


Parliamentary questions

2 July 2010

E-4857/2010

[Question for written answer to the Commission](#)
Rule 117
[Peter van Dalen \(ECR\)](#)

► Subject: Child labour in India

 Answer(s)

On 14 June 2010 in Luxembourg, the Council of Ministers for Foreign Affairs expressed its concern about the fact that more than 200 million children were still engaged in child labour. The Council reaffirmed its commitment to protect and promote the rights of the child. It also underlined the importance of the GSP + to promote sustainable development and good governance, including the effective implementation of ILO Conventions 138 and 182.

On 10 June 2010 a number of organisations, including the India Committee of the Netherlands, distributed a report and a press release on child labour in India. These state, *inter alia*: 'In India, more than half a million children aged under 18 are working in seed production, including for Dutch vegetable seed companies such as Advanta and Bejo Zaden. Around 230 000 of these children are even aged under 14. The children work for between 10 and 12 hours per day and are exposed to toxic pesticides.'

The reports also stress that three quarters of the work is done by women (girls) and that in many states the majority of the workers are Dalits ('untouchables') and Adivasis (tribal people).

On behalf of the EU, the Commission is currently negotiating a free trade agreement with India.

1. In its political dialogue with India, will the Commission place child labour and exploitation and poor treatment of Dalits and Adivasis on the agenda?
2. What will the Commission do to ensure that European seed companies do not allow child labour and exploitation in their supply chains?
3. Will the Commission do research into child labour in agriculture — the sector where nearly 70 % of all child labour is performed worldwide — and relations with European businesses, starting with the labour-intensive worldwide seed industry?
4. How will the Commission use the negotiations on the EU–India trade agreement to ensure that child labour is finally eliminated in India?
5. Does the Commission have a policy specifically geared to the situation of specific groups who suffer discrimination, such as women (girls) and Dalits, in its contacts with the Indian authorities?

Original language of question: **NL**

Ağgornata l-añħar: 13 ta' Lulju 2010

[Avviż legali](#)

Parliamentary questions

2 September 2010

E-4857/2010

Answer given by High Representative/Vice-President Ashton on behalf of the Commission

As an element of its political dialogue the EU is engaged in an annual Human Rights Dialogue with the Indian Government, and issues such as child labour, the exploitation and poor treatment of Dalits and Adivasis, and other human rights subjects are raised in this context. Considerable project funding to improve the situation on some of these issues is also made available under the European initiative for democracy and human rights (EIDHR), an example of which was the EIDHR-financed project in Andhra Pradesh designed to fight child labour, which was visited by members of the European Parliament in April 2010.

Concerning the businesses of European seed companies in India, the Commission is not in a position to control the manner in which they operate there. This is the responsibility of the Indian authorities. This being said, the Commission actively supports the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) within European business, and would refer to its communication of March 2006 entitled 'Implementing the Partnership for Growth and Jobs: Making Europe a Pole of Excellence on Corporate Social Responsibility'⁽¹⁾. In this document the Commission announced its backing for the launch of a European Alliance on CSR with the objective, *inter alia*, of ensuring greater respect for human rights, environmental protection, and core labour standards, particularly in developing countries. The Commission is furthermore promoting the implementation and awareness of instruments such as the OECD⁽²⁾ Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises (MNEs), the UN⁽³⁾ Global Compact, and the ILO⁽⁴⁾ Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy.

In terms of analysis of these issues, the Commission has launched a study, the results of which are expected by the end of 2010, to clarify the existing legal framework for human rights, including the rights of the child, applicable to European companies operating outside the EU. More analysis will however be needed, and a further study funded by the Commission will examine the practices and challenges of European companies in this area, highlighting good practice and lessons learnt.

The Commission does not foresee specific research into 'child labour in agriculture in India and relations with European businesses, starting with the labour-intensive worldwide seed industry' in the near future.

As regards the negotiations for a bilateral free trade agreement between the EU and India, the Commission is committed to proposing an ambitious chapter on sustainable development which covers the economic, environmental and social aspects of bilateral trade liberalisation. The Commission's approach on such a chapter is based on cooperation and dialogue. This cooperation could also include initiatives to support India's efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labour.

Regarding the existence of specific policies geared to the situation of specific groups in India who suffer discrimination, the Commission adapts its approach through a mix of policy and programmes accompanied by social mobilisation advocacy and awareness-raising. These combine EU development cooperation (under which the fight against child labour and support for other vulnerable groups are included as a cross-cutting issue), and political dialogue, complemented by close cooperation with other stakeholders. This comprehensive policy approach has been reflected in the Staff Working Document on Combating Child Labour published by the Commission in January 2010⁽⁵⁾, and confirmed by the Council conclusions of June 2010.

(1) COM(2006)136 final.

(2) Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

(3) United Nations.

(4) International Labour Organisation.

(5) SEC(2010)37 final.