THE ILO AND ITS WORK AGAINST CHILD LABOUR: THE NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK AND RECENT PROGRESS

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INTRODUCTION

The last decade has seen an upsurge in international attention to the scourge of child labour. The release on 4 May 2006 by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) of its second Global Report on Child Labour, entitled "The end of child labour: within reach", shows that this heightened attention to child labour has also resulted in progress in global efforts to eliminate child labour. The report presents new global estimates on the extent of child labour and gives examples of effective national action in combating child labour. The report also explores strategic frameworks and policy initiatives that are contributing to the elimination of child labour.

This paper will paint a picture of the current state of affairs in the struggle against child labour, and will give an overview of the normative framework against child labour. The first chapter will clarify some basic concepts and look at the

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1 All ILO publications mentioned in this article can be accessed at <www.ilo.org/childlabour>.
2 The first Global Report was published in 2002; ILO, A Future Without Child Labour, Global Report under the Follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, Report to the International Labour Conference, 90th Session (2002), Report 1(B).
3 ILO, The End of Child Labour - Within Reach, Global Report under the Follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, Report to the International Labour Conference, 95th Session (2006), Report l(B).
findings of the Global Report. The second chapter will describe the international standards relevant to child labour. Next, the linkages between ILO standards on child labour and international action be will explored briefly, and a succinct analysis of the main results of the Global Report will be presented.

1. CHILD LABOUR TODAY

1.1 What is Child Labour?

No one denies that there are forms of work that children – boys and girls below the age of 18 – can legitimately do, and that such work may even be beneficial to children in preparing them for a productive life as adults. So not all work done by children should be qualified as 'child labour' which should be targeted for elimination. Unacceptable child labour concerns work for which the child is either too young – work done below the required minimum age – and work which because of its detrimental nature is altogether considered unacceptable for children.

ILO Conventions therefore specify a system of minimum age levels for admission to work or employment, and also identify a number of activities to which no child should be subjected. The Minimum Age Convention 1973 (No. 138) – consolidating a series of minimum age Conventions adopted by the ILO since 1919 – obligates ratifying States to set minimum age levels for admission to light work and regular work, and qualifies hazardous work as work that should normally be barred to anyone below the age of 18 years. The Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention 1999 (No. 182) requires countries to “take immediate and effective measures to secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour as a matter of urgency.”4 The Convention defines these worst forms, to be prohibited to all persons under 18 years, as:

a) all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and servitude and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict;

b) the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or pornographic performances;

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4 Convention No. 182, Article 1.