

SIDE EVENT

Co-organised by UNICEF and
Business & Human Rights Resource Centre

"Children's rights & business"

Tuesday 14 June 2011 - during the United Nations Human Rights Council session

Palais des Nations (United Nations Geneva), Room XXVII



www.business-humanrights.org

Business & Human Rights Resource Centre

Comments by Christopher Avery

Director, Business & Human Rights Resource Centre

As Ulf Karlberg mentioned, my colleagues and I are very pleased to be launching our Business & Children Portal today. Given that our organization's mission is to bring more attention to the reality of business & human rights, I asked each of our 6 regional researchers to select two images of business & children's rights cases from their region: one example of an abuse, and one positive initiative. These images convey the human side of children's rights & business.

SLIDE 1:

My colleague Abiola is based in Cape Town, South Africa.



Abiola Okpechi

Anglophone Africa
Researcher & Representative,
based in South Africa

SLIDE 2:

Abiola picked this image: children working in Malawi tobacco farms. Children picking tobacco in Malawi absorb up to 2 cigarette packs' worth of nicotine each day. They have reportedly bathed in toxic effluent from tobacco processing plants, and picked through toxic tobacco waste dumped in open landfill sites. Children have also reportedly been subjected to physical and sexual abuse by tobacco farm supervisors.



Photo credit: BBC

SLIDE 3:

Abiola's choice of a positive initiative: In 2002 South African company Anglo American decided to make available free HIV-AIDS antiretroviral treatment to all its employees, and in 2008 the company began extending its HIV prevention, care, support and treatment programme to dependants of employees including their children.



Photo credit: AP

SLIDE 4:

My colleague Aliou is based in Dakar, Senegal.



Aliou Diouf

Francophone Africa
Researcher & Representative,
based in Senegal

SLIDE 5:

Aliou picked this image. When companies source conflict minerals from Democratic Republic of Congo for use in cellphones, the money can end up being used by militias to recruit child soldiers. Children in DRC mine coltan and other conflict minerals in dangerous conditions that threaten their health and their lives – often they are forced to do this mining, in slave-like conditions.

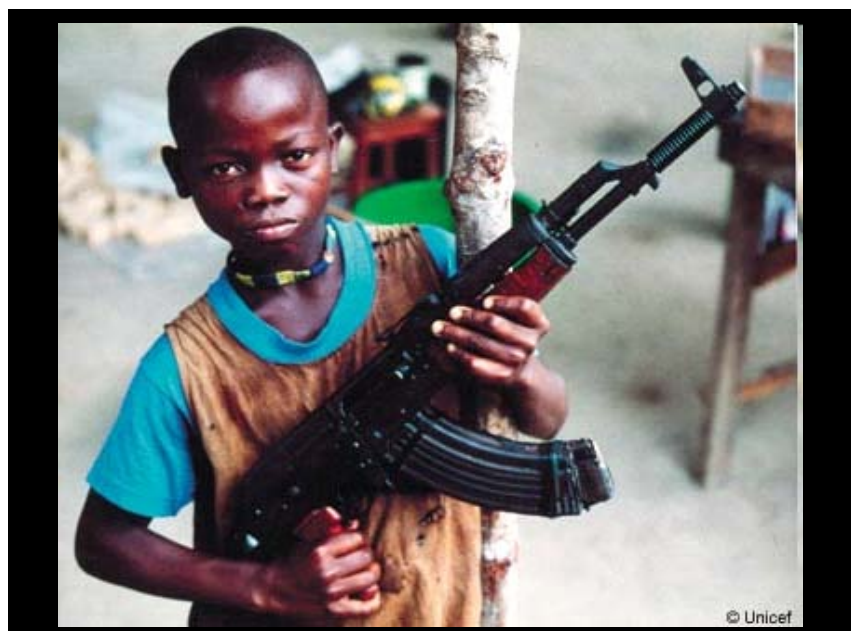


Photo credit: UNICEF

SLIDE 6:

On the positive side, Aliou picked the International Cocoa Initiative – an initiative by companies, labour unions and NGOs that aims to stop illegal child labour in the supply chain. This initiative has made progress but has also been criticised for falling short – a reminder that all voluntary initiatives need to endeavour to improve their effectiveness, and need to be closely monitored.



