

Forum: The Third Committee

Topic: Preventing child labour in the textile industry

Student: Amy McWilliams, The Grammar School at Leeds

Position: Chair of the Third Committee

## **Description of the problem:**

Child labour is defined as the practise of employing children in any sector of work which interferes with the ability to sustain a normal childhood, go to school, or is considered dangerous. This is a vital issue which threatens the moral integrity of the textiles industry as a whole, as it is estimated that there are approximately 215 million child labourers aged 5-17 worldwide. For Bangladesh, 10% of all children between the ages of 5 and 14 work while 6.8% of 7- to 14-year-olds combine work and school. Those numbers are 3.7 and 2.1% for Indonesia.

	Children ('000)	Children in employment		Child labour		Hazardous work	
		('000)	%	('000)	%	('000)	%
<b>World</b>							
2004	1,206,500	196,047	16.2	170,383	14.1	76,470	6.3
2008	1,216,854	176,452	14.5	152,850	12.6	52,895	4.3
<b>Asia and the Pacific</b>							
2004	650,000	122,300	18.8	-	-	-	-
2008	651,815	96,397	14.8	81,443	12.5	16,332	2.5
<b>Latin America and the Caribbean</b>							
2004	111,000	11,047	10.0	-	-	-	-
2008	110,566	10,002	9.0	9,722	8.8	4,529	4.1
<b>Sub-Saharan Africa</b>							
2004	186,800	49,300	26.4	-	-	-	-
2008	205,319	58,212	28.4	52,229	25.4	26,045	12.7
<b>Other regions</b>							
2004	258,800	13,400	5.2	-	-	-	-
2008	249,154	10,700	4.3	9,456	3.8	5,989	2.4

Despite the numbers of children involved, the needs and interests of migrant children are largely absent from mainstream debates on child protection, child labour and migration. As a result, most governments have failed to develop effective policy responses to assist and protect migrant children. And yet, governments are obliged to offer such protection as per Article 2.1 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which states that "Every child

without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his/her parents or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status is born with the same rights". This includes the right to be free from child labour for both local and migrant children. The Roadmap for achieving the elimination of the worst forms of child labour by 2016, agreed to at The Hague Global Child Labour Conference in 2010, also includes a focus on child migrants. In Article 5 it states that "Governments should consider ways to address the potential vulnerability of children to, in particular the worst forms of child labour, in the context of migratory flows".

However, the textiles industry is a particularly prominent issue with regards to the problem of child labour because the textile industry is related to many more industries- agriculture, animal husbandry, mining of metals and minerals, forestry, chemical research and many others. The fibre is produced in fields in the form of cotton, flax and other fibrous plants. It is obtained from animals and insects like, sheep ,goats, silkworms etc. Minerals like asbestos and wollastinite are also mined for getting fibres. As if these natural sources of fibres are not enough, they are chemically researched upon and synthetic fibres are prepared. As such yarns are formed from both, natural fibres such as cotton, hemp, linen, jute, wool, silk as well as from manmade fibres such as rayon and nylon. This means that it is very difficult to record the number of children affected and many strategies are needed to eliminate the problem.

### **Historical Perspective:**

From a historical perspective, child labour first became an issue in the textiles industry with the phenomenon of industrialism in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> Century, which created millions of low skilled jobs and a void in the workforce which could only be filled by the lower class children of desperate families. As a result, it has been estimated that by 1810 there were over 2 million children worldwide working 50-70 hours per week in factories, many inevitably associated with the textiles industry(particularly cotton mills), thus depriving the victims of adequate education and condemning innocent young people to a future of bleak oppression.

There was neither a bilateral nor a unified response in combatting this issue, and it could be argued that even today, a small minority of countries such as Indonesia and China have not taken sufficient measures to codify the protection of the relevant human rights associated with employment in entrenched law. However, between 1802 and 1878 Britain adopted a series of laws which shortened working hours and attempted to protect children under the age of 18 from exploitative employers. Other European countries soon followed, and by 1938, US congress passed the Fair Labour Standards Act. This fixed minimum ages of 16 for work during school hours, 14 for certain jobs after school, and 18 for dangerous work.

This was, to some extent, effective as Britain and the USA dominated the textile industry at this time because of their cotton resources. However the situation in modern day society is distinctly changed. Due to the profound socioeconomic impact of globalisation many Trans National Corporations (TNCS) have utilized improved technology and transport as an opportunity to outsource factory work to LEDCs due to the cost effectiveness generated by the cheaper labour costs

induced by a lack of government regulation regarding fair employment. This means that the strict regulations in the European Convention of Human Rights and similar sources of liberty in the USA have little impact in the present day.

