls and boys of today once they will be the productive forces and the leaders of our countries tomorrow.

Furthermore, the struggle against child labour is key to realizing the fundamental principles and rights at work which have been adopted by the ILO as the cornerstone of achieving balanced economic and social development and Decent Work for All. In all regions, we are seeing wide-spread action – and impressive results!- to combat forced and child labour, to promote the right to organize and to engage in social dialogue, and to put an end to discrimination at work, all called for in the 1998 Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. And this happens against the backdrop of political, economic and social difficulties and in the context of rapid globalization which pose enormous challenges to countries and people everywhere.

What has happened over the last four years that explains the new child labour figures and the encouraging trends?

Ratifications, in massive numbers, of the two principal ILO Conventions on child labour, Nos. 138 and 182, are a prime indicator of the political commitment worldwide. And the Portuguese-speaking countries are no exception in this regard. Then there are many examples of governments, employers, and trade unions adopting policies and developing programmes, for which more and better tools and solutions are becoming available every day. It is indeed amazing to see how the waves of advocacy during the 1990s have translated into waves of action ever since, especially after 2000. And now the results are becoming evident, in many countries. It is no secret that some of the countries represented here today, Brazil and Portugal, are making considerable headway in reducing the incidence of child labour, and are making available their experiences and lessons learned to all countries.

If this positive trend is to be sustained, continuing awareness raising and advocacy are required, as well as financial support from donors and national governments, backed up by a vibrant movement against child labour globally and at national level.

In this connection the ongoing cooperation of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries – CPLP – is of crucial importance and should be commended.

The CPLP is, after all, a partnership aiming at promoting new ways of cooperating and in promoting both the Portuguese language and its Members' common values. It is also a forum to foster common understanding and exchange of good practices and sharing of expertise on many subjects. We are glad to see this brought to bear already on labour and employment issues, and in particular in relation to child labour. And we particularly welcome the far-reaching actions planned by the Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs of the CPLP to effectively deal with child labour issues as a matter of priority.

In the past ten years there has been an increasing awareness of the impact of child labour on education and development in all regions. IPEC has developed programmes to assist ILO member States in all regions to prevent and withdraw children from all, including the worst forms of, child labour. Several donor countries, including Brazil, Portugal, the European Union and the United States, have expressed an interest in funding programmes in Portuguese speaking African countries to contribute to the

progressive elimination of child labour. In addition, Angola and Mozambique, UNICEF and the World Bank have carried out research on child exploitation, armed conflict, HIV-AIDS and the linkages of these to education. And a survey on child protection and child rights was carried out by UNICEF in 2001-2003. The time seems ripe to envisage programmes specifically aimed at eliminating child labour, which at the same time will greatly help the countries concerned to make progress in reducing poverty and in boosting education, a real investment in a future without child labour. The International Labour Office and its IPEC programme are ready to help you setting up and implementing such programmes alongside your partners in the Portuguese-speaking community. It gives us particular pride to acknowledge, here and today, how much we have been inspired and guided by the initiatives taken by Portuguese speaking ILO member States to tackle the scourge of child labour worldwide!