

**The Hague Global Child Labour Conference**

**Statement by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General**

**on Violence against Children**

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**May 2010**

**The Hague**

It is a great pleasure for me to join you at this important Global Child Labour Conference.

Warm congratulations to the organizers for their leadership in promoting a critical action oriented agenda. When we reflect on the dramatic situation of the unacceptably high numbers of victims of child labour, we feel pressed by the urgency of their cause and also inspired by the opportunity to make a difference. With the understanding and experience we have gained over the years, supported by a strong political will and the wide movement of social mobilisation we can all generate, decisive progress is within reach! More importantly, preventing and eliminating child labour is an ethical and legal imperative. We cannot afford to ignore it or postpone it any longer.

In my role as Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children, I am strongly committed to the protection of children from violence in all settings, including in the workplace and in work related activities.

The Special Representative is a global independent advocate, working to generate visibility and renewed concern at the negative impact of violence on children. The SRSG acts as a bridge builder and a catalyst of actions by a wide range of partners, within and beyond the UN system, to mobilise support to prevent and combat this child rights violation. In my role, I am determined to pursue three priority areas:

* The development in each country of a national comprehensive strategy to prevent and respond to all forms of violence in all settings, including the work place
* The introduction of an explicit legal ban on all violence
* The consolidation of a sound system of data and research to inform progress in this area.

These goals are critical to combat violence against children and, as we know, are also strategic to eliminate child labour. **Indeed,** **violence and child labour are closely interrelated and represent two manifestations of the same phenomenon.** They have serious and life-long impacts on children’s lives; and are often socially accepted and performed in hidden and clandestine settings. Violence is used to coerce children to work, to keep them in exploitation and servitude, and also to punish and control them within the workplace – including in situations where older children are legally working. Violence in the home, and in schools or institutions cause children to run away; as they search for a safe place and for survival alternatives, their health and safety is put at risk, and they are confronted with hazardous situations and the worst forms of labour – these are, by nature, also serious forms of violence against children.

Child domestic workers, especially girls, are highly vulnerable to violence; working in private households, often behind closed doors and away from their own home, with little or no protection or social support, they are exposed to excessive working hours, hazardous tasks, social stigma and discrimination, and physical and emotional violence, as well as sexual abuse. Freedom from violence is key to prevent child labour and also to promote effective strategies for the recovery and reintegration of child victims, and for preventing their return to situations of exploitation.

Child labour, and indeed violence in general, has a high social cost, holding back human development and preventing progress in the promotion of equity and social inclusion. But for individual children, **it represents a violation of their fundamental rights**. Child labour compromises children’s development and education, as well as their adequate standard of living; it hampers children’s health, rest and play; it is often associated with lack of birth registration, and at times it leads to the prosecution and deprivation of liberty of child victims. In all cases, it constitutes a denial of children’s right to protection from violence, abuse and exploitation.

Child labour and violence affect the life of millions of children around the world. But, as we have learned from the many successful initiatives promoted across regions, child labour is not inevitable; **it can be prevented and effectively addressed**.

Building upon the ILO Conventions and on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, we have a strong normative foundation to legitimize and guide our actions, and to monitor progress achieved along the way. These international standards are complementary and mutually supportive. They stand as a tangible indicator of genuine national commitment to respect the human dignity of the child at all times; to address risk factors that compromise children’s development and citizenship; to invest in the social inclusion of the most vulnerable; and to promote actions that build upon the child’s best interests and experiences.

It is particularly meaningful that The Hague Conference takes place during a very special year for children’s rights, the year of commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and of the tenth anniversary of the Optional Protocols to the Convention and of ILO Convention 182.

A commemoration is a time of celebration; but it is also a moment of reflection - a reflection on the critical areas where, in spite of our shared commitment, challenges have persisted and opportunities for change can no longer be missed. And also a moment of reflection on the most effective ways to accelerate progress, pressured by impatience, determination and ambition.

**The time for action is now.** **We must urgently promote the universal ratification and the effective implementation of key international treaties, particularly the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, and relevant ILO Conventions, and regularly assess their impact on children. This goal constitutes a high priority in my agenda**.

For this reason, on 25 May, in a high level event in NY, I will be joining hands with key UN partners to launch **a two year global campaign for the ratification and effective implementation of the Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child**. **I invite you all to join this important process, which also supports the goal of universal ratification of ILO 182 and the core objectives of The Hague Conference.**

During this two year campaign, I will be placing a special emphasis on the protection of children from sale, prostitution and pornography. Firstly, I am committed to mobilising political and social support to criminalize all forms of sexual exploitation of children; to safeguard the rights of child victims and witnesses and their protection from prosecution and arrest; to promote the establishment of extra territorial jurisdiction over these offences, and the strengthening of international cooperation and mutual assistance to combat them effectively.

Secondly, I am committed to promoting awareness raising and education activities, for the public at large and also tailored for children, and to supporting capacity building initiatives for professionals working with and for children.

Thirdly, the global campaign will pursue a **holistic approach** to the protection of children from sexual exploitation. With this approach, the campaign will promote respect for children’s views and best interests; it will safeguard the most vulnerable, invest in prevention and the consideration of root causes, and support the recovery and reintegration of child victims.

Child labour is a complex phenomenon. It can only be eliminated through a holistic and multidimensional approach, an approach which is consistent with the indivisibility of human rights and helps to break the conspiracy of silence and the cycle of exploitation marginalised children endure; and also an approach which needs to be pursued, at the national and international levels, through the convergence of all relevant interventions and policy tools, from advocacy and policy dialogue, to the promotion of development cooperation and technical assistance, research and ethical standards.

Clearly we have a sound international normative framework to build upon. As we pursue efforts for the ratification and implementation of international treaties, let us recall that it is also urgent to broaden the scope of international protection and address persisting loopholes. The protection of child domestic workers is certainly a case in point and an area of priority to the ILO. I am strongly committed to the development of a comprehensive binding instrument on decent work of domestic workers where the safeguard of children’s rights and the protection of children from violence, abuse and exploitation can be given the attention it deserves. I hope we can celebrate the adoption of these new standards in the very near future.

The agenda is clear, the tools are at hand and the resources within reach. I look forward to joining hands with you in building a world where freedom from labour, and from violence in all its forms, will be a reality for every child.