HAITI’S INVISIBLE CHILD SLAVES

Jean-Robert Cadet

Geneva, November 2002
Haiti’s Invisible Child Slaves

Public Lecture
by
Jean-Robert Cadet

International Institute for Labour Studies
Geneva
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Requests for this publication should be sent to: IILS Publications, International Institute for Labour Studies, P.O. Box 6, CH-1211 Geneva 22 (Switzerland).

Printed for the International Institute for Labour Studies, Geneva, Switzerland.
Opening Statements

Jean-Pierre Laviec  
*Director a.i., International Institute for Labour Studies*

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues. I would like to welcome you all in this meeting and especially our speaker, Mr. Jean-Robert Cadet. Mr. Cadet, let me thank you very, very warmly for having accepted our invitation, for having come especially from Cincinnati, Ohio, in order to speak about the terrible experience that you had as a child slave in the Caribbean. Your testimony is absolutely harrowing as anyone who has read your recent book will be able to confirm.

You are an author but also an activist, and we warmly welcome you here as such. You have decided to work and do everything you can in Haiti as well as in other countries where children are enslaved. Millions of children are concerned.

This lecture has been organized by the International Institute for Labour Studies and the ILO’s International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour, which is represented here by its Director, Mr. Frans Roselaers. The meeting will be chaired by Mr. Kari Tapiola, who is the Executive Director of the ILO sector focusing on fundamental principles and rights at work. Mr. Tapiola, at the moment, is still in a Governing Body meeting. He will join us as soon as he can. Meanwhile Mr. Roselaers will take the chair.

Frans Roselaers  
*Director, International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour*

It is unfortunate that the Governing Body is still in session but it is heartening to see that this room is already three-quarters full with a number of colleagues but also with guests from the outside whom we welcome especially. Jean-Robert Cadet tells a heartrending story of his childhood spent in slavery as a restavec in Haiti. His
escape from servitude began when his mistress moved to the United States and was obliged to send him to school there. The first time he slept on a bed was at the age of 18 when he joined the United States army. He went on to do a bachelor’s degree in international studies at the University of South Florida and a master’s degree in American history at the University of Cincinnati, Ohio, where he now teaches. His autobiography “Restavec: From Haitian Slave Child to Middle-Class American” published in 1998 by the University of Texas Press, was followed by numerous speaking engagements. He addressed the United States Senate in September 2000. He spoke at the United Nations in New York and in Geneva and produced a documentary with CNN called “Nobody’s Children”. This was shown around the world. Thanks to Terre des Hommes Switzerland, whom I greet especially, the book was translated into French under the title “Restavec: Enfant esclave en Haïti” and published by Edition du Seuil, Paris, in 2001. Jean-Robert Cadet’s mission in life is to prevent other children from toiling in domestic servitude. He has created the Restavec Children’s Foundation and frequently travels to Haiti to help former slave children living in the streets of Port-au-Prince.
HAITI'S INVISIBLE CHILD SLAVES

Jean-Robert Cadet  
*Executive Director, The Restavec Foundation*  
*Author of the book “Restavec: From Haitian Slave Child to Middle-Class American”*

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

African slaves in Hispaniola led uprisings against their French masters in the late 1700s and eventually gained their independence in 1804. They named their new country Haiti, and modelled their new government after the same one that had enslaved them for over two centuries. The Haitian elite who wished to live the same privileged lives as their former French masters took in children of the very poor as house servants and called them Reste-Avec, a term that means “to stay with”.

Restavec come from poor rural families who give their children to families of better means, and who hope their children will move up from poverty through education. Instead, the children become slaves and spend their formative years isolated from parental love and care, and from nurturing contact with siblings, deprived of schooling and subject to long days of work with no pay and living conditions far inferior to those of the overseer’s family. The slave children perform whatever services the overseer requires, under a constant threat of physical and verbal abuse, often meted out as a matter of routine by any member of the household. For many girls who become pregnant, a common response from the household is to put them out on the street. If the pregnant adolescents are allowed to stay, their children are likely to become a second generation of restavecs.

