

**Child-focused Agencies Statement to the Group of Friends on Children and the SDGs
International Year on the Elimination of Child Labour
26 April 2021**

Executive Director Fore, Excellencies, and colleagues. I am Meg Gardinier, Secretary General of ChildFund Alliance. I speak today on behalf of child-focused agencies Plan International, Save the Children, SOS Children's Villages and World Vision. Thank you for this opportunity to address such an important and timely topic.

Workers' rights include protecting the rights of children to be free from economic exploitation, hazardous work, or work that interferes with their education. When workers' rights are not protected, the resulting low wages and economic conditions create a situation in which households must rely on additional income from children. This puts children at risk of slavery, human trafficking, and sexual or economic exploitation—all of which cause grave harm to their development and well-being. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the exploitation of children.

The International Convention on the Rights of the Child clearly states children must be protected from economic exploitation and from any work that interferes with their education or development. Yet, the International Labour Organization estimates there are 168 million children labourers. For children in humanitarian settings, these issues intensify when there is an absence of strong and effective child protection systems and policies.

More than half of child labourers—85 million children—are in hazardous work, and a majority are part of the informal economy. Domestic work is the most common form of child labour for girls, with many working as housekeepers, nannies or caregivers. This puts them at high risk of violence in domestic settings, with little recourse to redress.

Our child-focused agencies support a holistic approach toward the elimination of child labour. This includes access to quality education, strong child and social protection systems and measures, and supply chain monitoring, as well as remediation mechanisms. These should be accompanied by appropriate policies and measures and supported by sufficient government funding and civil society.

Specific recommendations include:

- Governments should strengthen social protection mechanisms to enhance the family's capacity to provide financial support and care to children;
- Governments should create strategies to eliminate exploitative work assigned to vulnerable children;
- Governments should ratify and domesticate ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour and invest in raising awareness about laws protecting children from child labour;
- Governments should create and enforce laws related to the protection of workers and define exploitative informal types of work;
- Governments should adopt legislation combatting human rights abuses in global supply chains, including the use of child labour;
- Governments should adopt legislation to criminalize trafficking in persons, in line with the definition used by the UN Protocol to Prevent and Punish the Trafficking in Persons;
- Governments should sign or ratify relevant conventions and their Optional Protocols. The failure to ratify and implement the provisions of these international standards into domestic laws can lead to violations of the rights of children as enshrined in the UNCRC.

Civil society plays a crucial role in addressing and eliminating child labour and harmful work. We have seen children thrive when communities and civil society commit to protecting workers' rights; when strong child protection systems are in place; when education is accessible, valued and safe; and when age-inappropriate work is prevented. Thank you again for the opportunity to address this most important issue.