### **General Background:**

The main body fighting child labour is the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) which was created in 1992 with the overall goal of the progressive elimination of child labour, which was to be achieved through strengthening the capacity of countries to deal with the problem and promoting a worldwide movement to combat child labour. IPEC currently has operations in 88 countries, with an annual expenditure on technical cooperation projects that reached over \$61 million US dollars. This body also launched a World Day Against Child Labour in 2002, which is celebrated annually on the 12<sup>th</sup> June. However, this is not the only organisation which seeks to irradiate the issue. Many Non-Government Organisations and pressure groups take interest in the cause on the grounds that it is an unjust practise which violated human rights. For example, UNICEF has expressed opposition as has Amnesty International. WHats more,

The reasons for child labour in this industry are hard to categorise, as they are usually a result of microeconomic competition in a consumerist society which forces manufacturers to resort to immoral practices in order to provide the lowest possible market price for consumers. However, it is also important to consider the wider reasons for child labour in many industries due to the secondary associations with the manufacturing of fabric. These include:

**Primary Causes:** Poverty is the greatest single cause behind child labour. For impoverished households, income from a child's work is usually crucial for his or her own survival or for that of the household. Income from working children, even if small, may be between 25 to 40% of household income. Additionally a lack of meaningful alternative options, such as affordable schools and quality education may also drive children towards working in the textile industry. In essence, children work because they have nothing better to do. Many communities, particularly rural areas where between 60–70% of child labour is prevalent, do not possess adequate school facilities. It is therefore vital that, in order to prevent child labour, the issue of poverty is also tackled in order to remove an contributing factor to the problem.

**Cultural Causes:** Although this is true of a minuscule portion of cultural beliefs, certain cultural beliefs have rationalised child labour and thereby encouraged it due to the supposed benefit of skill development within a trade (particularly in agriculture such as the cotton used in the textile industry) . Similarly, in many cultures the education of girls is less valued or girls are simply not expected to need formal schooling, and these girls pushed into child labour such as providing domestic services.

**Macroeconomic Causes:** The causes for child labour include both the demand and the supply aspects of the market. While poverty and unavailability of good schools explain the child labour supply side, they suggest that the growth of low paying informal economy rather than higher paying formal economy is amongst the causes of the demand side. It has also been suggested that

inflexible labour market, of informal economy, inability of industries to scale up and lack of modern manufacturing technologies are major macroeconomic factors affecting demand and acceptability of child labour.

### **Preventative measures:**

There are many institutes, organizations, public departments and international organizations like UNICEF whose main objective is to prevent child labour. It is clear that the aforementioned causes of child labour must be tackled in order to remove the incentive for such work.

Substantial progress has been made in the struggle against child labour. The international community has identified child labour as a significant impediment to the realization of children's rights, national development and the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), particularly those related to poverty alleviation, education, gender equality and HIV/AIDS.

In November 2006, the International Labour Organization (ILO) Constituents of 183 Member States set the goal to eliminate all worst forms of child labour by 2016.

The 2010 ILO Global Report Accelerating action against child labour notes that child labour continues to decline, but that the rate of reduction has slowed. There was a decline of 3% between 2004 and 2008, compared with a 10% decrease between 2000 and 2004.

### **How to prepare as a delegate:**

- Use the helpful links listed below in order to obtain a full and comprehensive knowledge of the issue.
- Research the Millennium Development Goals
- Look into the International Labour Organisation
- Think about the socio economic situation in the nation you are representing, does this issue affect you? Are you in a position to provide support, financial or otherwise, to other nations?

### **Useful Links:**

<http://www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/briefing/labour/labour.pdf>

<http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/briefingpapers/childlabour/index.shtml>

[http://www.unicef.org/protection/files/child\\_labour.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/protection/files/child_labour.pdf)

<http://www.ilo.org/global/lang--en/index.htm>

**Sources:**

<http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/briefingpapers/childlabour/resources.shtml>

<http://www.globalissues.org/article/62/child-labor>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child\\_labour](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child_labour)

<http://www.globalfootprints.org/issues/local/children/labour.htm>

<http://www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/briefing/labour/labour.pdf>

<http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/history-child-labor>

<http://www.fashionunited.co.uk/fashion-news/fashion/textile-industry-child-labor-still-common-2013100818674>

<http://globalmarch.org/sites/default/files/pub/Brief%20Guide-GarmentManufacturing&ChildLabour%20in%20GarmentSector%20in%20India.pdf>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Textile\\_industry#Regulatory\\_Standards](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Textile_industry#Regulatory_Standards)

[http://inventors.about.com/od/indrevolution/a/history\\_textile.htm](http://inventors.about.com/od/indrevolution/a/history_textile.htm)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International\\_labor\\_standards](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_labor_standards)

[https://www.icac.org/cotton\\_info/speeches/plastina/2009/child\\_labor\\_lodz.pdf](https://www.icac.org/cotton_info/speeches/plastina/2009/child_labor_lodz.pdf)

<http://ilo.org/ipecc/programme/lang--en/index.htm>