



INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION OF EMPLOYERS  
ORGANISATION INTERNATIONALE DES EMPLOYEURS  
ORGANIZACION INTERNACIONAL DE EMPLEADORES

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**STATEMENT**  
**ILO JOBS SUMMIT**

Last week, in commemoration of the World Day against Child Labour and the tenth anniversary of Convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labour, US Senator Tom Harkin gave a moving and eloquent address in this room. He reminded us that child labour is a uniquely offensive practice that is never acceptable and never excusable. He challenged all of us to be more proactive and to do more in this fight.

This challenge is particularly relevant in the context of this Jobs Summit and of the Jobs Pact we have negotiated here over the past two weeks. Economic hardship should never be an excuse for violating fundamental rights but, sadly, as we all know, violations are often a consequence. We need increasing vigilance to prevent a downward spiral that threatens the progress we have made thus far in the fight against child labour, and that endangers more children.

I would like to take my few minutes here to share with you the response of my organization, the United States Council for International Business; and, indeed, of organized employers in this house, to Senator Harkin' s call to action.

First, as employers, as engaged members of our communities, as mothers and fathers and grandparents, we appreciate both the human dimensions of

this problem and our joint responsibility for addressing it. Despite recent progress, hundreds of millions of children can still be found working in deplorable conditions. Much child labour is part of subsistence-level economic activity in the informal economy. Some is the result of abusive practices by governments. The issue for us is that a considerable portion occurs at the bottom end of global supply chains. Companies that invest in, and source from, developing countries are at risk of being unwittingly implicated in its use. Thus, for us, this is not only a human rights issue, it is a business issue.

Child labour in global supply chains is on the agenda of activists, the media and public and private investors as never before. The consequences for businesses of being associated with the use of child labour can include reputational damage and shareholder disappointment or even disinvestment. In affected communities, when child labour is detected, too often there is no remediation, and a problem that stifles and stymies development and prevents children from realizing their basic rights continues unchecked.

To uphold universal values and avoid complicity in child labour problems, companies must understand the prevalence of child labour in the countries and sectors where they operate. They must actively manage the risk that child labour will occur somewhere along their supply chains.

However, child labour is a complex and dynamic problem, arising or diminishing in response to changes in any of a number of conditions, many of which are beyond companies' direct control. Moreover, in most countries, it is illegal and hidden from plain view.

Recently, US companies came together in a forum jointly sponsored by the United States Council, the International Organisation of Employers and the ILO, to address these challenges by hearing from a number of experts,

including experts from the US Government Departments of State and Labor, and sharing their experiences.

Our goal was to explore strategies that work in identifying, preventing and remediating child labour. Our conclusions can be summarized by five key themes.

First, addressing child labour requires the engagement of all stakeholders, including governments, international organizations like the ILO, employers of all sizes, employers' organizations, NGOs, socially responsible investment funds, unions, and other members of civil society.

Second, better information and data are required at all levels. We cannot constructively raise awareness or ensure the appropriate allocation of resources unless we can be confident that we know the nature, size and location of the problems. The ILO has a special role to play in this regard in helping to collect and disseminate information and improve data accuracy.

Third, we need to share and leverage local best practice solutions, recognizing that solutions will require a holistic understanding of the issues underpinning poverty, including quality education and the provision of other basic social services. One of the ways companies have organized themselves is by industry. Important child labour initiatives are under way, for example, in the cocoa, sugar and cotton industries. These initiatives are most fruitful where governments are willing to recognize and address the issue as a national priority. In this respect, we look forward to working together for example with the Government of Uzbekistan, to address the issue of child labour in the Uzbek cotton industry.

Fourth, tools and resources are available. We can all work to better disseminate them and we can better leverage our mutual efforts and commitments.

Fifth, and finally, industry-wide supply chain perspectives are important. Supply chains are often diverse and complex, and clarity on the roles and responsibilities within them is critical to undertaking corrective action and holding supply chain entities accountable.

Companies have a powerful tool here already in their risk management strategies and experience which, by definition, address the complex interaction of risk factors in commercial and operational activities. However, we must ensure against unrealistic expectations. It is not in the power of company supply chain management programme, however robust they are, to solve this problem alone. If we want sustainable solutions, at the end of the day governments will have to take responsibility and engage with both companies and workers' organizations and other actors to develop cooperative approaches that fit national circumstances.

Eliminating child labour is a challenge to all of us: governments, workers and employers. I hope these brief remarks today convey some sense of the seriousness with which the employers in my country regard these challenges, and of their commitment to working together with many other groups in society to share experiences and innovations in this common cause.