



# Egypt: For a Living .. A Child Eats Fire and Drinks Kerosene

Adel Zakaria / Member of Arab Trade Union Media Network.



Egypt- Hard conditions forced him to stop playing, so he abandoned his childhood in pursuit of a living. He practiced adult works under the market's conditions till he became a truly child of misery and deprivation. You cannot hold your tears while thinking about depth of suffering for a 14-year-old child, who is gifted with intelligence and excellence, but he found himself forced to support his family after illness and death of his father, who was a magician.

Only a minimum of choices and dreams were available in his small world. He did not know that his dreams of childhood with their beautiful games and memories will be known only from the movies shown in the cinema, and collected from the looks he steals from another child who has a much better life than his. He left his childish dreams aside, and decided to think in a manner that goes with the surrounding circumstances "You are no longer a child, and you need to earn money".

Unfinished scenes of childhood, confusion in the roles, he has no idea about the role he should play in this miserable story. However, all scenes and circumstances lead him to the same area which is the most miserable one, and put the truth naked in front of his eye that is "You are the man of the house." Among the stories of child labor in Egypt is the story of the child "Walid", son of Al-Hawamdiya center located in south of Cairo, who is known to the goers of cafes the down town and they call him the child prodigy.



## Playing with Fire and Kerosene

Kerosene, fire, and poetry are three things that distinguished Walid from his peers. He drinks the first one, blows the second in the air, and says the third in front of the cafes' goers. You can find him every day in the down town streets after turning from a student into a "magician" playing games to earn a few silver coins taken from the pockets of his fans.

From Al-Hawamdiya in the south of Giza to the down town, 14-year-old Walid accompanies his mother with a bottle full of kerosene, drinking it in front of his customers to set the fire and call their attention for his outstanding abilities. Regarding his mind, he memories verses of poetry to say them to listeners around him, so he can get their admiration and then their money. Walid inherited the skill of blowing in the fire from his father, and he used to go to the down town every day, showing capabilities the residents of the area and the passersby are not used to it: "I was called the child prodigy, because I drink kerosene and blow in fire. I have been working since my father died. I blow in

fire so I can support my mother and young siblings".

Distance travelled by Walid accompanying his mother from Al-Hawamdiya to the down town was never a hindrance to present his daily shows, as the most important thing to him is supporting his family that consists of five members: "I do not know anything named a holiday. When I was in school, I used to finish my studies in the morning and go to the down town in the evening. Currently I go the down town from morning till evening.

Walid is still devoted to his school despite his usualness to his profession as a magician: "I cannot leave my school, I like it more than my work, but I have to work to support my siblings." Walid's ambition did not stop at pursuing his studies; he aspires to become a famous football player, stressing that talent is existed but difficult circumstances prevent the realization of his dream: "I took part of the youth center in Al-Hawamdiya, and after my participation they told me that I should buy football kit to play. My mother and I can barely afford our food, how can I buy those kit!?"

Walid's mother – who works in the houses of others- could not hide her tears while we were talking about contradiction between Walid's academic excel and the necessity to work as magician in a job that poses a danger to his life. She says: "when Walid was younger, I found him practicing on his father's profession and trying to learn it in the early morning. That was after his father was infected with illness and became unable to move from his bed. I tried to prevent him, but I could not due to his insistence and our hard conditions. I had to leave him to work. At the beginning, I used to stay beside him till he became good in his work. But I know that this profession is very dangerous. His father burned his face once, and I know that there is a possibility for Walid to get burned like his father; in addition to that Kerosene causes lots of thoracic diseases, and his face may be influenced by the flames of fire."

## Child Labor in Egypt

Child labor is one of the most serious phenomena threatening the Egyptian society. According to the ILO estimates, number of child labor in Egypt reached about 2.2 million, representing up to 26%. According to the latest statistics of the Central Agency for Mobilization and Statistics, 46% of these child workers are between 15 and 17 years of age, 78% are male and 21% are female. Number of working hours spent by these children at work is more than 9 hours a day on average, and more than six days a week. i.e. number of working hours of the child may exceed the number of adults' working hours.

Concerning the international conventions and charters ratified by Egypt, which have become effective and committed to stopping child labor, the first one of them is the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Egypt was one of the first countries to ratify in 1990.

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The Convention defines the child as every human being under the age of 18, emphasizes the need to seek protection from economic exploitation, and prevent him from

performing any work that is likely to be dangerous or impeding his education, health, physical, mental, spiritual or Social growth. The Convention requires States parties to take legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to ensure such protection, in particular establishing a minimum age for admission to employment, and an adequate system of working hours and conditions, as well as imposing appropriate penalties to ensure the effective application of such provisions.

Egypt has also ratified the International Labor Organization (ILO) conventions (it should be noted that the organization has issued several agreements (16 conventions and 4 recommendations)) all of them oblige governments to implement policies concerning protection of children's rights. The most important two conventions ratified by Egypt are Conventions No. 138 of 1973 related to The Minimum Age for Employment, and No. 182 of 1999 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor. Those two conventions are considered the most important and recent conventions adopted by the International Labor Conferences in the area of child labor, as their contained provisions that are fun-

damental to human rights at work, which the acceding States are committed to and are held accountable for the breach of their obligations under them.

### Egyptian Law and Child

Egypt's new constitution 2014 did not overlook the criminalization of child labor. Article 80, which is the longest article in Egypt's new constitution states that it is prohibited to employ a child who passed the age of his basic education. It is also prohibited to employ him in the work that endangers his life, and the state is obliged to protect him from all forms of violence, abuse, ill-treatment, and sexual and commercial exploitation.

Accordingly, Egypt arranged in 1996 the Child Law No. 12 of 1996, amended by Law No. 126 of 2008, which detailed a separate chapter on the criminalization of child labor. It states that it is prohibited to employ a child before the age of full 15 calendar years. It is also prohibited to train him before the age of thirteen calendar years. Employment of children aged between twelve and fourteen years in seasonal works, that do not harm their health or growth, and does not prejudice

their attendance in schools, may be authorized by a decision made by the competent governor after the approval of the Minister of Education,

Secretary General of the Egyptian Coalition for the Rights of the Child, Dr. Hany Helal says that: "We have enough laws to stop child labor, but unfortunately, these laws have not been enforced adequately, especially that we also have a law to protect the child from his family, which forces him to work. If the family did so, it will be punished and obliged to pay fines. Its penalty may even reach imprisonment for a term not less than six months. He also points out that work of children at an early age before the legal age is a widespread phenomenon, occurring in the absence of the protection man's role inside the Ministry of Manpower. However, if the Ministry played its role in turn, it will be able to stop and eliminate the phenomenon of child labor. The Secretary of the Egyptian Coalition for the Rights of the Child expressed his regret due to that the file of child is not on the priorities' list of the Egyptian government, adding that instead of developing plans to stop this phenomenon, especially as we are on the threshold of the United Nations celebration of the World Day against Child Labor, it is increasingly promoted by the media without any accountability or deterrence.

A study published by the Egyptian Ministry of Manpower revealed that poverty and ignorance constitute the reason behind spread of child labor, which their number reached more than two million and 786 thousand child workers laboring in difficult conditions that endanger their lives. They work long periods exceeding working hours for adults. The study revealed also that almost all child workers have no legal protection, and work informally, without work documents or health certificates, as well as one-third of them suffer from ill-treatment and are exposed to various forms of violence from employers and supervisors.



# The slow death of children & youth in marble industry empire in Egypt

Adel Zakaria - Member of Arab Trade Union Media Network

Egypt – One cannot but notice a huge cement gate when taking the high way near ALmaadi area in the heart of Cairo. Entering this gate means you will see all types of marble and granite spread along the 7KM asphalt road that keeps ascending, it is called the marble empire and known in Egypt as “shaq Al Tuoban (cracks made by snake.”

In this empire you find migrant and Egyptian workers, engineers, traders, all work as if they are in beehive from 9 am till 11 pm, thousands types of marbles that you cannot find anywhere in the country as it gets exported to international markets, but how does this empire operates in such silence?

At least 50,000 workers work in the marble and granite industry in this region, mostly children, work without rights with their muscular arms, they make artistic stone sculpture, for a living that barely takes them

out of unemployment hell, dodging death day and night. These workers work hard but they have no right they have no idea what a trade union is, despite their success in achieving high export figures, where this region accounts for 90% of the total exports of marble, amounting to 330 million dollars annually.

We had to have evidence of this closed world at least in front of the media, so we had a chat with Hajj Hassan Hajjaj, the oldest workers in this empire, and we asked him about the reason behind the name “Shaq AL Tuoban” he said: 50 years ago, this area was a group of mountain valleys and each valley had a name, a group of quarries was here in this valley and the name came perhaps because workers drilled and dug the stones in a way that made an impact of a huge snake that wiggles in the mountains.

I asked him about the workers in

this empire, if they are skilled technicians that can be relied on to produce the best marble in the world? And he surprised me with his answer: “You will not believe that some of these skilled technicians do not know how to read or write. Some of them hold university degrees that are far from working in the field of marble manufacturing, the production line officer in this factory hold a bachelor’s degree in Sharea and low others hold a bachelor’s degree in finance and they are all under 30 years old.

