

[Bolivia]

If you fall, no one's gonna carry you out."

Children who work in tin mines

[1]



Preamble

"In Exchange for My Childhood"

Series on Child Labour and Exploitation in Latin America and the Caribbean

Article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes "the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development." At the same time, Article 36 states the need to protect "the child against all other forms of exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of the child's welfare." It has been more than 15 years since the Convention's adoption; however, the issue of child labour¹ continues to affect more than 200 million² children around the world. These children work under conditions that breach and put at risk the enjoyment of their fundamental rights, such as, their health, education and protection against any forms of exploitation and violence.

With this publication, World Vision wants to make a contribution in tackling child labor by making proposals and inviting the reader to know closely the life, family, feelings, experiences and context of the children who work in 13 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. We will have close relationships with such children through a country context analysis, interviews, adult testimonies and portraits of the daily lives of working children and their families.

The stories are about different countries, with different protagonists who are devoted to different activities. Nevertheless, will realize that the children who have allowed us to get into their lives have almost identical problems, aspirations and dreams:

- They work for the same reasons: Their families are in need, and they wish to contribute to family subsistence.
- They have the same dreams: To be able to study, help their families, make something useful and positive with their lives³.
- They experience the same physical and emotional pain, as a result of the work performed.
- They share the same fear: Adults – Once contact is established with adults, they maltreat, abuse and humiliate⁴ them.
- They come from very poor families that have been suffering from exploitation through at least two or three generations.
- They have been abandoned by their country⁵ social assistance.
- It is common for families to be numerous⁶, as well as for women to be the heads of the households because of the father⁷ abandonment.
- They would love to study or attend school regularly, but they cannot do that because they have to work, or they have actually lost their interest in school because of the maltreatment suffered⁸. Besides all that, their school agenda is not adapted to their needs as working⁹ children and adolescents.
- Girls should add the housework to their work, which is why their workload is heavier.
- In addition, girls are vulnerable to sexual abuse.

"In Exchange for My Childhood" opens doors to the private lives of working children, urging us to commit – as organization and personally – to the transformation of our society, so that life in all its fullness may finally be a reality for every child in Latin America and the Caribbean.

1 It should be clarified that not all the work performed by children infringes their rights, but only that work which does not allow them to enjoy their rights. See "Definitions and basic concepts" at the end of the booklet.

2 The United Nations Secretary General's Study on Violence against Children: Chapter 6, page 233; at: <http://www.violencestudy.org/r25>

3 The fact that there are many boys who want to be policemen and girls who want to be teachers attracts our attention here.

4 See the situation described by children in all booklets. Complementary reading: The United Nations Secretary General's Study on Violence against Children: Chapter 6; at: <http://www.violencestudy.org/r25>

5 See Brazil's booklet, situation described by Rafael

6 Example: Colombia's booklet, Alicia Bastos' testimony

7 Example: Bolivia's booklet, Margarita's testimony

8 Example: Guatemala's booklet, Rafael's testimony

9 Example: See the situation described in the Chile's booklet on children who work in the mountains and the influence of the seasons of the year on their educational process.

Interviews

Rubén: I started working at the mine when I was 13. My brother was working there and he told me that he would go with me and that I could earn a lot of money. The first time I went with him, it seemed okay. I just felt a little bit scared.

Jorge: Of course you feel scared! It's really dark and the other people make fun of you. Some of 'em say mean things like, "You're gonna die!"...They scare you by hitting you on the back. Or they'll say, "I'm gonna have your girlfriend."

Jorge: What scares me most is falling... into the darkness.

David: I know several jucus (illegal miners). There are lots of them here in Llallagua. We work, but we study too.

Jorge: There are other guys in my school who work at the mine. One's finishing high school and the other is in tenth grade. We go to the mine 'cuz we don't have enough money. Sometimes there's not enough for what we need, for our school supplies, books and other stuff. We can see that people in the city dress in expensive clothes, and we wanna dress like them. Sometimes we make 500 bolivianos (about USD60), sometimes 1,000 (USD120). That's if the guards don't catch us in the mine!

Rubén: Yeah, if the guard catches you, he grabs it all for himself – your work clothes, your helmet... your whole haul!

