

2021 International year for the elimination of child labour



Back to School not Work: Ending Child Labour in a Post-COVID World

Proceedings of the online
panel held on 17 June 2021



8 DECENT WORK AND
ECONOMIC GROWTH



GENEVA CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ADVANCEMENT AND GLOBAL DIALOGUE
مركز جنيف لحقوق الإنسان والحوار العالمي
CENTRE DE GENÈVE POUR LA PROMOTION DES DROITS DE L'HOMME ET LE DIALOGUE GLOBAL

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BACK TO SCHOOL NOT WORK

ENDING CHILD LABOUR IN A POST COVID WORLD



Mr. Philippe Vanhuynegem
Chief, Fundamental Principles
and Rights at Work Branch
International Labour
Organization

Ms. Jo Becker
Children's Rights Advocacy
Director
Human Rights Watch

Ms. Anita Sheth
Senior Advisor Social
Compliance and Development
Fairtrade International

Ms. Stacey Fru
Multiple Award-Winning
Child Author and Activist

Mr. Tomoya Obokata
United Nations
Special Rapporteur on
Contemporary Forms of
Slavery

Ms. Molly Namirembe
Former Child Labourer
Activist from Uganda

Ms. Florie May Tacang
Executive Director of the
Kaugmaon for Children's
Rights and Social
Development

Every child deserves a right to education and a safe and peaceful childhood, free from exploitation.
Join us to learn how, together, we can accelerate progress to end child labour and inspire change.

17 June 2021
3pm (CET)

FOREWORD

The present publication is the result of an online panel debate organized by the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue on 17 June 2021, entitled “Back to School not Work: Ending Child Labour in a Post-Covid World”. The subject represents one of the most pressing issues in human rights today, particularly since this year was declared the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour by a UN General Assembly resolution unanimously adopted in 2019.

The panel, composed of high-level officials and experts from ILO, the UN, international NGOs and human rights workers in the field, addressed a host of crucial issues including the adverse effects of school closures, the specific vulnerability of girls, the patent lack of implementation of existing international legal norms, the problem of ensuring accountability, the situation in rural areas, capacity building, and the need for strengthening social security nets and advocacy.

The Geneva Centre had the privilege to benefit from the remarkable international expertise and field experience of the seven renowned panellists, to whom it takes this opportunity to renew its deep gratitude. Their presentations provided the audience with thought-provoking insights and in-depth analyses regarding the various facets of this complex subject, offered true and touching personal experiences and, together with the discussions that followed, brought forth innovative ideas and proposed effective and realistic approaches and ways forward to attain the Sustainable Development Goal of ending child labour in all its forms by 2025.

The publication contains a summary of the proceedings, including the discussions during the question and answer session, and the full statements of the panellists.

The Geneva Centre wishes to reiterate its vigorous commitment to promote efforts aimed at eradicating child labour, within the framework of its mission, through continuing advocacy, dissemination of best practices, training and national capacity building.

Dr Umesh Palwankar

***Executive Director
Geneva Centre for Human Rights
Advancement and Global Dialogue***



PROCEEDINGS OF THE PANEL DISCUSSION

The Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue (hereafter the “Geneva Centre”) organized an online event entitled “**Back to School not Work: Ending Child Labour in a Post-COVID World**” on 17 June 2021. The online panel took place on the Zoom platform.

On the occasion of the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour, the Geneva Centre organized this online event to learn about the most recent updates on progress against child labour around the world and to discuss how, together, we can prevent the COVID-19 crisis from pushing millions of children into labour.

The panel debate was moderated by Dr Umesh Palwankar, the Executive Director of the Geneva Centre, and included the following distinguished panellists:

Mr Tomoya Obokata – United Nations Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery

Mr Philippe Vanhuynegem – Chief, Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work Branch, International Labour Organization

Ms Jo Becker – Children’s Rights Advocacy Director, Human Rights Watch

Ms Anita Sheth – Senior Advisor, Social Compliance and Development, Fairtrade International

Ms Molly Namirembe – Former Child Labourer, Young Activist from Uganda

Ms Florie May Butiong-Tacang – Executive Director of the Kaugmaon for Children’s Rights and Social Development from the Philippines

Ms Stacey Fru – Multiple Award-Winning Child Author and Activist from South Africa

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BACK TO SCHOOL NOT WORK
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Mr Philippe Vanhuynegem
International Labour Organization

Mr. Tomoya Obokata
UN Special Rapporteur

Ms Jo Becker
Human Rights Watch

Ms Anita Sheth
Fair Trade International

Ms. Molly Namirembe
Former Child Labourer

Ms. Florie May Butiong-Tacang
Kaugmaon for Children's Rights

Ms Stacey Fru
Child Author and Activist

17 June 2021

Members of the panel discussion



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invites you to join its online event on 17 June 2021

BACK TO SCHOOL NOT WORK ENDING CHILD LABOUR IN A POST COVID WORLD

SUMMARY OF THE PANEL PRESENTATIONS

Philippa Velazquez
Chief, Fundamental Principles
and Rights at Work Branch
International Labour
Organization

Ms. Jo Becker
Children's Rights Advocacy
Director
Human Rights Watch

Ms. Anita Shetty
Senior Advisor Social
Compliance and Development
Fairtrade International

Mr. Tonya Obokata
United Nations
Special Rapporteur on
Contemporary Forms of
Slavery

Molly Namirembe
Former Child Labourer
Activist from Uganda

Ms. Flo May Seng
Executive Director of the
Kaugmaon for Children's
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Development

Ms. Stacey Fru
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In his introductory remarks, the Geneva Centre's Executive Director **Dr Umesh Palwankar** warmly welcomed the esteemed panellists and thanked them for having accepted our invitation to share their analyses and insights flowing from their remarkable expertise and hands-on field experience, at the international, national and local levels, in regard to the subject of this panel.



Dr Umesh Palwankar, Executive Director of the Geneva Centre

Following the projection of a short video¹, Dr Palwankar presented the Geneva Centre, which was founded in 2013 and is an independent human rights think-tank, whose work rests on four pillars: research and publication, training of stakeholders, national capacity building in the field of human rights in specific focus areas. The fourth pillar is cross-cutting and consists of the promotion of human rights globally, through international human rights advocacy and offering a platform for inter-cultural, religious and civilizational dialogue.

This panel event involves two pillars: research and publication, and international advocacy. Research and publication because the proceedings of the panel will be published, comprising a summary of the panel presentations and ensuing discussions, followed by the full statements of the panellists. International advocacy will be undertaken through the participants in this panel debate and through universal distribution of the publication, in social media and the Geneva Centre's user-friendly website, which he invited participants to visit and discover. (<https://gchragd.org/>)

Regarding human rights advocacy, the Executive Director briefly mentioned an initiative of the Geneva Centre that has been highly appreciated by all stakeholders including Permanent Missions, the UN, international organizations and NGOs. Since 2020, the Centre has closely followed and extensively reported on the Human Rights Council's regular sessions, as well as certain special sessions, the latest of which in May on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. To date, since the beginning of this initiative, 122 reports have been sent, in real time, and are available on the Centre's website. The next reporting cycle will begin with the 47th session of the Human Rights Council. He cordially invited participants, if interested, to join the Centre's mailing list to receive these reports.

¹ The video is available on YouTube at the following link: <https://youtu.be/zHaXpwS7Gto>

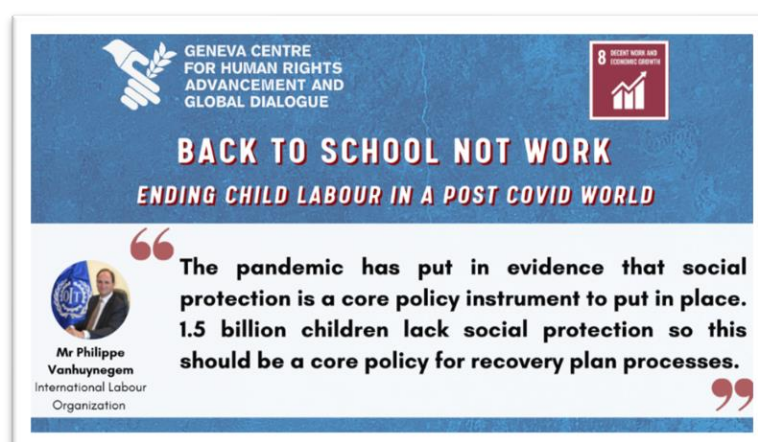
Mr Philippe Vanhuynegem, the first speaker of the event, recalled that child labour was central to the ILO's mandate, with the adoption of the first Convention on Minimum Age in Industry in 1919. A historic milestone was reached in 2020 with universal ratification of the ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour.



