

Statement of UNGEI Partners in East Asia and the Pacific and South Asia:

12 June World Day Against Child Labour 2009: Give Girls a Chance – End Child Labour

This year's World Day Against Child Labour marks the 10th anniversary of the adoption of ILO Convention No. 182 calling on nations to take action to prevent and combat the worst forms of child labour. This day, 12 June, serves to re-affirm our commitment to working towards a world free from child labour. The thematic focus for this year is the *girl child* – an important acknowledgement that around the world, a large number of girls who should be in school are working instead, often excluded from formal education and often in some of the worst forms of child labour.¹

Millions of people in all parts of the world are uniting on this day to remind us of the plight of working girls and boys and what we can do to tackle child labour. In the Asia-Pacific region, people in Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Fiji, Indonesia, India, Mongolia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Papua New Guinea, and the Philippines are organizing concerts, rallies, exhibitions, media campaigns and technical forums to mark this important day.

Call to Action:

Particularly at this time, in light of the current economic crisis – retrenchments in many formal economic sectors, reductions in working hours and downward pressure on household incomes – more girls and boys are likely to be forced to drop out of school and prematurely enter the labour market. In order to both tackle the problem of child labour and accelerate progress towards gender parity and equality in primary and secondary education by 2015, the East Asia and Pacific and South Asia UN Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI) call on countries to:

- ***Educate all girls and boys at least to the minimum age of employment.***
Make education services and facilities accessible to all through the provision of free and compulsory education at least until the minimum age of employment with a particular focus on reaching vulnerable and at risk girls and boys.
- ***Tackle gender and other forms of discrimination that keep girls marginalized.***
Initiate community awareness campaigns on the importance of girls' education and the risks of child labour. Assist in the identification of child labour

¹ Child labour is performed under the minimum working age and is likely to impede the child's education and full development. The minimum working age varies according to the level of development and according to the type of employment or work. In general, this is not less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling or the age of 15 (14 for developing countries). The worst forms of child labour covers children up to 18 years and includes hazardous labour (domestic work of girls can be considered WFCL if conditions are hazardous or involve trafficking or physical/sexual abuse) and the unconditional WFCL (slavery, debt bondage and other forms of forced labour, forced recruitment of children for use in armed conflict, prostitution and pornography, and illicit activities). Child labour does not include light work which does not affect children's health and personal development or interfere with their schooling.

prevalent communities in order to target education assistance for girls as well as other services such as school meals and income generative activities for families.

- ***Ensure education systems reach out to working girls and other excluded groups through properly resourced quality education and skills training programmes.***

Improve institutional arrangements in formal school systems such as transitional classes for older students, bridging courses and active efforts to enroll girls who are not in school through monitoring and home visits. Efforts to promote gender equality in education should include an adherence to the UNGEI Child Protection Code of Practice to ensure that the rights and needs of vulnerable children are fully met.

- ***Address child labour among both girls and boys through a multi-sectoral approach, including education and other relevant sectors.***

Reduce family poverty by providing social safety nets for poor families, enforcement of laws on child labour and education, and providing adults with opportunity for decent work and income all contribute to overcoming child labour.

Whilst the Asia-Pacific is a vibrant economic region, it is also home to more working children than any other region in the world; an estimated 122 million children aged 5-14 years are compelled to work for their survival. In Asia and the Pacific, more than 27 million children of primary school age are not enrolled in school, out of a global total of 75 million. Some children try to balance school with their long hours of work, but millions of these children are not enrolled in school at all; many of them girls (53% in South Asia). Evidence also shows that girls, who drop out of school or have not enrolled at the appropriate age, are unlikely to ever go to school.

Around the world, a large number of girls who should be in school are working instead, often in some of the worst forms of child labour. When faced with limited resources and many financial demands, parents often prefer to invest in the education of their sons and not lose their daughters' vital contribution to the household economy. Efforts to increase girls' education must go hand in hand with efforts to progressively eliminate child labour.

Girl's work is very often hidden from public view, putting them at special risk. Their work – in the form of household chores, domestic servitude, agricultural work and home-based work – can leave girls vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Other clandestine forms, such as trafficking into labour and commercial sexual exploitation, are not sufficiently captured by available statistics, however they are frequently reported through personal narratives and in anecdotal evidence. Many girls face a double burden, going to work as well as shouldering the bulk of household chores.

Some of the barriers to education are the same for girls as boys: the costs of education, poor quality schooling and families relying on child work to support family subsistence. However, girls can face particular problems: the physical distance to

school may raise security issues; schools may lack necessary sanitary facilities and traditional thinking may not place any value on girls' education.

At the same time, there is a global consensus that girls' education is one of the best investments a country can make resulting in both higher economic and social returns. Educated girls are more likely to have better income as adults, marry later, have fewer and healthier children, and have decision-making powers within the household. They are also more likely to ensure their own children are educated thus avoiding future child labour. Tackling child labour among girls and promoting their right to education is therefore an important element of broader strategies to promote development.

For more information on the 2009 World Day against Child Labour, including how to get involved, please visit:

<http://www.ilo.org/ChildLabourWorldDay>

Our UNGEI partner organizations at the regional level include:

