

24 January 2014

To,

H.E. President Evo Morales
Plurinational State of Bolivia
La Paz
Bolivia

Dear President Evo Morales,

We, the undersigned, as advocates of child rights have been closely watching the developments in Bolivia regarding the ongoing discussions for reducing the minimum age of employment. We are aware that this demand is being fostered by some civil society groups as a potential anti-poverty measure. We welcome Bolivia's ratification of ILO Convention 138 on minimum age of employment; Convention 182 on worst forms of child labour and support for the Dakar Framework for Action: Education for All. The ongoing discourse to reduce the minimum age of employment would not only violate your own obligations under the above treaties but would also be extremely counterproductive for the Bolivian economy.

If children as young as 12 are permitted to work, they will miss out on education during the very formative years of their development and risk being trapped in repetitive tasks, eroding their skills and prospective employability in future. In this process they would inadvertently enter into the vicious cycle of poverty and illiteracy which would not be easy to dismantle. Child labour as a double edged dagger could further deprive adults from decent working conditions because employers will always prefer children over adults for they do not demand minimum wages and cannot stand up for their rights. We all know that according to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) while there are around 168 million child labourers across the world, there are about 197 million adults and youth who are jobless. There is overwhelming evidence that children working in place of adults fuels unemployment, further deteriorating the economy.

We do understand that you have also expressed your commitment to ensure that there would be no room for exploitation of children who are working in Bolivia and that the work done by them will be thoroughly monitored and regulated. With about 850,000 child labourers in Bolivia and only 78 inspectors, the monitoring task per inspector is 10,897 child labourers already. You would appreciate that reducing the minimum age of employment will further increase the workload on the inspectors and they would not be able to inspect and report violations of child rights at workplaces. Thus, reduction in minimum age would only accentuate the chances of the children of your country being more susceptible to trafficking, slavery, servitude, forced labour and violence.

Mr. President, we therefore sincerely make an appeal to you for not supporting this regressive move of lowering the minimum age of employment and ensure that all children in Bolivia are in school attaining quality and meaningful education and the adults enjoy decent working conditions.

In Solidarity,



Aidan McQuade
Director
Anti-Slavery International



Kailash Satyarthi
Chairperson
Global March Against Child Labour



Jo Becker
Children's Rights Advocacy Director
Human Rights Watch

Responses may be directed to Ms. Priyanka Ribhu at priyanka@globalmarch.org