Mr Philippe Vanhuynegem, Chief, Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work Branch, International Labour Organization

However, the paradox is that despite these widely accepted legal norms and the UN declaration of 2021 as the year for the elimination of child labour, the situation on the ground is far from rejoicing. The latest global estimates in a joint ILO and UNICEF report show that there are still as many as 160 million child labourers today. He noted that the largest share of child labour takes place within families, and that Africa alone accounts for over 86 million children in child labour.

Mr Vanhuynegem concluded by stressing the importance, among others, of social protection, which needs to be factored into the core policies for post pandemic recovery, targeted interventions to provide poor rural families with decent work, livelihoods and access to quality education and health systems, and the critical role of the private sector, trade unions and civil society to ensure that diligence obligations are effectively put in place.



Our second speaker, the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, **Mr Tomoya Obokata**, drew attention to the very close connection between child labour and poverty. In fact, he noted that child labour is both a symptom and a driver of poverty. Given their situation very similar to

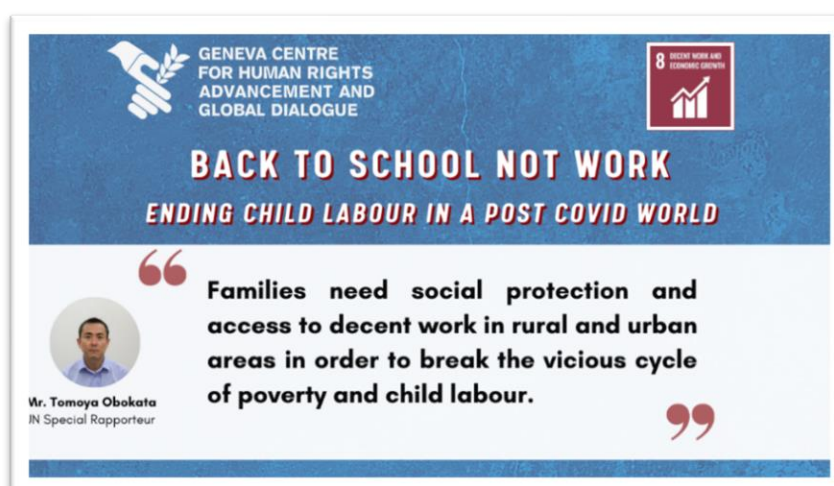
enslavement, even if they managed to escape, finding work would pose a major hurdle, thereby in turn making it very difficult to break free from poverty.



Mr. Tomoya Obokata – United Nations Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery

The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in a dramatic increase in child labour, spurred by school closures, sudden loss of livelihoods for parents and other adult family members, shortages of food supplies and health services. This has contributed to accelerating child labour in low-income countries, particularly in the agricultural, construction, mining and domestic sectors.

The Special Rapporteur underscored the vital importance of education, which ought to be considered now, more than ever, a priority. Education must be provided to all children, without discrimination, with an accent put on the most accessible low or non-tech approaches to distance learning and moratoria on the payment of school fees. He further stressed the importance of holding businesses accountable, within the framework of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.



Ms Jo Becker, our third speaker, began by observing the extensive negative impact of the pandemic on families, in all respects, thereby heavily contributing to pushing children into child labour. She identified some key drivers of child labour resulting from the pandemic. One is the unprecedented

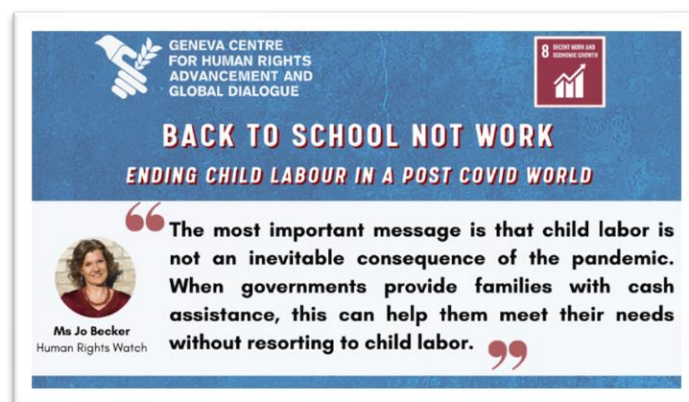
plunge into poverty due to job losses, thus prompting people to resort to cheap or free child labour. A second is school closures, making work for children a logical alternative. This reduces the incentive to go back to schools, once re-opened. Again, children orphaned by the Covid-related deaths of their parents find themselves forced to work for survival. And restrictions on monitoring of respect for child labour laws has reduced pressure on employers to comply with them.



Ms. Jo Becker – Children’s Rights Advocacy Director Human Rights Watch

Ms Becker referred to a recent report by her organization Human Rights Watch, prepared jointly with two others, based on interviews with over 80 children in Ghana, Nepal and Uganda. They revealed that most of their families suffered income losses from the pandemic lockdowns, forcing the interviewed children to resort to labour to help them and their parents survive. Furthermore, school closures resulted in so much idle time to fill in, which logically led to seeking work, with the additional incentive of earning money. Many described their work as being hazardous, particularly in gold mines and stone quarries.

One way to get out of this vicious circle is for governments to support families with cash assistance. Provided on a monthly basis, this can effectively contribute to reducing poverty, and hence child labour, and consequently contribute to increasing school enrolment, which alone can ensure the well-being of future generations.



Ms Anita Sheth began her presentation by observing that systemic inequalities and unfair conditions have been key drivers of child labour. Among her specific observations were that children’s insecurities have accelerated, the decline in farm workers’ income has negatively impacted on their

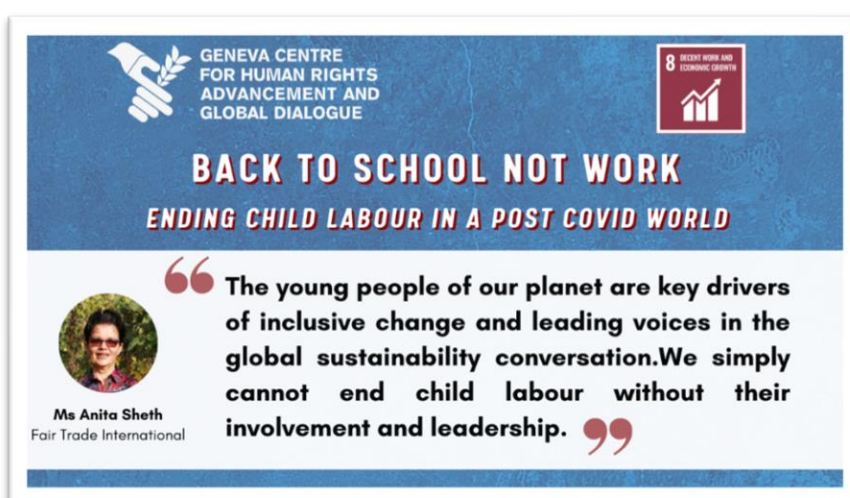
ability to respond to child labour, the pandemic resulted in a large-scale breakdown of national child protection systems built up by the authorities with UN support, children's education has not been considered as a key priority amid the pandemic.



*Ms. Anita Sheth – Senior Advisor Social Compliance and Development,
Fairtrade International*

Ms Sheth insisted on the importance of developing a holistic approach to the elimination of child labour. This would include preventive actions, the establishment of community-centred and inclusive plans to ensure safe withdrawals of children from labour, confidentiality in reporting to governmental authorities.

Practical steps would include funding the construction and setting-up of primary schools, agricultural institutes, training of teachers and farmers regarding ways to combat child labour, providing buses and bicycles for children to accede to schools from remote distances, and implementing alternative income generating projects in households having recourse to child labour.



