

A CALL TO END CHILD LABOUR: LAUREATES AND LEADERS FOR CHILDREN

5th Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour Plenary Session

This session was organized at the request of the Government of the Republic of South Africa by the Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation and held under the auspices of the Laureates and Leaders for Children initiative.

The shocking new figures from the ILO and UNICEF released in 2021 show that in the first four years of the SDGs, child labour increased by 8 million. Since then, the international response to COVID-19 has provided little support for the world's poorest families, leading to the anticipated further increase of at least 9 million more child labourers by the end of this year and, if adequate social protection measures are not in place, a possible further increase of 46 million child labourers. The international community agreed to a deadline of 2025 for the elimination of all forms of child labour and instead it is rising - the world is failing at its promise to leave no one behind.

This high-level plenary session explored why the world needs to recommit to ending child labour and why now. Ending child labour has fallen down the international agenda and, as a result, millions more children are working at the cost of their education, future, and childhood. Child labour is one of the worst end-results of extreme poverty and inequality, and if governments are to build back better and move forward together then freedom for hundreds of millions of children must be put firmly back on the agenda.

The conversation focused on the intersectionality of child labour with other SDGs, the imperative of ending child labour in order to have a just and sustainable recovery, and the need for international cooperation, including global financing for social protection and education. Nozipho Tshabalala, the moderator, provided the backdrop and facilitated the dialogue.

Lucky Agbovar, a child labour survivor and advocate, opened the session. He shared his story of being forced to work starting at the age of four across a wide range of different jobs and his long battle to secure education. He explained how he sent himself to senior high school at age 19 and how he has thrived since he received generous support to go to university. His story shows the potential of the millions of child labourers around the world, all of them having the same potential to learn as Lucky, but not the same opportunity to go back to education.

Messages shared by the panellists included:

- Prime Minister of Sweden Stefan Löfven (2014-2021) discussed child labour in the context of the European Union and recent legislation regarding global supply chain due diligence on human rights and the environment. He called for ways to create jobs for adults in order to ensure children did not work and to link that effort with the need to address climate change.

- 2011 Nobel Peace Laureate Leymah Gbowee highlighted the need for Africa to take the lead now on this issue as it is the continent with the most child labourers. Calling for governments to be held accountable for their actions, or lack thereof, especially when it comes to enforcing laws and providing funding and resources to address this issue, she pointed to Africa's rich natural resources, but its inability to leverage those resources to benefit its own citizens.
- Minister Thembelani Thulas Nxesi, Employment and Labour Minister, Republic of South Africa, who sat in for the President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, reinforced Ms. Gbowee's points saying that governments must follow up statements with transparent and accountable implementation plans. In addition, he pointed to South Africa's numerous social protection programs, some of them created as a response to the pandemic, and how they may alter and be taken forward as the pandemic subsides. Child labour is a social justice issue that finds its roots in poverty and must be viewed in that context.
- 2014 Nobel Peace Laureate and founder of Laureates and Leaders for Children Kailash Satyarthi remains optimistic on the path to end of child labour even though he has been fighting to free children for more than forty years. We know what works, such as social protection programs which help reduce child labour, and we have the resources. The challenge to solving this problem has always been political will and making this a priority in the halls of power. Mr. Satyarthi emphasized that the world can never eradicate poverty without eradicating child labour. In addition, he stated that the world cannot achieve any of the SDGs without ensuring safety, education, and freedom for all children.

Key Takeaways

In the four years prior to the pandemic, global wealth grew by \$10 trillion while child labour increased. This shocking increase shows it can no longer be business as usual. Social protection is needed more than ever to provide a foundation of support from which marginalized children and their families are able to send their children to school instead of work. Additional urgent action is needed including:

- Creating and enforcing laws banning child labour
- Robustly funding national action plans
- Enacting compulsory supply chain due diligence laws and regulations
- Supporting and funding quality, inclusive education for all children

Each participant brought their own unique perspective to the discussion but were united in their calls for the elimination of child labour, greater investment in social protection programs, and ensuring the dignity and rights of children are protected.

"We must be honest to children. We must be honest to the promises we have made."

~ Nobel Peace Laureate Kailash Satyarthi