Photo credit: International Cocoa Initiative

SLIDE 7:

My colleague Harpreet is based in Delhi, India.



Harpreet Kaur

South Asia
Researcher & Representative,
based in India

SLIDE 8:

Harpreet chose this image: a child who was among the thousands killed in the Bhopal gas tragedy in 1984, the world's worst industrial catastrophe. The impact continues, with high rates of deformities in children born in the area after that period.



SLIDE 9:

Harpreet chose this positive initiative: the long-term IKEA-UNICEF partnership to combat child labour in India through addressing the root causes, including education, health and poverty.



Photo credit: Marieke de Leede

SLIDE 10:

My colleague Mayling is based in Hong Kong, China.



Mayling Chan

East Asia
Researcher & Representative,
based in Hong Kong

SLIDE 11:

Mayling chose this image. Over recent years there are continuing reports of children in rural China being kidnapped and forced to work as slaves at brick kilns, while their parents search for them.



Photo credit: AP

SLIDE 12:

For a positive case, Mayling chose this: Chinese agriculture product company Yongye International is partnering with Stanford University to develop programmes to help address rural poverty, education, nutrition and health issues in China, including programmes aimed at children.

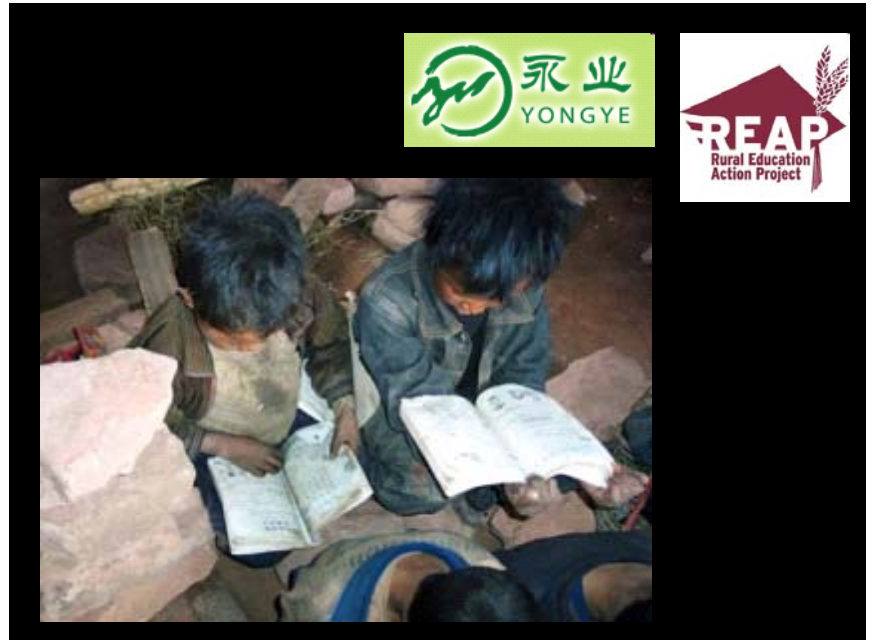


Photo credit: Stanford University

SLIDE 13:

My colleague Ella is based in Kyiv, Ukraine.



Ella Skybenko

Eastern Europe / Central Asia
Researcher & Representative,
based in Ukraine

SLIDE 14:

Ella picked this image: children working in Uzbekistan's silk industry. Silk farmers say they are threatened with fines or loss of their land leases for missing quotas, and these quotas are reportedly set so high by the government that they have no choice but to draft their children into the work – work which can run from 4am to midnight during the silkworm breeding season.



Photo credit: Alexander Zemlianichenko, AP

SLIDE 15:

Ella chose this positive initiative: a telethon in Romania that raised over US\$750,000 to protect children in Haiti impacted by the earthquake. The telethon was organised by UNICEF and Romanian television company Realitatea, and many other Romanian companies also made donations.



