Introduction

- Good morning. I appreciate this opportunity to be here today and to share with you the Department of Labor’s work to protect children around the world from exploitive labor, including human trafficking. It is a pleasure to participate on this panel with my esteemed colleagues Armand Pereira from the ILO and Hans-Peter Boe from the IOM. I would also like to thank George Mason University and the U.S. Departments of State, Homeland Security, and Health and Human Services for sponsoring this event.

- Child labor is an enormously challenging and complex issue – one that requires concerted efforts by many actors. It is a human rights issue, a governance issue, a health issue, and an education and economic development issue.

- As I am sure you have discussed over the last two days, unaccompanied and separated children are at extremely high risk of ending up in exploitive labor conditions. For example, orphaned or separated children in search of work to support themselves and perhaps their siblings may be lured or tricked into exploitive work. Unaccompanied children migrating in hopes of reuniting with their families can be easy prey for unscrupulous adults who profit from their vulnerability. Children may also unknowingly enter into exploitive labor conditions when they are sent to live and work as domestic servants in exchange for false promises of security and education.

- According to the International Labor Organization’s 2006 global estimate, there are close to 218 million child laborers between the ages of 5 and 17 around the world, 126 million of whom work in hazardous forms of child labor. Not all children toiling in exploitive labor are captured in these estimates. There are still far too many children working outside of the spotlight; beyond the reach of surveys, unseen and uncounted.
• But there is cause for hope. The ILO’s 2006 child labor estimate represents a significant decline – of 11 percent – since the ILO’s earlier estimates from 2000. There has been an even greater decline – of 26 percent – in the number of children involved in hazardous work.

• These figures are encouraging, yet exploitive child labor remains a widespread and tragic problem. As I think we can all agree, much work remains to be done. That is why the Department of Labor’s Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB) considers child labor a priority and an issue that cuts across all we do. Each of ILAB’s three offices plays a key role in U.S. government efforts to end exploitive child labor.

**The Role of the Department of Labor**

• The agency I lead, the Bureau of International Labor Affairs—known as ILAB— supports the President’s international agenda on labor matters and carries out the international responsibilities of the Department of Labor. The work we do includes the negotiation of international trade issues, and child labor is now part of every trade agreement we sent up to Capitol Hill. Child labor is also a key area in our cooperation with the International Labor Organization, and other regional and international organizations, and our largest technical assistance portfolio.

• The Department of Labor has been engaged on the issue of child labor internationally since the mid-1990s, when the current global movement to eliminate exploitive child labor really began to pick up speed. Our earliest work on the issue was research-related, as we responded to annual research mandates from Congress on various child labor topics. That work continues today under the Trade and Development Act of 2000, which requires the President to submit an annual report to the Congress on the efforts of our trade beneficiary countries to fulfill their international commitments to eliminate exploitive child labor. We recently released our seventh annual *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor*, which covers the child labor situation and efforts to address the worst forms of child labor in 122 developing countries and 19 non-independent countries and territories.

• For us in ILAB, our efforts to address the issue of child labor gained further momentum with the adoption of ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor in 1999. This Convention calls on signatories to take
immediate measures to eliminate, as a matter of urgency, the worst forms of child labor, which include all forms of forced labor, slavery, child trafficking, child soldiers, the use of children in pornography and illegal activities such as drug trafficking, and children working in hazardous conditions. Convention 182 has been ratified by over 90 percent of the ILO’s 181 members.

• The United States was among the first countries to ratify Convention 182. Ratification is an important step, but ratification without implementation is meaningless. The United States has taken seriously its commitment to implement Article 8 of the Convention, which calls on signatories to “take appropriate steps to assist one another in giving effect to the provisions of this Convention through enhanced international cooperation and/or assistance including support for social and economic development, poverty eradication programmes and universal education.”

• We are proud of our efforts at the Department of Labor. Since 1995, DOL has funded over 200 child labor eradication projects, worth over $600 million, of which $274 million were dedicated to projects that aimed to combat child trafficking. The United States is the largest donor to the ILO’s International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor, and has also funded projects implemented by some 50 other organizations through our Child Labor Education Initiative.

• Currently, our Office to Combat Child Labor, Forced Labor and Human Trafficking oversees more than $278 million in active programs in 61 countries around the world. We are very proud of the fact that to date, child labor elimination projects funded by the Department have rescued one and a quarter million children from exploitive labor through the provision of educational services.

