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## **Commission on the Status of Women – 51<sup>st</sup> Session**

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### **Defence for Children International**

#### **Position Statement on**

#### **GIRLS IN DOMESTIC WORK**

International standards on children's rights protection, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, guarantee the human rights of girls, emphasizing the right to be protected from exploitation and violence, and to equal access to education without discrimination. However, in the daily lives of the world's girls, these rights are often not realized.

The multifaceted and multidimensional relationship between child labor, education, and poverty often contributes to a cycle of poverty that is difficult to break. Regarding girls and education, of the 120 million children in the world without schooling, 57% of them are girls. Many of these school-aged girls not receiving an education work as part of their family's survival strategy, and in many less-developed countries this can account for 25% of the family income.

DCI is particularly concerned about children engaged in domestic work outside his/her own households, knowing that in most cases it represents a threat to the child's health, education, safety, etc., even a form of modern slavery. In international standards, however, most notably ILO Convention No. 182, child domestic work is not specifically mentioned as one of the worst forms of child labor.

DCI recognizes that the vast majority of the estimated tens of millions of children in domestic work around the world are girls. For example, according to ILO research, 10% of children in Haiti are engaged in domestic work, approximately 75% of whom are girls. Additionally, in Central America and the Dominican Republic nearly 90% of the estimated 70,000 children in domestic labor are girls.

DCI agrees with the Report of the Secretary-General on the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child, especially with regards to the fact that official statistics on child labor often focus on visible child labor, where boys are found, and consequently underestimate the invisible, informal sector in which girls are predominately found. Although estimates range from 120 to 250 million child workers worldwide, the number would be significantly higher if it took into account invisible forms of child labor, particularly child domestic work. At the same time, DCI agrees with the recent report of the UN Study on Violence against Children, especially about the identification of various kinds of violence which child domestic workers are subjected to.

DCI, in accordance with the standards set by the ILO Convention No. 138 on the minimum age of employment and 182 on the worst forms of child labor, becomes concerned with children in domestic work and asks for special attention to it if the child:

- *Is sold or trafficked/is bonded to repay family debt* – The link between child domestic labor and trafficking remains very strong. Due to a high demand for cheap domestic workers, the trade in children continues to expand, and not only move young girls from rural to urban areas, but also abroad. Frequently, the families of girls recruited from poor, rural areas consider domestic labor as good and safe work, remaining ignorant of the many risks to a vulnerable child far away from family and perhaps unable to speak the local language.
- *Works without pay* – Children in domestic work are frequently indebted to their employers in order to repay the fees required to travel to their employer's home. In addition, employers can

accuse children in domestic work of theft and cut off pay until the amount is recovered. On the other hand, another form of child labor that is invisible is the domestic work that many girls are engaged in their own houses.. This practice is usually done without pay.

- *Works excessive hours* – Children generally work extremely long days, often more than 16 hours per day several days a week, and are on call day and night. Although some young girls serving as domestic workers are allowed free time to attend school and have friends, most of the time child domestic workers are not permitted time for leisure or schooling.
- *Works in isolation or during the night/is unreasonably confined to the employer's premises* – The majority of children in domestic work are highly isolated or hidden, leaving their employer's homes only for specific tasks.
- *Is exposed to safety or health hazards* – During work, a child in domestic work can be exposed to heavy weights, chemical cleaning products, insecticides, excessive humidity (laundry, wash dishes, etc.), and fire.
- *Suffers physical violence or sexual harassment* – Girls in domestic work can suffer from various forms of verbal, sexual, physical, and psychological abuse. Employers can beat up, even burn or torture, girls working in their homes. Additionally, girls are more vulnerable to sexual abuse by their employers, and girls who become pregnant as a result of this abuse are dismissed, rejected by their families, and often can only turn to prostitution to support themselves.
- *Is very young* – While most girls in domestic work are between the ages of 12 and 17, there are a significant number of girls who begin much earlier, even as young as age 5.

DCI supports the statements made in the Report of the Secretary-General on the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child, notably raising awareness about their rights. This Report specifically suggests that child domestic labor negatively influences girls' attendance and achievement in school and increases repetition and drop-out rates, mentioning that approximately 55 million girls do not receive formal schooling.

DCI believes that in order to improve the situation of girls in domestic work, governments need to implement strategies for effective compulsory quality education as a preventative and rehabilitative measure to combat child labor, including domestic work. In this light, DCI's International Campaign on Inclusive Education seeks to enable States to achieve a 100% school participation rate of children, particularly for those who are part of their family's survival strategies. In order to break the cycle of poverty, such inclusive educational systems should offer flexible schedules that accommodate those of child workers, recognize their experience, and create educational models that promote their socialization and integration.

DCI's International Campaign on Inclusive Education seeks to enable invisible working children, including children in domestic work, to access Inclusive Education Systems. To achieve this goal, DCI's Campaign targets not only working children, but also the educational community, civil society, and governments.

In order to realize this goal, DCI urges States parties to:

- Ratify and implement international standards related to children's rights, such as the Convention of the Rights of the Child and ILO Conventions No. 138 and 182.
- Recognize invisible forms of child labor, with specific attention to the girl child in domestic work, and guarantee their right to education and to protection against violence and exploitation in the workplace.
- Recognise invisible forms of child labor in official statistics.
- Develop plans of action to transform educational systems into inclusive education systems, thus improving the incorporation of boy and girl workers into schools and protecting both from violence and all forms of exploitation.
- Allocate sufficient financial resources to implement appropriate national, regional, and international plans of action regarding violence against and economic exploitation of girls.
- Raise awareness about invisible forms of child labor, the benefits of inclusive education, and children's rights in order to ensure effective protection of girls.