

Human Rights Council

Eliminating the Rising Trend of Child Labor in Southeast Asia

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Forum: Human Rights Council

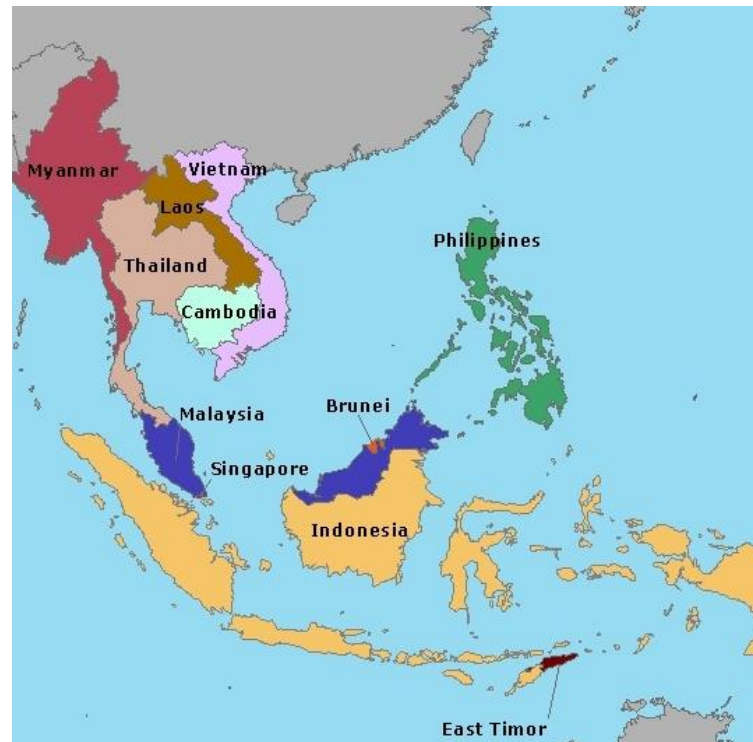
Issue: Eliminating the Rising Trend of Child Labor in Southeast Asia

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Introduction

The issue of child labor has been a persistent problem in Southeast Asia, where millions of children work long hours in hazardous conditions to contribute to their families' incomes. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that around 17 million children in Southeast Asia are engaged in child labor, with the highest number of child laborers found in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam. This number accounts for around 10% of all children in the region. The ILO also reports that poverty is one of the primary drivers of child labor, with many families relying on their children's income to survive. The commonness of child labor in Southeast Asia represents a violation of children's rights and a moral failing on the part of society. It also perpetuates the cycle of poverty and can have long-term consequences for children's well-being and future prospects. The UN sees the issue of child labor as damaging to a child's physical, social, mental, psychological, and spiritual development. The Human Rights Council aims to protect all human

rights and fundamental freedom. Eliminating this issue is very important for the United Nations Human Rights Council.



Map 1: Map of Southeast Asia

Definition of Key Terms

Child: A person younger than 18.

Domestic Work: Tasks performed in a household whether by a person related to the family or not.

Child labor: Work undertaken by children younger than the legal minimum working age. The law normally sets various minimum ages for different types of work.

ASEAN: the Association of Southeast Asian Nations

Fast Fashion: inexpensive clothing produced rapidly by mass-market retailers in response to the latest trends.

Southeast Asia: the geographical south-eastern region of Asia, consisting of the areas that are situated south of mainland China, east of the Indian subcontinent, and northwest of mainland Australia.

General Overview

Children working in a variety of industries and sectors, frequently in dangerous circumstances, have been a long-standing issue in Southeast Asia. The prevalence of child labor, which continues to be a significant challenge for many countries today, is a result of the region's long history of colonialism, war, and economic exploitation.

Historically, a number of factors, such as poverty, cultural norms, and economic exploitation, have contributed to child labor in Southeast Asia. Children in Southeast Asia used to work in agriculture, fishing, and handicrafts to help support their families living expenses during the pre-colonial era. Child labor increased in urban areas with the arrival of European colonial powers in the 19th century, especially in sectors like mining, textiles, and rubber. Now, with the arrival of fast fashion, big corporations looking to make a profit by paying low wages to many workers arrived in Southeast Asia. Many workers in these sweatshops appear to be children and although some awareness has been raised in recent years, the conditions have not improved. Corporations like H&M and Uniqlo have sweatshops in Bangladesh, and they are some examples of fast fashion companies that have sweatshops in Southeast Asia.

