

THE PROBLEM OF CHILD LABOUR - WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

It has been said in the past that it takes a village to raise a child.¹ Unfortunately, today, it takes the Global Village to Raise a Child. Raising a child today includes feeding, educating and, above all, protecting him/her from harm. We must play our part as members of the Global Village in this work of protecting children.

The global number of children in child labour is estimated at about 168 million and more than half of them are in hazardous work.² The largest numbers are in Asia and the Pacific, followed by the Sub Sahara, with Africa as the region with the highest numbers. The estimated 59 million are mainly in the agricultural sector, especially in the cocoa plantations.

Child labour in its most extreme forms results in children being enslaved, separated from their families and being forced to work long hours, often in hazardous conditions. The worst forms of child labour include the sale and trafficking of children, forced or compulsory labour, forced recruitment for use in armed conflict, procurement for sex work and pornography.³ Poverty is a major factor forcing many children to work preventing them from going to school, and being able eventually to find decent work. Often a child's income is what helps the family to survive. Sadly, there are instances when they are not paid, only receiving food and a place to sleep.

Children are also a source of cheap labour for employers and are unable to speak up for themselves. The Trafficking of unborn children who are bought and sold is an area of grave concern. Pregnant mothers are targeted. Traffickers prey on the maternal instincts of the women with the promise of a better life for the child and/or monetary compensation which would enable the family to survive. These children have no identity but that which the Trafficker determines and many end up in slave labour and/or prostitution.

In Uzbekistan the government closes all schools during the cotton harvesting season and children are forced to work in the cotton fields until they have fulfilled the prescriptive government quotas.⁴ Natural disasters such as the Tsunami in Indonesia and Earthquake in Nepal have left many children orphaned leaving them vulnerable to being Trafficked and subject to sexual and domestic violence.

¹ African Proverb

² International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour

³ International Labour Organisation

⁴ Trafficking Persons Report 2015

We Can Make a Difference

To enable families to rise above the poverty trap it is essential that Australia honours its commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals and not make cuts to Overseas Development Assistance. We can make a difference by joining campaigns asking the Australian government to discontinue cuts to our Overseas Development Assistance to our neighbours.

Much of the chocolates sold in Australia is from the Ivory Coast where children as young as 12 years old are used to pick the cocoa beans. Some of these children were kidnapped or trafficked and have to work for minimal or no wages for long hours often in dangerous work conditions

We can make a difference by purchasing ethically sourced, certified chocolate e.g. Fairtrade, Rainforest Alliance, Utz Certified. NGOs such as Stop The Traffik have produced postcards targetting major chocolate companies.

The plight of children who have been exploited and abused is poignantly encapsulated by the following poem by Professor Eddie Mhlanga

I cried when Mama died

There was silence

I cried when we were thrown out

There was silence

When will you be silent?

Till I be silent?

Do you love me?

You told God you care about me!

How can we be Silent and not Act? Together we can make a difference!

Sr. Margaret Ng rsj

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