

## **Talking points**

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### **Launch of “Child Labour in the Arab Region: An Analysis of Quantitative and Qualitative Data”**

**Cairo, 7 March 2019, League of Arab States**

Your Excellency Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary General of the League of Arab States,

Your Royal Highness Prince Abdel Aziz bin Talaal Bin Abdel Aziz,

Esteemed highnesses,

Esteemed Representatives and Ambassadors of Member States of the Arab League,

Your Excellency Dr. Haifa Abu-Ghazale, Head of the Social Affairs Sector, and Ms. Nawal Berrada, Head of the Department of Women, Family and Childhood Affairs,

Excellencies: heads of partner organizations FAO, ALO and ACCD; ministers, parliamentarians, ambassadors; heads of UN and international agencies,

And, most importantly, dear children who are now waiting somewhere backstage, and who will soon share their talents with us, accompanied by their instructor Maestro Salim Sahab,

- The relationship between the League of Arab States and the ILO is a longstanding and strong one. We are very pleased to have reinforced this relationship almost three years ago, through joint action to address the pressing and unacceptable issue of child labour in the Arab Region.

- We are thankful for the League of Arab States' trust in the ILO's expertise, in having asked us to coordinate and to provide technical support to this very valuable report. Its preparation involved several important partners, with each providing its own expertise and added value to the report.
- Many Arab governments have taken effective policy and practical measures in recent years against child labour, developing national policies that are aligned with international standards. Egypt, for example, has recently launched its National Action Plan against Child Labour, and we understand from our ILO colleagues in Cairo that the Egyptian government is committed to its full implementation.
- The ILO and its International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour – IPEC – has worked hand-in-hand with our partners in the region to combat child labour, especially in its worst forms.
- In fact, our former colleague Khawla Mattar, who will be honoured later today, is the one who first introduced the ILO's child labour programme to the Arab region, in the year 2000, beginning in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Yemen, Morocco and Egypt. The legacy of Ms Khawla's initiative – the accumulated work, experience and knowledge – remains crucially relevant.
- Yet, the tragedy we face today is that much of the progress in combatting child labour in our region in past decades has been reversed. Economic shocks, political turmoil, conflict, and war, appear to have erased decades of

progress in some countries. As is the case across the globe, conflict has hit women and children disproportionately hard in our region.

- In consequence, child labour has emerged as perhaps the most critical child-protection issue in our region, requiring our urgent attention and action. In many countries, children have been forced out of their school-rooms and into the workplace, to help their families make ends meet, or - in some cases - simply to survive. This is often the case with internally displaced and refugee children. Under the circumstances that we witness today, some children are trapped in extremely hazardous work and sometimes slavery-like conditions, simply to be able to eat, or to ensure a roof over their heads. Let us remind ourselves that these children also represent our future, socially and economically. We simply cannot leave them to such a fate.
- If we do, we will create a chronic crisis of lost generations: generations of stolen childhoods, of illiteracy, of dangerous work - leading to adulthoods of insufficient incomes, poverty and insecurity.
- In order to remedy this critical situation, we need to know more about child labour in the region, in terms of magnitude, profile and characteristics. We also need to also know which policies and actions have worked in combatting child labour in the past, and which have not.
- The study we are launching today provides much of this information, and thus forms a significant step towards addressing – and ultimately eradicating

– child labour in the Arab region. It provides a comprehensive regional picture which sheds light on trends and characteristics relating to child labour in the region, especially in its worst forms. It notes good practices in some areas, and immense challenges that remain in others.

Highnesses, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen:

- The ILO, as the lead UN agency on child labour, is honoured to once again join hands with valued partners to produce this joint report. Our sincere appreciation goes to our sister UN agency, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and to two regional organizations: our close and longstanding partner the Arab Labour Organization, and the Arab Council for Childhood and Development.
- The development of such a comprehensive report could have only taken place under the umbrella of such a major player in the Arab arena as the League of Arab States. Here I would like to extend special thanks to his Excellency Mr. Ahmad Abou El-Gheit for taking this issue to the Arab Summit held in Beirut in January, and for placing child labour high on the Arab political agenda. This is unprecedented achievement in the cause of combatting child labour in the region.
- Sincere thanks go to Ms. Inas Mekkawy and her team for having initiated this report with us, and to Ms. Nawal Berrada and colleagues for continuing the project with great enthusiasm and commitment.

- Many thanks go to her Excellency Dr. Haifa Abu Ghazale for steering the report through numerous challenges, ensuring its endorsement first by the Arab Council of Ministers, and then by the technical and political teams of the Arab Summit.
- Finally, I would like to sincerely thank all Arab League Member States for tirelessly studying, re-studying and commenting on the report, and updating information when necessary. This is a sign of your serious commitment to supporting the rights and wellbeing of Arab children.
- It is of the utmost urgency to address both the root causes and repercussions of child labour, because this dangerous scourge not only jeopardizes the present and future of our children but also threatens the development of our region as a whole.

Thank you.