Jorge: They're armed, and they take everything. I can carry up to 50 pounds of ore at a time. I can get that out after four after dynamiting a spot four times. One day, I was finished and comin' outta the mine at two in the morning, 'cuza the guards aren't out at that hour. Suddenly one of 'em grabs me and takes my rocks!

David: The miners who've got their carnet [legal affiliation with the local miners' cooperative] -- they hate us 'cuz we're jucus. And its really hard to get a carnet.

Jorge: Sometimes we go into the mine in the morning and leave at night. Other times we go at night and leave in the morning. The guard doesn't say anything when we go in, he just waits till we're leaving and then he rips us off and sells the ore for himself!

Rubén: Yeah, and you can't say anything! It's hard work in the mine. The most difficult part is getting in and outta there. It can take three or four hours. Sometimes we sleep inside, all grouped together so that the tio [the "uncle", ie. "devil" of the mine) leaves us alone and doesn't make our stomachs hurt¹.

Jorge: Before you go into the mine, you have to eat a tonne. Then you gotta acullicar [chew and suck on coca leaves]. You should also drink a little alcohol, or chew coca so you can get a buzz going. If you don't, you're not gonna be able to do the work you gotta do.

Rubén: You have to use a mallet and chisel to make the toqochi [a hole in the rock] for the dynamite. That's where you put the dynamite. Then you gotta get the hell outta there or else the smoke will make you sick and mess you up, 'cuz it smells so bad. Then you wait 20 minutes and go back. The tricky part is taking out the ore, 'cuz you gotta do it fast. When the guard comes, you gotta find a hole to hide in.

Jorge: If you fall in the mine, no one's gonna take you out. You die right there and that's it. There's nothin' good about being a jucu.

¹ Stomach ache due to the cold on the mines.

Rubén: I really wish I could get a carnet. That way if I have an accident, I could get some help. We have to go into places where no one else goes – really dangerous places. And you don't go there alone 'cuz it's so dangerous. There are thugs and there's even some guards who kill the jucus.

Jorge: There are girls who go in every day. And you can talk to 'em.

Rubén: They get paid [* for sex] with rocks that are worth between 50 or 60 bolivianos.

Jorge: They're all ages, but most of 'em are around 18.

Rubén: When we're tired, we group together to sleep so we can protect ourselves from... the ghosts.

Jorge: Yeah, I was working once and I got right up against the wall 'cuz a ghost was goin' by. I believe in God, though.

Rubén: We go to church. God protects us.

Jorge: But we get scared.

** While some girls exchange sexual services for ore, the majority are jucus who, like the boys, work in the mine illegally. Some are the daughters of miners who have died prematurely from illness or an accident, leaving their families and siblings to fend for themselves.*



Portrait

In the high altiplano region of western Bolivia, near the impoverished and largely indigenous community of Lallagua, hundreds of subsistence-income miners enter the ominous black mouth of a once-closed tin mine on any given day or night.

Among them are dozens of children whose small size and superior agility enable them to make the 600-meter descent deep into the mine in just 20 perilous minutes. They are jucus – illegal miners – who will fill their rucksacks with heavy rocks laced with tin ore, extracted from the walls of the mine with mallets, chisels and dynamite.

As jucus, the children enter the mines clandestinely, without permission and with no insurance. They typically work in the more isolated and dangerous sections of the mine, where they can find greater quantities of ore while avoiding detection by the slower-moving guards who usually limit their patrols to the safer and more accessible areas of the mine.

Their work is extremely hazardous but well compensated – at least by local economic standards. The children's rucksacks can hold about a five-kilo load of ore, which typically takes about 10-12 hours of hard work to collect. For each load they receive anywhere from 200 bolivianos (USD25) to more than 800 bolivianos (USD 100), depending on the quality of each load. It is, without doubt, more money than the children could possibly earn doing any other job in their remote and impoverished communities.

The jucus usually sell their unprocessed ore directly to rescatistas – intermediaries who amass the ore into much larger quantities for resale to mining companies at a handsome profit. It is the rescatistas who, probably more than anyone else, have the most to gain from the exploitation of the jucus.