## Workplace hazards and lack of safety measures

There were huge blocks of rough stones moving by winches to be placed next to a giant electric saw controlled by a computer unit and observed by one worker, then we saw a marble production line produces a specific sizes requested by the customer, The quality control officer was following the amazing product, we stopped him and asked him about the nature of his work, and how it requires a mechanical engineer, not a technician holds a diploma of trade like him, Mr. Hosny Abdel-Tawab, 30 years old, said: “My experience qualifies me for this position I have been working on this line for more than 6 years, I observe the cleanness of each piece and its quality. I do not allow any defect in the product, no matter how simple.”

We stood in front of a giant machine called Monofilo, a circular saw that moves slowly under a huge block, and surprisingly, the worker operating this unit did not have any qualifications. Ramadan Abulfadil , 41 years old, says that he has been working on this machine for 4 years, and there were no problems that he cannot write or read as he is well trained, and knows the numbers used and he never made a mistake with these numbers.

However, the real mistake, the real danger that occur daily in the empire of marble in general, according to Haj Hajjaj is that a worker get killed weekly and a worker get in-



jured every day, although these statistics are not accurate, it is alarming. I asked him about the reasons behind these accidents? He said: Absence of workplace safety is a joint responsibility between the owners of factories and the Ministry of Environment, which must review the safety requirements and contribute to the cost in order to ensure a safe health environment for all workers here. He says that the cost of providing safety in workplace is high and owners of factories cannot afford it, "in Italy for example the concerned authorities in the government inspect the winches and its efficiency and the wires that carry large blocks, and change them regularly all workers there wear helmets and masks, and if this does not happen, officials get a fine.

### Child labour:

One of the workers, who appeared to know the legal aspects of the problems- preferred anonymity- said that this empire employ children under the age of 14 or between 14 and 18 years of age and this constitutes the major part of the problem here because it is contrary to articles 19 and 32 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in addition to the absence of supervision and follow-up by the concerned bodies and the negligence by the families and factories owners, in addition to the outbreak of diseases among workers such as renal and intestinal colic a result of food and drinking water contamination, which is the mother of problems, as well as chest diseases due to dust resulting from marble cutting, workers cannot get ambulance in case of an emergency, restaurants here serve food that is not suitable for human.

"I have been working here for almost a year now, I work 10 hours a day and get one hour rest, what bothers me here is the water, it is dirty, drivers fill up water from the Nile river and they sell it for us as if it is drinking water, one day we found a fish inside, sometimes drivers bring water from dirty tanks,"

Amro Adel Ahmad, 16 years old said.

"most workers here are children and youth because we are paid much less than other workers and we don't have insurance," he added. "work here is hard, one needs to be focused all the time because a mistake means you might lose an arm or leg, but worst thing we face here is the drinking water and the food which are not suitable for human consumption," said Karim Hisham, 15 years old.

Abdullah Saeed Mohammad, 16 years old, said that he gets paid well but I have been feeling pain in my lungs recently and I know it is from the dust, most workers here complain from chest pain and allergies but what should we do."

Abdulhamid, 15 years old, carry a heavy box on his head instead of carrying a toy, he walks through the rocks and rough roads instead of sitting in a classroom to learn! He wakes up at dawn to reach his workplace, where he has been working since he was in middle school, he had to drop out of school to provide a living for his family, and all he wishes for is to return to school and to be able to breathe through his right lung as it has stopped working completely after he inhaled lots of dust for the past 2 years.

Abdelhamid is not the only one who works in the marble empire, as there are 7 thousand children work in the second largest industrial area in the world and the first of its kind in the Middle East.

### The diseases of this deadly profession

Many scientific studies have been conducted on the effects of limestone and cement emissions on workers, however, officials neglected and kept silent in the face of the tragedy of tens of thousands of workers.

Dr. Asmaa Mahmoud, Assistant Professor, Department of Occupational Diseases and Environmental



Medicine, from the National Research Center, said that Chest Diseases and Pulmonary Seizures are the most common diseases among these workers, as well as osteoporosis that affects quarry and marble workers who use electric shredding machines that have been shown to lead to blood vessels contraction and affect the calcium in the bones, There are other diseases related to the inhalation of nitrate, nitric, nitroglycerine and lead. Although the law covers all these types, there are many types and categories that are not included in the occupational diseases table.

An ILO report on the conditions of workers in Egypt revealed that there are many categories of workers, especially irregular labour, who are not covered by Law 25 of 1977 on insurance against occupational accidents or diseases, the report focused on the fact that only 10.3 million beneficiaries are insured against occupational accidents and occupational injuries and that more than 4.6 million others are denied insurance against accidents and work injuries. "Shaq Al Tuban" workers are among those.

"We are exposed to many diseases such as allergies, pneumonia and skin diseases such as eczema and skin allergies, as well as eye diseases that sometimes require chang-

ing the cornea,” said Hassan Ali an accountant in one of the factories. “These diseases are widespread among workers in the empire of marble” he added. The marble industry is one of the industries that Europe has pronounced for reasons related to the size of the damage caused by it. Like the cement industry, it is an internationally reprehensible industry which produces pollutants that harm human health and the environment, that is why it is called “dirty industry”, which pushed Europe to get rid of it once and for all, especially after heavy pressure and sharp criticism from environmental protection organizations and civil society, in addition to the strict European environment laws, as a result of these efforts combined these industries have been completely removed from Europe once and for all, but this huge industry had to look for a new place less controlled and more cooperative, and certainly less concerned about the environment and health of its citizens.



# Jordan: Children silently swallow abuse in the labour market

Rania AL Sarayra - Member of Arab Trade Union Media Network

Jordan – Near the commercial market in AL Nasr district, Karma sits in his wheelchair trying to sell few bags of Mulukhya leaves and spinach. This boy who is under 13 years old waits quietly for passers-by to notice him and buy his goods, he does not call them to buy, he spends almost seven hours a day waiting.

Karam had become well known in this area, he does not only sells Mulukhya and spinach, as his goods vary depending on seasons, sometimes he sells Turmus, and sometimes he sells coated sweets.

While parents drop their kids off to school, Karam's mother drop him off to the same place every day, due to its closeness to his home.

Karam was not willing to talk to us, but his mother, who came to take him home before sunset, said "I had no other choice. It was difficult to keep him in the public school near our house, because he needs special care because of his disability, and the nearest center for special needs is not near, and I need to pay a sum of money for his transportation and I cannot afford it".

Karam's mother does not find it a problem that her child entered the labour market. In her opinion, she is "keeping him busy by doing something useful," as he tries to help a little with home expenses, his father works as a guard in a company, His income is not enough" she

says, "I am not worried about him, as I can see him from the window of the house", she added. Karam's mother is not worried about his son's future, as she says: "God will take care".

When we asked her if she got any assistance by the competent authorities, she commented "We did not resort to any party except for one center that recommended by the school counselor, however, when we went there we faced many obstacles such as securing his expenses in case he goes to the center."

## Legal control

Karam not only is a dropout who works in an irregular sector, but also a child with a disability who is supposed to be provided with double care and protection.

Articles 73 of the Labour Law ban the employment of children under the age of 16 and set limits on the employment of minors between the ages of 16 and 18. In the case of children with disabilities in the labour market, there appear to be no instructions, laws or even studies to indicate their situation, although the observers for their situation, indicate that the dropout rate among them is "very high", and therefore it is expected that part of them, has been engaged in the labour market.

This is confirmed by a member of the Senate, who is activist in the



field of the rights of persons with disabilities Dr. Muhannad al-Azza, who says: "people with disabilities file in general did not take its share of sufficient attention from various bodies," which doubled their number in the labour market.

This may be explained by the fact that laws and legislation do not discriminate between healthy children and their disabled counterparts, where persons with disabilities are included in child labour. However, activists demand greater attention to children with disabilities in the labour sector, as their suffering is doubling, because they are subjected to several violations more than their peers, despite the fact that both have been subjected to violations.

child labour has been on the rise, according to the figures by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), to over 79 thousand labouring children, compared to 44 thousand in 2007. Experts on child labour and policy call on the government to revisit economic policies, which have enforced social gaps and instigated poverty.

On the other hand, experts have also made the claim that the Inter-

national Community have been falling short in their responsibility towards Syrian refugees, and need to step in to prevent them from pushing their children as well into the labour market.

ILO conducted a census, recently, on the labour of children between the ages 5-7, and found that many of them work in hazardous fields to help provide for their families. The survey showed that most children work in wholesale and retail trade, as well as agriculture, forestry and fishing, and most children work more than 33 hours a week on average.

The survey, which was based on a sample of more than 20,000 families from all over the Kingdom, aimed at reaching estimates in each of the 12 Jordanian governorates, including the Za'tari camp, about "children being exposed to a number of risks, such as dust and smoke, Physical and psychological abuse".

On the occasion of the World Day against Child Labour, celebrated annually on the 12th of June, a paper issued yesterday by Phenix Center for Economic and Social Studies, said "Despite the clear provisions in Jordanian law prohibiting the employment of children under 16, as well as the employment of children aged 16 to 18 in hazardous occupations, reality often overrides policy."

"the number of children engaged in the Jordanian labour market, and the most recent statistical indicators, together with other official and unofficial figures shared among policy makers, researchers, specialists, and national and international institutions paint a more realistic picture of the phenomenon of child labour in Jordan," the paper added.

