



**Whitney High School Model United Nations**

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## **WHSMUN XX CONFERENCE**

January 29, 2022

### **MIDDLE-SCHOOL INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION [ILO]**

#### **Child Labor in South Asia**



## **CHAIR INTRODUCTIONS**

Hi everyone, my name is Jessica Lee and I am excited to be your head chair for this conference. I am a current junior, and have been doing MUN since my freshman year, so that makes 3 years now. During my free time, I enjoy catching up on sleep and stressing about my next tests, as well as talking to my friends. I also enjoy art and architecture so feel free to come up to me during breaks if those are things that interest you as well. MUN has taught me so much about doing research, public speaking, interacting with others, and has opened my eyes to many ongoing issues around the world, so I hope that you can find as much value and enjoyment from your MUN experience in the years to come as I have. I can't wait to see everyone at our WHSMUN 2022 conference!

Hey y'all! My name is Tanishka Joshi, and I will be your Vice Chair for this committee! Currently, I am a sophomore, and I have been doing MUN for multiple years. When I'm not in session, I enjoy binge watching different shows like Haikyu!!, and participating in speech and public forum debate. I am also the Vice President of the WHS Debate Club. Participating in MUN has helped me learn about the various problems that afflict our world in the status quo, and I hope, throughout your MUN journey, it has the same footprint upon you. Let's have fun in committee at WHSMUN 2022!

Hi everyone!! My name is Olivia Kim, and I will be your legal for this conference! I am a sophomore and have been a part of MUN since 8th grade! Outside of school, I enjoy listening to music and watching kdramas! During my free time, I like to spend time with my family and friends at the beach. MUN has helped me so much with my public speaking and research skills. It has definitely positively impacted my academic abilities. MUN has also created many friendships. I hope MUN will do the same for you! I am so excited to see you all at the conference!!

## **BACKGROUND**

### A. History of Child Labor

Although child labor in South Asia has been a pervasive issue, with the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) estimating 12% (well over 41 million children) are involved in child labor, there has not been much progress and media coverage. Today, India has the highest number of children in employment due to factors such as large families, poverty, and lack of parental education. Child labor of individuals from 5-17 years of age is the highest in the following countries: Nepal (2.0 million), Pakistan (3.4 million), Bangladesh (5.0 million), and Indian (5.8 million).

Child labor in India stems from the defeat of Siraj-un-Daula, the Nawab of Bengal, at the hands of the English East India Company in the Battle of Plassey. With the British gaining control of east India, many children were employed to compensate for the high demand for cheap labor to produce large amounts of goods. Employers were incentivized to recruit children due to their allowance for lower pay, higher endurance from young age, their innocent nature, and being unaware of basic human rights, thus less likely to complain.

Predictions by the Governance and Social Development Resource Centre detail that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, child labor will once again see a rise, particularly in South Asia. Loss of sector jobs, poverty, and lack of social protection, combined with widespread school closures, will lead to families turning to child labor, making conditions harsher, pay lower, and hours longer for children already involved with labor.

## B. Children in Employment

Once employed, the children may be at risk for severe forms of labor such as bonded labor (debt bondage and peonage), child soldiers (involved with armed conflict), sexual exploitation (though exposure to pornography) and trafficking (illegal movement of individuals for exploited labor). UNICEF reports, specific to South Asia, children are found to be working with: brick kilns, carpet weaving, garment making, domestic service, agriculture, fisheries and mining. Generally, due to the high demand of labor in agriculture in South Asia, the majority of child laborers are involved in agricultural labor, as seen by children who neglect school attendance to help out in the fields.

In South Asia, the issue of child labor and exploitation is exacerbated by the high rate of poverty, social norms, and lack of decent work opportunities. Discrimination of gender, age, socio-economic states, ethnicity, and caste also influences the chance of children engaging in child labor. Hazardous domestic work is often assigned to girls and is relatively well-hidden. Migrant children or children from lower caste and marginalized ethnic groups can be seen as targets for recruitment in instances of armed conflict, many of which accept due to their lack of opportunity elsewhere.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) reports on the substantial amount of hazardous workplace environments for children ages 15-16, with 75% in Bangladesh, 72% in Sri Lanka, 41% in Pakistan, and also in Nepal, India, and Bhutan. ILO future reports that family labor accounts for a significant portion of employment, where the majority of child workers are between the ages of 7 to 14 in Bhutan India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, with older children involved in child labor be at outside areas.