The mine in which these children work was abandoned years ago by a company using heavy machinery to open its tunnels and extract the bulk of its accessible tin deposits. Now the children and other miners are essentially mining the residues, while the company has moved its operations to mine another vein inside the same mountain.

Usually arriving to the mine at around midnight, the children scramble down a series of precarious wooden ladders, set at nearly-vertical angles and separated by narrow and slippery ledges. The shafts are treacherously steep and narrow, lacking any light apart the dim beams of the children's helmet lamps that reflect off jagged walls and disappear into the black void.

The smallest children are able to work at the deepest depths, in shafts so claustrophobically narrow and precipitous that few adults can enter them. While the risks to life and limb are significantly greater, the children accept them knowing that the most difficult shafts to reach and penetrate are also the richest in terms of unextracted ore.

Fifteen-year-old Rubén and his best friend, 16-year-old Jorge, take swift and practiced steps down the ladders. They enter an expansive gallery where they begin the tedious work of chipping away at a rock wall with heavy steel chisels and mallets. They keep their cheeks stuffed full of coca leaves, sucking the sour juice down their throats to maintain their energy, ward off the high-altitude chill, and breathe more easily in the thin and malodorous air of the mine.

Suddenly, a powerful explosion from a nearby dynamite blast shakes the gallery and blows a stiff gust of wind past their ears. Some blasts are strong enough to throw them to the ground, but not this one. Rubén and Jorge hardly take notice of it, resuming their work a few seconds later.

Rubén has been working as a jucu for the past two years. His two older brothers are also miners, but have legal identification cards that allow them to work without fear of harassment from the mine guards who are eager to confiscate the rucksacks, helmets and clothes of any jucus who they manage to catch inside.

To escape detection, Jorge and Rubén avoid the main shafts and minimize their movements into and out of the mine. They stick close to each other most of the time, especially when they sense the presence of evil spirits in the darkness that surrounds them.

Near the mine's entrance, at the bottom of one of the first shafts, is a statue erected by the miners to the most powerful spirit – a “Tio”, or devil, that controls the mine. Bloody scraps of llama meat are thrown ritualistically into the shaft to appease the devil below, and mitigate his wrath. The rotting offerings lie scattered around the statue, interspersed with candles left by miners who routinely pray to Jesus for their safety.

The mine is clearly a place to be feared – a threatening netherworld permeated by exploitation, suffering, even death. Many miners wear headscarves adorned with skulls, indicating their casual acceptance of the risks. Most will not live past the age of 40, succumbing to mal de mina (miner's disease) caused by the inhalation of silica dust and other toxic minerals.

In addition, up to two or three miners are injured or killed every week by falls off ledges and ladders. Some plummet into shafts so deep that their bodies are never recovered because they believe that the bodies are like an offering to the Tio.

Women and girls are legally prohibited from working in the mine, yet constitute a small minority of the miners. Among them are sex workers, most younger than 20. Miners pay for their services with tin ore that the women sell to the recatistas once outside the mine.

Jorge, like Rubén, chooses to disregard the various dangers of the mine – at least for now. He says he likes to buy fashionable clothes, go to the movies, and have fun. He has an engaging smile and a patch of hair dyed blond. He is glad he can earn enough money to buy school materials, and he hopes to find a different job once he's finished with high school. But at the moment, he says, his biggest fear is falling into the darkness of a mine shaft, never to be found.



Context

Mining operations in Bolivia are very extensive and concentrated on the extraction of some 30 minerals, primarily silver, gold, tin, and zinc. The country's first tin mines were opened in the 17th century, under the control of a small ruling oligarchy that also reaped all profits.

For centuries, miners have ranked among the most exploited and poorest workers in Bolivia. Not until 1952 were a series of much-needed government reforms enacted, including the nationalization of mines and the founding of Bolivian Mining Corporation and Workers' Union.

A tin crisis in the 1980s led to the selling off of much of Bolivia's tin reserves. Thousands of mines were closed and many thousands of workers lost their jobs. Since then, new mining cooperatives have been formed by and for miners engaged in manual labour, due to a lack of resources within these same cooperatives for invested in machinery. As a consequence, a great deal of mining work is done by hand, with explosives and rudimentary instruments including drills, sledgehammers and chisels.