The rise in child labour in Jordan is owed to several factors accord-



ing to the paper" Some of these are endogenous, having to do with Jordan's own social and economic realities and dynamics, while others are exogenous, such as the inflow of hundreds of thousands of refugees into the country over the past years. Social inequality and a lack of social justice have largely been a consequence of fiscal and economic policies, placing a strong emphasis on liberalization, having been implemented with little regard for their social consequences. This produced a decline in living standards within several strata of the Jordanian population, especially among the poor."

The paper said that official figures indicate that poverty rates in Jordan increased from 13.3% to 14.4% between 2008 and 2010, and had risen to nearly 20% by 2014 (a fact which was not reported by the government), while the percentage of those living in "transient poverty," meaning that they live in poverty for a minimum of three months a year (that is, the lower middle class) has reached 18.6% of the population, according to World Bank figures.

"Unfortunately, as of June 2017, no new figures have been released regarding poverty levels in Jordan. This is especially relevant since working children usually come from poor families who are forced to push them into the labour market out of a need for additional income or an inability to continue supporting their education, "according to the paper .

The paper said that the Syrian refugee crisis has also contributed to the rise in child labour in Jordan. As mentioned previously, a large number of Syrian children are engaged in the national labour market – approximately 11,100, or 14.6% of the total number of child workers, because the basic services provided by international organizations related to the relief of Syrian refugees were weak.

The Jordanian women's solidarity association institute said that "reducing child labour requires effective action to alleviate economic vulnerabilities, using social protection tools, and through the implementation of relevant international conventions and local laws."



## Iraq: Working Children: Men before Time

Ashraf Zalzali / Member of Arab Trade Union Media Network.

Away from the center of the capital, where brick factories' chimneys fill the sky of Nahrawan city located in the outskirts of Baghdad, and cause lots of environmental waste, there is Haidar (12 years old) who works in Al Ameer Brick factory with his siblings and family from early morning till evening, in order to earn a small amount that does not exceed ten thousand Iraqi dinars equal to (8) dollars.

Since years, Haidar has been working in this hard work that has no alternative to help his family coping with difficult living conditions they live in. He says: "My family and I came here more than three years ago from one of the southern provinces to look for a job opportunity that can afford us a living. We found however this hard work only that provided us a mud house as

well as a work for me and my two siblings, so we can earn enough to meet our food needs. That forced me to leave my studies in the middle school last year to engage in my work.

Haidar is not the only child who works at this age. There are more than 30 people working in that factory distributed to families that work in whole in the brick industry. Brick is made of sand and oil waste that are burned to turn the sand into bricks. Each family has to have a child aged between eight and six years to work with it. While Haidar agreed to talk about his work, parents of many other children refused to let them talk about it so they don't get fired by their employer, who collects and brings them from the poor southern provinces in order to make a deal with the owners

of factories for the purpose of letting them work as a group and not individuals.

Eight – year- old Sajjad also agreed to talk about his work after many attempts to persuade him to do so. His family members believed that work is better than pursuing education for him due to their inability to afford its requirements including clothes and other things. As a result, he did not join school. He says about his long hours of work: "I start working with my siblings from 8 am to 12 pm, get a lunch break, and then go back to work from 1 pm to 5 pm in the afternoon.

Sajjad and Haidar talk about many children of their age who were affected by fatigue and various illnesses while laboring in the same work. Those illnesses resulted from exposure to the burning sun and fuel gases. However, the most thing they get is medical care provided in a small room where a simple medical assistant works with his tools and medicines.

Phenomenon of child labor doesn't spread only in the outskirts of the capital; it is also spreading and being exacerbated day after another to reach high levels, especially after high levels of poverty and displacement of more than 3 million citizens from the areas that were subject to terrorism and occupation of ISIS. Media man and the presenter of social programs, Ahmad Al-Hasan (29 years old) raised such phenomena a lot for discussion. He believes that the first factor contributing in the diffusion of child labor is the economic situation and conditions of displacement, which forced families fleeing from ISIS's oppression to encourage their young children to work in any affordable profession to contribute in improving their conditions inside camps and houses that are inhabited with early manhood.

On the other hand, some social activists see that reality of deteriorated education contributed sometimes in occurrence of that situation and influenced by it at other times. Activist Mustafa Al-Omaeidi (32 years old) from Diwania province in Southern Iraq, believes that the rural nature of most southern provinces deals with the child as he is a young man, where he should be treated in the same manner as treating an adult in the purpose of creating a masculine personality. That leaves him with the option of dropping out of school which leads to the choice of work as an alternative for study. This is what prompted us to search for the seriousness of this subject. As according to statistics of the Ministry of Education, there are more than two million dropout children that did not join schools, and this is one of the most important factors that create a serious environment for replacing the book with the mattock of work.

Activist Mustafa Al-Omaeidi also believes that high rates of child workers led to a decline in rates of school enrollments. That in turn led to an opposite effect achieved by both equations through widening the phenomenon's circle that attracts families to employ their children, get them away from their classes, and contribute in creation of illiterate generation that is unable to read or write. That will also contribute in letting children speak the language of interests and money only, and accept any work or mean that justify the purposes, regardless of their negativities or positivists to the individual and society.

### Procedures without Deterrence

Risks of child labor are not about breaching the law by employment of minors only; they even exceed that to reach further levels. President of the General Federation of Trade Unions in Iraq, Mr. Sattar Donbous Barak says that this phenomenon is very dangerous, as it is associated with cases of exploitation and harassment that cause violence to the children and denial of their rights with absence of any defender, not to mention quality of the work carried out by those young children and its hard nature, which can't be borne by the adults themselves so imagine its impacts on the children and their fragile bodies that cannot stand for hours under the burning sun of Iraq. In addition of work of blacksmithing, car repair, and lots of other works in which we cannot find a facility affiliated to them that is free of a child worker, who works in something that is not meant for him.

Regarding their procedures as a trade union against this phenomenon, he says that the trade union took more than one procedure and filed cases to the compe-



tent authorities as well as the Ministry of Labor. However, necessary procedures were not taken and no one moved to stop this phenomenon. Therefore poor control and deterrence were upon reasons of the spread of this phenomenon.

According to Mr. Sattar Donbous, dozens of filed cases remained without a solution or an immediate procedure. That led him to propose solutions which included formation of special divisions and detachments that are interested in this matter, to arrest offenders of child labor and its associated problems in order to stop this phenomenon.

### Steps and Attempts

Head of Information and Government Communication at Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs in Iraq – the body responsible for taking procedures and implementing mechanisms – says that the Ministry does not deny in its turn the spread of the phenomenon, confirming its continues work aims to stop it through many steps taken by its institutions in cooperation with international and local organizations. Those steps include conducting a recent quick and general assessment about the worst forms of employment in five Iraqi provinces, in cooperation with UNICEF and Iraqi Al-Amal Association, and referral of a number of employers to the courts as a result of violating child labor law, as well as formation of Child Labor Control Unit in the Employment and Loan Department that arranges visits to the formal business sectors to monitor violations of child labor laws and conditions.

## Laws on the Shelf

Laws of Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs stipulate various penalties against the person responsible for the child labor, ranging from financial penalties, to suspension of the employer's work permits, or even suspension of his activity. According to the human trafficking law, whoever exploits a person who is not aware of his rights, such as children, shall be punished by imprisonment or a fine. Internationally, Convention on the Rights of the Child states that: "States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development."

Despite all those laws, thousands of children are still scattered in the markets, industrial neighborhoods, and waste dumps working in the harshest conditions that do not comply with any laws, in order to provide a few dinars in the purpose of protecting the family from poverty and hunger. Here the legal expert Ali Jaber Al-Tamimi explains more about these laws and their latest amendments in Iraq, indicating that labor law No.37 of 2015 prohibits employment of children under the age of 18 and prevents employment of those aged between 15 and 18 under conditions, supervision and specific professions, stipulating a penalty for employers in case the law is breached. But in the end, those laws despite of their adoption were born semi-paralyzed as they remain without implementation. They are only set without being implemented as a result of the country's economic circumstances and repeated wars, which made attention paid for such phenomena a secondary matter, forgetting that disregarding those laws leads to



create time bombs in the future. Another legal expert is the attorney Odai Al-lami, who shares the same opinion and stresses that child labor which is widespread these days carries in its pouches too much vagueness that may drag those children –after bearing the early responsibility and dealing with older persons - to commit illegal acts that have already occurred in our society and the victims were child workers. Those illegal acts include child trafficking, or exposure to the trade of human organs by gangs scattered to hunt such opportunities. Add to that leaving their education which is the basic weapon of each child in the face of future's challenges.

In conclusion, laws are written on papers, but they do not go beyond the limits of the book in which they were written in, according to specialists who believe that child labor has become a phenomenon and a feature that exists wherever the work is, in search of money after all situations of poverty and wars in Iraq. In addition to exploitation committed by employers because of children's compliance and acceptance for all hardships of work, which ultimately leads to a flagrant violation of the child rights after the

widespread disregard of the parties concerned, as well as the fact that the children will represent time bombs which explode by spreading drugs and theft, exploiting them in incidents of terrorism and crime due to the easy manipulation of their small minds. That leaves us with the question: When was there a value to the human being under wars so there is a value for children?



