

Child Labor A serious Human Rights Problem in the Philippines

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The Department of Labor and Employment has reported that there are about five million children working in commercial and industrial sectors. About 777,000 are aged between 10 and 14 years old; 1.4 million between 15 and 17 years; while a large number of which are below 10 years. There are also reports that garment industries, wood and rattan furniture shops and gold mining industries, use child labor. These companies and manufacturers hire the services of under age children to do labor that adult worker would not do. The children used to work long hours, with no extra or overtime pay; in fact, they are under paid.

These children should be at school and not working for money. But why are they doing this? What are their parents doing? Why do they let or allow their children to work instead of sending them to school? The answer is poverty! About two-thirds of Filipinos are below poverty line. But why is this so? There are about 93 million Filipinos in the Philippines (NSO) today. At the rate of population growth we have, it won't be impossible that our population would reach the one hundred million mark.

Unless the government interferes with the alarming population growth, more and more children would be forced to work for livelihood to help their parents in the day to day struggle for survival: the need of food. There are also parents who forced their under age children to work in their place. This is a clear violation of the rights of children to food, shelter and education. A child has the right to be educated to become responsible citizen of the country; he has the right to live and be treated equally as individual. He also has the right to be given shelter and food.

Our country is one of those that tolerate child labor. The government is making no move to stop these abuses on children, especially those aged 10 and below. You can see children 6 to 10 years' old selling plastic bags in wet markets and offering labor services to market goers who are carrying heavy loads. You can see these children scattered along the exits of commercial centers and market places like here in Zamboanga City. These children are exposed to all kinds of hazards that could endanger their health and life. How come the parents of these children can sit safely at home, while their children are battling with death just so they can earn money to buy food? There are others who are forced into child prostitution because of poverty. Food is always the root cause of all what is happening to our children who go into labor when they should be in school.

Although there are bills and laws passed regarding the rights of children to food, shelter and education, still, child labor is everywhere and children are being abused physically, mentally and spiritually. People in the government must do something, now! The parents of these child labor children should be given jobs, so they can let their children go to school. The Department of Social Welfare and Development should take the lead in helping these children so they will not become juvenile delinquent in the future. Child labor should be discouraged and not tolerated. Give these children have the right to live and enjoy their childhood; live normally as everyone else.