

# The Ending Violence Against Children Taskforce

## Support Funding to End All Forms of Violence Against Children

Dear Chairwoman Murray and Ranking Member Blunt,

Half the world's children – nearly one billion– are victims of violence annually.<sup>1</sup> Violence against children includes physical, emotional, and sexual violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Around the world, 152 million children are engaged in child labor, and nearly one in three adolescent girls has been a victim of emotional, physical, or sexual violence, and the International Labor Organization estimates that there are about 10.1 million children who are victims of human trafficking globally.<sup>2</sup> COVID-19 has only exacerbated these issues. World Vision estimates that as a result of the secondary impacts of the pandemic, an additional 85 million children worldwide may be exposed to violence.<sup>3</sup>

These vulnerable children need protection and access to essential services to keep them safe now and sustain them long-term. A growing body of research has shown that adverse childhood experiences impact the brain development of children, affecting their lifelong health, well-being, and future education and employment opportunities. Repeated exposure to violence in childhood can impede the child's ability to succeed in school and increase the likelihood that they become a victim or perpetrator. Cultivating future prosperity in any society is dependent on investing in and ensuring the healthy development of the next generation.

On a global scale, violence against children is estimated to cost as much as \$7 trillion annually, yet the US only spends about half a percent of overseas development assistance (ODA) on programs that focus on ending violence against children,<sup>4</sup> and the economic costs of child labor amount to 2.4 -6.6 percent of the world's gross national income each year. Experts estimate that by engaging in harmful labor instead of schooling amounts to a global income loss of \$176 billion annually.<sup>5</sup>

A first step in preventing violence against children is gaining a better understanding of its magnitude, nature, and consequences. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) conducts Violence against Children Surveys (VACS) to measure physical, emotional, and sexual violence against girls and boys. These surveys guide programs and policies to prevent violence before it starts. Before receiving CDC's support for a VACS, countries must agree to develop a national action plan to address violence based on the survey's findings. With this reliable evidence, countries can make better decisions using limited resources to develop, launch and evaluate violence prevention programs and child protection systems.

Through VACS and other efforts, US foreign assistance has made significant strides in reducing specific forms of violence, including child labor. The number of children subjected to hazardous child labor has been cut in half since 2000. However, the rate of reduction in child labor has slowed significantly in the last four years. The most recent estimates of child labor show that 152 million children are still engaged in child labor and 73 million work in hazardous labor that endangers their health through exposure to dangerous chemicals, heavy machinery,

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<sup>1</sup> Hillis, Susan. *Global Prevalence of Past-year Violence Against Children: A Systematic Review and Minimum Estimates*. January 2016.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/lang--en/index.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.wvi.org/publications/report/coronavirus-health-crisis/covid-19-aftershocks-perfect-storm>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.childfund.org/uploadedFiles/public\\_site/media/ODI%20Report%20%20The%20cost%20and%20economic%20impact%20of%20violence%20against%20children.pdf](https://www.childfund.org/uploadedFiles/public_site/media/ODI%20Report%20%20The%20cost%20and%20economic%20impact%20of%20violence%20against%20children.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> World Vision. *Eliminating child labour, achieving inclusive economic growth*. October 2016.

poor working conditions and heavy loads.<sup>6</sup> This work prevents them from attending school and impairs their physical, mental, and social development.

Since 1995, the Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB) has worked with partners to directly impact the lives of nearly 2 million children vulnerable to exploitative labor, through education, vocational training services, and livelihood support.<sup>7</sup> ILAB is the only U.S. agency that works to end exploitative child labor.

ILAB represents the interests and welfare of U.S. workers by enforcing the labor provisions of U.S. trade agreements and trade preference programs. This includes a growing labor attaché program, which places Department of Labor personnel in U.S. embassies around the world to help nations build the capacity to comply with the labor provisions of trade agreements and trade preference programs. In cooperation with ILAB, organizations have leveraged their experience to build the capacity of the private sector to address child labor, forced labor, and worker rights issues, including companies working in tobacco, rubber, tea, cocoa, sugarcane, cotton, and many other areas.

In order to ensure the continued leadership and influence of the U.S. in the protection of children from violence globally we request the following:

- **\$5 million to support Violence against Children Surveys** in FY21 (via the Global Health Bureau). Violence Against Children Surveys (VACS) are nationally representative household surveys of children and young adults aged 13-24 years. The data collected can inform steps already being taken to address violence against children and give insight into where these can be strengthened or expanded. In addition, findings can help raise awareness of the scope of the problem, support outreach and advocacy, and bring in new and diverse stakeholders. National government commitment and the required development of a national action plan to address the findings ensures that evidence will lead to action and increased local technical capacity to address violence against children.
- **At least \$100 million for the Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB).** A report looking at U.S. Government spending in FY15 indicates that ILAB accounts for nearly half (48 percent) of all U.S. Government spending on efforts to prevent and address violence against children. These projects most commonly provide education and life skills to children and youth and give their parents support to allow children to stay in school rather than work. ILAB also reports on consumer products made through forced or child labor. The requested funding would allow ILAB to continue its work to prevent and respond to exploitative child labor by restoring FY2014/15 levels, increase technical assistance for worker rights to countries with which the U.S. has trade agreement or preference programs to ensure consistency with expanding U.S. trade commitments, and continue the strong evaluation of programs.

We value the impact made by global efforts to end all forms of violence against children and urge your subcommittee to fully fund these critical programs in the Fiscal Year 2022 State and Foreign Operations Appropriations bill. We are also writing Chairman Coons and Ranking Member Graham of the State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Subcommittee in support of the vulnerable children account, the Department of State Child Protection Compact, and efforts to end child marriage as outlined in the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013.

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<sup>6</sup> ILO. *Global estimates of child labour: Results and trends, 2012-2016*.

<sup>7</sup> DOL. *Fact Sheet: The Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking*. 2016.

We also urge the US Government to develop and implement a comprehensive and coordinated strategy built upon evidence-based practices and adopt common metrics and indicators to monitor progress to prevent, address, and end violence against children and youth across the various agencies and accounts contributing funds to this work. We greatly appreciate your consideration of our requests.

Sincerely,

**The Ending Violence Against Children Taskforce:**

American Academy of Pediatrics

ChildFund

Futures without Violence

Save the Children

UNICEF USA

World Vision