

Mr Maurizio Martina
Special Adviser to the Director-General

Introductory Remarks

Eradicating Child Labour, Building a Better Future

19 November 2021
14:30-16:30 CET, Rome time

Cardinal Turkson,

Sister Alessandra Smerilli,

Monsignor Chica,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honored to participate in this event and thank you for the invitation. The issue at stake is of utmost importance and I wish to thank the Holy See and the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development for organizing today's discussion.

2021 is the *International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour* and represents a **unique opportunity** for increasing collective efforts to eradicate child labour. The numbers call for immediate action: **152 million** children are involved in child labor. Of these, **112 million** are in the agriculture sector. We **need to tackle the causes that force** children into exploitative and dangerous working activities. In **all sectors** and **especially in agriculture**.

The **main dramatic cause of child labor is poverty** and vulnerable and fragile conditions of families with low incomes and no social protection. Poverty and inequality have a **direct correlation** with child labor. In certain countries a 1 percent increase in poverty can lead to a 0,7 percent increase in child labor. We have seen this correlation very dramatically with the pandemic. The **impact of COVID-19** on the economy and on the incomes of families together with the school closures have pushed many of the poorest families to engage children in child labor.

We need public policies especially in vulnerable countries to support social protection nets, in particular towards children and women. And I would like to highlight the strong relation between child labor and the condition of women.

Because child labor occurs where women are exploited: we cannot separate these two aspects. It is not a distinct topic with regards to eradicating child labor.

The other big aspect I want to highlight is the responsibility of companies and the private sector to create decent jobs and decent employment conditions. And this is crucial in large multinationals and in in small-scale production, including in local and regional value chains. **Too often price competition between companies leads to a compression of rights and salaries. Unfair practices and the race to the lowest price** will impact the most vulnerable, mainly children and women.

And we know that this is a **global problem**, since child laborers are employed in sectors that export their production worldwide. **This means that child labor and the poverty trap originated in developing countries are commercially sustained by consumers in other parts of the world.** And therefore we need **strong social clauses** to guide international trade especially when we look at the agrifood systems. We cannot accept a competition with no rules infringing fundamental rights only to increase profits. Everyone should take on more responsibility to fight this scourge. **Governments must put in place and ensure that legal frameworks protect child rights, ensure social protection nets and regulate the labor sector. Intergovernmental organizations** should continue supporting the development of national child labor-sensitive policies and strategies for inclusive development.

Civil society must continue raising awareness at all levels, in particular with consumers to contribute to global action through informed choices. The **business sector** must be open and transparent in working with the international community to help eliminate child labor in their global value chains. In concluding, I would like to reaffirm that **we all have a responsibility** in protecting our children's rights, in supporting their dreams and defending their dignity. Let's all double our efforts to eradicate child labor.

Thank you

Maurizio Martina