Child Labour Convention Sets Ratification Record

GENEVA: The world's international standard on the worst forms of child labour, ILO Convention 182 (1999) has been ratified by 27 governments in its first year, racking up more ratifications than any other ILO Convention during a comparable period, the International Labour Office announced. The Convention will come into force on November 19 of this year.

For Juan Somavia, the Director-General of the ILO, the nods of approval are a reason to celebrate. They reflect the prevailing spirit among ILO member states to quicken the global effort to protect children forced into the worst forms of child labour.

Reiterating his intention to make the abolition of the worst forms of child labour, "a global cause," he said that "this rapid pace of ratification is evidence of the growing support for global action against child labour, particularly its worst forms and gives us hope that the elimination of this scourge will become a reality for millions of children who face exploitation today".

Convention No. 182, unanimously adopted at the International Labour Conference in June 1999, is likely to garner as many as 12 new ratification by the end of the current session of the International Labour Conference on June 15. Many more ratification are in the pipeline.

Only one other ILO Convention, No.105 on the Abolition of Forced Labour, has come anywhere near this pace of ratification, receiving, in the first year after its adoption, 17 ratification.

The Convention requires states to ban such exploitation of children and to design and implement programmes of action to eliminate the worst forms of child labour as a priority. It defines the worst forms as those, which have a debilitating effect on the health, morals or psychological wellbeing of children and are likely to severely impede a child's normal growth into adulthood. These activities include work in dangerous industrial activities such as mining, or illegal activities such as prostitution, pornography and drug trafficking, work in extreme conditions of heat or cold, or work that involves exposure to hazardous substances and chemicals.

The new Convention is beginning to have a concrete impact on the lives of working children. Not only is it prompting policy and legislative changes, but also, more importantly, it is leading to concrete action.

In Indonesia for example - the first country in Asia to ratify the Convention - intensified concern about the worst forms of child labour led, amongst other activities, to the creation of a High Level Committee to combat child labour on the fishing platforms (Jermals) - one of the more horrendous forms of child labour present in the country where children are confined for three months to narrow wooden platforms anchored to the sea bed.

The countries that have put their weight behind this convention include

Belize, Brazil, Mexico, Canada and the United States, from the Americas;

Malawi, Ghana and South Africa, from Africa; Jordan and Qatar,

from the Middle East;
and Finland, Ireland and Britain, from Europe. Seychelles was the first to ratify.