

Parliamentary questions

21 February 2012

E-001995/2012

Question for written answer
to the Commission

Rule 117

Thijs Berman (S&D)

► **Subject: Brick industry in Afghanistan**

The ILO has published a report, 'Buried in Bricks', on the brick sector in Afghanistan (Kabul and Nanghar) and the pressing human rights situation of the labourers in this sector. The study shows that, by using a system of advances, the kiln owners keep their labourers bonded to the kiln. Nearly all the households surveyed (98 %) began working in brick kilns while they were in exile in Pakistan. The households consist of large families and have almost no access to credit, therefore they turn to brick kilns because this is one of the few places where they can get credit advances as well as in-kind payments such as shelter and water. Their debt keeps these households bonded to the kilns. In addition, since the household's members are all forbidden to seek employment outside the kiln, and are only allowed to leave the kiln at set times to go to set locations (the hospital for example), they cannot seek jobs elsewhere. The families are also tied to the kiln because they do not own land and are dependent on the shelter offered by the kiln owner.

Child labour is also widespread in the kilns (56 % of the labourers are children). Child labour helps kiln owners maximise the in-kind payments by using all the household's members, and children perform the tasks that make adults more productive, such as carrying water and rolling mud balls. These children are trapped in a cycle of being bonded to the kiln since they cannot attend school and are forced to take over their parents' debt.

- Is the Commission aware of this pressing human rights situation in the kilns in Afghanistan and if so, what action has been taken so far?
- Would the Commission be willing in principle to support the programmes of e.g. Unicef, the ILO and NGOs, to tackle both bonded and child labour in the Afghan brick kilns, for which options have been sketched by the ILO in the report 'Buried in Bricks'?
- Would the Commission be willing to support specific programmes to get children working in brick kilns into mainstream education as part of the focus on the 'educational needs of vulnerable groups' as mentioned in the Country Strategy Paper, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2007-2013?
- As the Country Strategy Paper for Afghanistan mentions possible actions under the thematic programme 'migration and asylum', with an emphasis on the link between migration and development, would the Commission be willing to support a regional programme with Pakistan, as recommended by the ILO?

Parliamentary questions 10 May 2012

Answer given by High Representative/Vice-President Ashton on behalf of the Commission [E-001995/2012](#)

The EU Special Representative and Head of the EU Delegation to Afghanistan (EUSR/HoD Afghanistan) is monitoring the human rights situation on the ground in close consultation with EU Heads of Mission (HoMs) and has discussed the issue of child labour in the brick industry with the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The EU attaches particular importance to addressing the problem of child labour, based on the Council Conclusions on Child Labour of June 2010.

EU assistance addresses social protection through capacity building in the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled (MoLSAMD) and by funding non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to provide a range of social services in a public-private partnership targeting in particular highly vulnerable categories of the population, among them children. This also involves support to the Ministry of Education's (MoE) 'inclusive education strategy' aimed, inter alia, at reintegrating children into mainstream education.

EU assistance focuses on governance, agriculture and health, in support of the Afghan National Development Strategy and National Priority Programmes (NPP). The Afghan Government is committed to addressing child labour through a dedicated strategy led by a 'child labour unit' under the MoLSAMD. In this context, the EU has funded a Child Protection Secretariat, which aims to group together all national government services targeting vulnerable children, and improve their coordination. In preparing its upcoming three year Social Protection programme, the EU has been raising the issue of exploitative child labour with all stakeholders (civil society and government) to ensure that the issue is given sufficient attention in the relevant National Priority Programmes, which are the basis for the EU's future support in this sector.

While the EU has programmes aimed at fostering regional cooperation, including between Afghanistan and Pakistan, child labour is not addressed in this context.