



Introduction to United Nations Agencies

In this section, the editor has chosen several examples of ways in which the United Nations operates in the wider field of action. While the major action of peacekeeping in times of crisis usually takes the spotlight in the media, the UN operates on a daily basis to provide service and assistance to peoples around the world. Many of these actions are taken in order to help achieve a better standard of living for people and in, the long run, perhaps prevent conflicts in the future. The agencies chosen here are but a very small number of such operations conducted on a daily basis. Teachers and students can get some sense of the extent of these ongoing operations by surfing the Internet site <<http://www.unfoundation.org/unwire/unwire.cfm>>. Additionally, teachers might encourage the study of peace in their classrooms by daily citing a news item about the UN from the local press that highlights these peaceful, and effective, ways to foster better conditions in the world. The approach used here is to quote a news item from the UNwire on a recent event that is representative of the UN agency—it is not intended to be an exhaustive description of that agency's functions. Each item is followed by a brief description of the mandate of the agency; and, finally, a brief activity that teachers might use in their classrooms, or a reference to school-oriented UN materials. - Don Bragaw, Editor

ILO LAUNCHES INITIATIVE TO COMBAT CHILD LABOR



The International Labor Organization (ILO) and the International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor

(IPEC) plan to launch the first-ever program to combat child labor in Albania. The project will focus on rehabilitating children who face the greatest risks to their well-being, including those who are trafficked and sexually exploited, as well as those who live on the street. The plan, which targets 20,000 children, includes removing them from the work force and enrolling them in school.

Years of economic decline, coupled with recent crises in the Balkans, have worsened an already “dire” situation for many Albanian children. With the collapse of the government in 1991, parents are no longer compelled to send their children to school, resulting in a significant drop in enrollment. According to one study, no more than 7% of the children in some Tirana suburbs are in school. In some parts of the

country, “fear of vendettas or blood feuds keeps thousands of young boys in hiding and out of classrooms.” IPEC Program Manager Werner Blenk, “Up to now, there was no comprehensive effort to prevent the commercial exploitation of Albanian children. Only

a few isolated associations, nongovernmental organizations and individuals have implemented limited initiatives, with uneven levels of success.” Blenk said national and local institutions need revitalizing and retraining.

Source: ILO World of Work, July 1999.

ACTIVITY

Consider how each of the following people might respond to the news report. Debate the responses.

1. Mrs. Y in Albania, who has four children, one of whom is 13 and working in the Marschichenko Factory; her other three children are under the age of five.
2. Mr. Edward Smolenki, CEO of the Marschichenko Factory, producing children's clothing in Tirana, Albania.
3. Stefan X, a 14-year-old production worker in the Marschichenko Factory.
4. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations.
5. John McDonald, an investor in a mutual fund, one of the stocks of which is the Marschichenko Factory.

Key Questions for Possible Discussion

Why does child labor still exist in the modern world? Why do you believe that each of these people responded as they did? What is the “human” dimension to child labor? Why should the other nations of the world be concerned about child labor violations in Albania?

The NIKE shoe company has been accused of allowing poor working conditions in its Far Eastern factories. Included in that accusation have been inadequate health conditions, low wages and the use of child labor in the production of their sneakers. Does a company like NIKE (used here only as an example), with factories in undeveloped nations, have a social and moral responsibility to correct such conditions without being reminded to do so by international organizations? Should there be a prohibition on US (and other developed nations’) companies moving to less developed areas and not paying adequate compensation to their employees? Many workers in the United States have protested US companies’ shifting some of their operations to less developed areas in order to cut costs and increase profits for their shareholders. The loss of jobs in the US has created new jobs in less developed areas, however, at greatly reduced wages for the new workers. In many areas these wages far exceed what they would ordinarily have been able to earn; or, indeed, perhaps there would have been no jobs at all. This is a very complex issue economically; is it complex from a human rights perspective?