## C. Influences of Gender and Rural Urban Outcomes

According to the ILO In terms of gender with respect to school attendance, the gender disparity in South Asia is the most prominent globally; there is a significant lag in female attendees, with

Pakistan reporting 82 female for 100 males, and Afghanistan with 71 female for 100 males. However, this gender disparity is not constant, with Bangladesh reporting 94 males for 100 females, and Nepal reporting 92 males for 100 females. Generally, females engaged in child labor is more concerning, as they constitute the majority of the most dangerous categories of labor, such as forced and bonded labor, commercial sexual exploitation and domestic work outside of their home. Furthermore, with greater age, there tends to be less male child workers, but the opposite for females, with a greater number of females joining the labor force with age. The ILO reports a larger share of girls in this age range are reported “inactive” (i.e. out of school and out of employment) with Bhutan being the exception.

Children living in rural areas are also more likely to be employed, as seen in Bhutan, India, and Nepal, where twice as many children are employed in rural areas compared to urban areas. Unsurprisingly, children who are employed are much less likely to attend school, with 24 million children out of school in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh alone. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, in rural households, restrictions on movement reduce the amount of adult laborers, forcing farmers to rely on children.

#### D. Ongoing Solutions and the International Community

Despite the lack of media coverage to countries outside of Asia, much improvement has been made through forms of government and organizations within Asia. From 2018 to 2019, the National Child Labor Project Scheme, enacted by the Ministry of Labor and employment has benefited 66,169 children, and 47,635 children in 2017-2018. This project withdraws children from work, who are then admitted to NCLP Special Training Centers, where they receive bridge education, vocational training, stipend, health care in support. Furthermore, through the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act, the government of India, curbed sexual exploitation of children in the country.

Suggestions from the International community, reported by the China Global Television Network (CGTN) hope that measures can be implemented to discourage the use of child labor; such activities may include collaborating with the Sustainable Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations, which seeks to make quality education accessible, affirm gender equality, and create decent and exploitative work opportunities for the young.

Additionally, Child Workers in Asia (CWA), established in 1985, is a non-profit that has grown in the past 15 years to encapsulate 50 different organization and groups that aim to reduce child labor in 14 different countries of South Asia. Agencies such as the South Asia Technical Group on child labor has established at the SAARC level to facilitate conceptual and methodological solutions regarding child labor. This can be done by strengthening knowledge of child labor and its contribution to the socio-economic development of South Asian countries.

## **UN INVOLVEMENT**

The United Nations has started to highlight the topic of child labor more and more as the issue becomes more pressing. The International Labor Organization is an agency from the UN, implemented to handle issues that are related to the topic of labor, as the name suggests. Established in 1919, the ILO was created as part of the Treaty of Versailles, which helped to end World War I. The organization’s main purpose is to promote social justice, as well as fight for the rights of those who are victims of child labor, and other breeches of human rights. The goal of the ILO is to set labor standards, and avoid the exploitation of innocent children. With this in

mind, in 2002, the members of the ILO came up with the World Day Against Child Labor which meant that every year on June 12th, the World Day Against Child Labor would be recognized to bring attention to "...the global extent of child labor, and the actions and efforts needed to eliminate it" (un.org). Additionally, the UN has ratified Conventions, held by the ILO which have been put into place to promote an integrated and civilized approach to the issue at hand. These Ten Principles of the UN Global Compact were initially created by the UN, so companies could create safe environments to work in, as well as implement a principle-based approach in their environment. Principles 1-5 highlight the overall guidelines and limits of labor, principle five highlighting the importance of differentiating between "child labor" and "youth employment". It provides the framework for administering a minimum age that youth can be employed, as well as a limited number of hours they can work based on a certain age.

The first legally binding document to provide a complete set of human rights to children all over the world was the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The initial beginning of the Convention included groups such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for financial support, many several non-governmental organizations offering their support, and many member states from the Commission on Human Rights. The CRC was initially designed to guide other nations so they could have a general framework of the necessary measures needed to be taken when it comes to enforcing the principles surrounding child labor laws as outlined in the document. These four core principles include non-discrimination, devotion to the best interests of the child, the right to life, survival and development, and respect for the views of the child. Enforcing laws concerning child labor in itself is a huge step towards success, but it would be an even greater progression if more countries would adopt the principles.