According to the 2001 national census, some 1.7 million children from ages seven to 14 were engaged in work, primarily in mining, followed by agriculture. This situation persists despite the fact that Bolivia has enacted national legislation to combat child labour, and is also a signatory to international agreements including the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as Conventions 138 and 182 of the International Labour Organization (ILO), which are specifically focused on the worst forms of child labour.

In 1996, an international committee was formed for the progressive eradication of child labour. The committee prepared a national plan in Bolivia for the eradication of child labour by 2010. The plan's main components are the reduction of labour by children under age 14; protection of adolescent workers older than 14; and eradication of the worst forms of child labour.

Nevertheless, the outlook for this plan's success is bleak – to put it mildly -- as due largely to the continuing absence of effective legal enforcement mechanisms that can significantly reduce the numbers of children engaged in mining and other highly exploitative labour sectors.

Mining activities by children constitute one of the world's worst forms of child exploitation. It is highly dangerous, putting at great risk children's physical, psychological, and moral integrity.

As reported by various Bolivian media, approximately 13,500² children are involved in mining activities throughout the country. Commonly referred to as *jucus*,³ they risk their lives to extract ore illegally from clandestine and abandoned mines. Their earnings vary between 500 and 1,000 bolivianos (USD62 to USD124) per week. In the Huanuni mine, currently considered the most profitable, *jucus* can earn up to 6,000 bolivianos (about USD750) per month.

The children engage in activities ranging from work as *carreros* (pushing and steering carts filled with minerals) to drilling, carrying tools, and extracting and cleaning ore. *Quimbalates* (sledgehammers) weighing at least 25 pounds are often used by children to break up the ore. Inhalation of the dangerous ore dust can cause loss of appetite, headaches, sickness and even death from prolonged exposure.

2 Cecilia Molina. Coordinator of the Child Workers Program. *La Razón* magazine.

3 Name attributed to illegal mine workers.

Social Indicators Bolivia

Human Development Index	115/177
Gender-focused Development Index	86/177
Life expectancy	64.4
Per capita GDP	2,720
Total population in millions	9
% Urban population	63,7
% Population under 15	38,5
% Consumption by the poorest 20%	1,5
% Consumption by the wealthiest 20%	63
% of population living under the poverty line	62,7
% of population living on less than US\$1/day	23,2
% of GDP spent by the State on education	6,4
% of GDP spent by the State on health	4,3
% of population w/access to essential drugs	50 - 79
% Illiterate (over age 15)	13,3

** The World Health Organisation (WHO) specifies this percentage range as "limited access".*

Source: 2006 Human Development Report, United Nations



Conclusions



Job scarcity coupled with the economic instability of many families are among the strong contributing factors to child labour. Children often enter the workforce at a very early age, due in many instances to abandonment by their fathers, and a long history and tradition of child labour in the Andean region.

Child workers, far from having their rights recognized and protected by law, are victims of poverty, domestic violence and abuse outside the home, in addition to exploitation suffered in their jobs.

This is especially true in the mining sector which provides no guarantees of even minimally safe working conditions. On the contrary, the work in mines exposes children to the gravest of physical and psychological risks which can in turn have the profoundest impact on their welfare and futures.

Adult Interviews



MARGARITA

Rubén's mother

Of course I don't want Rubén to work in the mine, but what can I do? I'm just one person. He and the other kids go in there, and then they can't find the ore. It's very dangerous work. I want my son to go to school. He works in the mine during holidays and sometimes he misses class to go there with his dad.

CECILIA MOLINA

Child Labour Expert, Miners' Advocacy Centre in Llallagua

It's extremely difficult to eliminate this form of child labour given the present circumstances. At the very least we have to reduce the number of children who are engaged in the work (in mines), and reduce the hours that adolescents are working.

A reform of policy is also needed for better regulation of child and adolescent labour inside the mines. A recent government plan included a small paragraph entitled "Eradication of child mining labour". Nevertheless, it is difficult to have a strong political impact since the cooperatives themselves own the mines and have an established "employee to management" relationship. This makes it all but impossible for us to intervene. Those children themselves will say, "If you are telling me that I can't work in the mine, then give me an alternative, because I need to eat."