## Lebanon: More than 100,000 children work in hazardous environments

Jameela Haddad – Member of Arab Trade Union Media Network

Lebanon - Three years ago, the Lebanese National Committee for Combating Child Labour, in collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO), estimated the number of children who were victims of child labour and trafficking in Lebanon at over 100,000. At the time, it was reported that Lebanon may be among the “countries with the highest proportion of children in the world, between 10 and 17 years of age.”

The number of children working today, many of whom are known as “street children”, has doubled over the last three years due to the increasing number of Syrian refugees and the deteriorating economic situation in the country, according to some concerned.

Salam has been working in a car repair garage for almost two years, he wakes up early every day and head to his work, he says that after two years of hard work his employer trust him to open the garage early and welcome the costumers. Salam is a clear example of child labour, those whose childhood has been put on hold, those who are forced to grow up too fast too soon, and those we see in “movies”: dirty clothes from car oil, and

rough hands tired features. He says he has never been to school ever “my family can’t afford the school expenses.” He gives what he earns to his mother as his father passed away four years ago.

A study titled “Children Living and Working on the Streets in Lebanon: Profile and Magnitude” carried out in February 2015 by the International Labor Organization (ILO), in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour , and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and Save the Children International (SCI), reported that 62 per cent of children on the streets never attended school And that only 8% of street children have passed primary school.

The link between child labour and the so-called “street children” is due to the adoption by the ILO of the “children on the street” as a general term that include two categories: children living on the street and children working on the street. The second category includes street-based businesses and begging, as well as forms of activities that attract children to the streets among these activities: Sexual exploitation, drug trafficking, militia activities, using children to burn up tires and oth-

ers. Work for these two categories, in addition to begging, includes the production of goods and services, whether or not they are market oriented or paid, whether these goods were legitimate activities or not.

Hence, begging or sale of goods falls within the adopted general term “children in the streets”.

Samira (6 years old), for example is a Syrian girl, she heads to Al-Ghubairi checkpoint in the southern suburbs of Beirut, to sell Gardenia. She waits for cars to cross the checkpoint; she jumps from one car to another to sell the flowers. She does not talk much and gets scared easily, perhaps because she is still the youngest among her peers, she did not get tough yet.

Less than 5 percent is the proportion of children working on the streets between the ages of 5 and 6 years, according to the study, which shows that 26% of children working in the street between (5 to 8 years) are working with no adult accompaniment.

The same study also shows that females start working on the streets at an early age (8 years and 11 months) compared to males (9 years and 11 months).

Samira falls into children who work as street vendors category. These people usually go to overcrowded places and witness a rush of traffic to sell their goods, in Adahyeh, for example, they are distributed on the airport bridge and the al-Ghubairi checkpoint. Children's work is concentrated in the streets of urban areas such as Greater Beirut and Tripoli areas. . The most prominent areas that witness the phenomenon of child labour are: Hamra, the new road and the National Museum area.

Children involved in begging account for 43% of all children working in the streets, followed by children who work as street vendors (37%), and the rest are distributed to seven other types of activities ranging from waste pickers, shoe-shine, car glass cleaning, and others.

It is worth mentioning that a large number of children working as street vendors prefer to work "independently", pointing out that they have been beaten and exploited by their employer.

Ali (14 years ) who sells bags of paper tissues in Beirut , says that he worked in a gas station two years ago but his employer was not paying his on time and used to hit him in front of customers that is why he prefers to work independently and make his own money.

The average daily income of children in the streets is estimated at 16,000 Lebanese pounds, equivalent to about 10 US dollars, while the average daily income of begging children is about 13,000 Lebanese pounds, equivalent to about 8 USD. Unfortunately, a large part of the children give everything they earn to others (often family members). These make up about 56% of all working children.

Therefore, Lebanese people in gen-



eral see that that these children, especially the beggars, should be given what they can benefit directly from, such as food, clothing, etc. Therefore, about 57% of the children in the streets receive their food from passersby.

It should be noted that in 2012, has developed a list of hazardous work occupied by children. Street children topped the list, because it exposes children to violence and dangerous environment.

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# Mauritania:

## Child Labor... Between Law and Reality

Ahmad Salem/ Member of Arab trade union media network



Mauritania – as an African country at the Atlantic coast is not away from the child labor phenomenon, despite of the governmental efforts to combat this phenomenon. A worrying statistics about child labor minors and manifestations of children suffering time, toiling in careers much bigger than their ages. Most notably is working on donkey carts, vehicle's repair sits and even in houses for low salaries.

Sead Almen, a child of 11 years old working on a donkey cart in – Dar Almen district/ at the Mauritanian capital Nouakchott.

You fell when you are talking to him

that you are talking to a 30- year young man. And because of his job – Sead Alnaem- build thoughts related to financial collection, work and money on the expense of educational achievement because of spending most of his time out home and school.

He says even that his parents are a live it didn't prevent his grandfather on giving him a donkey cart to work on it all day at the holidays. But his fondness of education is still a barrier in the face of leaving and getting out of school altogether, he's at the fourth grade, and after the completion of he's examinations superiority he goes back to alleys nocking

at house's doors to carry garbage and move it to a non-secure waste dumps at the nearest plaza. "I have two brothers, one is at the army and the other works, and even that I gain money I can't purchase clothes that I like at days of –Eid-, my father is the one who do it, all money I gain goes to my grandfather, he sometimes purchase some sweats for me and sometimes he doesn't" says Saed Almen.

For – Alnbhani- is not the same case, who was forced by the divorce of his parents to support his family which is composed of his jobless mother and twin brothers. The family lives at truck parking, they guard

it at night and gain a small sum (50 USD monthly).

At the north of Mauritania and specifically at the economic capital – Nwathebo- talking about money becomes a daily necessity because the city is a city of plants and fishing. “Work and money” is the main topic in any discussion. It is precisely in this city that immigrants are spread, whose regional migration policies have prevented them from traveling to Europe and refuse to go back to their countries, holding by their dream in reaching the Europeans beaches a cross the Atlantic ocean which links Mauritania with the Spanish Islands -Las Palmas. The ability of reaching of those to Spain nowadays is – Zero case-, after the reaching of -36 thousand Mauritanian immigrants to Spain soil coming from Mauritania in the year 2006.

In the city everyone and by different ages are seeking for work, at vehicles repairing garages and in other places, everyone is working or seeking for work.

Mohammad Wald Alsufee- the “coordinator of children and development association” is racing time to hold the child’s case in his rehabilitation active center on protecting children from exposure to risk. Mohammad tells the story of the beginning of the association which started at the late 1990s exactly at the year 1998, where the association started its activities in the capital Nouakchott. In 2010 they transferred their work to- Nwathebo- city, where they counted hundreds of displaced children, working daily for living at any place, without any safety procedures.

Says Mohammad: “We found children working and sleeping at streets and in scrap vehicles, so we took the lead in pulling out those children from their miserable situation and getting them back to the normal life. The main trouble we faced was that those -6 thousand- children were without identification papers because of parent’s absence or



lack of parent’s marriage contracts, so we start with the important procedures for marriage contracts and children school registration until we succeed at the end.”

After that –wald Alsufee- start following up the underage working children in cooperation with local authorities and the ministry, by establishing statistics data about – child case- and comprehensive protection against the exposure of children to the risk of working outside labor laws.

Esha Bent Sae’ed-, a child of 13-years at- Wald Alsufee- center, she left her sixth grad school classes because of hard living circumstances, and by total agreement of her family. “I came to the center to learn a profession and to work; I started to learn sewing after a conversation between my friends and myself, and I am much better now after training at the center! I love what I do” says Esha.

Says- Zainab Bent Mohammed- the regional coordinator of the Mauritanian ministry of childhood and family that they adapted a comprehensive child protection system led by the local authorities, it had been adapted since 2010 with

a lot of goals to achieve such as the elimination of child labor by involving them again into normal life with cooperation of educational sector which gives ability in returning many children into regular schools. Adds –Bent Mohammad-: children’s families gave excuses about children labor saying that by their work they can support us by gaining more money for living, that’s way we look for a new income sources by financing profitable activities that gave children the chance in going back to schools.

## Obstacles

Says -Alrabea’a Adoum-: representative of the Euro-Mediterranean migration (civil society foundation), that the biggest reasons in aggravating child labor phenomenon in Mauritania are the increased rates of family disintegration, poverty, dropping out of schools, non-monitoring of school-age children, migration from rural areas to large cities because of drought that is hitting the Mauritanian desert, which leads families to face challenges in integration into large cities. Wald Alaoum-thinks that” the poorest families are who is forcing their children to work and to leave schools, thinking that with such be-

have they will increase their income and get a better living for the child and for his family at the same time, specially within fragile layers of Mauritanian community”.

The university professor and sociology Dr-Alhussain wald Bdede- sees that:”that child labor is complicated phenomenon produced by several overlapping factors, such as economic factors (poverty...), sociologist (family disintegration...), and the others are represented in the high fertility and migration from rural areas. All those factors together exists in Mauritania, that’s why is normal to see such phenomenon.”

