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End Child Labour in Agriculture NOW!

Children toiling at looms to make rugs or stitching footballs – this is the public's image of child labour. While it is true that kids do this work, in fact the biggest single user of child labour is agriculture.

Statistics from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) show that 70% of all working children are in agriculture - and some of them at a very young age. ILO figures show that there are over 132 million children aged 5 to 14 work in agriculture.

What work do children do?

These child workers are harvesting cotton, sugar cane, coffee, tea, bananas, tobacco, cotton – things that people use everyday. There is also clear evidence that some of the children are in worst forms of child labour- exposed to dangerous pesticides, driving machinery designed for adults, lifting loads far too heavy for their small frames. Others are trapped in forced or bonded labour.

ILO studies show 7-14 year old children work 8-10 hours a day in extreme temperatures. Some carry heavy loads like 50 kg sacks of cotton and are paid less than a dollar per day. Many children are injured and even disabled or die while operating dangerous machinery and using cutting tools. Work in the fields often ends their schooling and deprives them of time for rest that is crucial to children's psycho-social development.

Migration for labour is increasing worldwide; many children migrate with their parents and end up working in the fields with no access to education or any benefits in the destination country.

End it now

IUF, the global union federation for food and agriculture is calling for elimination of all forms of child labour and is urging its affiliates to take measures at national level to help achieve this.

World Day Against Child Labour

And the good news is that the IUF is not alone in the campaign. Last year's

ILO Conference concluded "Unless a concerted effort is applied to reducing child labour in agriculture, it will be impossible to achieve the ILO goal of elimination of all worst forms of child labour by 2016." Consequently, the ILO has agreed to designate this year's World Day Against Child Labour (WDACL) to agriculture.

WDACL which takes place each year on June 12 will call on other UN agencies to work together with the ILO and IUF on child labour. The ILO will produce special materials and host an event in Geneva to mark the day.

What can your union do?

The IUF is calling on its affiliates to:

- Raise the matter with employers and get them to commit to work with trade unions at national and international level to eliminate child labour in their workplaces and/or in their supply chains
- Call on their Governments through the Ministry of Labour or other appropriate departments to ratify and fully implement the ILO Convention No.182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, Convention No. 138 on Minimum Age, Convention No. 184 on Safety and Health in Agriculture and adhere to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Each Member which ratifies this convention shall take immediate and effective measures to secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour as a matter of urgency. (art. 1, ILO Convention Nr. 182)

- As of today, 163 countries have ratified the ILO Convention 182 but only 8 countries have ratified Convention 184 – making agricultural workplaces safe for all is a good way to ensure adults and children alike are not exposed to farm hazards.
- Participate in drawing up the list of “hazardous work” in your country.

Governments who have signed Convention 182 have to draw up the list after a tripartite consultation with trade unions and employers organisations. Any activity that effects child’s safety, physical or mental health and moral development is “hazardous work” and the governments should take immediate measures to eliminate it as a priority.

"Agriculture that relies on child labour is not sustainable. In many cases we know children work because their parents are poor so as IUF with our member unions we must work to ensure decent jobs for agricultural workers around the world and access to good quality and free education for rural children. Let's make June 12 2007 the day this becomes a global call to action" says IUF general secretary Ron Oswald.