

Chained Childhood

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When colleague Nacienceno commented in Granma newspaper the painful feeling that overcame him after watching Peruvian children weaving in and out the traffic in Lima to sell meager products that contribute to the family sustenance, he recalled similar scenes in Jakarta, New Delhi and other places in the underdeveloped world, just when it was announced that the United Nations (UN) intends to declare 2021 as the International Year for the Elimination of the so-called Child Labour.

But, I personally think that calling it labour is too meliorative, since it is actually slavery without chains, but the fastening is so tight that prevents those human beings from becoming the hope of the world.

Now, it is said that such a labour has decreased by half in our continent, but it does not clarify that it has taken new forms, which remain hidden and stats do not register the children who are prostituted in several Latin American countries and United States.

Nowadays, some 250 million children work around the world and over 150 million do so in dangerous conditions; further, over 1 million children become human trafficking victims every year.

But the said slave labour refers to any activity that deprives children of their childhood, harms their physical and mental health, and consequently avoids their adequate development.

The worst forms of child labour are forced labour, trafficking, debt bondage or servitude. This also includes illegal activities or activities that can endanger the children's safety, health and morality, such as prostitution, pornography, compulsory or forced recruitment due to armed conflicts, drug trafficking, etc.

In this context, forced labour comprises household chores carried out during long hours in an unhealthy environment, in dangerous places that require the use of dangerous materials or tools, or that force the child to carry objects that are too heavy.

And although I don't agree because the life of the child and teenager is always burdened, certain activities are not considered labour or exploitation, because they entail to help their parents complete the daily chores of the family, which the children can dedicate a few hours every week to and that allows them to earn some money for their expenses. But it brings about negative effects for their education.

Likewise, this way of hiding the situation we're approaching does not avoid the difficulty of the chores in tough conditions that can cause their early aging, malnutrition, depression or drug abuse.

Disadvantaged, minority or abducted children lack protection. Their employers do whatever necessary to make them completely invisible and, therefore, they are able to exert absolute control over them. They work in demeaning conditions, which undermine all their main rights and principles.

On the other hand, they are not in a position to have a normal education and thus will be destined to become illiterate adults, without having the possibility to grow in their social and professional life.

In some cases, child labour also endangers the child's dignity and morality, especially when he/she is a victim of sexual exploitation, such as child prostitution or pornography.

In addition, working children are more exposed to malnutrition and usually become victims, I underline, of physical, mental and sexual violence.

While in our country a real revolution does it all so the aforementioned evil things do not happen here and collaborates so that such a condition disappears in the rest of the world, there are I reiterate, 250 million child labourers aged 5-17 years old; over half do dangerous works and some 8.5 million do so in slavery conditions, trapped in the worst illegal, demeaning and dangerous forms.

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