The Dr. adds “this phenomenon is remarkably widespread, and the elimination of it is an elusive goal under those factors, but that doesn’t mean that is impossible to limit them to achieve that goal. We can do that by adapting several procedures such as: the existence of deterrent laws, activation of existing laws which criminalize child labor, conducting media campaigns to show the negative effects of this phenomenon on children and community, crating and activating the partnership among all institutions to combat this phenomenon, taking strict actions against who employs children and to raise awareness of children’s rights among those who deal with children in order of reducing violations.”



## Strategies for the Mauritanian state

The Mauritanian state has adapted a five year plan named as the –National plan for eliminating child labor- (2015-2020), the plan was prepared by ministry of public service in order to participate in eliminating child labor in line with international conventions which protects children in time of war and peace. The plan focuses around five points:

1. Strengthening the legal and institutional frameworks in combating child labor.
2. Strengthening the technical and practical capacities of actors.
3. Observing child labor and its harmful forms.
4. Execution of direct activities to combat child labor in its harmful forms in all sectors and fields.
5. Cooperation, coordination and partnership.

A government report has been made in 2015 and has been adapted by the Mauritanian government to release its five year plan points that about – 300 thousand- Mauritanian girls and boys under 15 are exposed to several faces of violence, exploitation, discrimination, offenses and neglecting cases.

The statistics of the report shows that more than -18 thousand – child between 5-14 year are child labor (early work) victims, and about -31 thousand- orphan including the (AIDS epidemic), 1,000- at least of homeless children, 7,000 disabled child and 10,000 at least of deportees, refugees and immigrants. Most of child labor victims are females, working as a domestic in hard circumstances, (about 15% of them are subjected to sexual abuse).

The report recommended that there are obstacles and it should be considered and to understand the unacceptable dangerous of child labor and that there is a real need for media for pointing out at all community segments the right understanding of child labor.

Mauritania has released several regulations of child labor according the law 2004/017 in the sixth of July 2004 including blog work in its comprehensive parts at book 3 ( work conditions) – address 1 (work of female and children) article 135-169, at address 5 (health and safety) article 246-248 and article 135- about age of admission to work which states that” it’s not admitted at any institution to employ children even as trainees before reaching age -14 or if they reached this age and they are subjected to compulsory education. Except child from both genders who reached 12 can work in fishing under the specific conditions in article 154, and that they work in institutions where a member of their family is working at. The conditions are: (1) permit of minister in charge. (2) Without prejudice on arrangements of compulsory education. (3) Not to harm their health and normal growth. (4) The work should not exceed two hours per day.

Article -247 related in preventing some works states that” is not prevented to employ children under 18 and pregnant women in works that may harm by its nature their health, physical safety or morals.”

As children such as - Sead Almen- remain in his daily work, child labor in Mauritania will remain a complicated mater under non-deterrent laws and facing the problem of implementation especially with limited income, poverty and illiteracy that force their families to toss them into streets and facing life challenges out of school classes.

# Mauritania: Child Labor Increases among Lack of Law Enforcement and Poverty of the People

Abadat Mohammad / Member of Arab Trade Union Media Network.



Mauritania – Obligated to leave their classrooms, and forced by the difficult circumstances of life to keep up with adults, they found themselves in a market for work, which is originally closer to a black market, and characterized by a general absence of organized laws that do not meet the most basic safety standards.

Children of Mauritania are the title of misery and unhappiness. Their innocence does not brought them any tenderness or compassion as the most important thing for their families is letting them work to earn their daily living, and often contribute in supporting entire families.

This is a reality that is lived by people of Mauritania and resulted from policy of exclusion and deprivation, which is followed by the modern Mauritanian state system. Descendants of slaves and former slaves are the group that is impacted the most by this system, especially their children in general and minors in particular. The miserable reality of those children's families enforce them to engage in some dishonest work on one hand, and works they do not have the ability to practice them due to their vulnerability and young age on the other hand, and that puts them at great risk.

However, the reality of misery, deprivation, harsh living conditions, and absence of job opportunities for these children's parents forced them to work under the impact of sufferance. This reality forced Abdullah, Salikah, and Ismail to work in places that are not suitable for children, but the desire to survive and support the family support is the motive behind that.

Some human rights organizations on the other hand are working to fight those exclusive policies in order to mitigate that suffering. Those organizations include Independent Confederation of Mauritanian workers, and SOS slaves which are active in these fields. Since decades, The confederation has been conducting many activities aim to raise awareness of the great risks that result from child labor, and create a climate that protects the child, and ensures provision of all his needs so he cannot be exposed to such bad conditions.

Abdullah is an innocent child, and this appears from his looks. However, time has robbed that sense of in-



nocence, as Abdullah competes the eldest people in the port market to sell used clothes that are locally called (Pfko Jay). Abdullah uses a local cart, which requires the power to move from one place to another, where many men cannot do that. But the harsh living conditions of the innocent child and his family that waits for him every evening to have what helps it in making its dinner, enforce him to compete the adults regardless the difficulties he may face, which can result in health complications because he doesn't have the ability to drag the cart from one place to another.

Ironically, Abdullah pays a regular tribute and tax to the municipality and the police, and in case of his inability to do so, his property is taken and detained by the police until he pays the tax.

Abdullah's same-age peer, Salikah bent Mohammad Ali reached the third year in her primary school, but her family's conditions forced her to leave the school to labor continuously in domestic work for seventeen hours, with a salary amounted at 10000 MRO, which is equal to 40 dollars per month.

As for Ismail who did not exceed his first year in the school, he works also in cleaning houses from dirt, and that puts his health at risk. He works for a daily salary of 500 MRO, equal to two dollars a day.

In Mauritania, children work in various classified and unclassified fields and sectors, such as agriculture, fishing, and working on carts (weightlifting, waste collection, selling used clothes, work in car repair garages (mechanics), and construction equipment manufacturing workshops)

According to a report prepared by the Mauritanian Commission for Human Rights - which is an official governmental body- that evaluates the status of rights in Mauritania for the year of 2016, more than a quarter of Mauritanian children (26%) aged between of 15 and 17

years old are working, while ratio of children aged between of 12 and 14 years old who are participating in a work reaches 22%.

The report indicated that exploitation of girls is widespread more in the field of domestic work. The report pointed out that about 300 thousand children under the age of 15 are at risk of violence, exploitation, discrimination, omissions and negligence.

Ratio of child labor varies from sector to sector, as agriculture comes first in terms of employment, followed by the fishing sector.

According to an informal study, 70% of the children working in agriculture are employed in the fields of seasonal agriculture, flood agriculture and model farms (irrigated agriculture). All workers in these fields do not earn a specific income; rather they work for the families and under the tutelage of the father and mother, excluding those who work in irrigated agriculture, as they work for less than 2 dollars a day, and this work is done outside all labor laws and regulations.

Ratio of workers laboring in the field of fishing is ranging from 1/4 and 2/5 of the workers laboring in traditional boats, in the absence of safety procedures, where many of them lose their lives due to loss of marine safety equipment and mechanisms. In addition to that they are exposed to other risks which result in abnormal and unusual behavior, because the children are brought up there in the sea.

Whereas for carrying loads and luggage on carts, and providing clean drinking water, most of the workers are children, even if there is no official studies to determine their ratio. There is also a serious phenomenon that threatens thousands of children, which is the forced labor under the name of slavery, where thousands of children working with families - who do not have anything to do with them except for claiming that they are their slaves - are

working in unethical and inhuman conditions at homes, grazing livestock, agricultural fields and palm fields.

Those children were liberated by a human rights organization, which is SOS slaves in Mauritania at the end of 2015. They were grazing hundreds of sheep's heads in the areas located inside Mauritania, in unethical and inhuman conditions. Until the time of their liberation, they did not know anything and their whole talk was about grazing sheep. As for education, their parents -who appear with them at an advanced age- know nothing about it except for its name.

Despite the Mauritanian government's recognition regarding this family, which confirms their exposure to practices that are contrary to values, it failed to redress those children, making the African Court of Justice decide on their file.

Causes of child labor in Mauritania are due to a number of factors. Some of them are social factors while the others are social factors. The widespread poverty in the country, poverty that reaches a ratio of 70%, the extreme poverty of over 40%, displacement of children through family disintegration, and absence of the state's role and its application to laws concerning children, especially in the field of education, made child labor an inevitable fate.



# Palestine: Child Labour Take A dangerous Turn

Israa Ghorani – Member of Arab Trade Union Media Network

Palestine- Child labour is a thorny and common problem in the Arab countries, and it is growing at an alarming rate due to the ongoing crises in the region which accompanied with increasing levels of poverty and bad economic conditions, forcing children to work at an early age, however, child labour in Palestine is a bit more serious than any other country, as hundreds of children are smuggled into the Green Line and in settlements through brokers, unaware of the risks and exploitation they may face.

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics for the year 2016, there are 34,700,000 workers who are between 10-17 years old. The number of children working in the West Bank stands at 28,000 compared with 6,700 in the Gaza Strip.

Attorney Salah Abu Saud of the International Defense for Children movement says that Palestinian children are engaged in many forms of work, there are children working in the agricultural seasons in the Jordan Valley and Jericho, while other work in construction, and some of them work in garages, restaurants, basically children work in all sectors.