Anyone of you sitting here at this very moment can go to Haiti and ask for a child to live with you. All you need to do is to find a family with too many mouths to feed and promise that you will send the child to school and she is yours. You can treat her the same way slaves were treated under the French colonists. You do not have to make her a part of the family, learn her name, send her to school, provide her with health care, buy her clothes, give her affection, or treat her like a human being. You can make her sleep outside, torture her to death and dump her body in the trash, and no one will question you, and there will be no government investigation to find out the cause of death. In fact, the same specialized whips that were manufactured to torture the slaves during the 1700s can be purchased today on the streets of Port-au-Prince to torture children in domestic servitude. This practice is a
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violation of Haiti’s Constitution, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which passed the UN General Assembly in 1989, as well as the ILO’s Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182).

One of the worst forms of abuse facing Haiti’s slave children is exclusion. Slave children in Haiti set tables for meals in which they cannot partake, fetch water that they cannot use for their own needs, are denied medical care when they are struck by illness, are forbidden to speak until spoken to, and stay outside when adults are inside. While these slave children are forced to be invisible, they must remain within the reach of their master’s voice. Otherwise, severe doses of physical punishment will ensue without mercy. This is a reality which provoked nightmares that consumed my own childhood and still haunt me well into my adulthood.

At night, when I was a restavec child in Haiti, the adults installed themselves in the living room and I would go behind the house to watch television through the window screen, standing on a concrete block in the dark while mosquitoes feasted on my exposed legs and arms. I had to be constantly within the reach of the grown up’s voices in case they wanted to be served a cold beverage from the refrigerator within their reach. I then remained out of sight until everyone was in bed, arranged my bedding under the kitchen table and woke before everyone would get out of bed.

Today, in the year 2002, on any early morning in Port-au-Prince, children in tattered clothes are seen hand in hand with children in bright uniforms crossing the street. The ones in tattered clothes are restavecs who must return to their duties as domestic slaves after escorting their counterparts to school.

This daily exclusion from any community or family often leaves no visible scars but the trauma lasts a lifetime. These children all too frequently become victims of the abusive and institutionalized practice of domestic servitude. Since their most basic rights - to a family’s love and protection, health and education - are denied, restavecs are invisible children, observers instead of participants in their own society.

As a slave child in Port-au-Prince, my day began at 5:30 in the morning and ended when the last adult went to sleep. I had to sweep the yard, water the plants, fill the tub for everyone’s bath, empty and wash the chamber pots, hand wash diapers, boil baby bottles, wash the car twice a day, dust the furniture every day, serve people drinks in the front yard every evening, wash people’s feet every evening, run errands, hand wash women’s monthly napkins, fetch water from afar, be borrowed by the family’s friends, and cook my own food. I worked seven days a week with no pay and no time to play. I was also excluded from all family activities such as meals, birthdays, attending school and church, Mother’s Day, Christmas, New Year’s celebrations, weddings, first communions, and even funerals. I could not speak unless spoken to. For any minor infraction, such as not answering quickly enough when my name was called, I was beaten without mercy. Like all restavec children, I was only an observer rather than a participant in my Haitian society and culture.
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It was by a twist of fate that I came to the Unites States. In 1970, the family that owned me moved to the United States and later sent for me to resume the same duties that I used to perform in Haiti. My birth certificate was purchased on the black market, and I was listed as my virtual owner’s son only to fool the United States’ Immigration officials.

In New York, my situation improved a great deal. My owners made sure that I wore shoes and clean clothes to hide the fact that they had a slave child living with them. However, by having to address everyone as Monsieur, Madame, Mademoiselle, they made sure that I did not forget my status as a restavec. I no longer had to wash their feet, fetch water or hand wash feminine napkins every month. But I continued my duties of washing dishes, cleaning the house, setting the table, babysitting three children and washing the car.

One day, a family friend who knew me in Haiti came to visit and told the family that it was against the law in the United States not to send a minor to school. I was taken to Spring Valley High School in New York and placed in the ninth grade. I was about 16 years old and I had the equivalent of a third grade education, with no English proficiency.

When the family realized that their children and I would be attending the same school, I was shown the door to fend for myself. However, the facts that I was attending school, participating in extra-curricular activities and eating in the cafeteria with my fellow students made me an integral part of American society. For the first time in my life, I could express my needs, feelings, and opinions.

After four years in high school, I graduated and joined the United States Army for three years. I then completed my university studies and eventually wrote my autobiography “Restavec”, simply to raise international consciousness to the plight of Haiti’s more than 300,000 slave children.