• What we cannot capture in any measure, however, are the intangibles: how a former child soldier feels when he is handed school supplies rather than a gun; the re-found dreams of a girl rescued from commercial sexual exploitation; the pride of parents who, thanks to skills training and the resulting increase in income, can now provide for their family, including their children’s schooling. What you might call these intangibles, which so many people in wealthy countries take for granted, are what motivate and push us forward in our work to break the cycle of poverty, illiteracy, exploitation, and despair.
• Global studies have shown that the economic benefits of education far outweigh the costs. When children, such as Hamela in case study four, are forced into exploitive work at the expense of education, they miss out on a unique window of opportunity to gain literacy and the other skills necessary to succeed in life. In addition, the injuries and psychological trauma experienced by Hamela at the hand of her employer can gravely hamper her future development. When such educational opportunities are missed and negative health consequences suffered, not only are a child’s future prospects diminished; the human capital and future productivity of our societies are undermined.

• No nation, no matter how poor, can afford to neglect the education of its children. I have personally been in meetings with Ministers of Labor, who recognize the problem that large numbers of their children are working at the expense of their education, and they ask me “But how can we afford to remove them all from the workforce and send them to school?” And my answer is “How can you afford not to?”

Examples of DOL Interventions

• In addition to the case study of Hamela that you all have, I would like to share with you a few real examples, what we might call our “faces of change,” of how DOL-funded projects have changed the lives of exploited children separated from their families.

Rashida-Domestic Servant Tanzania

• Like many other girls her age, Rashida had no other place to turn when she accepted a position as a domestic servant. After she had finished primary school, her parents could no longer support her and her many siblings. They sent Rashida to live with her aunt, who pressured her to get married at the age of 14. Unable to continue her studies and not wanting to get married, Rashida had set off with a stranger for Dar Es Salaam, the capital of Tanzania, with the promise of a better life.

• Rashida recalls, “For almost 2 years, that lady turned me into her slave. I had to perform house chores from very early in the morning until very late at night, taking care of her children.” When threatened with physical abuse, Rashida escaped, seeking refuge with a neighbor. It was during this time
that Rashida met another young girl who shared similar experiences as an exploited domestic servant. Rashida’s new friend told her about a center operated by the Conservation, Hotels and Domestic Workers Union (CHODAWU) that could provide her with help and vocational training.

- The U.S. Department of Labor is supporting vocational training centers like those run by CHODAWU across Tanzania – and in many other countries around the world – to enable children like Rashida, who have missed out on crucial years of education, to have a another chance. This strategy is a key part of the Tanzanian Timebound Program to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor, implemented by ILO/IPEC. The project also offers formal and informal educational services for younger children who either need help catching up in their studies or transitioning into formal schools.

- With her years of economic exploitation now behind her, Rashida went on to receive training in hairdressing and tailoring and hopes to one day open her own business. Rashida’s dreams are mirrored in the countless other children who have been rescued from exploitive conditions and have gone on to receive vocational training, their lives significantly changed for the better.

Apollo—Child Soldier Uganda

- Or yet another example, of Apollo Nsibambi, an orphan, was abducted at the age of 16 by Lords Resistance Army (LRA) insurgents in Uganda. Apollo was forced to transport heavy weapons and even carry wounded soldiers in combat situations. During his time with the LRA, Apollo witnessed the murder of several of his fellow abductees. He says of those days, “I would cry within my heart for fear of being killed.”

- When Apollo was finally returned from captivity, schooling was an unlikely prospect for him, being an orphan, with no family to support him. However, the “Opportunities for Reducing Adolescent and Child Labor through Education” (ORACLE) project, funded by DOL and implemented by the International Rescue Committee, paid his school fees and purchased a uniform, school books and materials for him. After passing his primary school exams, Apollo was able to enroll in a secondary biology, chemistry, and math program and start down a pathway towards a brighter future.
Dominican Republic

- In January, I had the opportunity to travel to the Dominican Republic to launch the second phase of a DOL-funded child labor eradication project. During that trip, I was shocked to learn about the challenges in the Dominican educational system, especially that children are in classrooms on average only 2.5 hours per day, which potentially leaves them vulnerable to dangerous work during the remainder of each day.

- I was also shocked to learn of the thousands of stateless Haitian children living in the Dominican Republic and that international organizations estimate that up to 3,000 Haitian children are trafficked to the Dominican Republic each year to work in the streets, in agriculture, as domestic servants, and for commercial sexual exploitation.

- The DOL-funded projects in the Dominican Republic have targeted these particular challenges in the hopes of reaching the most needy children through innovative interventions.

