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Enhancing mobilization to prevent child trafficking and labour: The contribution of parliaments

Regional seminar jointly organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the International Labour Organization (ILO), in cooperation with the Parliament of the Economic Community of the Western African States (ECOWAS) and with the support of UNICEF

ECOWAS Parliament, 23 to 24 November 2018, Abuja (Nigeria)

SEMINAR CONCLUSIONS

Since 2012, we, members of the Parliament of the Economic Community of the West African States (ECOWAS), with the crucial support of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the International Labour Organization (ILO), have been engaged in combating child trafficking and labour to promote the best interests of the child as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

It is with regard to this that we met on 23 and 24 November 2018 to assess the implementation of measures that we agreed on at our last meeting in May 2016, and to renew the impetus behind delivering further significant steps towards eradicating child trafficking and labour. The persistence and magnitude of this phenomenon does not make it a lost cause, but it is still a concern on our continent, in light of very telling estimates from the ILO: out of a worldwide population of 152 million children, 72 million, or 47 per cent, are forced to work.¹

As part of putting our work into context, we were reminded of the main points of the May 2016 seminar and of its recommendations, which had highlighted the need to raise greater awareness among parliamentarians—and so prioritize work to prevent this scourge—but also among the general public so as to involve them to a greater extent. The recommendations also highlighted the need to strengthen the statute book by ratifying texts about combating child trafficking and labour, and the transposition of agreed upon provisions into national laws.

We were informed of work carried out in line with these recommendations, including:

- National-level follow-up seminars have been set up that concluded with short, medium and long-term parliamentary strategies; in some cases, these strategies have led to the adoption and approval of national action plans to prevent child trafficking and labour (Burkina Faso);
- Parliamentarians have taken part in consultation meetings about the process of revising the list of all forms of hazardous work; this was organized nationally in various regions (Mali);
- A project run jointly with Care International has been delivered to promote girls' education, through which children who were out of school were gathered together in informal education programmes; a protection and advocacy programme for domestic work has been set up; a telephone line (*Allô 1011*) has been opened to allow members of the public to report all violations of children's rights, including child trafficking and labour; the closure of all types of sand and rock quarries without an authorization permit (some of which use child labour) (Togo);
- The National Assembly of Guinea has ratified the Domestic Workers Convention (No. 189).

¹ *Ending child labour by 2025: a review of policies and programmes*. ILO, December 2018

Given that child trafficking and labour in Africa persists in general and, more particularly, continues in our sub-region, and that the different overlapping factors perpetuate it, we believe that we need to consider more than ever a holistic strategy that brings together both the well-planned joint efforts of those concerned and targeted action, the effects of which should be made sustainable by follow-up processes to be decided upon jointly by those involved.

In that regard, we noted with interest the ambitious programme of the ECOWAS Committee on Gender, Women Empowerment and Social Protection that deals with combating child trafficking and labour. We support the proposed approach to form a common front with the ECOWAS Parliament to prevent child trafficking and labour that should enable experiences to be shared, information to be exchanged more easily and the complementary qualities of all concerned to be enhanced.

Similarly, we have taken note of commendable activities led by civil society organizations, including advocacy, outreach, awareness-raising and data collection. We applaud and encourage their grassroots efforts with the public. As we identified common ground with some of our work, we call for this community of interest and practice, with all its advantages, to be maintained and strengthened.

We also commend Mr. Satyarthi's initiative in producing his documentary *The Price of Freedom*, which we were able to watch during the seminar. We believe the film is part of the energetic and voluntary initiatives whose promotion we wholeheartedly support. We also support the objectives that it pursues, particularly that of championing children's education without discrimination as it is they who should assure the future. As an enabler of development, (children's) education—and training—is indeed, from all points of view, a solid bulwark against a multitude of ills, including child trafficking and labour; and it is an investment in reliable dividends. The only risk we run is not to forge ahead. As a result, we believe that children's education should definitely be made part of our priority work, if not actually making it one of our top priority activities.

We also looked at other long-term solutions for eradicating child trafficking and labour. We therefore feel it is important to also invest in decent work for young people as well. To that end, we reiterate our support for the *Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth*. It is an inclusive platform that brings together various stakeholders, including parliaments, and that aims to encourage innovative national and regional solutions² in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. We have also learned about another project called *Alliance 8.7*.

In light of the magnitude of the challenge around child trafficking and labour, forced labour, modern slavery and trafficking in persons, Alliance 8.7 aims to eradicate them through the joint and harmonized efforts of all those concerned. As part of our commitment to implement the Sustainable Development Goals, we will deploy all constitutional means at our disposal to contribute to achieving the objectives of Alliance 8.7.

During our talks, we also discussed how regularly updated data can be a precious tool, not only in terms of generally being able to make projections about promoting the rights of the child, developing effective strategies against child trafficking and labour, but also in terms of evaluating what has been delivered on this issue. To that end, we encourage structures to be established that can gather and analyse this data.

We have also identified terrorism as one of the main barriers to children's rights being fully exercised. In complete contempt of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, children are recruited by armed groups to commit terrible crimes. In certain cases, the children are subjected to violence and abduction, and are used by these groups as human shields for nefarious purposes. As representatives of the people with a duty to advance and protect their interests, we roundly condemn all these acts of terrorism and, like the international community, reaffirm our commitment to combat every act of terrorism and create a hostile environment for these armed groups.

² https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/youth-employment/publications/WCMS_488464/lang--en/index.htm

As our discussions concluded, we agreed to implement the following measures as the parliamentary contribution to the general effort to combat child trafficking and labour, and to advance and protect children's rights:

1. Ensure that our domestic legislation is regularly updated and that international human rights standards are transposed onto our statute books, including standards on the rights of the child (and other standards against all forms of violence against children) and ensure their effective implementation;
2. Continue and step up the awareness-raising, information and training campaigns for national parliamentarians (through seminars supported by the IPU and ILO) so as to strengthen and maximize MPs' contributions to combating child trafficking and labour through parliamentary action plans;
3. Also raise awareness with the general public so as to garner their widespread support to take action against this scourge;
4. Promote children's education and training comprised of specific elements, including that such education be free of charge, especially for children from deprived sections of society;
5. Facilitate national parliamentary discussions to identify how to contribute to the different global initiatives on children's and young people's self-fulfilment, including the *Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth* and Alliance 8.7;
6. Encourage the ECOWAS Parliament to cooperate with all other international, national and regional stakeholders; and to that end, create or found a series of regular meetings with the ECOWAS Committee on Gender, Women Empowerment and Social Protection to discuss activities to combat child trafficking and labour;

At the IPU

7. Include the subject *the child and terrorism* into the list of questions considered by the IPU as part of its efforts to combat terrorism.

Concluded at Abuja, 24 November 2018.