By looking at me, you cannot tell that I never had a childhood. It was stolen and the accomplice is Haiti’s institutionalized practice of domestic servitude. Since it can never be recovered, I will feel its absence for the rest of my life. To give you an idea, what it is like to have never had a childhood, let me read parts of the foreword to my book that my wife Cindy wrote:

“My days and nights reverberate with the truth of this story that my husband has written. I was not there to witness the circumstances of his birth, the horrors of his childhood or his surreal assimilation into American society that form the basis of his memoirs, but I lie beside him now each night as he sleeps. And when that sleep is fitful - when I hear his labouring breath, his muffled cry, or feel his arms tremble and his legs thrash about - I know that reality from decades ago is up on us again.”

Four months ago, while I was in Haiti to distribute clothes to street children who once were slaves, a Haitian acquaintance invited me to spend a weekend as a guest in his family’s house. It was a two-story yellow and white brick house in an
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upper-class suburb in Port-au-Prince, protected by an eight-foot wall and a large red iron gate. I was awakened from a light sleep at around four in the morning by the crowing of roosters. I went to sleep again, and I opened my eyes to daylight when I heard a noise coming from the yard. It was quarter to six. I got out of bed and I looked down from the balcony. It was the sound of Celita’s large broom sweeping the cement yard. Everyone else in the house was still in bed.

Celita was an 11 year old slave girl who had been living with the family for the past two years. Her mother, who lived in the countryside, had handed Celita to the host family because she was no longer able to provide her daughter with what every child needs: three meals a day and a decent school. Celita was dressed in an oversized, sleeveless t-shirt and a skirt. Her small budding breasts were visible from the side each time she leaned forward.

She cleaned up after the dog, washed the yard with buckets of water and dried it with a rubber squeegee. Then she repeatedly carried water from a bucket upstairs to flush toilets and to fill-up bathtubs. After each of the four adults and one child bathed, she set the table and made a trip to the bakery, while the cook prepared breakfast. As everyone ate, Celita stood near the doorway with her hands behind her back, waiting for requests to pass the butter, the sugar, the salt, or whatever someone did not care to reach for. After breakfast, Celita cleared the table and ate the leftover food sitting on a cement block near the gate. Then she washed dishes and went upstairs to make the beds, dust the furniture and mop the rooms. While doing these tasks, she was interrupted with several requests, “Celita fetch my slippers, Celita bring me a comb, Celita bring my purse”. Besides being the doer and the fetcher of everything for everyone, Celita also cared for the family’s bright eyed nine-year old daughter Maida, whose face looked healthy and was always ready to smile. She was often praised and affectionately touched by her mother, father and grandfather, who spoke to her only in French. A large picture of her first communion in a gold frame graced the small coffee table in the living room. Maida was Catholic, she had toys, and attended an expensive private school.

Celita was a dark skinned child with a thin, scarred and hardened face that did not seem able to smile. Her eyes were deep and dull. She was often criticized and threatened with the back of a hand. She had no picture of herself in the house. She did not go to school and her owners never took her to any church. She had no religion. She entertained Maida instead of playing with her. She obeyed Maida’s every command.

As her owner begun to back his brown car out of the driveway, he honked his horn and Celita ran at full speed to open the heavy iron gate that kept the house and everyone inside safe from intruders. As soon as Celita finished her other house-cleaning duties, she sat on a cement block and began to wash by hand a huge pile of clothes. And again, she was constantly interrupted, “Where is Celita, come wash this pot, Celita come dry the floor, Celita come flush the toilet, Celita come set the table”. By late afternoon, the brown car returned again and the horn was honked again.
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Celita rushed to the front yard and pulled opened the heavy iron gate. The car entered, and she pushed the gate shut.

By late evening, the family sat on the front porch relaxing in the warm tropical breeze. Celita carried a bucket of water to the side of the house where the dog was tied. She bathed there, changed to an oversize dress and remained out of sight but within the reach of everyone’s voice. Soon the requests began again until everyone went to bed. “Celita bring me a glass of water, Celita fetch my slippers”. Celita’s sole purpose was to slave. Her right to be a child ended the very moment she walked through the red iron gate. Her masters’ comfort was her hell.

