

WORLD DAY AGAINST CHILD LABOUR

STATEMENT BY THE AFRICAN COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON THE RIGHTS AND WELFARE OF THE CHILD THROUGH ITS WORKING GROUP ON BUSINESS AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

12 JUNE 2026

The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child through its Working Group on Business and Children's Rights joins the global community in commemorating the World Day Against Child Labour under the theme: ***Red Card to Child Labour: Fair Play for Children, Decent Work for Adults.***

The Working Group welcomes this year's theme, which underscores the urgent need to eliminate child labour while addressing the underlying social and economic factors that perpetuate it. The theme serves as a powerful call to action, reminding AU Member States, businesses, communities, and all stakeholders that child labour has no place in our societies and that every child has the right to grow, learn, play, and develop in a safe and protective environment. Significantly, sustainable and inclusive economic growth cannot be achieved at the expense of children's rights; businesses operations must contribute to building economies that are equitable, safe and supportive of children's development.

This year's commemoration is particularly significant as it marks twenty-seven years since the adoption of the ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, one of the most rapidly ratified international labour standards. Across Africa, significant progress has been made in strengthening legal and policy frameworks to eliminate child labour. Several Member States have adopted or revised legislation, strengthened labour inspection systems, established national coordination mechanisms, and developed action plans to address child labour and its root causes. Importantly, 54 AU Member States have ratified Convention No. 182,¹ demonstrating the continent's strong commitment to protecting children from labour exploitation. These achievements reflect Africa's determination to uphold children's rights.

Yet, despite commendable progress, child labour remains one of the most pressing child rights challenges facing the continent. Millions of African children continue to be engaged in child labour, with many exposed to hazardous conditions that threaten their health, safety, education, and overall development. Child labour is particularly prevalent in agriculture, mining, domestic work, street-based activities, and other informal sectors, where regulation is weak and exploitation thrives.

1 The Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, an AU Member State, is not a member of the International Labour Organization and is therefore not among the ratifying States.

Persistent poverty and inequality, weak social protection systems, barriers to quality education, unemployment and underemployment, conflict, displacement, humanitarian crises, and the growing impacts of climate change continue to drive children into labour. Families facing economic hardship rely on children's labour as a coping mechanism, underscoring the close link between child labour, social justice, and decent work for adults.

The Working Group further recognizes that rapid technological advancement and the expansion of the digital economy are creating both opportunities and risks for children. While digital technologies can enhance access to education, information, and skills development, they may also expose children to new forms of economic exploitation through digital platforms, online content creation, and other technology-enabled activities. Efforts to eliminate child labour must therefore remain responsive to these evolving realities and ensure that children's rights are protected both online and offline, consistent with the rights guaranteed under the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the aspirations of Agenda 2040, and Sustainable Development Goal Target 8.7.

As we commemorate this important day, the Working Group calls upon AU Member States to strengthen and effectively enforce laws and policies aimed at preventing and eliminating child labour. This includes through adequately resourced labour inspection systems and child protection mechanisms, enhancing universal access to quality education, and providing child-sensitive social protection systems. Governments should also expand skills development opportunities, and employment policies that promote decent work for adults and young workers of legal working age.

The Working Group further calls upon businesses to uphold their responsibility to respect children's rights by conducting human rights and child rights due diligence throughout their operations and supply chains; integrating child rights considerations into investment decisions; identifying and addressing child labour risks; adopting effective remediation mechanisms; promoting responsible business conduct; and paying particular attention to sectors where child labour is prevalent, as well as to emerging risks associated with digital technologies and global supply chains. Businesses should further promote child-centred safeguards and ensure that all actions are guided by and serve the best interests of the child.

Civil society organizations, development partners, communities, traditional and religious leaders, and children themselves all have an important role to play in preventing and responding to child labour. Strong partnerships and coordinated action are essential to addressing the root causes of child labour and ensuring that every child is protected from exploitation.

On this World Day Against Child Labour, the ACERWC reaffirms its commitment to advancing the rights and welfare of every child in Africa. Together, let us give a red card to child labour, promote fair play for children and decent work for adults, and accelerate efforts towards an Africa where every child can enjoy a safe childhood, quality education, and the opportunity to realize their full potential.

Done in Maseru, Kingdom of Lesotho

12 June 2026