Despite efforts to address the issue, child labor is still a major challenge for many Southeast Asian nations. Several nations have strengthened their labor laws and regulatory frameworks in recent years and invested in children's educational and training opportunities. However, development has been slow, and many children in Southeast Asia still work in dangerous settings, particularly in the informal and agricultural sectors. Child safety in Southeast Asia is a crucial issue with only Singapore ranking in the top sixty of the world in child safety statistics.



The results are devastating. Child labor can cause severe physical and mental suffering, and even death. Slavery and other forms of economic or sexual exploitation may result. And in almost every instance, it denies children access to education and medical care, limiting their fundamental rights and jeopardizing their futures.*

*-Map 2: Child Safety Ranking for ASEAN

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Cambodia: Child labor is a serious issue in Cambodia, where many kids work in the agricultural industry as well as in domestic work, brick-making, and construction. Nearly 300 thousand kids which is 45% of the children population are working.

Indonesia: One of the largest populations of child laborers in Southeast Asia is found in Indonesia, where a large number of kids are employed in domestic work, mining, fishing, and the agricultural industry. In order to address child labor, the Indonesian government has put in place a number of policies and initiatives, including a strengthened legal framework and collaboration with private industry and civil society groups to advance ethical business practices.

China: Children who are brought to the region to work in a variety of industries, including manufacturing and agriculture, come from China as migrant laborers to Southeast Asian nations. This migrant labor may be subject to abuse and exploitation, such as forced labor.

Philippines: Despite recent progress in addressing the issue, child labor is still a serious issue in the country, especially in the unorganized sector. Even though the Phillipinese government has taken steps to protect children, the number of child workers stands at around 2.1 million in the Philippines.

International Labor Organization (ILO): The ILO is a special UN agency that works to advance social justice and opportunities for decent employment for all. To address child labor and enhance working conditions for children, the organization collaborates closely with governments, employers, and workers' organizations.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF): UNICEF works closely with the issue of child labor in Southeast Asia. They raise awareness and advocate for the harms of labor to a child. They also fund children's education and protection by working closely with governments and other organizations.

Timeline of Events

19th Century	<i>In the Industrial Revolution in England, children were used in factory jobs because they were small, allowing them to fit in small places, and they required a low salary.</i>
Late 20th Century	<i>Countries in Southeast Asia went through significant economic growth which resulted in a demand for cheap labor.</i>
1997	The Asian financial crisis leads to increased poverty and unemployment in Southeast Asia, which increases the issue of child labor in the region.

2015	The Sustainable Development Goals are adopted, which include a goal of ending child labor in all its forms by 2025.
2020	The COVID-19 pandemic hits Southeast Asia which affects the region's economy and exacerbates the problem of child labor

Treaties and Events

International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention No. 138: This 1973-adopted convention establishes minimum employment ages, with the majority of jobs requiring a minimum age of 15 and jobs posing a risk to one's health requiring a minimum age of 18.

ILO Convention No. 182: Adopted in 1999, this convention outlines the worst types of child labor that need to be stopped right away. They include forced labor, slavery, trafficking, and jobs that are immoral or damaging to one's health.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC): The CRC is a convention on the rights of the child that outlines children's civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. It demands that children be shielded from all forms of economic exploitation, including child labor.

ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers (2007): This declaration acknowledges the rights of migrant laborers and their families, including children, and raises awareness for their protection from economic exploitation and abuse.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): The SDGs, adopted by the United Nations in 2015, include a goal of ending child labor in all its forms by 2025.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

The issue of child labor has been recognized for the past few decades. This recognition brought some important solution attempts. The ILO tried to solve this problem by setting international labor standards. These standards set minimum age requirements for employment, prohibited dangerous forms of labor, and promoted education but these standards failed to solve the problem since children were still faced with poverty and were forced to work to survive. All governments in Southeast Asia have banned child labor, Indonesia in 2002, Cambodia in 1997, and all others in recent decades. However, these laws were very difficult to enforce because of corruption, and limited resources. For example, Cambodia ranks 150th in the corruption index, which puts them as one of the most corrupt countries. This level of corruption makes it incredibly difficult to monitor corporations; therefore, child labor continues. Some corporations also worked together to develop corporate social responsibility policies. They provide educational opportunities for young people but although it reaches a number of children it does not solve the issue.

Possible Solutions

Addressing the issue of child labor in Southeast Asia needs a multifaceted approach to the problem. Strengthening international laws by placing strict regulations on companies can be used. Increased punishments for companies who violate child labor laws can be implemented with improved monitoring of corruption and children's safety. Another approach might be providing education and training to child workers who are in danger. Their futures can be saved by getting the right education. One of many other approaches to this issue might be solving it by strengthening the funding systems to help migrant families get back on track without allowing companies to exploit them at such young ages.

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