In her statement, **Ms Molly Namirembe** shared her personal story, a poignant testimony of suffering, sacrifice, but at the end, success. She described her current engagement as a youth advocate against

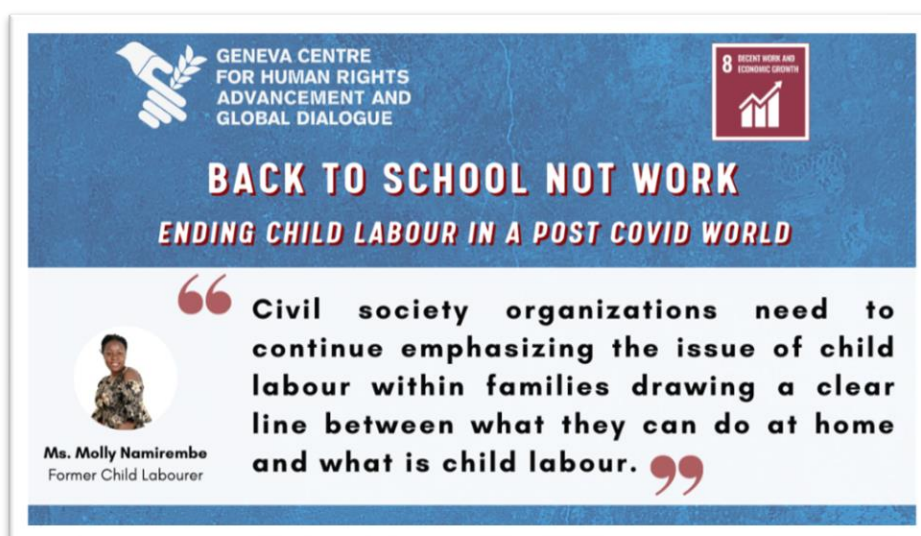
child labour, implementing programs that involve withdrawal of children from such situations, support their education as well as livelihoods of their families, while providing food security.



Ms. Molly Namirembe – Former Child Labourer, Young Activist from Uganda

Ms Namirembe explained how her organization works to support children through education, art, including music and drama, and media. The approach is to prepare former child labourers to a rights-based life, through career-guidance sessions and promotion of self-awareness.

There is an urgent need to combine prevention and response strategies, for governments to prioritize education for all children, without discrimination or inequalities, desist all cultural norms and behaviours that render children particularly vulnerable to child labour, create public awareness and reinforce monitoring and accountability.



Ms Florie May Butiong-Tacang presented her NGO called Kaugmaon, which in the local Philippines dialect means future. It thus envisions a society respectful of children's rights and works for the

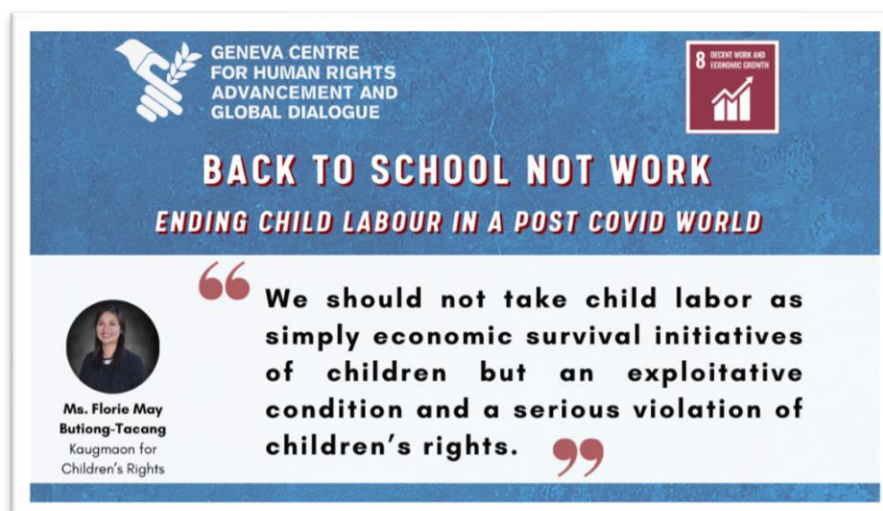
protection of children from abuse and exploitation. It is an NGO based in the islands of Mindanao, particularly in the Davao region.



Ms. Florie May Butiong-Tacang – Executive Director of the Kaugmaon for Children's Rights and Social Development, presenting her organization.

The organisation conducted consultations with child labourers and their parents regarding the effects of the Covid pandemic on their lives. These revealed loss of jobs and hence income, food scarcity, lack of occasions for healthy activities and socialization.

Child labour constitutes a serious violation of the rights of the child. This issue needs to be part of the priority plan of local, regional and national governmental levels. There is also need for international collaboration and oversight to render those concerned accountable.



Child activist, 14-year-old **Stacey Fru** from South Africa, presented her Foundation, which advocates for literacy, safety and security for children. The Foundation donates books, clothing, computers, provides food and offers learning sessions.



Ms. Stacey Fru – Multiple Award-Winning Child Author and Activist from South Africa

She underlined that children in Africa, just as in many parts of the world, are very vulnerable. Stacey Fru has written several books, in one of which she describes how a South African boy set out to Europe and America to seek his role model but found none. It was upon returning home that he saw his model was actually in his neighbourhood.

She observed that the Covid-19 pandemic has affected household incomes, thereby imposing suffering on children. She vibrantly appealed to adults the world over to protect children from any form of employment and against abduction and trafficking. Solidarity in this regard among nations and peoples was vital.

A graphic with a blue background. At the top left is the logo of the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue, which includes a stylized hand holding a leaf. To the right of the logo is the text 'GENEVA CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ADVANCEMENT AND GLOBAL DIALOGUE'. At the top right is a red square icon with the number '8' and the text 'DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH'. The main title 'BACK TO SCHOOL NOT WORK' is in large, bold, white letters. Below it is the subtitle 'ENDING CHILD LABOUR IN A POST COVID WORLD' in smaller, bold, white letters. On the left side, there is a small circular portrait of Ms. Stacey Fru. Below the portrait is her name 'Ms Stacey Fru' and her title 'Child Author and Activist'. To the right of the portrait is a large quote in white text: 'I call on adults across the globe to play very important roles in avoiding child labour by protecting children from any employment of children anywhere including in homes and farms. Protect children against abduction and trafficking.' The quote is enclosed in large quotation marks.



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BACK TO SCHOOL NOT WORK

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Q & A SESSION

Mr. Philippe Vanhuynegem
Chief, Fundamental Principles
and Rights at Work Branch
International Labour
Organization

Ms. Jo Becker
Children's Rights Advocacy
Director
Human Rights Watch

Ms. Anita Sheth
Senior Advisor Social
Compliance and Development
Fairtrade International

Ms. Stacey Fru
Multiple Award-Winning
Child Author and Activist

Mr. Tomoya Obokata
United Nations
Special Rapporteur on
Contemporary Forms of
Slavery

Ms. Willy Ntarembe
Former Child Labourer
Activist from Uganda

Ms. Florie May Tacang
Executive Director of the
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During the ensuing Q&A session with the virtual audience, Mr Michel Veuthey, Deputy Ambassador of the Permanent Delegation of the Sovereign Order of Malta asked what the role of faith-based organizations could be in the fight against child labour and promotion of access to education.

In her response, **Ms Namirembe** highlighted the essential role of faith-based organizations in awareness-raising. Faith-based organisations, she said, were big platforms with a significant number of followers. These platforms could and should be instrumental in awareness raising about the dangers of human trafficking and child labour, the legal implications of employing children, and the role of communities in preventing violations.

Mr Vanhuynegem reminded the audience that Pope Francis had just expressed himself earlier in the day during the World of Work Summit at the ILO which focused on the response to the devastating impact of COVID-19 on the world of work. Pope Francis, continued Mr Vanhuynegem, delivered a brilliant speech on the decency of work that needed to be sought. Advocacy played an important role, but so did the promotion of having a more human-centred approach in the economy.

A representative of a Geneva-based human rights NGO asked how it could be possible to oblige States to enforce principles that already existed for many years and had acquired universal acceptance and recognition.

Mr Vanhuynegem said it was not a question of forcing but a question of the vision of the society we want for our future. Decent work, he added, was *the* instrument that put the human being at the centre. The policies that enable people to be protected throughout their life, when they are active and when they are retired, such as child benefits, access to health insurance, or pensions, are very effective means to reduce vulnerability and poverty.