Haiti’s institutionalized practice of using children as domestic slaves violates every article of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which passed the U.N. General Assembly unanimously, along with Haiti’s ratification in 1989. Haiti is now making preparations to celebrate its 200th year of independence in 2004. Leaders of many nations will be invited to attend the ceremony, and every Haitian will take to the streets to celebrate, except the children forced into domestic slavery.

I thank you very much for listening.
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Mr. Roselaers (the chairperson) – Thank you, Jean-Robert. I think I can speak for everyone here in saying that we are deeply touched by this testimony of the terrible conditions under which Jean-Robert Cadet lived his childhood as an invisible child, to use his own words. We are equally impressed by the strength and the willpower which made Jean-Robert overcome this condition and made him devote a considerable part of his energy to combat child servitude in the form of the restavec system in the country of his origin. We now have an opportunity to discuss with him any questions you may have, any suggestions you may have, anything that you would like to bring forward on this subject. I would encourage you to ask questions as you have Jean-Robert Cadet here in person and need not rely on his book only.

Question/Comment – I have more of a reaction than a question. As a Christian believer, what strikes me in the strongest way is that the behaviour of these adults towards slave children does not only go against all the articles of the Convention for the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989), but against all the values of Christian life. I cannot believe that people who claim to be Christian can be so blind and treat children like this. This is a shock for me. Do you have something to say about this? Do you think that some people are starting to change their point of view?

Mr. Cadet – Yes, there is a degree of blindness. You see this thing in front of you, you are participating in it, you are practising it, but at the same time you do not see what you are doing. This is one of the reasons why I wrote the book “Restavec”. I wrote it to sensitize people. The book is part of a sensitizing campaign to open the eyes of Haitian society, open the eyes of the people who are practising child slavery.

Question/Comment – My question relates to your current work, your foundation. Have you been able to deal with problems of slave children? Have you been able to sensitize the Haitian authorities about this problem? What has taken place?

Mr. Cadet – In Haiti, I do give support to three or four NGOs that help the street children. These were former house slaves, restavecs, and now they are street children in Port-au-Prince. Our foundation actually has very little money, about US$15,000 per year. This is not enough really to sensitize the authorities, to raise awareness. But I do my best to help the street children in Haiti. For example, I go to Haiti three or four times per year with food, clothes and shoes to give to the street children.
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Question/Comment – I was absolutely shocked to hear your testimony and I find it incredible that in this day and age, these things can continue to happen. So my question is, first, what is the U.N. system doing, what is UNICEF doing, what about all these conventions, the ILO’s Rights of the Child? Second, in your own country, your former country, with democracy coming in, how can this state of condition continue?

Mr. Cadet – You mentioned UNICEF, UNICEF has an office in Haiti. Frankly, I do not know what they are doing. I have not been in contact with them. They have a huge compound, very well protected. They have been there for a long time. You said that you cannot understand how this can be going on. You have to understand that Haiti, after its independence, was an isolated country. It was under quarantine by France, the United States, practically all the European countries. Isolation really added to the problem. A lot of the people who are practising this today are people who felt powerless; having those child slaves gives them some power.

Mr. Roselaers – I think it is only fair on Jean-Robert Cadet that I should also chip in a bit and not leave him to answer for what we may be doing or not doing or doing wrongly. I think we should put this in perspective on what the situation of Haiti is as a whole. In the discussion that Jean-Robert had this morning with Mr. Somavia, our Director-General, that point was also touched upon and, of course, the fact that Haiti as a whole has a severe problem of poverty to deal with, as well as a problem of governance. Various turbulences in recent and less recent history have made it very difficult to undertake development programmes in that country but they do exist, under the leadership of the UN and UNDP but also by UNICEF and by ourselves. In the case of the ILO, several programmes are ongoing. We from the IPEC programme are trying to do our best to help a number of the groups that are active in this area. We are also working with the Government but there are serious constraints and very big difficulties to be overcome. The effectiveness of programmes, whether they are done by the UN, by bilateral donors or by NGOs, is less than ideal and this will be the case for some time to come, I am afraid. At the same time, we are determined to continue to help all those who are making an effort to improve the situation, whether it is at the level of poverty reduction and employment creation or at the more specific level of improving children’s rights or combating child labour.

