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**400 Children Rescued from Slave-Like Conditions over Past Year in Mexico**

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In an interview published Thursday by Mexico City daily El Universal, the minister said that 2.5 million children work in some capacity in Mexico but that that figure has been reduced by 500,000 over the past two years.

“To solve the problem, the first thing we need to do is recognize the full harsh reality... What was happening in Mexican farms in some regions of the country speaks for itself. It’s a system that should be torn up from the root.”

Of the total number of farmworkers in Mexico, at least 20 percent, or more than 433,000, are below the age of 18, according to a report from the Network of Internal Day Laborers, which says that at least 40 children have died at farms since 2007.

In that regard, Navarrete recalled that Mexican labor law was amended in 2012 to give his department the authority to carry out farm inspections for the first time in 42 years.

He cited Baja California Sur, Baja California, Sinaloa, Zacatecas, Michoacan and Guerrero as the states with the highest number of companies that use child labor.

Mexico’s government has tackled the problem by conducting 11,000 inspections over the past two years, imposing 140 million pesos (\$9.2 million) in fines and promoting the involvement of other institutions dedicated to child welfare.

“Behind forced labor there’s the face of a child, and behind that exploitation there’s the face of

poverty, but it's been shown that putting children to work does not improve or change a family's conditions," the secretary said.

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