



Tuesday, 25 November 2008

PRESS RELEASE

Combating child labour

Directorate-General for Communication
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

COMBATING CHILD LABOUR

Debate: 25.11.2008

Vote: 28.11.2008

Report on social consequences of child labour and strategies to combat child labour

Rapporteurs: Mrs Ana Rita Sithole (Mozambique) and Mr Liam Aylward (UEN, IR)

Measures to harness the power of consumers and industry to discourage the exploitation of child labour - including a "without child labour" kite mark and a requirement that large firms eliminate child labour from their supply chains within three years, are set out in a report approved by the Social Affairs and Environment Committee on 24 November.

According to the ILO some 165 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 are involved in child labour, the worst forms of which include child slavery, the sale and trafficking of children and child prostitution, says the report.

Consumer power

The report calls for the international community (including the WTO) to pioneer a "child kite mark" for products "grown/manufactured without child labour". After a phased enforcement programme, imports of products without the kite mark into the EU would be prohibited.

It also calls on the European Commission to set up a "child labour hotline" for callers with information on child labour used by large EU firms or their suppliers, and to publish a blacklist of such firms.

Supply chain compliance

The committee also calls on the Commission to oblige "the corporate sector" operating in the EU to document, report and take responsibility for labour practices at all levels of the supply chain. Supply-chain compliance should be inspected at all levels and independently audited, it says, and firms with child labour in their supply chains should be required to publish a time-bound programme for eliminating it within three years, and face sanctions if they fail to do so.

The report calls on the EU Member States and Commission to tie support given to companies through trade missions, export subsidies, grants and loans to demonstrating compliance with international conventions on child labour. It also says public procurement contracts should require firms to demonstrate compliance with international child labour standards, and not be awarded in the absence of proof.

Development policy levers

Finally, the report calls on the international community, and particularly the EU, to include child labour concerns in their development programmes, and to target education funding on those most at risk of exploitation: girls, children in conflict areas, and those in marginalised or vulnerable groups.

Intolerable types of labour

The report stresses the need for urgent action to eliminate "the most intolerable aspects" of child labour, such as employment of children in slave-like and bonded conditions and in dangerous and hazardous work in the production and trafficking of drugs and the smuggling and trafficking of small arms, the exploitation of very young children, and the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

At greatest risk are children belonging to ethnic or other minorities, child migrants, displaced children or refugees, children affected by armed conflicts, child soldiers, orphans, children affected by HIV/AIDS, and those with disabilities. Girls face additional risks of exploitation, it adds.

Plenary debate

"Child labour is a global problem that calls for global action" said Ms Sithole, stressing the need for both ACP and EU states to "move from resolutions to measures".

Improving child welfare is vital to achieving the Millennium Development Goals, which means society, including the private sector, has a role to play, she said, observing however that "many companies do not look upon child labour abuses - or even sexual abuses - as a societal problem".

So "business must be made more accountable", although poverty, and the fact that children are kept out of school in many ACP countries, make this a tough challenge, she admitted.

"The facts show that we do tolerate and do accept that huge numbers of children around the globe are denied access to education and that their mental and physical development is impaired by being sent out to work from a very young age", said Mr Aylward.

The report advocates a "push and pull" approach, in which the "pull" factor is corporate social responsibility and the "push" one is education, he explained. "As policymakers we must together with the corporate sector work towards removing the demand for child labour, which involves ensuring that companies in the EU are child labour free", he said. On education, "we must step up our efforts to ensure that there is quality education available for all children, and that this education is easily accessible and well-supported", he said.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/acp/60_16/default_en.htm

Link to website of the ACP/EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly

Further information:

Andrew Boreham

Press Service

Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea

Mob. + 352 661 430055

Tel.: +675 323 88 75

e-mail: andrew.boreham@europarl.europa.eu