Question/Comment – I work for an organization that fights for the eradication of poverty and we actually have an office and a team that is working in Port-au-Prince. I think it is quite obvious that what has happened in your own childhood and what continues today is a scandal and that there is no disagreement on this. I would like to retake one of your points. You said that the girl you saw recently, working in the house of an acquaintance of yours, had actually been taken there by her mother, because her mother could not give her daughter what she needed, namely three meals a day, being able to go to school, etc. I linked this a little bit with your saying that you visit Haiti four times a year, helping with food, clothing, etc., which is an immediate solution. But for me, there has to be something on a long-term basis. We have to go back to the root of the problem and really think about how we can enable
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these parents to provide for their children and actually enable the family to stay together. The situation must not arise where they are forced or humiliated enough by society to give their children away to this slave trade.

Question/Comment – Have you had the chance to present your book in Haiti? Have you been interviewed by the radio or television? This would be a very good way to raise awareness about restavecs and all the people who employ them.

Mr. Cadet – I talked to the publisher to have the book sent to Haiti. However, you have to understand that there is a literacy problem. 80 per cent of the people in Haiti cannot read. Just having the book in Haiti in a few book stores is not going to help. You have to have a sensitizing campaign around the book that will encourage the people who can read to purchase it and disseminate its message. That sensitizing campaign must be done at a critical time and that critical time, in my opinion, is in 2004, the moment when the Haitian Government will celebrate its 200 years of independence. This is something that I have been working on, something I am trying to accomplish. I am trying to organize support to have this campaign.

Question/Comment – I would like to thank you for your impressive testimony. I was in Haiti last year and saw that there were a lot of containers blocked in the Port-au-Prince port with medicine and drugs and the authorities did not release the medicine. What are your relations with the authorities?

Mr. Cadet – I was in Haiti two months ago with two journalists from the La Vie magazine and I went to see the director of social welfare. We asked him if the problem of these children, constitutional or not, is a priority for the Haitian Government and he said, “Just go and talk to the ILO about this”. I was shocked because he talked in a way that seemed to make the ILO Office a branch of the Haitian Government. People are blind. They do not see anything really. To be able to inform these people, we have to have an awareness campaign.

Question/Comment – I am Haitian and I work with ILO. I have a comment rather than a question but first I would like to assure everyone here that there are no restavecs in my family. Haiti is an extraordinary country. I come from a region (département) called the Northwest. You have spoken of the children in Port-au-Prince, but this phenomenon is all over the country. It is not only useful but absolutely necessary to take care of street children and slave children. If we do not act on the basis of legislation though, and punish the people who have child slaves and implement this legislation throughout the whole country, the problem will remain and you can only help a group of children here and there. I saw how demagogic this type of help can be. For example, I saw on television how the Government took a few children and gave them some presents. A paternalistic spirit is still alive and I think we have to fight against this with means based on the law.

Question/Comment – I would like to ask you, Mr. Cadet, if you have the impression that the situation is becoming worse or is it the same in the last few years?
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Mr. Cadet – There are many laws against slavery of children but the laws are not implemented. Tradition is more powerful than the legislation. The situation seems to be getting worse because of the high unemployment but as far as I am concerned, poverty should not be an excuse to practise child slavery. If you take Cuba, for example: They have a different government, a different system, but a difficult economic situation, similarly to Haiti. Cuba has been under US embargo since 1963, the people are poor, but they do not practise child slavery. To me, poverty is not an excuse.

Mr. Roselaers – I would like to add something from the perspective of the ILO. In 1999, the delegates to the International Labour Conference used precisely Jean-Robert Cadet’s words when adopting a new convention on the worst forms of child labour: “Poverty is a reality but it is not an excuse”. Some forms of child labour are so serious that neither poverty nor cultural differences or traditions should be invoked for them, and servitude and slavery are part of that. Since then our programmes are very much oriented towards combating those forms of child labour and the way we do it is by helping governments as well as trade unions, the private sector and civil society to tackle the problem at its roots. We mainly work to reduce poverty and try to improve the parents’ income or employment situation while simultaneously creating sufficient capacity in the educational system for the children being withdrawn from child labour.

Question/Comment – I lived in Haiti for nine years and would like to follow-up on a point that was made here. Not only do you need laws but you also need to work on prevention. If in each municipality you had a school with a canteen, there would be fewer children who would be sent to town to work with families. I think you need to have a massive support for education in the rural areas so that the families can keep their children. Also, do the parents who give children to other families as a restavec, do they know what is expected of their children there? And is there no organizational body that could put pressure on the Haitian government?