Secondly, continued Mr Vanhuynegem, in society, we need to talk and dialogue, often expressing diverse and opposite opinions. The ILO, by its tripartite nature, is pushing for entrepreneurs and enterprise representatives, for civil society and workers, and for the government, to talk about the society they wish to have, and define those policies as a social contract they want. Children – who are the future of every nation – should be at the centre of the preoccupation of policymakers. The solution is not to force, but to understand what the society wants through the democratic process – and in this, dialogue has a key role. That is the strategy the ILO is pushing forward.

In response to the same question, **Mr Obokata** said that from the practical point of view, many countries with cases of child labour and slavery are low- and middle-income countries which are struggling a lot. It is therefore essential to stress the importance of international cooperation: the high-income states should be able to assist these low- and middle-income states so that they can develop the appropriate measures for economic development and eradication of poverty, which would prevent children from being put in this kind of situations. The importance of international cooperation and the role of international community should be also emphasized.

Ms Sheth brought up the important issue of remedy in her response. For decades, she said, we had been counting the numbers related to child labour in different sectors and countries. The ILO and UNICEF received these numbers and analysed them. Those that count, said Ms Sheth, are also obliged to remedy. We all have a responsibility to focus on remedy, she insisted, and the questions that should now be addressed in the post-COVID settings are “Why are we counting?” and “What are our responsibilities, whoever we are – whether we are The Fairtrade, the media, the government, ILO, UNICEF, child rights organisation – when we count and report, what is our obligation to contribute to the remedy?”

Ms Becker added that one of the things the world community needed to do was to emphasize better why putting an end to child labour was in each country’s self-interest. Some of the speakers had spoken about the generational aspects of child labour and poverty, she recalled, and we need to continue to emphasize that when children are removed from child labour and enjoy the right to education, it really enhances the economic prospects of the country, its development and long-term societal benefits.

Secondly, referring to what Mr Obokata had said earlier about international cooperation, Ms Becker said that many low-and middle-income countries did not necessarily have the resources they needed to put strong social protection systems in place. And yet that was essential to buffer financial crises that families experienced in times of the pandemic or other difficulties. She insisted on the need to promote the proposal for a Global Fund for Social Protection so that governments could really support low-and middle-income countries in putting the safety net in place for families who needed it.

Finally, a civil society representative from Costa Rica made a remark saying that in her country they had cash assistance but, unfortunately, it had not been enough to stop child labour, as the extreme poverty of kids continued.

Ms Becker noted that this was an important point. For it to be successful, she said, cash assistance needed to meet at least three criteria: 1) reaching a large number of families; 2) providing adequate allowances; and 3) ensuring payments are regular, preferably monthly. In other words, she concluded, the more families covered, the larger the benefit, and the more regular the payment, the stronger the impact.



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FULL STATEMENTS OF PANELLISTS

Mr. Philippe Vanuyne
Chief, Fundamental Principles
and Rights at Work Branch
International Labour
Organization

Ms. Leanne Becker
Children's Rights Advocacy
Director
Human Rights Watch

Mr. Anita Shetty
Senior Advisor Social
Compliance and Development
Fairtrade International

Mr. Tomoya Obokata
United Nations
Special Rapporteur on
Contemporary Forms of
Slavery

Ms. Mary Namirembe
Former Child Labourer
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Ms. Florie M. Tacang
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Mr. Philippe Vanhuynegem

Chief, Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work Branch, International Labour Organization



A Belgian national, Mr. Philippe Vanhuynegem holds a Master's Degree in Economics and a Special Master's Degree in Econometrics from the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB). Mr. Vanhuynegem joined the ILO in 1997, first in Côte d'Ivoire and then in the Lima Sub-regional office, as a junior professional officer working on social protection. He then spent almost seven years at headquarters in Geneva working on several large technical cooperation programmes on social exclusion, social protection and local development. In 2008, based in Dar es Salaam, he managed a regional programme on cooperative businesses in East and Southern Africa. In 2011, he returned to Lima as a senior enterprise specialist for the Andean Countries, where he became Director of the Subregional Office for the Andean Countries in 2016.

Since April 2021, Mr. Vanhuynegem has been the Chief of the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work Branch of the Governance and Tripartism Department at headquarters. Before joining the ILO, Mr. Vanhuynegem worked for a consultancy firm on banking and telecommunication for the private sector in Europe. He started his career as a research fellow at the Research Center for Applied Economics of the ULB (DULBEA) and published several studies on social protection, cooperatives and other labour-related issues.

First of all, I would like to thank the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue for organizing this webinar as part of the International Year for the Elimination of Child labour. I am very pleased to be a member of this panel along with distinguished panellists, addressing child labour specialists from all around the world.

I was asked to start today's discussion by presenting the new global estimates of child labour and their main findings, which were released last week. Let me start by pointing out the "paradox" in which we find ourselves today.

As you know, child labour has been at the heart of the ILO's mandate since its inception, in 1919, with the adoption of the first Convention on Minimum Age in the Industry (C.5). In 1973, Convention 138, which sets the minimum age in any type of work or employment was adopted and only 14 Member States are yet to ratify it.

In August 2020, we reached a historic milestone with the universal ratification of ILO's Convention N° 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour. This is proof that the international community condemns the worst forms of child labour, such as slavery, sexual exploitation, the use of children in armed conflict or other illicit or hazardous work that compromises children's health, morals or psychological wellbeing, and that they have no place in our society.

And here is the paradox: while the international community is fully committed to the fight against child labour, and while the UN General Assembly declared 2021 the UN international year for the elimination of child labour, the situation for millions of children is not improving at the pace it deserves.

Let me explain.

For more than 20 years now, the ILO has, every for years, collected, analysed and published global estimates on the magnitude and characteristics of child labour in the world. Until 2016 the number of children in child labour around the world had constantly decreased, from 245 million in 2000 to 152 million in 2016. This means that, in that period, 94 million children went back to school, not to work, to paraphrase the title of this webinar

The latest global estimates, released last week by the ILO jointly with UNICEF, however, are worrying: indeed, it shows that global progress has stalled for the first time since we started measuring child labour two decades ago, with 160 million children in child labour today.

Allow me to go into more details, because the situation is more complex than a number. I would like to give you 6 key elements to understand the panorama of child labour: its prevalence, the situation of hazardous work, the type of workplace, the sector of activity, the age of children and the geographic differences.

- Prevalence. The proportion of children in child labour has not increased, but almost 1 child out of 10 is working. It was one in every six children in the 2000s.
- Hazardous work. Another worrying point, speaking to the paradox I mentioned earlier, is that although C.182 has been universally ratified, the number of children in hazardous work has actually increased in the last 4 years, with 79 million children in situations which endanger their health, safety and moral development.
- Work place. One of the main findings of the report is that the largest share of child labour takes place within families, primarily on family farms or in family microenterprises. Family-based child labour is frequently hazardous despite common perceptions that the family offers a safer work environment.
- Sector. Another conclusion of the report is that child labour is largely predominant in agriculture. 70% of all children in child labour work in that sector, and child labour is three times higher in rural areas than in urban ones. This has major consequences for policies.
- Age of children and gender. Two things: firstly, the prevalence of child labour is higher for boys in all age groups. Secondly, since 2016, the number of children between 5 and 11 in child labour has risen, representing 56% of all children at work. This is extremely worrying because it means these children are excluded from school, despite falling within the age range for compulsory education.
- Geographic differences. While Asia and the Pacific and Latin America have seen the prevalence rate and the total number of children in child labour continue to decrease, and that is good news, Africa has seen a reverse tendency. Today Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa in particular, accounts for 86.6 million of all children in child labour, more than all other regions combined. It means almost one child out of four in sub-Saharan Africa is in child labour.

This is outrageous. Because behind the figures are children, whose future is compromised. But there is some good news, and that's what I would like to conclude with: solutions, although complex, exist: they require both political courage and coordination, especially as the global estimates do not take the impact the COVID-19 crisis into consideration.

So, what can be done?

Firstly, the pandemic has clearly demonstrated the importance of social protection; it must be at the core of policy instruments. Even before the pandemic, nearly three quarters of children (1.47 billion) lacked social protection. Universal social protection, through, for example, child benefits, should be one of the core policies for recovery.

