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International Labor Organization: Elimination Of Child Labor Not Likely In Foreseeable Future

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On May 14 in Quito, the International Labor Organization (ILO) warned that abolishing child labor in Latin America would be a difficult task, even in the long term, and called on governments to be "bold" in their efforts to resolve the problem. Speaking at a seminar on child labor, Juan Bossio of the ILO Child Welfare Department urged all governments in the region to improve education and "strictly" enforce labor laws to combat child labor. The purpose of the seminar attended by government, union and private sector representatives from seven nations was to define joint economic and political strategies to prevent child labor and protect children who work. According to Bossio, nearly 7% of children in Latin America between the ages of 10 and 14 (3.12 million) work on the streets in the informal economy. He said these figures, provided by governments in the region, were "far short of the real situation," since they do not include children under 10 and many others who were excluded from the census. According to Mexican psychologist Mario Cuevas, 100,000 Latin American children live and work on the streets, and 200 die every day from poverty and hunger. Citing figures from the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Bossio said 34.2% of all households in the region live "below the poverty line," and 15.3% live in "extreme poverty." Because child labor is a response to poverty, said Cuevas, "the abolition of child labor is an unattainable objective in the short term." According to the ILO, 100 countries have ratified international agreements on the protection of child workers, but "these are a long way from being enforced." UNESCO statistics indicate that 12.4% of Latin American children between ages 6 and 11 do not attend school because of their families' economic problems. (Basic data from Inter Press Service, 05/14/91)

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