Palestinian Labour Law for the year 2000 prohibits the employment of children under the age of 15, the law also sets the working conditions of the child between 15 and 18 years, as they are prohibited from working in remote and excavation areas, and should not work at night, and requires any institution to hang the regulations on child labour on walls, and allow children to take medical examination every six months.



Abu-Saud discussed some of the positive aspects that have been added to the Palestinian laws that may limit the employment of children at an early age, including determining the age of compulsory education up to the age of 16, which means that children under age of 16 are not allowed to leave school and if did their parents will be charged in court. After the age of 16, it is possible to transfer the student who does not wish to complete his academic education to vocational training, which allows him to enter the labour market at the legal age. However, there are some weaknesses and gaps in the application of these laws according to Al –Saud, the labour law allows the children to work from the age of 15 years and the education law of to make determined the age of compulsory education up to the age of 16 years, and all these issues need to be addressed to ensure that children would not enter labour market. Children are exposed to many violations in workplace as employers prefer to employ four or five children with a salary of one adult. In agriculture sector for example, they tend to hire children because adults demand higher wages, and children are exposed to work injuries because they are unaware of the work safety, according to Abu Saud.

Children working in the settlements are exposed to a more dangerous situation, they are exposed to vari-



ous kinds of risks and exploitation of their rights, especially that they are outside the control of the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian authorities.

In addition to poverty and the economic factor, children can be motivated to work for a number of reasons, including: lack of awareness among parents, failure to study, and bad companions. When a student drops school and starts work and earn money he encourages the rest of the students to do so.

Many children from the West Bank go to work inside the Green Line as brokers smuggle them through, exposing them to great danger. They are forced to enter this way because they have not reached the age and for obtaining permits from the Israeli side.

In this context, Abu Al-Saud noted that the risks are greatly increased. If a child gets injured, no one will recognize him because of his illegal presence. He is forced to stay in unsafe areas and becomes vulnerable to sexual assaults or other violations.

He added that one of the greatest dangers the children face when

working inside the Green Line is exploitation by the Israeli intelligence and they involve children to cooperate with the occupation.

For his part, Mamoun Odeh, director of the Juvenile Labour Department at the Ministry of Labour, pointed out that although the percentage of children who are smuggled to work inside the Green Line is less than those who work in the West Bank, they are exposed to dangerous violations. , children smuggled inside the Green Line work in many sectors and they get involved in begging, theft, and acts that may be illegal such as the smuggling drugs. Odeh said that the one of the biggest danger a child might face is that the broker and the employer inform the child who wishes to return to his home that he must surrender himself to the Israeli police which in turn hand him over to the Palestinian police, the children are held for a while by the Israeli police and therefore can be exploited by intelligence who might force them to cooperate with the occupation, and they might accept the deal just to be able to return home.

The risk to children is not limited to what they may face during and after their work, but risks start from the

moment they are smuggled. Some of them are smuggled into vegetable refrigerators and continue to work for months. Sometimes families deal with the broker to send their children to work inside The Green Line thinking that they will work in fields and they are not fully aware of the risks the children may face as they sleep in farms and under bridges or inside caravans and abandoned homes, and there are fears of drug and alcohol abuse, children might face the risk of dealing with brothels or drug smuggling all this is possible as long as the child is out of family control.

As for the mechanism of the Ministry of Labour dealing with the issue of brokers, Odeh stressed that these cases are treated as criminal and the Palestinian Child Law, prohibits the exploitation of any child or the exploitation of any child or smuggling children to dangerous areas or beyond the borders of the state. But it is often impossible to punish brokers for their actions being carried out outside the control of the Palestinian Authority, ie, in the areas of barriers and crossings, and thus the inability to take punitive measures against brokers.

As for the actions of the International Defense for Children movement, attorney Salah Abu Al-Saud noted that there are two aspects in which we can eliminate child labour. The first is preventive prevent awareness, where the movement operates workshops and at this stage, and targeting Ghore area, the child protection teams carry out follow-ups and reports to monitor the phenomenon. The other side is a therapeutic aspect through field trips in all governorates, where the team deal with children who work and file a complaint against the employers and return the child back to the school or to vocational training to learn a profession until completion of legal age .

# Tunisia: Economic exploitation of young girls: the dream of life between two sharp bows: family and brokers

Sharaz Al Rahali – Member of Arab Trade Union Media Network



Tunisia - "Sometimes I have to accompany her to her relative's homes during family occasions in summer times to help with the cleaning, sometimes she sends me alone to their homes also to help them in housework"

"I do as she tells me, whether in her home or in the house of her relatives when they have an occasion and I cannot go back to my parent's house" with these words, Kinza, 17 years old, tells her story, her name means treasure but she does not feel that her fate matches the meaning of her name.

Kniza works as a sleep-in domestic worker for a family of 6 members, she earns 350 Tunisian Dinars (153

US dollars a month). She had to enter the labour market early to support her family, burying her dreams of a life inside the valleys of her village.

Kniza was able to get this work by one of her acquaintances, who also works in another house, her parents did not oppose sending her to work they didn't even bothering to check the conditions under which their child will work.

## Vacancies without requirements

Domestic work ads start as follows: a family is looking for a domestic worker (sometimes says sleep – in domestic worker and sometimes they do not mention this) with salaries that seem attractive to the ads writer because he knows very well to whom he directs his announcement, salaries say up to 450 Tunisian dinars (197 US dollars) and without specifying the age. The brokers begin to search for girls from poor and uneducated families as it is fragile grounds that accept such conditions.

The story of these girls' life begins and ends the same as what "A" has been through. She spent more than 15 years working as a domestic worker but when she got sick, she returned to her parent's house without social security or health insurance, however, her suffering did not end here she had to work in a farm

which was not less merciful than her previous work. She was afraid to talk but the looks of her eyes revealed everything.

Brokers have also become recruiting companies, as we notice this ad "domestic worker is needed immediately to work for a prominent and well-known Tunisian families on daily, monthly or sleep-in basis, cleaning workers are also required to work in private companies, salaries range between 250 and 350 d (109 and 153 US dollars) please contact the company's headquarters." By following such ads we could notice that there are no age requirements?

There are departments for the protection of children in all governorates across the country, but Mohsen Dabousi from Jendouba governorate associations network confirms the spread of the phenomenon there, "Among the major problems and causes of employing young girls phenomenon is the early school dropout and poverty help parents push their daughters to work at an early age" he says. We provide livelihood to families to eliminate the need for their daughters to work. Livelihoods are mainly sheep breeding, opportunities were also provided for those who mastered the confectionery industry. We hope that authorities would create and develop rural girls' centers because it may support our efforts" he adds.

Manhajya an activists from Ghardimaou area confirms that girls who work in farms are exposed to stress due to the nature of their work they often faint and get sick, however they are only paid a daily wage of 10 Tunisian Dinars (US \$ 4.3) and always without guarantees. The activists also confirms that in other areas The efforts of some civil society activists to call mothers often to raise awareness of what girls can take risks when they are employed at an early age of the country brokers are always looking for girls to work as domestic worker. Some civil society activists are joining efforts to

raise awareness among mothers of what girls can take risks when they are employed at an early age.

Child protection departments rely on the reporting mechanism to act on a case-by-case basis. In a report on the situation of childhood in Tunisia in 2016, about 1,0057 cases were recorded, an increase of about 15% compared to 2015, child protection delegates received 6999 cases, of which 29.5% were characterized by parental or childcare disability. The child abuse for begging and economic exploitation were 62 cases at the national level and were monitored only in 14 governorates. Tunisia topped the list with 30.6% of total cases through 19 cases.

Al-Zein, a civil society activist, warns that concerned departments have failed with child protection in terms of creating mechanisms to help parents stop sending their daughters to labour markets. Confirming that they monitored daily early school dropouts.

### Specific areas for the provision of domestic workers

The Children's commission in Beja Governorate confirms the phenomenon without having official data to rely on reporting. As long as it

does not receive a report on the existence of abuse, the responsible department for child protection moves and undertakes its efforts to diagnose the situation and carry out the necessary measures.

Hadia Jbara said that when the child is being economically exploited, the commission takes action to return the child to the school in 24 hours. If the matter is not carried out, the public prosecutor get informed.. "We are aware that there are networks of brokers in the areas of Jendouba, Fernana and other areas, but we do not have any reliable access to informations about them" she says. Phenomenon is wide spread only need to be confirmed," she adds.

Boubaker Ben Abbas from the Child Protection Office in Kasserine province confirms that in his administration girls are not exposed to employment and says it is isolated cases not a phenomenon, but confirms that children do work in the agricultural sector and in other labour markets, as he received few cases. "We are trying to provide vocational training to children, for the province of Kasserine, the representatives of child protection face many problems like the lack

of transport means and lack of psychologists, this is why we choose the preventive awareness aspect with the emphasis that it becomes more difficult when the family is not coherent. About 90% of childhood threats are due to family disintegration," he adds. The Department of Child Protection in Kasserine governorate receives 700 child violations per year, usually the mother reports the case.

We went to the most controversial provinces that organize weekly market every Friday, selling young girls, however some components of civil society denied the existence of such markets.