Secondly, we have seen that school closures tend to drive children into isolation and child labour, and that this trend is often difficult to revert even when schools open up again. Even before the pandemic, more than 258 million children and youth were out of school. But the solutions for getting and keeping children at school exist, for instance by aligning the minimum working age and the end compulsory schooling, and abolishing school fees and costs for books, uniforms and transport.

Thirdly, we have a debt towards the rural economy. If we truly want to combat child labour, it requires more spending and targeted interventions to provide poor rural families with decent work, livelihoods and public services, such as access to quality education, health, sanitation and social protection systems.

Last but not least, we need to recognize the key role the private sector, trade unions and civil society play or should play. Enterprises and their representatives have very much engaged to make sure that due diligence obligations are put in place. And substantial progress has been made. We also need to recognize the work done by trade unions and civil society, especially in giving a voice to the voiceless, in particular in rural areas. This is of particular importance in the framework of this webinar.

The report gives many more policy drivers. I will not go into detail but would like to stress THREE things. We need to ACT NOW, ACT STRONGER and ACT FASTER to achieve target 8.7 by 2025 and eradicate child labour in all its forms.

Indeed, the new estimates are a wakeup call. We cannot stand by while a new generation of children is put at risk. The ILO is calling all its Members States, social partners, civil society, academics and partners to put child labour and forced labour at the centre of their priorities. We are at a pivotal moment and much depends on how we respond. The time has come for renewed commitment and energy, to turn the corner and break the cycle of poverty and child labour. The COVID-19 pandemic is a test of our intergenerational solidarity and our vision for a human-centred and inclusive recovery. We cannot ignore the most vulnerable and it is not in our interest to put children last on the list. The solutions are on the table; we need to foster political will and consensus to implement and finance them.

We have made a promise to children to end child labour.

There is no time to lose.

Mr. Tomoya Obokata

United Nations Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery



Mr. Obokata is a Japanese scholar of international law and human rights, specialising in transnational organised crime, human trafficking and modern slavery. He was appointed as the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences in March 2020. He currently serves as Professor of International Law and Human Rights at Keele University, and previously taught at Queen's University Belfast and Dundee University.

He has extensive experience of working on the issues of transnational crime, human trafficking and modern slavery with relevant stakeholders, including the UK Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights, the Northern Ireland Assembly All Party Group on Human Trafficking, the UN Office of Drugs and Crime, the International Organisation for Migration and the European Union. Mr. Obokata also worked as a legal clerk for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Japan. He has published widely on the topics mentioned.

Dear colleagues, friends, Excellencies,

I would like to thank the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue for the invitation to speak at today's webinar.

In July 2019, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) unanimously adopted a resolution declaring 2021 as the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour, highlighting the member States' commitments "to take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms."

This leaves us, the international community, with only 4 years for action. Four years to free 160 million children from child labour, including 79 million children who are in hazardous work. These are the latest figures released by the ILO on 10 June, indicating that there has been an increase in child labour, including in its worst forms, since 2016. And what I find particularly shocking is the significant rise in the number of children aged 5 to 11 years in child labour, as they now account for just over half of the total global figure.²

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced more children into work. Temporary school closures, combined with pressure from the sudden loss of livelihoods, food shortages and breakdown of community safety nets -- all these factors have resulted in an increase in child labour in sectors including agriculture, construction, mining and domestic work in regions such as Asia, Africa and Latin America.³

According to UNESCO, 11 million girls might not return to school after the pandemic-induced unprecedented education disruption. Indeed, I have seen instances of early/forced marriage,

² ILO, statement at the occasion of the World Day Against Child Labour (Geneva, 10 June 2021), available at [World Day Against Child Labour: Child labour rises to 160 million – first increase in two decades \(ilo.org\)](https://www.ilo.org/global/news/press-releases/2021/06/10/world-day-against-child-labour-2021)

³ Obokata, et al, Good Practice in Protecting People from Modern Slavery during the COVID -19 Pandemic (June 2021).

trafficking for sexual exploitation, domestic servitude and other forms of exploitation and violence.⁴ For many girls, school is more than just a key to a better future. It's a lifeline.⁵

As my predecessor noted in her report on child slavery presented to the General Assembly in 2019, "where children are not able to access education, their ability to understand, enjoy and assert their rights both in childhood and in adulthood are impaired".⁶ So the longer we wait with bringing children back to school after the pandemic, the stronger the impact on their futures will be. And the higher is the risk of more children being drawn into child labour.

Child labour, which may amount to slavery-like conditions, is both a symptom and a driver of poverty.⁷ If children manage to escape their situation of enslavement, their prospects of finding work are diminished, making it very difficult to break free from poverty.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The task ahead of us is gigantic. There is no justification for putting our children, our future at risk. So, there is no time to waste, and States must take renewed action without further delay.

Last year, a milestone and historic first was achieved with universal ratification of ILO Convention 182, meaning that all children now have legal protection against the worst forms of child labour. In this way, the global commitment was reaffirmed that the worst forms of child labour, such as slavery, sexual exploitation, the use of children in armed conflict or other illicit or hazardous work that compromises children's health, morals or psychological wellbeing, are explicitly prohibited in all countries. This commitment is, however, not yet translated into tangible action by States, calling for urgently stepped-up measures which go beyond the criminalization of child labour.

Families need social protection and access to decent work in rural and urban areas in order to break the vicious cycle of poverty and child labour. And States must focus on the most vulnerable families as a matter of priority in order to ensure that no one is left behind. Without a specific focus on the most marginalized people, the SDGs remain an empty shell.

Education needs to be a matter of priority at all times, including in times of crisis. In this regard, my colleague, the Special Rapporteur on the right to education last year recommended measures including the adoption of the most accessible low-tech or no-tech approaches to distance learning and moratoria on the payment of school fees. It goes without saying that education must be provided to all children without discrimination.

Furthermore, the root causes of child slavery must be addressed, including through comprehensive awareness-raising at the national level on the rights of the child, and States need to strengthen their efforts to promote gender equality.

Also, anti-slavery provisions should be included across wider social policies and programmes so that child slavery concerns are reflected in areas such as education, social protection, labour markets and labour standards.

⁴ Obokata, et al, Good Practice in Protecting People from Modern Slavery during the COVID -19 Pandemic (June 2021).

⁵ [Keeping girls in the picture \(unesco.org\)](https://www.unesco.org/en/keeping-girls-in-the-picture).

⁶ A/74/179 para 49.

⁷ Sanlaap, Under-age Marriage in Rural West Bengal: A Survey Based Study (Sanlaap, 2007); ECPAT and Plan International, Thematic Report: Unrecognised Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children in Child, Early and Forced Marriage (2015).

To prevent and end child slavery, States should adopt and implement time-bound, measurable and realistic targets, action plans and strategies, and allocate sufficient resources to this end.

Finally, States should take effective preventive measures to ensure that businesses do not engage in child slavery and, in case of non-compliance, hold businesses and respective perpetrators accountable, in line with the UN Guiding Principles of Business and Human Rights

Living up to the commitments made under SDG target 8.7 and the International Year against Child Labour is only possible if States show real political will to change the status quo. Investing in our children's future is investing in our planet and inaction in this regard can no longer be justified.

Thank you.

Ms. Jo Becker

Children's Rights Advocacy Director, Human Rights Watch



Ms. Becker is the advocacy director of the Children's Rights Division at Human Rights Watch. For the past twenty years, she has carried out research and advocacy on children's rights, with a particular focus on the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict and exploitative and hazardous child labor. Her advocacy helped lead to the adoption of international treaties on child soldiers and decent work for domestic workers, and influenced multinational tobacco and jewellery companies to strengthen their policies and practices regarding child labor and human rights.

Her field investigations have encompassed work in Burma, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Morocco, Nepal, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Uganda, and the United States. She is co-author of numerous Human Rights Watch reports. Her most recent is "I Must Work to Eat": Covid-19, Poverty, and Child Labor in Ghana, Nepal, and Uganda (2021). In addition to her work at Human Rights Watch, she is also an adjunct associate professor of international and public affairs at Columbia University, and the award-winning author of two books.

Over the past two decades, countries have made remarkable progress in reducing child labor. Between 2000 and 2016, the number of children in child labor decreased by 94 million – that's a drop of nearly 40 percent.

