



**Message by Juan Somavia
Director-General of the International Labour Office
on the occasion of
World Day against Child Labour**

12 June 2011

This year's World Day against Child Labour puts the spotlight on the plight of 115 million children involved in hazardous work – more than half of the estimated 215 million child labourers in the world.

These children, the “silent majority”, are exposed to toxic chemicals, to extreme temperatures, to repetitive mind-numbing tasks, to isolation, to denigration. Their lives are being destroyed.

Although the overall number of children in hazardous work has decreased over the past years, there is cause for concern that they may be falling off the radar.

In some countries, there has been a slowing down in the pace of decline of hazardous child labour. The numbers of older children (aged 15-17 years) in hazardous work has increased by 20 per cent between 2004 and 2008. And the economic crisis has put a dampener on global efforts to reach the goal of eliminating the worst forms of child labour by 2016.

We cannot relent.

What's at risk is not only the physical, moral and emotional integrity of these children, but also the future of their societies. Work which negatively affects the health and development of children will inevitably affect their employability as youth and later as adults.

It is unacceptable that economic growth and development should permit complacency or resignation about child labour or be premised on the expendability of the lives of the most vulnerable.

A new ILO Report on “*Children in Hazardous Work: What we know, What we need to do*”, shows that this problem is not confined to developing countries. And findings in the United States and Europe indicate that children have higher rates of injury and death at work than adults.

The new Report shows that it is possible to have a far reaching, positive impact on the lives of children exposed to hazardous work.

On this World Day we call for policy action in three key areas:

- A renewed effort to ensure that all children below the minimum age of employment are in education and are not exposed to hazardous work.

- Strengthened workplace safety and health systems for all workers, but with specific safeguards for children between the minimum age of employment and the age of 18.
- All countries, in consultation with workers' and employers' organizations, to determine the types and conditions of work to be prohibited to children below the age of 18, and to ensure that lists of such work are regularly reviewed and effective enforcement action taken.

Child labour is one face of poverty. It is an expression of profound deficits of decent work. Decent work for women and men including a floor of basic social protection, as well as access to quality education, are the bulwark of stability for families, communities and societies. They are stepping stones to a world free from child labour. It is time for the broad vision and coherent policies that will end child labour.

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