

PRESS BRIEFING

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TOPIC: - CHILD LABOUR

Ladies and gentle from the media,
Officials from Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs),
Employers' and Workers' Organisations,
Development partners.

This media briefing is preceded by a Statement on the Floor of Parliament because of the importance of the subject to the Legislature, the Executive, the Judiciary, and indeed that of many Ghanaians and the international community. The subject, is 'Child Labour'.

This step by the Parliamentary Select Committee on Employment, Social Welfare and State Enterprises of which I represent as the Chairman has become imperative at the backdrop of the new child labour data released by the Ghana Statistical Service as part of the Ghana Living Standards Survey round 6 and the recent launch of ECOWAS Parliamentarians against Child Labour, a platform to enhance the engagement of members of Parliament in efforts by Member Countries to eliminate the canker from the Sub-region. -

It is important to note that according to our laws, not all work done by children is classified as child labour, and should be targeted for elimination. The Children's Act, 1998 (Act 560) allows children of a particular age range to do light work. Children's or adolescents' participation in work that does not affect their health and personal development or interfere with their schooling is generally positive and should be encouraged.

These include activities such as helping their parents around the home, assisting in a family business or earning pocket money outside school hours and school holidays in activities that are not injurious to their health and morals. These kinds of activities contribute to children's development and to the welfare of their families and the nation at large. They provide them with skills and experience, and helps prepare them to be productive members of society during their adult life.

Child labour is clearly different from acceptable work which is the normal way of growing up in preparation for adulthood. Child labour constitutes unacceptable work for children because the child is either too young for the work, or it prevents him/her from benefiting fully from education; or the working conditions exposes the child to occupational safety, health, and environmental hazards, as well as long hours of work with associated detrimental effects to the child's total development.

In its most extreme forms, referred to as the Worst Forms of Child Labour (WFCL), it involves children being enslaved, separated from their families, exposed to serious hazards and illnesses and/or left to fend for themselves.

The forms of child labour prevalent in Ghana include stone cracking/quarrying, agriculture, illegal mining ('gallamsey'), commercial sexual exploitation of children, child domestic servitude, portorage of heavy loads mostly referred to as 'Kayayei' with the numbers of street hawking and begging increasing every day. Some of these children are trafficked and exploited under very dangerous conditions, contrary to the Human Trafficking Act, (Act 694) passed by this noble house in 2005.

Globally, child labour has reduced from about 246 million in 2000 to an estimated 168 million children in 2012, according to the latest ILO Global Child Labour Report¹. Most of the decline however took place in Asia, clearly showing that child labour can be reduced with the right interventions. The decline in Sub-Saharan Africa has however been slow, from about 65 million children in 2008 to 59 million children in 2012, with the region still having the highest incidence of child labour, estimated at 21.4% in 2012. The region remains a great concern.

Sadly, the 2012/2013 six round of the Ghana Living Standards and Labour Force Survey (GLSS6/LFS) by the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), revealed that the total number of child labourers has increased over the last decade by about half a million children, with the prevalence at one-in-five children in child labour in Ghana, having hardly changed since the 2003 survey. The report estimates that, 1.9 million out of the total population of 8.7 million children between 5 and 17 years are in child labour, representing approximately 22%, while 1.2 million representing 14% of all children were involved in hazardous work.

¹ *Making Progress against Child Labour: Global Estimates and Trends 2000 - 2012*

This is not a very good picture of improvement compared to the 2003 Ghana Child Labour Survey (GCLS 2003), with estimate of 1.27 million children in child labour out of a population of over 6 million, representing 20% and 242,000 in hazardous work.

Even though the MICS 2006-2011 report ²showed that the number of out-of-school children (aged 6 to 11) fell by 46% from 513,000 between 2006 to 278,000 in 2011³, the 2012/2013 GLSS report estimated 20% of the children combining schooling with child labour.

Clearly, the involvement of children in these activities has serious implications for their education and health. They lose out on quality education because they miss several classroom contact hours. The cost of missing out on school is greater to the child in future as he/she will lack quality education resulting in lack of competitive skills that may result in under-employment. .

