

Brussels, 12 June 2008

Commission joins the celebrations of the World Day Against Child Labour

World Day Against Child Labour will this year be marked by thousands of events in scores of countries around the world on 12 June with a focus on the need to improve access of children to education as the right response to child labour.

On the occasion of the World Day Against Child Labour, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, EU Commissioner for External Relations and Neighbourhood Policy, has said: *"I am pleased that this year the day is dedicated to raise awareness of the importance of education in fighting child labour. I am convinced that improving access of all children to education is the right response to this evil. Fight against child labour is for me a core commitment in our human rights agenda and I will continue to raise it in my political dialogue with other countries.*

"Child labour is exploitation and must be tackled at all levels," added Employment & Social Affairs Commissioner Vladimír Špidla. "This is part of our broader agenda to promote decent work for all and we strongly support both the ratification and effective implementation of the International Labour Organization's core labour standards."

"The fight against child labour requires a concerted response from governments, industry and the international community. For the EU, sustainable development, including labour standards, are a core objective of our dialogue with trading partners. We are not forcing standards on countries, but believe as they do that it is in their interest. We do not want to stop legitimate trade that will help countries trade their way out of poverty, but are looking for the best way to address the issues, whether by agreements, incentives, or cooperation", said Peter Mandelson, EU Commissioner for External Trade.

Background

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has estimated that some 165 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 are currently involved in child labour, of these, 74 million are exposed to hazardous work.

Therefore, the ILO launched the first World Day Against Child Labour in 2002 as a way to highlight the plight of child workers. The day, which is annually observed on 12 June, is intended to serve as a catalyst for the growing worldwide movement against child labour, reflected in the huge number of ratifications of ILO Convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labour and ILO Convention No. 138 on the minimum age for employment.

Child labour is prohibited in all EU Member States by European legislation, itself inspired by Convention No. 138. In addition, all Member States have ratified Convention No. 182. The EU works with the ILO to promote ratification of the eight ILO core labour standards at a global level and has established a number of structured dialogues on employment and social affairs with countries such as China and India.

The Commission supports various actions worldwide to strengthen children's rights and prevent child labour. Through the European Initiative on Democracy and Human Rights, the Commission has supported the implementation by NGOs of a series of projects in Brazil ('Empowerment of the Waste Picker's Associations and Protection of their Rights' and 'Stock Market-School Citizen - Income and Education to Prevent Child Labour Exploitation'), Cambodia ('Utilising the Buddhist monks and school students to prevent sexual abuse and child labour'), Egypt ('Campaign Against Child Labour in the Egyptian Agrarian Sector') and Morocco ('Awareness to Fight Against Child Labour').

Moreover, the "Project for Eradicating the Worst Forms of Child Labour" – supported by the European Delegation in Turkey (the budget allocated was 5.3 million euros) – aimed at enhancing the capacity of the Child Labour Unit in the Ministry of Labour and Social Security and providing approximately 3000 Turkish children and their families with education, rehabilitation and support services in seven different provinces.

Most recently, the European Commission, the ILO's International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) and Pakistan's government signed an agreement to implement a project to combat child labour in Pakistan. The Commission's contribution (€4.75 million) will help Pakistan's government and IPEC to tackle child labour in the formal and informal economies, for example domestic work, car repair workshops or recycling of waste. The project, due run until 2013, aims to take children out of the worst forms of work immediately and rehabilitate them. It will also involve prevention work.

Finally, the European Commission also supports initiatives by the business community to promote decent work through corporate social responsibility (CSR).

The EU's Human rights & Democratisation Policy:

http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/human_rights/child/index.htm

International aspects of EU employment and social affairs policy:

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/international_cooperation/index_en.htm

The ILO's World Day Against Child Labour site at

<http://www.ilo.org/ipec/Campaignandadvocacy/WDAACL/2008/lang--en/index.htm>