- In addressing the education challenge, the first phase of the DOL-funded child labor eradication project, through consultations with the Dominican Government, teachers, community members and parents helped design a unique and innovative approach to enrich the education for disadvantaged children. This program is called “Espacios para Crecer” (EpC) or “Spaces to Grow”.

- The approach complements formal education and cultivates the joy of learning, civic responsibility, and leadership potential. I have visited a number of EpCs and have heard the important and positive message that is conveyed to children at the opening of every session, “How wonderful you are here!”

- Because children who participate in EpCs do better in school, it has caught the attention and support of the Secretariat of Education. Also, I am pleased to say that this program is now being implemented in other Latin American countries.

- The new phase of this project has developed a program for adolescents, called Espacios para Emprender (EpE) or “Spaces for Entrepreneurship”,


that offers vocational instruction, life skills and leadership development, and entrepreneurship training.

- The project has also been able to meet the needs of vulnerable and exploited Haitian children in the Dominican Republic.

- Some of these children are sent across the border by their families in hope that they will receive better life opportunities in the Dominican Republic; others are trafficked across the border through fraud and coercion.

- Some children are Dominican born and descendants of Haitian immigrants in sugar plantation communities in the Dominican Republic and have never been to Haiti. And some children are torn from their families through unexpected deportations.

- Most of these children become part of the thousands of stateless Dominicans of Haitian descent who are denied their constitutional right to citizenship and the documents for a legal identity. It is as if they do not exist.

- Thus, their rights to education, adequate housing, water and other fundamental human rights are violated. Without identity, these children are denied schooling beyond the sixth grade in Dominican educational system.

- Our projects are assisting by providing educational opportunities to these children who are working in the worst forms of child labor or who are vulnerable to working in those conditions.

- The projects have directly addressed the challenges related to the issue of statelessness. For example, the new project has worked with the national vocational training institute (INFOTEP) to provide vocational courses to adolescents enrolled in the EpEs and has ensured that it will extend a certificate of completion to all participants, regardless of whether they possess a birth certificate or national identity card.

**Lessons Learned in Combating Exploitive Child Labor**

- From the projects highlighted above and through the large number of other project interventions around the world, the Department of Labor has learned a lot in the many years that we have been working to address this
challenging and complex issue. One critical lesson is that to successfully eradicate the worst forms of child labor, we need renewed and sustained action by many actors. Governments, the private sector, international organizations, and civil society each have a unique role to play, and we can accomplish so much more when we combine our strengths through partnerships.

• Another critical lesson is that a piecemeal approach does not work. While we do not prescribe a one-size-fits-all solution, there are basic approaches that work and we stand by them. We support a basic, comprehensive approach, with five fundamental goals:

1. Withdrawing or preventing children from exploitive child labor through the provision of direct educational services that take into account the specific circumstances of child laborers. For victims of trafficking, such services may also include medical services, psychosocial counseling or shelters.

2. Strengthening national policies and legal frameworks on child labor and education and the capacity of national institutions to combat child labor. In cases where potential for regional cooperation is ripe, particularly in the area of trafficking, we support opportunities for regional dialogue and partnership;

3. Raising awareness of the importance of education for all children and mobilizing a wide range of actors to improve and expand education infrastructures;

4. Supporting research and the collection of reliable data on child labor; and

5. Ensuring the long-term sustainability of these efforts by building local and national capacity to address the issue. The projects we fund strive to build capacity by supporting legal reform, building child labor concerns into national policies on education and poverty alleviation, boosting enforcement capability by training labor inspectors, assisting with national child labor surveys, and encouraging reform in educational curricula. A critical message is that we do not aim to be a substitute for what national governments are or should be doing, but rather to support and provide momentum to governments’ own efforts.
• With this in mind, I want to pose three challenges for those of us working to combat child labor.

_First_, we need to make sure that the education we are offering to children is relevant to their lives.

_Second_, we need to be searching for effective and efficient interventions that have impact, leverage resources, and that can be scaled up and sustained.

_Third_, we need to continue to press national governments to take ownership and become leaders in the fight to end child labor. This requires political will and an investment of resources—both financial and human—on an ongoing basis.

• As Rashida and Apollo’s story suggests, we _can_ help change the lives of children whose childhood may otherwise be lost. We can also help change attitudes about the importance of education and the hazards of child labor.

• In closing, I would like to thank you again for providing me with this opportunity to speak with you about the important work our department is doing to combat child labor. I look forward to answering any questions you might have and to an open discussion on these topics.