It is important to note that child labour contributes to the perpetuation of poverty. It is a national and indeed global problem, not only because it contributes to the school dropout rate and performance, but also because, by keeping children out of school, “it breeds another cycle of people who most likely will be less well off or end up in poverty later.” More so, the fact that child labour interferes with education has significant implications for social and economic development at the individual, household and societal levels, including the achievement of very important development goals including the FCUBE objective, MDGs and national human resource development.

Even though poverty is at the core of the problem of child labour, there are, other contributing factors, for not all children from poor households engage in child labour, and some poor societies manage to keep the incidence of child labour low. In Ghana, socio-cultural factors such as ignorance and misconceptions, inadequacies of the education system, and institutional weaknesses in the application of child labour laws are also important causes. Nevertheless, the poor are more vulnerable to the kind of exploitation that is found in child labour, in part, because poor households often need the income earned by their children for survival of the entire family.

Government has since independence, recognized the problem of child labour and has put in place a comprehensive legal framework to deal with it. The 1992 Constitution guarantees the protection of the child from any work that constitutes a threat to

² *Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2006 - 2011*

³ *2013 Education Sector Performance Report*

his/her health, education or development. The Children's Act, 1998, (Act 560) seeks to protect the rights of children, including the right to education, health and shelter, and proscribes the engagement of children in exploitative labour, in line with Article 28(2) of the Constitution. It sets the minimum age for admission of a child to employment at 15 years, 13 years for light work, and 18 years for hazardous work. These guarantees reflect the nation's growing concern over the employment of children, particularly in activities that are exploitative or otherwise harmful.

Apart from efforts to bring the national laws in line with international instruments, strenuous efforts have been made in other areas to address many of the factors underlying the problem of child labour. In a bid to accelerate national efforts to combat effectively the scourge of child labour and the elimination of its worst forms within the shortest possible time, Ghana joined the ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (ILO/IPEC) by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the ILO, in the year 2000, and renewed in 2011 after ten years of technical support to Ghana. This was promptly followed with the ratification of the ILO Convention No. 182 on the elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour in 2000 and Convention No. 138 on the minimum age of employment in May 2011. By this, the country committed itself to put in place effective and time-bound measures to address the challenge.

Since then we have accelerated our efforts: Several Government institutions, Employers' and Workers' Organizations, Media, the ILO and other UN Agencies such as UNICEF, FAO and IOM as well as local and international NGOs, have contributed significantly to efforts to address the problem. This has resulted in the development of policy and legislation and the implementation of direct actions in identifying, withdrawing and rehabilitating children in various WFCL, as well as empowering families economically to provide the basic needs of their households, especially the education and health needs of their wards.

Many of the ongoing or planned interventions under the first and second phases of the Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda (GSGDA 2010-13 and 2014-2017) relating to areas such as education and skills training, employment creation, micro-finance, rural development, the deepening of decentralization and the provision of increased resources to District Assemblies present excellent opportunities for addressing the underlying causes of the problem of child labour in the medium to long term. Recent policies and programmes such as the Capitation Grant (CG), School Feeding Programme (SFP), and the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), will contribute substantially to this end. Equally important is the National Social Protection Strategy, including the institution and expansion of cash

transfer schemes under the Livelihoods Empowerment against Poverty (LEAP) programme for the poorest and most vulnerable sections of society.

In 2006, the Government started the implementation of the National Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour in Cocoa, targeting the WFCL in all cocoa growing districts of the country, following threats by the international community to boycott the purchase of cocoa from West Africa including Ghana, because of the use of children in unacceptable work in the production of cocoa.

The many lessons learned through the various approaches were translated into a comprehensive National Plan of Action on Child Labour elimination⁴, endorsed by Government (Cabinet) in October 2010, mainstreamed into the GSGDA 2010-2013 and launched on 13th June 2011 by the Government, represented by the then President of the Council of State, the late Hon. Prof. Kofi Awoonor. The implementation of the NPA is expected to end this year and processes are already on-going, under the leadership of the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations (MELR), in consultation with employers' and workers' organisations and CSOs to review the implementation of the NPA and develop a new phase for 2016 to 2020.

I therefore call on all, including the Executive, Legislature, Judiciary, MDAs, Workers and Employers' Organisations, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), academia, the media and development partners to support this process for effective implementation of the next phase of the NPA to eliminate the worst forms of child labour from our society by 2020.

