



Bolivia: Calling for The Necessary Distinction between Child labor and Exploitation

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Statistics indicate that over 800,000 children have a full time job in Bolivia, one-fifth of the population in the age group between 5 and 14 years. Shoe-shine boys and girls work in La Paz, wearing a ski mask partly to resist pollution, partly to hide their identity and protect themselves from discrimination; they are ticket inspectors on the buses of Cochabamba; informal workers in the markets in Salar de Uyuni, where they sell bottles of water to the tourists who visit the salt plains; farmers of Brazilian nuts for many months in the year risking to catch malaria in the jungles near Riberalta. The book "Diversity in Motion", analyzes these realities, written by Christian Morsolin, an expert of the Observatory on Latin America SELVAS, who has been working in the Andean Region since 2001, with the support of Terre des Hommes TDH Italy and the International Catholic Children's Rights Organization (BICE).

Robin Cavagnoud, of the French Institute of Andean Studies IFEA of La Paz, on the occasion of the presentation of the book pointed out that "in the Andean countries the majority of children workers and adolescents are located in rural areas, where the economic participation of children is linked to their socialization and development within the community and family, but it is not an imposition of the parents. Working in the fields, taking care of animals ... are part of an activity that has a cultural identity".

These children and adolescents work to help the family, to support themselves in their studies, to provide for their personal expenses, to secure themselves a better future compared to their **fathers and brothers buried by silicosis and accidents in mines or plantations of sugar cane**. Since the '90s, they have grouped themselves in an organization called NATs (Ninos y adolescentes trabajadores, the acronym in Spanish) present in Bolivia, South America and spread to other parts of the world, to claim their right to decent work, with proper working hours and adequate health conditions for children, but also to defend their ability to study and play like everyone else.

The Catholic Church is constantly concerned towards working children. Cardinal Julio Terrazas Sandoval, Archbishop of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, said that "the kingdom of God is expressed when we feel affection and love for those thousands of children working in the street or going to work as if they were adults, who have not had a proper childhood, who are threatened by many things. But we must not only rejoice because we are celebrating the Day of the child worker, but we think that in God's



plan, in the Kingdom of God it is not anticipated that such young children do not have the opportunity to be free and that their dignity is not recognized ” .

In 2009, Bolivia's new Constitution was approved: article 61 recognizes that “the State prohibits forced labor and child exploitation. The activities that children, and adolescents carry out in the family and social life are oriented to their full formation, as citizens, and should have a formative function. Their rights, guarantees and institutional mechanisms of protection will be the subject of a special regulation”.

This historic recognition of the Social Movements NATs is the result of a mobilization of working children. It is the first time in modern human history that a Constitution (and not only the code of Infants) recognizes child labor in descent conditions. What the social movements NATs want is a clear distinction between child labor - which for them is an economic necessity, because of poverty - and exploitation, which is the work of children in situations of great danger, such as work in mines or Brazilian Walnut or sugarcane cultivation.