Last week, the ILO and UNICEF released new global estimates, showing that since 2016, child labor rates had started to rise for the first time in 20 years. But what's more alarming is that this increase does not even reflect the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The pandemic is driving child labor even higher for 4 key reasons:

- First, unprecedented loss of jobs and income have plunged nearly 90 million people into extreme poverty, leaving them struggling to meet their basic needs and often resorting to child labor.
- Second, the pandemic has brought massive school closures, forcing 1.4 billion children out of school. For those who can't access distance learning, work seems a logical alternative.
- Third, more than 3.8 million people have died from Covid-19, leaving hundreds of thousands of children without one or both parents. As a result, many children have entered the workforce to support themselves or their families.
- Finally, restrictions due to the Covid-19 have limited monitoring and enforcement of child labor laws, reducing pressures on employers to comply.

Human Rights Watch recently launched a new report documenting how these factors have played out in children's lives. Between January and March of this year, Human Rights Watch, Friends of the Nation, and Initiative for Social and Economic Rights, interviewed over 80 children in 3 countries – Ghana, Nepal, and Uganda.

We chose these three countries because each has made significant progress in reducing poverty and child labor over the last few decades. Each is also a "pathfinder" country, which means they have made an explicit commitment to accelerate progress to end child labor in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. But each is lagging behind other countries in using cash transfers, a policy measure that can be remarkably effective in reducing poverty, child labor, and increasing school enrolment.

Of the 81 children we interviewed, the vast majority said that their family income had been negatively impacted by the pandemic and lockdowns. Their parents lost jobs when businesses shut down, couldn't get to markets to sell their goods, or lost customers due to economic slowdowns. Families struggled to pay for food and other basic needs, and many children felt they had no choice but to work to help their families survive.

The majority of the children interviewed had limited or no access to distance learning during school closures, so had little to occupy their time. One boy from Nepal told us, "There was nothing to do at home since school shut down. And with everybody at home, we started to run out of food quickly. I decided to go to work because what else was I going to do?"

The children we interviewed worked at brick kilns, carpet factories, gold mines, stone quarries, fisheries, and in agriculture. Some worked as mechanics, rickshaw drivers, or in construction, while others sold items on the street, such as masks, brooms, or food.

Many children described work that was clearly hazardous. This boy on the left is working at a stone quarry, where children reported injuries from flying stones, including sharp particles that got into their eyes. The boy on the right, works at a construction site, carrying bags of cement up and down four flights of stairs for 10 hours a day. He told us, "It's so hard. Sometimes I feel drained but I have to finish the work and earn my pay."

In Uganda and Ghana, children worked at gold mining sites carrying heavy loads of ore, crushing the ore into smaller pieces with hammers, breathing in dust and fumes from processing machines, and handling toxic mercury to extract the gold.

Long hours of work were common, particularly during school closures and lockdowns. During Nepal's initial lockdown, several children said they worked in carpet factories for 14 hours a day or more. One 14-year-old girl started weaving at a carpet loom at 4 a.m. and didn't finish until 10 at night, with only an hour's break in the afternoon.

Most of the children were paid very little for their labor, if they were paid at all. Some children said that their earnings did not always provide enough money for food, and that there were times when they still went hungry. More than a quarter of the children we interviewed said that their employer sometimes refused to pay them or cheated them of their wages.

Most of the children were eager to return to school as soon as they could. At the time of our interviews, in January and February, most children in Ghana and Nepal had returned, but continued to work before or after school. Some said that their work hours made it difficult to keep up with schoolwork, or that they attended erratically because of work demands. In other cases, children had not yet returned, because they believed their families still needed their income, or because they needed to earn money for school expenses. A boy in Nepal told us that his parents borrowed money when they had no work for several months. He said, "If I go back to school now, my family will just go further into debt."

Research shows that the longer children are out of school, the less likely they are to return. UNICEF estimates that 24 million children that have missed out on schooling during the pandemic will drop out for good. We saw that in our interviews as well. A few of the children showed little interest in returning to school. For example, one boy had gotten work repairing motorcycles and scooters said, "I've spent so much time learning these skills, why would I leave this to go to school now?"

Our research paints a troubling picture. And the heightened risk of child labor is not going away. Since our interviews just a few months ago, both Uganda and Nepal are undergoing a second round of school closures and lockdowns.

But the most important message is that child labor is not an inevitable consequence of the pandemic. When governments provide families with cash assistance, this can help them meet their needs without resorting to child labor. Decades of research show that such cash assistance – provided on a regular, monthly basis – can reduce poverty, reduce child labor, increase school enrolment, and stimulate the economy. In fact, cash transfers were an important element in the dramatic reduction in global child labor rates between 2000 and 2016.

Despite their proven impact, 1.3 billion children – primarily in Africa and Asia – have no access to such programs. And the assistance governments have given in response to the pandemic has often been too little – most programs have been short-term, or a single cash payment.

Our report urges governments and donors to take immediate action to protect children. 3 key recommendations:

- Prioritize cash allowances and cash transfers in their pandemic response. This can alleviate both the immediate and long-term impacts of the pandemic, and help families meet their needs without resorting to child labor;
- As soon as it's safe to do so, get children back into school, making special efforts to reach out to children who are working and ensure that financial barriers do not stand in the way of their education;
- Enforce child labor laws through effective monitoring, removing children, and applying appropriate penalties.

Our full report is on the HRW website, and I will also post a link in the chat.

I look forward to hearing from the other speakers, and our discussion. Thank you.

Ms. Anita Sheth

Senior Advisor Social Compliance and Development, Fairtrade International



Ms. Sheth joined Fairtrade International in 2009 as its Senior Advisor, Social Compliance and Development. She is the organization's expert on mitigating child labour and forced labour issues, including gender-based violence in the production and processing of certified commodities. In September 2020, she became Fairtrade International's Senior Advisor, Rights and Vulnerable Groups, where she will focus on human rights protection, remedy and impact involving right holders such as children, women, youth and at-risk migrants. Prior to joining Fairtrade, Ms. Sheth worked at Save the Children in Canada as its Senior Policy, Research and Advocacy Analyst. She has worked on labour and human security issues in the agricultural and extractive sectors, involving many countries in West and East Africa, South and Central America and Asia and the Pacific.

She has been an expert advisor to the U.S. Department of Labour's Cocoa and Child Labour Oversight Body and was a board of directors of Partnership Africa Canada that played a key role in preventing the sale of conflict diamonds. She is an Indian born, Canadian citizen, who studied in Malta and currently resides and works in Bonn, Germany.

The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly increased economic, social and environmental insecurity for farmers and farm workers around the globe, especially migrant workers and their families. This has profoundly disrupted supply chains, impacted recruitment and employment practices for labour, and halted gains made in the fight against child labour.

Fairtrade Africa estimates that many farmers in that continent have lost up to 80% of their revenue.

The loss of farming household incomes, coupled with school closures and government support services, including a reduction of law enforcement and labour inspections, has once again renewed pressure on children to contribute to their own and families' financial well-being. It is therefore no surprise that, according to the ILO and UNICEF, child labour numbers have not only increased over the years, but all indicators suggest that even more children have become involved in exploitative and hazardous agricultural work, while those already working do so under worsening conditions.

So, what has this pandemic taught Fairtrade about the work we have engaged in thus far in eliminating child labour?

To sum it up in a sentence, it has reconfirmed our long-held position that systemic inequalities in the production, processing and trading of commodities, along with unfair trading conditions, have been key drivers. As a result, we have seen that:

1. Children's insecurities have accelerated on the one hand and dependence on their financial contributions has increased on the other.
2. Farmers' and farm workers' declining incomes have impacted their ability to act and respond to child labour. In this context and focusing not just on the vulnerabilities of working children and their families, but on the economics of trade, we need to ask, what is the shared responsibilities and duty of care of all supply chain actors and their governments to address farmer poverty and enable a more equitable share of gains made through trade?

3. Children's education has not been regarded as a key priority amid the pandemic, even though children's right to education in emergencies (such as conflict and natural disasters) has been embraced, instituted, and upheld by many countries and duty bearers. The key question to address here, is why were the learnings and practices of children's right to education in emergencies not transferred to the pandemic context?

4. While sector specific media stories and research information on child labour were generated and discussed during COVID 19, support services and agencies were shut down at all levels, making it impossible to seek help for the safe withdrawal of children identified even in the worst forms of child labour. Another important question to address in this context is, what broke down in the national child protection systems built over decades with support of governments, UN bodies and rights based international and national non-governmental organizations?