Mr. Cadet – Haiti depends on foreign aid, foreign aid from the United States, France, Canada, Germany, Great Britain. If all these countries would unite and say, you have to do this or otherwise you will not get the foreign aid, I really believe the situation would change overnight. If you look at what is going on right now in the Middle East, George Bush wants to go to war and it did not take him long to get a lot of people, leaders of the world, the UN, to give him what he wants. On the other hand, you have a country, in the backyard of the United States, with a slave problem. I really believe that something can be done, otherwise, I would not be here and travelling around and talking on behalf of children in servitude. It is very upsetting to me to see this, to have this situation that has been going on since 1804 and it is still going on today. There are a lot of questions that I cannot answer. I am not an expert in policies regarding the ILO or the UN but this is something that can be done.

Question/Comment – I work here at the ILO and I want to thank you for your talk tonight. I wonder if you could elaborate a bit more on the fate of these child slaves. You mentioned that you are seeing second generation slaves. Also, in the process of
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looking at the problem, how does one go about documenting these workers, when they are taken from their families and with such a high illiteracy rate?

Mr. Cadet – There are several NGOs in Haiti, three of them in particular that I can think of, where there are 300 children who can be documented. They can be asked questions about where they came from, the kind of work they are doing. I was able to talk to a lot of these children two months ago when I went to Haiti to do an article on the restavec situation. There are two other NGOs, one is the Beyond Border that has a literacy programme in the countryside. They serve a lot of children who are in domesticity. Documentation is easy to obtain, but you have to have a contact with several of these organizations to be able to interview children.

Mr. Roselaers – Thank you Jean-Robert. It is our experience in working with children in domestic child labour that several things need to be done at the same time. NGOs that operate as watchdogs and others that do awareness raising can be very powerful instruments. In addition, ways must be found to get the children out of their individual isolation and give them the possibility to regain contact with the community around them and later on defend their rights – rights of education, speaking up, of being treated properly and not being exploited. In many parts of the world, children themselves are very active in organizing those groups and those community contacts and with that you will find a beginning of a solution but it always has to come with a simultaneous action to be taken to improve the situation of the parents and to cut the problem at the root or with preventive action.

Question/Comment – I am from Haiti myself. I left Haiti when I was 17 and I think I would like to make some comments. We ourselves had a little girl at home and I can assure you that we loved her and she learned how to read and write. All around us, we also saw people who treated these children well and actually looked after them as if they were their own children. Of course that does not mean that other children are not being ill-treated. When I read the book of Mr. Cadet, I really did suffer for him and for all these children who are being ill-treated, so marked. And so I decided together with a friend who has a school in Haiti to create a small association in order to help these children. All the suggestions that you can give us will be useful to us. I would like to stress that the families who take in children are supposed to feed, cloth and send them to school. As counterpart the children would do a number of small jobs. But of course this is not the way it happens and the families who hand over their children cannot imagine the realities. Maybe one could give women in such families micro-credits so that they could keep their children at home and the families could stay together. I would also like to say that in Haiti, unfortunately, children are being beaten by their own parents. It is very sad but I have seen it myself: Very often parents hit their children very, very hard.

Question/Comment – Good evening, I am also from Haiti. When my friend first spoke to me about the restavec children in Haiti, I felt not really concerned. I had experiences: We had children living at home and my parents treated them as if they were their own children. They did deal with them properly. I did not even know that
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children were being ill-treated in Haiti. So my friend brought me your book which I started reading and which has really saddened me and upset and shocked me. My friend and I decided to establish an association and do something for these children. I had already set up a school for children in difficult situations and we now have five restavec children who go to this school in Haiti. We have started something but we would like to have your assistance, your suggestions and ideas.

Mr. Cadet – We are talking about ten per cent of Haitian children’s population in that kind of situation. Helping a small group of children will not solve the restavec issue. It is deeper than that. You have to have government intervention to be able to eliminate the situation completely. Laws must be enforced, schools must be built. In the United States and Canada alone, you have about 1 million Haitians and these people are professionals who can go to Haiti if the situation improves, who can run schools. There is a shortage of teachers, shortage of everything in Haiti. As for the work that the few NGOs are doing, taking care of a few hundred students here, a few hundred restavec children there, this is just a drop in the bucket. What I am doing, when I go to Haiti - I travel with food, a lot of equipment and clothes - I do that because when I see children in the streets basically naked, it has an effect on you. But all of this is small, a very minuscule step. It is essential to put pressure on the Government to eliminate the problem.

