

Anti – child labor gets boost

The Department of Labor and Employment – Regional Office No. 1 (DOLE-ROI) conducted a press conference recently for the Eliminating Child Labor in the Tobacco Industry (ECLTI) Project at the penthouse of the DOLE building. Leading the media forum were Atty. Guerrero N. Cirilo and Atty. Napoleon V. Fernando, Regional and Assistant Regional Directors for DOLE respectively. The occasion also served as a welcome dinner for its guest of honor, Marc Hofstetter, Director of the Swiss funding agency Eliminating Child Labor in Tobacco Growing (ECLTI) Foundation, a conglomeration of Trade Unions, tobacco farmers, multinational tobacco companies, and the ILO – IPEC.

In his opening remarks, Dir. Cirilo said that the issue of child labor is one of DOLE's primary concerns. In his message, Dir. Hofstetter mentioned that the ECLTI project in Region I is the only anti-child labor project funded by his foundation in Asia, the other pilot projects being Tanzania, Malawi, Uganda and South Africa, all in Africa. Hofstetter also expressed delight with "working with the government for the first time". He also agriculture, and that very little study has been done about the hazards of working in tobacco growing.

This special two year aims to alleviate conditions of child labor in the tobacco growing industry and provide assistance to marginalized tobacco farming families in the four provinces of northern Luzon. It is consistent with the principles of the National Program Against child labor (NPACL) and aims to raise the awareness and capacity of local communities in preventing child labor through trainings, organization and strengthening of Barangay Councils for the Protection of Children (BCPC), the provision of alternative livelihood, and educational assistance.

The project brings together the national Tobacco Administration (NTA), the Department of Social Welfare and Development of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Department of Education (DepEd); the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), Department of Health (DOH), Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), LGUS, Union Leaf; Conleaf Phils., Philipp Morris Phils., Trans Manila, Northern Tobacco Redrying Corporation (NTRCI) and its Labor Union, and DOLE-ROI as the lead agency.

The project began in the 2003 with the conduct of a research by the Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University (DMMMSU). It uses data-base system to profile child laborers in Region I's tobacco industry and a resource sharing scheme for better service delivery. Its programs include orientations on the NPACL, responsible parenthood, domestic violence, gender and development, counseling sessions for parents and children, increased access of direct health services for child workers and their families, incorporation of child's rights and welfare in learning activities, increased access to educational opportunities, and capacity building for communities.

The ECLTI Project will provide funding and technical assistance to qualified farmers groups and thier children following certain provisions in the criteria for selection. Presently, of the 62,417 tobacco farmers in the Philippines, 41,126 are spread all over Pangasinan, La Union, Ilocos Sur and Ilocos Norte.