5. Youth farmers and farm workers continue to remain excluded from consultations on ways to eliminate child labour, even though their contributions to the production, processing and trading of commodities has been continuously documented. Official statistics before the pandemic indicated that youth are three times more unlikely to find decent options for sustainable livelihoods when compared to adults.

What then has Fairtrade done to factor in these observations in developing our holistic approach to child labour elimination?

Firstly, we have learned how the issue of child labour is addressed is critical.

Fairtrade has and continues to operate on a standard based requirement that every child confirmed in child labour must be safely withdrawn to ensure prolonged safety, and that prevention actions must be engaged to ensure withdrawn children are not replaced by others. And taking such an approach during COVID-19 has proven to be particularly relevant.

In further developing our community-centred, inclusive and area-based approaches to child labour, we asked involved cooperatives to elect responsible and interested persons (women and youth among them) in their communities to support efforts to respond to child labour. Once elected, Fairtrade trained these community representatives in areas where government offices remain closed on child rights and child protection, particularly on methods of safe withdrawals of identified child labourers. Furthermore, we required these trained representatives to document steps taken in withdrawing these children and provide confidential reports to local and/or national authorities to independently verify them. Where government offices were open but providing limited support due to COVID-19 restrictions, these community representatives and farmers assisted officials in remediation actions when called upon. Fairtrade is exploring how involved farming communities and their trained representatives can play a key role in remediation with government and other expert agencies.

Fairtrade continues to address farming household poverty through Fairtrade Minimum Prices and Premiums, including through the work we have been doing on developing the Living Income Reference Price which indicates the price needed for an average farmer household with a viable farm size and an adequate productivity level to make a living income from the sales of their crop and reach a decent standard of living. Fairtrade has been working on living income pilot projects with committed, forward-looking, commercial partners. Achieving Living Incomes for Fairtrade producers is at the heart of our mission and at the top of our agenda. Fairtrade Premiums have funded the building of primary schools, agricultural institutes and/or learning labs, supported the training of teachers and farmers on safeguarding, provided school buses and bicycles for children who have to travel long distances to

attend school and implemented alternative income generation projects for women and older youth in households using child labour.

Schools are not automatic safe places for children. Where child labour exists, chances are that schooling is absent, unsafe and/or irrelevant to children's aspirations of securing a life free of poverty, hardship and/or violence. Fairtrade is engaging with child rights NGOs and the education and labour departments of governments to work with labour inspectors and truancy officers to ensure that children withdrawn from child labour and placed in schools, flourish and live their lives with security, dignity and respect.

Much of the work Fairtrade does in the area of child labour mitigation involves young people because we believe they are resourceful and best placed to challenge traditional power structures and practices. We are lobbying for their inclusion so benefits obtained through their involvement in the production, processing and trading of agricultural commodities are distributed in a way that includes them. Fairtrade is also calling for all supply chain actors and their governments to enable decent youth employment, skills development and business opportunities in the agricultural sectors.

The young people are key drivers of inclusive change and leading voices in the global sustainability conversation. We simply cannot end child labour without their involvement and leadership. As one 17-year-old youth worker recently reminded me: "What is happening in the farm is also happening in schools. The only difference is the people who do it have a better pair of shoes."

Ms. Molly Namirembe

Former Child Labourer, Young Activist from Uganda



Ms. Namirembe is currently a program officer and a SCREAM trainer at Ecological Christian Organization (ECO), a non-governmental organization in Uganda. She is passionate about working with children and youth and she has done this since 2015. At ECO, she is implementing projects that are aimed at ending child trafficking and child labour. She has a bachelor's degree in social work and social administration from Makerere University, and a certificate in child protection from Makerere University.

For Ms. Namirembe supporting children is not just a job but a passion. She is a living example of resilience as she is a former victim of child labour and now actively involved in global efforts to combat it.

My father died when I was less than two years old, my paternal family wanted to have custody of me but my mother secretly took me away to a distant place. So, growing up it was my mum, my sister and I. At 11 years, my mother passed away on the 1st/03/2004 and somehow because we had not interacted with our Families that much, it was just us left to take care of ourselves. We lived near a tea plantation and all we knew how to do was pick tea, so we got into the job. I did it part time in the morning before I went to school and in the evening after until I completed primary seven. After that I needed more money to join a new school, I dropped out of school to work fulltime because this would earn me money since were paid per basket picked but also this did not help much. These were the hardest days of my life. I had to wake up early in the morning latest 6:00 am, as other children walked to school, I walked to the farm, I endured the morning dew, the insect bites, working for long hours with a basket around my chest and sometimes on an empty stomach, we slept late because we also to do our home chores and prepare a meal every evening. The strongest pain and what made me cry every day was watching my friends go to school, watching my dream of going to school fade away. But I would wipe my tears and would copy notes from one of my friends and I kept doing this until one day when I realized that what I was doing would not help much. I woke up one day and looked for my mother's best friend who then helped me to trace my maternal family and later my paternal family where one of my uncles took me under his wings and I was able to go back to school. I can say that amidst all the challenges I never lost hope and I was sure all I needed was to go to school so that I can make my life better but also help others and here I'm.

We cannot talk about development while children are labouring Protection of children is very important if we are to break the poverty cycle.

Best Practices: PHE (Population Health and Environment) integrated projects. NGOs need stop handling child labour as a challenge that happens in isolation from all the others but rather start understanding the underlying factors to it. We implement programs that involve actual withdraw of children, support their education, livelihood and incomes improvement through the VSLAs of the families, provide agro input to address food security amidst the climate change challenge and finally addressing the family planning needs to ensure that people give birth to planned and manageable children in terms of number.

SCREAM- Support Children's rights through the Education, Art and media is a methodology of the ILO. The methodology empowers children in child labour to be able to speak out, to ask for help from duty bearers as well as any other people around them in the most comfortable ways of Art, Music and

Drama, it encourages children to understand the value of education and to help one another. It also prepares children for intervention because at times it's hard to cope after exploitation. Personally, it took me more than two years to get used to rights fulfilled kind of life, even to perform well in school. We use the methodology to prepare former child labourers to rights filled life through, career guidance sessions to decide what intervention they want to go for in what environment, self-awareness, sharing feelings until one is ready for intervention. We talk to them about the importance of education.

We have a lot of work to do as adults but as we do all this, we need a generation of resilient young people, a generation of young people not exploited but determined to do something to help others who can remain strong and actively participate in the cause to eliminate child labour. And from that time dedicated my life to empowering the children to be just that. I have so far worked with 13 children clubs and we have made mile stones, we have achieved two child ordinances, one bylaw, we were also consulted during the review of Uganda's mining Act in 2019, we have changed our ways, we look out for one another and we impact the people around us, we have advocated for private sector to pay royalties and we have seen them support children to go back to school. Everyone amongst us is just doing what they can in their capacity.

Child protection workers were not treated as essential workers and child protection was left in hanging, Schools were closed yet farms, mines, fishing sites and factories remained open, closure of inspection offices and ourselves being banned from movement. Child protection is equally essential and should have been given a little more attention than was given.

- We need to start addressing child labour in a more comprehensive way. We have to combine both prevention and response in our interventions. In response we can work on Actual withdrawal but in prevention we need to focus on addressing the underlying causes such as poverty through livelihood strengthening, addressing food security through incentivising and mechanization of labour-intensive supply chain levels, provide all utilities needed to eliminate child labour force. In the end people can do much more work.
- Governments also need to prioritize education for all children especially now where some parents cannot afford because their small businesses have been crippled by the current situation and I want to say if we are committed to it, we can still fulfil our commitment amidst the pandemic.

To the Families, we need to know where to draw the line between light work and child labour, desist all cultural norms and behaviours that render children especially vulnerable to child labour and we all have the responsibility to create awareness on this.

Finally, to the children, we the adults are not seated, we are working on it, just play your part, don't sit back, look for help and if you can help other fellow children, look out for one another where you can please do so, if you have a voice use it. Every action counts.

Every child deserves to have their first 18 years free of child labour. Tomorrow is too far, today is already late. We must Act now to end Child Labour.