Shaima Jendoubi who works for the Office of Protection of Children in Jendouba province confirms that the figures published do not reflect the reality due to difficulties in follow-up, Despite the tendency to alert and raise awareness among parents, but the state does not have mechanisms to ban them from sending children to work and even if the girl returned to study, no one can follow up due to lack of human resources and because family do not really want their daughters to study.

Hoda Aboudi, head of the office Child Protection Commissioner in EL Kef, also stresses that the economic exploitation may be ignored and the role of the administration in this regard is to raise awareness and organize workshops for officials and mayor in the event of a girl dropped out of school or did not show up in her home for days. "Of the 8 cases of intimidation under chapter 20 of the Tunisian Child Rights magazine, which are carried out by child protection departments, there is economic exploitation and involvement of children in organized criminal acts, which are the two cases where we do not receive any complaints about," she says.

Mounira Hammami, member of the governing body of the Tunisian Women's Association for Research





on Development and domestic worker aids, added that their struggle aims towards ensuring more rights and providing social coverage rights and setting a minimum age for them.

### Temporary Employment Agencies

With monthly or annual contributions, some random offices may provide jobs according to the conditions of the job applicant and according to the level of education, they contact the applicants via phone calls or messages, to inform them about available vacancies.

The General Union of Occupations and Services which works under the umbrella of the Tunisian General Union of Labor, affirms that all

private employment offices are not legal and unrecognized, as they exploit vulnerable groups. According to official data, the poverty rate in Tunisia for the year 2015 reached 15.2% and the highest rate in the Western Region is estimated at 42.3%.

Civil society and official departments of the state does not deny the existence of economic exploitation, but it takes more courage to address the issue, the Minister of Women and Childhood dared to talk about a weekly market that sells girls. as long as no one speak up about this file, it would be impossible to predict the recorded violations.

# Tunisia: Child Labor ... soft hands under the iron of exploitation

Sabri Alzuqaidi/ Member of Arab trade union media network



Tunisia- the issue of child labor emerged significantly in Tunisia after the revolution -14 Janfe /2011. Although the numbers of this case are scant, many civil community NGOs from the raised up the alarm because of the outbreak of this phenomenon at the same time where the country is facing critical conditions at all layers.

All of legal institutions, trade unions, child defense associations and a large number of state's institutions have increased its level of fear in consider of children joining labor market and the weakness of protection which threatens their rights in having a kind childhood, happiness and good health.

The first accused in spreading this phenomenon in Tunisia is the state, which remained unable to resist this problem, and its weak aware-

ness programs targeting families and parents who lead their children to work and begging because of the poverty and need of money, unknowing the risks that may face their children such as violence and sexual exploitation and its negative affectless on their health.

## Need Cause Reasons

Exceptionally and in -Ramadan-, Ramsey opens a small vehicle cleaning station in -Areana- governorate near the capital of Tunisia where his older brother works starting from 7 Am until almost the evening before he goes at night to his original work at a rubber wheels repair workshop.

Ramsey is 17 years old; his father was forced to take him out of the institute because he was unable to succeed in his study. He entered directly to the workshop and managed to train in a record time, he even didn't think ever to go back to school, especially after his father passed away, to become one of the in charges of the family by providing more than 500 Dinars (270 USD).

When we asked -Ramsey- about his knowledge of Tunisian law which prevents child labor he respond us that he is ignorant about it and said" even if I knew about the law I will keep my work and I am pleased with it and I feel that I am responsible of my family and for their needs, and I will fight all who try to prevent me from working even if it's the government."

The story of -Ramsey- summarizes thousands of Tunisian children stories who broke into the word of work because of hard economic and social circumstances. In the capital -Tunisia-, there is no need to search and explore governmental authorities about numbers of child labor cases, just by walking for a short journey in few streets is enough to observe the huge disaster of children.

Tunisians are familiar to see young girls and boys at roads, bus stations and train stations selling everything, begging you to purchase different goods from tissues, chewing gum to some vehicle accessories. In markets they sell vegetables, grain or cleaning shops, without forgetting the tragedies at fantasy homes where thousands of underage girls are cleaning, ironing or cooking under the threat of beat, censure or sexual assault.

Tunisia became especially after the revolution a hotbed to child labor whether voluntarily or forcibly in several illegal and dangerous activities such as smuggling fuels, selling gasoline, selling smuggled cigarettes, even wines and drugs. At this case the government deals with those children as delinquents and deposits them into reforms which is dangerous issue because it will allow them to mix with other delinquent teenagers which facilitate their entry into the world of deviation.

## Risks and Exploitation

Experts in Tunisia agreed that child labor is violation of child's right in having protection and in normal physical and mentality growth, not ignoring depriving him from healthy and balanced education especially at the age before school, the mater that will affect negatively on his future.



The main reasons are in the hard social conditions which families are living or those who are facing problems including divorce.

Experts confirm that during the child is working he is vulnerable to heat and noise risks resulting from machines, chemical, gases, dust, lack of clean drinking water, absence of means of protection, absence of health and safety conditions, in addition the children do not enjoy proper nutrition which expose them to disease and the affectless on child health such as his growth, strength, sight and hearing because of some exhausting works that they do.

Concerning of the employment of underage girls in houses, the latest semi-official statistics- 2009 shows that almost -200,000 girls in Tunisia are working in houses, most of them are children with no more than 17 years, leaded by their families in rural areas to work in houses at cities.

Some studies have been conducted by a number of psychologists and sociologists shows that there is a

high suicide rate among those who are working in houses, and the media monitored several mysterious such cases.

Those girls are facing several slavery forms such as low wages which they transfer to their fathers, mothers or brothers, working for late hour in hard conditions with privation of social security and health care.

From another side according to a study conducted by the -Arab institute for human rights about child labor in Yemen, Lebanon and Tunisia, child labor in considered a facet of the economic exploitation of children, because it can be in the context of not empowering the child of his rights despite doing the same adult activity especially about wages, rest or hours of working. This may lead to another worst form of exploitation such as children trafficking, exploitation of prostitution, pornography and armed conflicts.

### Numbers and Indicators

Scarcity in numbers and studies about child labor in Tunisia are the

most obstacles in knowing the truth about this phenomenon.

Successive government didn't pay serious attention on this phenomenon; they just provide routine studies and inaccurate statistics. The latest statistics about countering child labor in Tunisia shows that the total percentage is 3%, distributed as follow: 5% in rural areas, 2% urban areas. Covering group between 5-11 years, the percentage age those young girls working in houses is 17.5% covering group between 12-17 years suffering of absence of protection, they are ignorant about their rights and physical weakness because of their young age.

Child protection delegates in Tunisia received- 6096 notice in the year 2014 about children under threat.

### What do the law says?

Legislation in Tunisia didn't set a general standard on exact age for all work activities, the age is decided depending on the work sector, at agriculture sector is not allowed to employ who are under 13 (article 55/work), at industry sector in not allowed to employ who are under 15 (article 53/work), at home services and after it was 14 years according to the law number 26- July /1965 it was amendment by the law 32 -April /2005 (law related to home services) to be 16 years instead of 14. About harmful works such as working under ground, mines, recycling or converting old metals or metal storage, the Tunisian law says that the age must be 18 depending on chapters 77/78/79, therefore and according to same chapters of the same law is not forbidden for a child to work or to do financial activities for getting paid. The legislator in Tunisia tried to fit with the international standards of employment, starting from facing the child financial exploitation by preventing employment of children who did not reach the age -16, the chapter number 53/work says: "it's

prevented to employ children who are under -16 in all activities under this act taking into account the special provisions contained in the same act.

Also the law includes the minimum age for admission to work which it's an approval of child right in education by enforcing the basic education and arranged penal penalties for parents who don't sent their children to join basic educational institutions or pulling them out. The chapter 21 of directing law states that "all parents who abstain sending his children to basic education instigations or bulled him out of education under -16 years despite his ability to continue his education in a normal method among the applied procedures will display itself to payment fines from 20 Dinar (8 USD)-200 Dinar (90 USD), and goes up to 400 Dinar (180 USD) in case of return to action.

It should be noted that the Tunisian law approves two exceptions to the law of preventing child working under -16 considering it was approved under the first one to minimum age to be adopted to work while at the second minimum age was raised up to be adopted to work in some work fields. The legislator approved the employment of those under -16 in institutions where a member of the family is working under the father, mother or guardian authority, also is approved to employ children up to -13 soft in agriculture works with no effect negative on the child's health, physical and mental growth and do not cross with their education and participation in orientation and vocational training programs. From another side the Tunisian law raised up the minimum age in some harmful fields, with no a approve to employ who are under -18 at any form of works that may harm the child's health, safety or morals by its nature or conditions. For this issue the ministry of social

affairs issued a resolution defining professional activities which is not admitted to employ those who are under -18 years such as: underground works, mines, sewage, high buildings, manufacture or use the asphalt, manufacture or trade with alcoholics, night clubs and bars.