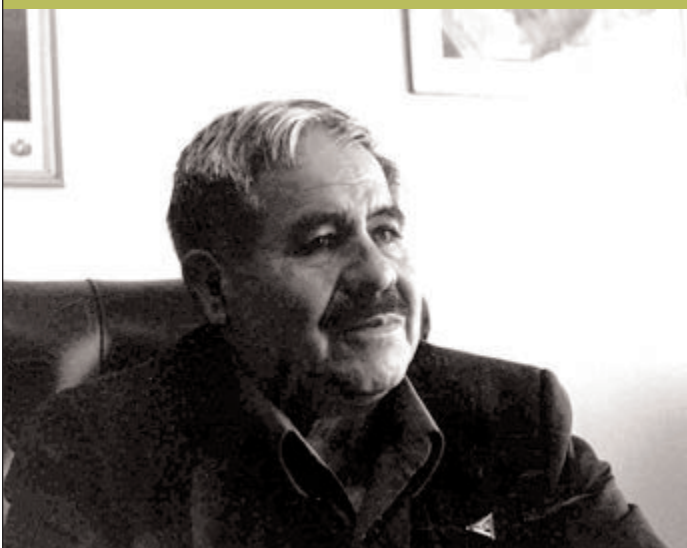


TOMÁS QUIROZ

Exvice-Minister of the Miners' Cooperatives in La Paz

Child labour is a daily occurrence and we are fighting to eliminate it, at least in the mining sector. The Ministry of Labour is trying to make businesses comply with labour laws and improve the working conditions for children. Many cooperatives have improved conditions, but there are others that have not, and that still do not comply with labour laws.

The Ministry is trying to coordinate with municipalities to establish a National Mining Council and state councils in Potosí, to analyse problems like the contamination of rivers, and the working conditions of women and children in mines. The Ministry is also creating a Mining Investment Fund to finance businesses seeking to meet these goals.



Definitions and Basic Concepts

For the purposes of this publication, "child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier."¹

- Worst forms of Child Labour according to ILO Convention 182²:

- a) all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict;
- b) the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances;
- c) the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties;
- d) work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.

- Child Labour

Children's participation in economic activity that negatively affect their health and development or interfere with education. This means all children below 12 years of age working in any economic activities, those aged 12 to 14 years engaged in harmful work, and all children engaged in the worst forms of child labour.³

Occupation that denies children or adolescents their childhood, potential and dignity, and is damaging to their physical and mental development⁴

- Commercial Sexual Exploitation

The commercial sexual exploitation of children is a fundamental violation of children's rights. It comprises sexual abuse by the adult and remuneration in cash or kind to the child or a third person or persons. The child is treated as a sexual object and as a commercial object. The commercial sexual exploitation of children constitutes a form of coercion and violence against children, and amounts to forced labour and a contemporary form of slavery.⁵

- Work

Human activities, paid or unpaid, that produce the goods or services in an economy, or supply the needs of a community, or provide a person's accustomed means of livelihood.⁶

About Child Labour⁷

- Some Characteristics:

- a) Children start working at an earlier age in rural areas rather than in cities
- b) 80% of children work in an informal economy
- c) Work prevents children from attending school or limits their academic performance

- Conditions:

- a) Working hours are longer than the maximum limits established by many national laws for an adult worker
- b) Low Income: 90% of child workers between the ages of 10 and 14, earn wages that are equal to or below the minimum wage, approximately 20% lower than the income of an adult with a 7th grade school level. Children are paid an even lower salary than that or are paid in kind.
- c) Children do not have labour rights
- d) Jobs are precarious

- Causes:

- a) Poverty
- b) Family violence
- c) Social and cultural patterns

- Consequences of child labour at all levels:

Social and Moral:

- a) Encourages inequality
- b) Violates the fundamental human rights of children and adolescents
- c) Leads to a loss of self-esteem, problems of social adaptation and trauma

1 Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 1

2 ILO Convention No. 182: Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999, article 3

3 As opposed to Child Labour: Child work: Children's participation in economic activity - that does not negatively affect their health and development or interfere with education, can be positive. Work that does not interfere with education (light work) is permitted from the age of 12 years under the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 138. http://www.unicef.org/protection/index_childlabour.html

