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Forced Labor

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# Forced Labour in Latin America

Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work

International Labour Office

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# Forced Labour in Latin America

## **Abstract**

A fact sheet on forced labor in the Latin American region, inclusive of statistics and an outline of the ILO's actions against it.

## **Keywords**

America, Bonded, Catherwood, Compulsory, Cornell, Economic, Exploitation, Forced, Global, Globalization, Globalisation, Human, ILO, ILR, Industrial, International, Labor, Labour, Latin, Law, Legal, Legislation, Library, Organization, Organisation, Portal, Principals, Relations, Report, Rights, School, Standards, Trafficking, University, Work, Workers, Workplace

## **Comments**

Forced Labour Facts

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## Forced Labour in Latin America

### OVERVIEW

In Latin America and the Caribbean today, several governments are tackling forced labour in earnest. Brazil has taken strong measures against forced labour in agriculture and in remote logging camps. The government of Brazil officially acknowledged the existence of forced labour at the ILO in 1995. Since then, it has addressed the problem with high visibility. A National Action Plan against Slave Labour has been implemented since March 2003.

Recently, a number of other Latin American governments have decided to confront forced labour, notably in their agricultural sectors. Bolivia, Peru and Paraguay have taken important steps to develop, jointly with workers' and employers' organizations, new policies to combat forced labour.

### KEY STATISTICS

- There are an estimated 1.3 million forced labourers in Latin American and the Caribbean, out of a global total of 12.3 million;
- 75% of forced labourers in Latin America are victims of coercion for labour exploitation, while the remaining victims are either in state-imposed forced labour or in forced commercial sexual exploitation;
- 250,000 forced labourers, or 20% of the total number in the region, have been trafficked, either internally or across borders;
- The estimated profit derived in Latin American and the Caribbean from trafficked forced labour is an estimated US\$ 1.3 billion.

### FORMS OF COERCION AND RECRUITMENT

Substantial numbers of mainly indigenous agricultural workers are in conditions of debt bondage, mostly as a result of wage advances made to workers by private labour contractors. Factors which make indigenous peoples in remote areas particularly susceptible to coercive recruitment and debt bondage include a weak state presence, low investment in educational services, poor literacy and numeracy, slow implementation of land reforms as well as the lack of official identity documents, rendering people "invisible" to national authorities.

ILO field research on forced labour and debt bondage in rural areas has documented the following situations:

- Agricultural "slave labour", mainly in the state of Pará, in the Brazilian Amazon region. The term "slave labour" refers to degrading work conditions and the impossibility of leaving the farms due to alleged debts and the presence of armed guards;
- The *enganche* and *habilitacion* labour systems, based on wage advances in Bolivia's agriculture, in particular in tropical areas of Santa Cruz, the northern Amazon, and the Bolivian Chaco;
- Forced labour in the Amazon basin of Peru, both with recruited workers in logging camps and with isolated indigenous communities;
- Discrimination and employment conditions of indigenous people in the cattle farms of the Chaco region in Paraguay.

Brazil's National Action Plan against Slave Labour was adopted in March 2003. Components of the strategy include awareness-raising campaigns, promotion of a new law with stronger sanctions against offenders such as confiscation of their property, greatly intensified release of forced labour victims in remote areas through the interventions of mobile police units and other agents of criminal and labour law enforcement.

In Bolivia, the government created a National Commission for the Eradication of Forced Labour in December 2004 with a mandate to develop and implement an effective strategy against forced labour with the participation of workers and employers organizations.

In Peru, the government is setting up a Multisectoral Commission which is to design a national policy to eliminate forced labour and strengthen the rule of law in the regions where forced labour occurs.

#### **REGIONAL AND NATIONAL RESPONSES**

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In Bolivia, the government created a National Commission for the Eradication of Forced Labour in December 2004 with a mandate to develop and implement an effective strategy against forced labour with the participation of workers and employers organisations.

In Peru, the government is in the process of setting up a Multisectoral Commission, with a view to designing a national policy to eliminate forced labour and strengthen the rule of law in the regions where forced labour occurs.

### **ILO ACTION AGAINST FORCED LABOUR**

Since 2002, the ILO has been supporting the eradication of forced labour in Brazil. Activities such as sensitizing law enforcement agencies, and bringing them together in a common platform against slave labour has resulted in the creation of mobile tribunals ("*varas itinerantes*") to deal immediately with the most serious cases.

In Bolivia, Peru and Paraguay, the ILO helping to initiate new strategies and policies developed jointly by Governments, workers' and employers' organizations. In Bolivia this led in December 2004 to the creation of a National Commission for the Eradication of Forced Labour, a significant milestone in the fight against forced labour in this country.

A number of ILO projects aim at the elimination of child trafficking in Central America, Panama, the Dominican Republic, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Colombia, Paraguay and Peru.