### Legal Gaps

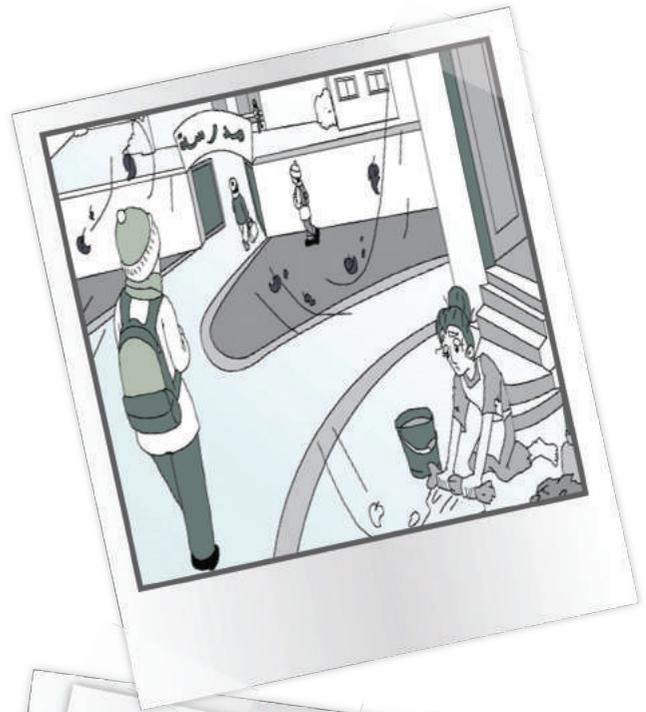
Despite of the existence of several legislations and law articles in order to face child labor phenomenon it does not mean that there is no legal or procedural gabs at several layers and should be noticed.

According to experts the current law needs amendments and revisions in some articles related to authorized exceptions by law for issuing work permits to those who are under-16, and to review on penalties to prevent child labor, and to review organizing laws of labor inspectors (foremen) in order to provide them with jurisdictions to inspect, fact-finding and appraisal of house working and to have a law to direct children who are out of schools and their ages are between 12-15 years into the educational and training systems under the requirements of directing labor laws in the aspect of education and protecting child's rights, and to issue implementing articles that organizes child labor.

Trade unions led by the -General Tunisian union of labor- demands to review the list of harmful works and its treaty number -182 and provisions chapter number 58/ work and to fill the legislation and legal gaps in chapter number 56/ work and to issue a command to control soft works, beside to validate on the issued international conventions by ILO related on monitoring the work at agriculture sector (convention number 129), health and occupational safety for those who are working in the mentioned sector (convention number 184), to ensure decent work for house labor (convention number 189), there must be generalization and simplification of terminology in different articles related to child labor and to bring them closer to the understanding of public.

The time has come to reformulate certain laws that don't match with the current situation of Tunisia in related of child rights in order of protecting him from interring labor market at young age, and to criminalize whoever violates that. It's disgraceful to a country that is seeking to build a democratic experience at all layers to remain silent against child crimes.





# Yemen: Child Labor in yemen is tripled by war

Ashraf Al Refi / Member of Arab Trade Union Media Network.



Yemen- Ten years old- Mohammad settled in Sana'a with his mother and two of his siblings as refugees, after they escaped from the ongoing war in his Yemeni city of Harad. In the morning of a cloudy day, Mohammad and his 11-year-old cousin Rashad were engaged in cleaning cars that are parked in front of a government office in Sana'a. They seemed new to this kind of work and their lack of experience was apparent.

I approached them waving as a sign of salutation, so they interestingly received me as a new customer. Mohammad said: "we wash your car for one hundred Riyals only". It is a humble amount that does not reach half a dollar, while any another worker earns between 300-500 Riyals. I liked talking to them, so

they told me the tragedy of thousands of affected Yemeni families from the war.

They were working without having their breakfast because they could not afford it, while the fatigue and sweating of hunger were clear on them. However, their insistence and determination were their weapons to earn money by their own efforts so it can be used to buy food and mitigate their families' suffering.

Families of Mahammad and Rashad live in one of refugee camps in Sana'a surrounded with misery and helplessness, which impelled those two children to look for a job through which they can support their families. So they worked in car cleaning as the first mission for both of them to earn money by their own efforts.

Mohammad who lost his father recently said that he can't pursue his education in the fourth grade while his family is suffering from poverty, due to absence of someone that can secure their living requirements. Consequently, he made his hard choice of finding a job to fight specter of poverty and famine existing in most of the areas in Yemen. Mohammad and Rashad wish to go back to their school, city, and former lives in case the war is stopped and safe living and economic conditions are available. However, their faces showed a sense of impossibility to realize that in the near future.

Meanwhile in Al Sunainah area, Amjad is living another story in the field of work to help his family in facing up living requirements.

Amjad sells boiled eggs with his three siblings to provide living needs for their family. He earns by himself between 400-800 Riyal per day, which is a convincing amount for him in the shade of these hard conditions.

However, Amjad did not leave his school yet, as he studies and sells eggs to his classmates in the school during the break time.

Crisis and cease of salaries are the reasons behind compelling Amjad and his siblings to support their families. Though despite this effort, they barely can fulfil some of living requirements with their earnings.

It becomes clear that child labor was significantly spread at recent days to the extent that some of children stories became a public opinion issue in Yemen. An example of those issues was the story of Mohammad whose photo was published in the social media while he was carrying an egg basket to sell in front of one of the schools in Sana'a, and gazing from its gate at

the morning line conducted by children of his age.

The photo was clear and descriptive enough, so it gained so much attention to the extent that many donors have declared their sponsorship to the child's education expenses on their own account until he completes his university education, and this is what really happened when Mohammad returned to study and left the work imposed upon him by the war and severe economic crisis. "They Become White-headed at Dawn":

However, Mohammad, Rahsad, Amjad and other thousands of Yemeni children "become white-headed at dawn" as the late Yemeni novelist Mohammad Abd Al Wali gave this expression in his novel that carried the same title decades ago.

Though the novel of Mohammad Abd Al Wali talked about children who were engaged in fighting during the revolution of 26 September 1926 and stopped their lives, thousands of children today are forced by miserable economic and living conditions to find a job and work,

even if that is done by carrying guns and smell of blood.

There are painful stories of many children, who were enforced to join ranks of belligerents because of these conditions, leaving only the photos of loss hanging on the walls of their city and houses in addition to heart-rending tragedies in hearts of their families.

Recruiting children to fight in the armed conflicts, which was described by international organizations as the ugliest kind of child labor, becomes recently a catastrophe that threatens purity of childhood in Yemen, and an evil thief that exploits the families' economic conditions to turn their children to savage monsters or dead bodies.

Of the teachers whose young students left their school and joined ranks of belligerents is the teacher Abood al Soufi. He says that color of blood became closer to the children more than the colors pack; and Kalashnikov replaced their toys, where the training area and troop camps replaced schools, parks, and gardens.

According to Soufi, it is a serious phenomenon that can disturb the old and tired social situation in the country, and warns of a more brutal and mercilessness generation in the society and its surroundings.

Meeting childish frowning faces while children are carrying Kalashnikovs and searching walkers in the check points is no longer a strange scene in the streets of Sana's.

Harmful Alternatives to child rights: Chairman of Seyaj for Child Protection, Mr. Ahmad Al Qurashi said that: "Many of violations, crimes, and practices that are harmful to child rights were doubled, because of the war and its direct impacts on the vulnerable and most vulnerable groups like children, as many income sources were ceased, and more than three million people most of them from children and women were displaced. That encouraged Yemeni families to find harmful alternatives to child rights including child labor and recruitment, not to mention the sexual acts conducted on them, in order to improve their standard of living, especially with unprecedented high rates of pov-



erty and unemployment in Yemen.

At the opinion of Mr. Al Qurashi in his press interview with Arab Trade Union Media Network, he states that "Of the reasons behind diffusion of child labor is failure to pay state employees' salaries and social security, despite they cover only a small ratio of Yemenis. Add to that absence of state institutions responsible for child protection, such as institutions of sheltering and detention, police and judicial authorities, as well as absence of accountability officials, and full control of the armed groups over the country in the past two years, leading to attracting more children to work, join army, and participate in the armed conflict.

He added that child recruitment is considered one of the worst kinds of child labor for which there is no specific statistics today according to International Labor Organization (ILO) law. However, the size of problem has certainly doubled three times at least in comparison with its size in the past periods as Al Qurashi said.

The solution in his point of view comes with economic rehabilitation, financial and technical support, and consultation provided to small and micro enterprises, in addition to family and village projects. These projects are useful since they enable society to recover itself, not to mention investment and development of humble human and financial resources in agriculture and some handmade textiles, so it becomes more useful and profitable for families.

Al Qurashi confirms that of the most important solutions in addition to provision of direct food aids, is focusing on improving livelihoods through rehabilitation of families and mothers, especially the families that lost their breadwinner, or families whose breadwinner is injured and unable to work, produce,



and sustain the family's standard of living.

### Negative effects:

The recruitment of children in armed groups is one of the negative effects and its severity on children under fifteen, the deprivation of education that will lead after war into unproductive personal who will become fathers and mothers with no ability to participate in the development process after war.

The joining of children in what is named as the worst child labor will

make them useless in future and easy target to attract them to join terrorist groups, criminal organizations and criminal activities in the social level as robbery and looting..... etc.

Mr. Mohammad Alasa'ad- the UNICEF spokesman in Yemen said to the – Arab Trade Union Media Network -: that Yemen basically is a poor country before war, and that Yemen is considered the poorest country in the Middle East, therefore, child labor is a normal phenomenon due to economic reasons.