Question/Comment – You are right when you say that there has to be some kind of government pressure but you also have to have some kind of initiative on a grassroots level. If everything is coming from a national and governmental level and there is no support or initiative on the grassroots level, then nothing will be achieved. You stated that this started in 1804, this abuse has been happening for years and years and it is almost as if it became part of the culture, something that people are blind to. I think that, to the contrary of what you said, the initiative the lady spoke about is exactly what we need. If the people in Haiti are not willing to accept and do something on a grassroots level, then I really do not see any kind of solution. I would like to add one question as obviously child labour is a problem for not just Haiti. Is there some kind of reflection or debate, possibly at European level, that is currently in process between certain countries who would like to think about ways on how to eliminate child poverty on a world wide level?

Mr. Roselaers – I will not reply to all of what you said because some of it is very central to the development debate as a whole: Should action come from the top or from the bottom, is it preventive action, grassroots level action, legislative action that will make a difference? As for the plans to eliminate child poverty, I refer you to the extensive literature and experiences we have posted on our website of the ILO. There is in fact an enormous upsurge both in awareness raising and in action against child labour in many countries worldwide, in particular, since the adoption of the new convention on the subject in 1999. We ourselves operate in more than 80 countries worldwide to try to deal with that problem effectively, not just with pilot projects but also with large scale sectoral or industry wide programmes and lately with an approach whereby we help countries to eliminate altogether at least the worst forms
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of child labour in a time bound fashion, i.e. within a defined period of time. I can give you more information later if you wish.

Question/Comment – I have a practical question. What are the activities that your foundation has set-up to date?

Mr. Cadet – The foundation is working with Free the Slaves International. The goal of the foundation is to provide relief for families who had their children returned to them, in other words, children who escaped or children who find themselves in servitude, leave and return to their family. We try to support the family, to help them retain their child. Another thing that I do, as I mentioned before, is to travel to Haiti and support other NGOs who are taking care of children living in the streets.

Question/Comment – You said you help the children come back to the family, so do you actually give money to the family or what do you do to help?

Mr. Cadet – It is a project called Seeds Money. For example, you provide the family the opportunity to create a business, either selling food or some other product to maintain the family. The problem is getting to the family, to find out what the situations are.

Question/Comment – This reality which Mr. Cadet has just presented to us is a horrible thing which everybody condemns. What is worse is that we have similar situations in almost every country of the world. The solution should be found in development policy, in economic and cultural development. People in completely different material conditions will not live with domestic slaves; and where there is work for families in rural areas, they will not have to send their children to become domestic slaves in towns and cities. In Haiti, poverty is absolutely everywhere. If one can find a third world country where the situation is not so serious, then it means that they have better development policies. In the past, this terrible situation also existed in today’s developed countries. The United States and European countries came out of it thanks to cultural and economic development.

Mr. Roselaers – We have debated a very sensitive and a very complex problem for which there is no simple solution. This is true not just for child domestic labour or for child servitude but for a lot of aspects of child labour in a broader sense. The discussion has given a lot of useful and clear indications on the urgency to act and on the way to act, although there was also some divergence of view on whether it is better to start at one end of the range of solutions or at the other. Probably, the solution is to combine what everybody does best. Some will be best equipped to act at the grassroots level whereas others may have the possibility to act through diplomatic channels or on labour legislation or on partnerships to be built-up between different parts of society who can all bring in an element of the solution. Let me thank you all for your presence and your contributions. We did not have many Governing Body members contrary to what we thought originally, but they have been kept busy on other important subjects in the meeting room next to us. Despite that, we had the
meeting room quite full and that shows the great interest there was for Jean-Robert Cadet's testimony. I thank those who came from the outside, from the diplomatic corps, the media who help us a lot in disseminating messages of this type, the NGOs from the Geneva area and around. I also would like to thank our Executive Director who did manage to come out for this and who helped us in the preparation of this meeting. Finally: many thanks to Jean-Robert for coming all the way. Thank you for being so convincing and so moving in the testimony you gave and I hope to see you here again.

Mr. Cadet – Thank you all very much for coming. Thank you.

Geneva, November 2002