Photo credit: UNICEF Romania

SLIDE 16:

Finally, my colleague Amanda is based in Bogotá, Colombia.



Amanda Romero Medina

Latin America
Researcher & Representative,
based in Colombia

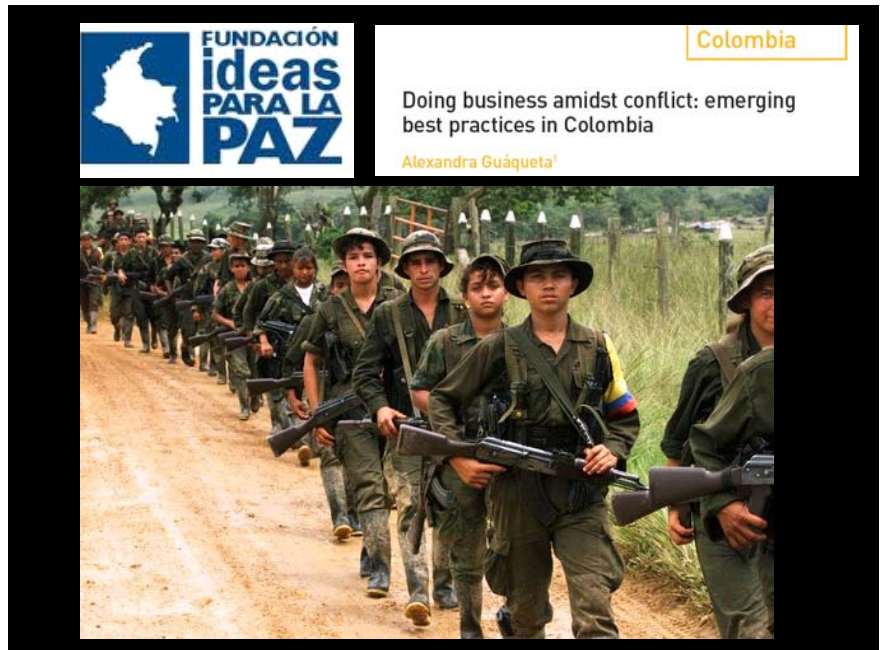
SLIDE 17:

Amanda chose this image: a father with his daughter in La Oroya, Peru, where a smelting plant owned by a U.S. company was so lacking in environmental safeguards that a 2001 Ministry of Health study found 99 percent of children in the community had lead poisoning, and 67 percent had lead levels so high that they should have been medically treated.



SLIDE 18:

Amanda chose this positive initiative. During the decades of armed conflict in Colombia, children have been victims of extrajudicial killings, “disappearances”, rape, torture and displacement – and thousands of child soldiers have been recruited. In 1999 business leaders in Colombia started the organization Fundación Ideas para la Paz, which recommends peace-building initiatives for companies, such as in the working paper entitled “Doing business amidst conflict: emerging best practice in Colombia”.



The slide features a header with the Fundación Ideas para la Paz logo on the left, which includes a map of Colombia. To the right of the logo, the text reads 'Colombia' in a yellow box, followed by the subtitle 'Doing business amidst conflict: emerging best practices in Colombia' and the author's name 'Alexandra Guàqueta'. Below the header is a photograph showing a line of young boys in military uniforms and hats, carrying rifles, walking along a dirt road in a rural setting.

Photo credit: VTV

These images today have highlighted challenges and opportunities. Unfortunately it was much easier for my colleagues to find examples of abuses than to find strong positive initiatives. Much work needs to be done by all concerned, including child rights advocates, companies, and governments.

For our part, my colleagues and I will use our new Business & Children Portal to reflect progress made. I encourage each of you to use our portal as a platform for your reports and materials – that is its purpose. Just send us a Word document, a PDF, or the best option is for us to link directly to your website, which sends traffic to your site. We will draw attention week in and week out to the reality on the ground, both to alleged abuses and to positive initiatives including partnerships between companies and UNICEF, UNDP, etc. We will do so in a way that encourages companies to address abuses, and gives recognition to those companies promoting and protecting the rights of children.