

obstacles to, ratification of selected ILO conventions. In the year 2000, Convention 138 is scheduled for reporting. Yet while this has the potential to be an important step for furthering management of the issue and understanding concerns relating to child labour, there is much more to child labour than compliance with Convention 138.

The limitation of Convention 138, with its focus on age, has been internationally recognized. There is currently no ILO convention that defines and seeks to eradicate the worst abuses associated with child labour practices. There is growing support to negotiate a new convention on child labour that would be operationally more effective.³ Such a convention would address exploitation of child workers, rather than age in-and-of-itself. A new ILO convention, which to be effective would need to take real steps toward the elimination of the most intolerable forms of child labour, could be adopted by the ILO as early as 1999. During 1998 and 1999, Canada will play a lead role in seeking a strong, simple and ratifiable convention which can apply to countries with different levels of development. As always in this context, individual countries would be free to make their own decisions on ratification.

The ILO has been active in addressing aspects of child labour aside from Convention 138. In recognition of the several dimensions of the problem, the ILO Labour Office has established an International Program for the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC).⁴ This program is action rather than rules-based oriented. Launched in 1991, the IPEC works with NGOs and government partners in many developing countries. The IPEC seeks to mobilize understanding and action among social partners in addressing child labour, and seeks to remove children from exploitative working conditions by providing alternative options such as access to educational institutions.

Characteristics of Child Labour

Child labour encompasses a very broad range of actual work experiences. As noted earlier, there is a critical need to distinguish between exploitative and non-exploitative child labour. Work experience may have to varying degrees positive or negative impacts on a child's development and future opportunities. An initial step for

³ At the March 1996 session of the ILO's Governing Body, a decision was made to place child labour on the agenda of the 1998 International Labour Conference with a view to the adoption of new international labour standards, particularly with a priority on action to halt the most intolerable forms of child labour. This decision was subsequently endorsed by a resolution adopted at the June 1996 International Labour Conference.

⁴ Canada has provided financial assistance for this program.