4 Extracted from: Guía Práctica para Parlamentarios, Número 3-2002, Erradicar las peores formas de Trabajo Infantil, Guía para implementar el convenio núm. 182 de la OIT

5 The Stockholm Declaration and Agenda for Action, First World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, Stockholm, Sweden, 1996, http://www.ecpat.net/eng/A4A02-03_online/ENG_A4A/Appendices_1_Stockholm.pdf

6 <http://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ILO-Thesaurus/english/tr2454.htm>

7 ILO, <http://www.oit.org.pe/ipece/pagina.php?pagina=156>

Physical and Psychic:

- d) Chronic diseases
- e) Dependence on medicines
- f) Physical and Psychic abuse

Economic:

- g) Working children fall behind in school by an average of 2 grades or 2 school years in the long-term which means a salary that is 20% lower during their adult lives
- h) Loss of buying power in the national market
- i) The lack of an education (loss of school years) translates into an lower quality of human capital in society

The Position of World Vision on the Issue of Child Labour⁸

The experience of World Vision, given its work in developing countries among the most marginalized people, indicates that children will continue to work until there are feasible and sustainable alternatives for the family and communities. By ignoring this, we endanger the lives of children. In a world characterized by poverty and inequality among the rich and the poor, work is a reality and a need for many children.

Based on this perception, World Vision, is making efforts to abolish the most extreme and dangerous forms of child labour (exploitation), such as child prostitution, slavery, any form of work that involves very small children and any job that represents a danger for a child's physical, emotional or spiritual health.

World Vision has been a firsthand witness of the devastating results of attempting to eradicate all child labour immediately. In addition to recognizing the obvious problem represented by exploitative child labour, non-governmental organizations, governments and the corporate sector must avoid the automatic, though, comprehensible, temptation of demanding that child labour be immediately abolished. This may be a well-intentioned measure but may have disastrous consequences. For this reason, World Vision does not support punitive intervention, or boycotts of consumers or sanctions. Instead, World Vision defends a multi-disciplinary approach:

- To quickly eradicate the worst forms of child labour
- Convince the employer in the formal sector to improve conditions and shorten the number of work hours
- Establish alternate ways of generating income for families
- Improve access to good quality and adequate education
- Confront structural impediments that generate and aggravate poverty

These changes are possible only if long-term structural changes are introduced

The underlying causes of child labour are basically structural: generalized poverty, great inequality, deficient or inadequate education, malnutrition, the structure of the country's economy, consumption patterns and macroeconomic policy frameworks.

This does not mean that poverty automatically cause children to enter the workforce. However, it creates the conditions for this phenomenon to be more likely. In reality, the reasons for which child workers are preferred are not economic. Children are not as aware of their rights as adult workers are. Children are, therefore, easier to exploit.

When children are forced to work in order to survive, their interests may be better protected if employers are encouraged to cease exploitative practices. This type of transition focus requires the application of adequate health and safety conditions within the workplace, reasonable hours, meals, education and skills training.

Prevention, elimination and rehabilitation comprise the three columns of any strategy for eliminating exploitative child labour. Of these, prevention is the most difficult since it covers long-term solutions based on the family and the community in both a national and international environment.

Is education the answer?

One of the keys for preventing and resolving child labour is education. Although, education alone is not enough to end child abuse, it is key to a larger program that seeks to diminish poverty and other pressures that push children into the workforce.

In order for education to be an effective weapon in the fight against child labour, it must be mandatory and allow equal access for both boys and girls. It must be high quality, pertinent, free of charge and realistically flexible, for example, taking into account the agricultural harvest seasons and related needs for families who work in agriculture.

In areas where there is a high index of child labour as well as elevated high school drop-out rates, it is often discovered that the education offered is low level. An inadequate education inadvertently pushes children into the workforce, since by working they can learn a trade and learn skills to earn income.

It is possible to eradicate child labour. In the short-term, we must force ourselves to eradicate the most extreme forms of child labour. In the medium and long-terms, governments, consumers, children's rights groups should combine efforts in order to guarantee that children have the opportunity to develop their potential and satisfy their needs and fundamental rights as human beings.

⁸ By Melanie Gow- Policy and Advocacy- Word Vision Australia, 2000.



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