Ms. Florie May Butiong-Tacang

Executive Director of the Kaugmaon for Children's Rights and Social Development (Philippines)



Ms. Butiong-Tacang is a registered social worker. She is currently the Executive Director of Kaugmaon for Children's Rights and Social Development, Inc., a non-governmental institution that works for the protection of children, especially those involved in hard and hazardous work. In her decades of engagement in development work, she spearheaded and managed different programs on upholding children's rights and developing the life skills of young people.

Today, she continues to advocate for child protection to the fore along with conducting research on children's issues and working with the community and other stakeholders in developing and strengthening child protection structures and mechanisms.

Good day everyone!

It is safe to say good day, since we are coming from different parts of the globe.

I am so honored to be part of this activity today to talk about Kaugmaon's initiatives together our partners to provide opportunities for children to continue enjoying their rights to education.

Allow to introduce my organization; Kaugmaon for Children's Rights and Social Development, Inc is a non-governmental organization based in Davao City, Philippines.

Kaugmaon (ka-ug-ma-on) is a local dialect that means future. Kaugmaon as an organization, envisions a society respectful of children's rights. With this, efforts are geared towards the protection of children from various forms of abuse and exploitation especially those involved in hard and hazardous work.

Kaugmaon has 6 core programs; organizing, capability building, direct services, research and advocacy, networking and linkages, as well as organizational development.

But I will only talk about organizing, research and advocacy, direct services, and the need for networking and linkages.

Kaugmaon is a local NGO in the Philippines, that is based in the Islands of Mindanao; particularly in Davao Region. Kaugmaon organizes Self-Help Group (SHG) composed of parents of child laborers and at risk to child labor. This is an approach to empower women; which eventually are expected to participate in establishing child protection mechanisms in the communities.

We also facilitated the establishment and strengthening of community-based child protection mechanisms as well as Children's Groups and Children Advisory Committee.

The Children's Advisory Committee is part of "Dialogue Works" it is a global effort led by Kindernothilfe and Terre des Hommes together with various stakeholders in ensuring that voices of child labor and working children are being heard in the political discussion up to the V Global Conference on the Sustainable Eradication of Child Labor in 2022.

To better respond to the need of children especially during covid; in June last year Kaugmaon together with Kindernothilfe conducted consultations with child labourers and their parents on the effect of covid to their lives;

Of course, because of lockdowns and quarantines, economic activities also stopped which affect the lives of the marginalized sectors. Parents lost their jobs. Before the pandemic, food is already scarce for children and their families; this worsens during the pandemic. Children could not help earning a living as they could not work too because aside that there are no available opportunities to earn something, they are not allowed to go out too. This disrupted the usual activities of children, more so they were unable to socialize with other children. A year after; we conducted another consultation on how children and their families coped with challenges brought about by covid-19.

Parents have part-time job now. This is also true in some areas where Kaugmaon works. It was found out in the study conducted by the organization under the BuildCA2p Project of ChildFund Philippines; banana plantations ceased to accept seasonal workers since demand for banana in the global market also decreased. Despite engaging in the seasonal job, still food is not enough for the family.

Older children have the opportunity to work in construction sites. However, there are children who dropped out from school because they could not cope with the demand of the modular mode of education and some also prefer to help their family look for a living.

Kaugmaon also conducted a Children's Rights Situational Analysis together with Kindernothilfe Philippines. Children expressed that life is difficult before covid; but it is much more difficult during covid-19 which forced them to engage in hard work just to earn. They also suffered health related concerns like peptic ulcer, fever, and cold and body pains. Children also expressed that they are bullied.

After knowing the descriptive and qualitative data on the effects of covid-19 to children and their families; Kaugmaon together with its partners Kindernothilfe Philippines and Child Fund Philippines conducted the enumeration of children who are involve in agricultural work particularly in rice and banana; and also, from other work of children. Kaugmaon continues to advocate for recognition of child labor as an urgent exploitation issue that need to be part of the priority plan of the local governmental units up to regional and national level.

As for the direct services in relation to the support for children to education; Kaugmaon under the BuildCa2P Project of Child Fund Philippines with support coming from the US DoI will provide education support to 1,500 children which will be distributed next month. Furthermore, our partner organization Kindernothilfe Philippines will facilitate child sponsorship to 500 children for the next 5 to 10 years.

As we recognized the magnitude of child labor problem, and it exacerbates during the pandemic; it is just right that networking and linkages among various stakeholders that address the issues of child labor be established and strengthened. Child labor should be tackled in various level of socio-political spheres from community, cities, regions and in the global context.

As number of child labor increased during the pandemic, we need to double our effort to address child labor, widened collaboration, and meaningfully discuss the issue, so that appropriate intervention will be afforded to exploited children.

WE should not take child labor as simply economic survival initiatives of children but an exploitative condition and a serious violation of children's rights.

Ms. Stacey Fru

Multiple Award-Winning Child Author and Activist from South Africa



Stacey is a multiple award-winning Child Author of chapter books, a Philanthropist, Activist, Analyst, Brand Ambassador, and Public Speaker. She is the current face of the African Union (AU) and International Labour Organisation's (ILO) 2021 International Campaign for the Elimination of Child Labour. One of her books is available in Braille and Daisy formats. She runs The Stacey Fru Foundation that reaches out to donate books, food, computers and other items to children and care homes across South Africa. She also honours other African children who are impacting their communities by awarding them during The Annual African Children of the Year Awards held every November.

As you know by now, I am 14-year-old Stacey Fru from Johannesburg, South Africa. I am an international multiple award-winning Child Author of chapter books, a Philanthropist, Activist, Analyst, Brands champion, and Public Speaker. My works as a child rights activist positions me as the current face of the African Union (AU) and International Labour Organisation's (ILO) 2021 International Campaign for the Elimination of Child Labour.

I am the founder of the Stacey Fru Foundation, which advocates for Literacy, Safety and Security for children and why not adults? Through my foundation, I give to underprivileged and inaccessible children in forms of books, clothing, computers, foods, learning sessions, etc. I run a few projects, including; An African book a child campaign, through which I collect and donate books by African authors or books about Africa to children in underprivileged areas.

I have focused on teaching African children because when I was 8, I was very disappointed to find out that many children in my beloved continent cannot read and write by age 12. I teach, motivate and encourage others through public talks, writings, and my television (Children Television South Africa (CTVSA) projects. Mind you, children in Africa and many parts of the world are very vulnerable.

I have written 5-chapter books and still writing. My first book titled Smelly Cats focuses on family issues. I use the lives of cats to show how cousins compete for friends and attention. In my second book Bob and the Snake, I tell of a boy's relationship with his pet snake and how he had to make a tough decision (in his opinion) of choosing to respect his parents. My 3rd and 4th books are of adventures. In Smelly Cats on Vacation, the cats in my first book go on holiday and enjoy the beautiful country, Namibia. In Tim's Answer, a South African boy sets out to Europe and America to find his role model. Unfortunately, he found none. He then came back home to South Africa After a long journey and so many weeks, to find that his role model was in his neighbourhood. Tim's Answer is so well received that Blind SA made it available in Braille and Daisy formats.

Today, I was requested to give an insight of the book titled Where is Tammy? In this book, I endeavour to communicate to individuals, institutions and governments that many other children including 6-year-old Tammy depends on grown-ups, to become grown-ups themselves. Meaning that only adults can provide a safe and secure environment for children. Unfortunately, in the book, like with many children, Tammy was taken away by strangers as he walked beside his father. In fact, take away in this book means that Tammy was Kidnapped. Although Tammy reunited with his overjoyed father hours later, what I put across in this book is that it matters for children to be protected by their dear ones. Children's Safety and Security should come first at all times in different situations. I remind grown-ups that child kidnapping is real and can happen within seconds. What really happened to many kidnapped

children out there? Although I urge you all to read my book for more details, my immediate call is that you should Play-Your-Part! Make the world a better place for children to thrive in. I consider Tammy very lucky to have come back to his family because many children are never reunited with their beloved ones after they are either kidnapped or trafficked. Many are enslaved.

In closing, I will join many to acknowledge that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected household earnings. This means that children will suffer more. I therefore plead that individuals should not let child labour make the situation worse. I call on adults across the globe to play very important roles in avoiding child labour by protecting children from any employment of children anywhere including in homes and farms. Protect children against Abduction and Trafficking.

I thank you.

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