One UN committee who focus greatly on the concern surrounding child labor laws is UNICEF. Part of their work is preventing violence against children, especially through increasing safety for individuals all across the globe. Many anti violence campaigns or petitions seen around the world have been created and funded through UNICEF. They also propose the creation of more humanitarian initiatives to specifically help children working in circumstances like war zones, natural disasters, and dangerous work conditions since they are less likely to receive protection. One active NGO working closely with UNICEF is called "Save the Children India " working to ensure child survival, protection, education, and making sure responses to emergencies always remains the priority. This organization has contributed a lot to maintaining protection for children dating back to the 1920's, and since it has worked to create many child-centered relief projects such as providing health programs, night schools, and protection programs all ensuring that child labor isn't being overlooked and that the UN is doing everything in their power to make sure children are being protected.

## **BLOC POSITIONS**

### Western Bloc

The effects of child labor extend to the Western Bloc, albeit not to the extent that it may be present in South Asia. For example, in Denmark, 1114 children were employed as of the start of 2019. The Western Bloc, and organizations in which countries of the bloc are members of, are working to combat child labor. For example the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO, has instituted a zero-tolerance policy on human trafficking, which children in labor are often vulnerable to. This includes training NATO forces, and extends to holding military and civilian personnel accountable for any behaviors engaging in or related to human trafficking. Additionally, various organizations have been created in response to child labor, such as Terre

des Hommes, an organization based in Netherlands which provides medical, works to improve working conditions, and much more in various countries, helping thousands of children. Overall, countries in the Western Bloc strive to abolish child labor.

### Latin American and Caribbean Bloc

There is an estimated number of 8.2 million children in Latin America that are classified as child laborers. Of these children 77% are male, and child labor is particularly present in the agricultural sector (48.7%). In addition, similar to South Asia, half of these children's work involve family work. Although there has been a 2.3 million decline of child laborers in Latin America from 2016 to 2020, the pandemic is expected to reverse that trend, and the ILO and ECLAC estimate that it will rise around 1-3 percent, meaning 100,000 to 326,000 more children. Historically, child labor in Latin America stemmed from Great Britain in the 18th century, then saw a rise with industrialization, particularly in poor and working-class families. Today, the Latin American countries with child labor include Argentina, Mexico, Brazil, Chile, Guatemala, Costa Rica and Honduras.

### African Bloc

The African region consists of a great number of children working under conditions without being paid. Data from the UNODC suggests that close to 80% of victims in West Africa were trafficked for forced labor, which remains the major form of exploitation in the region. As the main subjects of international law, States have the primary obligation to combat human trafficking. An important task of the African Court then will be to elaborate upon the nature and the extent of relevant obligations for them to follow. The Southern African Bloc specifically had recently called for collective action to end child labor as whole seeing as the continuous efforts in small countries are not making enough progress in eliminating child labor and its dangers.

### Eastern European Bloc

Children working in Europe have dangerous jobs in agriculture, construction, or small factories. Their jobs require the use of hazardous tools, carrying heavy items, and toxic chemicals. The European Union has a strong opposition to child labor. The EU's *Strategy on the Rights of the Child* is devoted to decreasing child labor rates and improving labor inspection systems. To add on, Russia has estimated that there are about one million working children in the country. Russia allows children ages 14 and up to work if they have completed basic education or received parental permission; they are allowed to work a maximum of 24 hours per week. However, the International Labor Organization's Global Report has found an overall decrease in child labor.

### Asia-Pacific Bloc

The Asia-Pacific region has more working children than any other, at an estimated 122 million in total who are forced to labor in various economic sectors, particularly the agricultural sector. Pervasive issues such as gender disparity and the disparity between rural and urban children contribute largely to the increased employment of children in South Asian countries. In order to decrease this number, countries in Asia-Pacific have committed to several treaties - both international as well as regional. One such example is the South Asia Strategy Against Child Labor (SASCL), a development process for the strategy of combatting child labor. This was created in collaboration with the International Labor Organization, and the South Asia Coordinating Group on Action against Violence against Children (SACG). With regional and international commitments, the Asia-Pacific region is working to decrease child labor.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Why is there a disproportionate amount of female child workers and child workers in rural areas? What can be done to alleviate this statistical disparity?
2. How does a hazardous work environment affect the children that work in those areas? Should policies prioritize the elimination of child labor or reducing the amount of hazardous conditions?
3. Given the expected rise of child labor due to the COVID-19 pandemic, how does this affect the atmosphere of solving the issue of child labor in south Asia? What are some solutions that can be implemented, while considering the circumstances of an ongoing pandemic?
4. Based on statistics, it seems that poorer communities face a higher number of children being forced into labor so how can financial aid be distributed?
5. How are companies gaining access to the children being forced into child labor? What measures can be taken to prevent these actions?

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