In December 2012, Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs of 15 ECOWAS countries adopted a West Africa Regional Action Plan (RAP) to Eliminate Child Labour. The RAP serves as the implementation framework for ECOWAS policy on child labour both for the ECOWAS Commission and for each Member State. The RAP contains a peer review mechanism to encourage countries to assess each other's implementation and learn from each other. Ghana was the first country to volunteer to be peer reviewed. The review was done by Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria and the recommendations were discussed and adopted by all ECOWAS countries in April 2014, along with a set of standard monitoring tools. Countries, including Ghana, found the peer review a useful exercise to share progress, challenges and strategies to overcome barriers to eliminating child labour. Other countries are volunteering to follow Ghana's footsteps to be peer reviewed.

⁴ *National Plan of Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour in Ghana (NPA: 2009-2015)*

Parliaments have very important roles at sub-regional level. A Declaration of the ECOWAS/ILO tripartite symposium on child labour in 2013 highlighted the role of Parliaments by calling on Parliaments to monitor progress in the National Action Plans and hold governments to account for adequate progress to meet targets.

For example, Ghana's Parliament is engaged in national efforts to address child labour. Apart from passing legislation, Parliament is represented on the National Steering Committee on Child Labour (NSCCL), the highest coordinating body on national child labour issues, chaired by the Hon. Minister of Employment and Labour Relations. Parliament also scrutinises and approves Government plans and budgets to address child labour and holds Government to account for progress. Parliament also receives statements from Government each 12 June on the World Day against Child Labour, followed by a debate.

I am happy to announce to you the launch of a Platform of ECOWAS Parliamentarians against Child Labour. The Platform was launched in November 2014 in Turin, Italy with the support of the ILO. At the launch, Ghana, represented by me was nominated as the first chair of the Platform.

The objective of the platform is to expand solidarity, provide mutual support and improve effectiveness through sharing experiences and knowledge on innovative, replicable and sustainable solutions to eliminating child labour

A communiqué adopted by the Platform during the launch has the following action points:

- establish a South-South network of parliamentarians to support the countries of the Region and each other in the fight to eradicate child labour;
- advocate for child labour to be given attention, in particular the role of our parliaments and parliamentarians in passing legislation (especially regarding ILO Conventions C138 on minimum age, C182 on worst forms of child labour, C189 on domestic workers, C29 Protocol on forced labour) and budgets, in oversight and holding government to account, and in exercising leadership at national and local levels;
- encourage bilateral/multilateral consultations, exchanges and reporting mechanisms within the region on specific issues such as child trafficking, impact of the cultural context, child labour in domestic work and child labour in specific sectors (e.g. cocoa, fishing, domestic workers, mining, etc.);
- stimulate research and understanding on the root causes of child labour and the best means of addressing it;

- encourage ECOWAS member states and the ECOWAS Commission to implement the *West Africa Regional Action Plan to Eliminate Child Labour*;
- promote cooperation at local, national, regional and international levels amongst parliaments and parliamentarians for improved outcomes on eliminating child labour.

Ghana's Parliament is willing to share – in the spirit of South/South co-operation - good practices with, and learn from, other Parliaments in the sub-region as a first step to consolidate the Platform, by hosting the second meeting of the Platform, jointly by the NSCCL and this august House in May, 2015.

It is true that child labour interventions receive significant space in Ghana's policy initiatives. Underpinned by a constitutional provision that “ every child has the right to be protected from work that jeopardizes his health, education and development (Article 28:2)”, various national and sub-national policy frameworks, including legal instruments and developmental plans, have incorporated both implicit and explicit intentions to deal with the scourge. However, given that child labour continues to be pervasive in our country

Child Labour, no matter its form is undesirable and needs to be eliminated.

I therefore call on all stakeholders to support this fight to its logical conclusion [i.e.e.](#) to ensure all children are given the opportunity to develop their potential to contribute positively to national development.

I thank you for participating.

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Chair of the Select Committee on Employment, Social Welfare and State Enterprises
Chairman of the ECOWAS Parliamentarians against Child Labour
24th March, 2015

***Full text of the Communiqué and a Press Release is available to all.**