

Discours Inauguration de Martine Combemale

Merci, Thank you

Je remercie Son Excellence, Monsieur l'Ambassadeur. Thank you, dear François, for your support, and thank you for having curated this exhibition with the United Nations.

I would also like to thank Madam Jane Stewart, here representing ILO/

Thanks to all of those who participated in the project, Plantu and cartooning for peace, the cartoonist from 47 countries, our partner in USA Diane Mull, president of IIECI in Washington DC, an NGO fighting against the child labor.

Thanks to Charles Gay and Dimitri Tisseyre, who supported us from the very beginning of our operation, on a voluntary basis, by creating a short film for the launch of the project.

Human Resources Without Borders' mission is to take concrete action that will guarantee respect of human rights in the work place, in the sub-contracting supply chain. Our philosophy favors questioning rather than judgement, dialogue rather than interventionism, and support rather than substitution.

Our organization acts within the companies, on the ground of the supply chain, through pilot projects and pragmatic approaches to reconcile the legitimate interests of all parties - from the buyer, to the workers, to both parties on both ends of the chain.

We aim to raise awareness to media organizations and the general public by providing the keys to understanding these pressing human rights issues within the sub-contracting supply chain.

A few years ago, I evaluated a subcontractor of a large French company. This company had won numerous prizes in corporate social responsibility, and was considered one of the best in that regard. It was also audited. To my surprise, most of the workers at this company had been working there for years, but were never registered because they were assigned their job through a labor agency. Every one of them were in a situation of forced labor.

Forced labor is hidden. These workers often live with a mentality of "It could be worse", accepting their current situation out of ignorance, threat, or fear. They are obligated to work overtime, just to reimburse the labor agencies that give them the right to work. The fees paid to these agencies can add up to the amount of three years' worth of full-time work.

This situation is widespread, and exists all along the supply chain. It happens everywhere, where workers without qualifications are needed.

About two years ago, we decided to act. Alongside Irene Fernandez, winner of the Alternative Nobel Prize, and her organization Tenaganita in Malaysia, we continued her courageous work to expose the dehumanization of migrant workers. Irene unfortunately passed away a year ago. The very same day she died, she wrote me a letter. In it, it said: "The struggle must continue for justice. And when people like you come to our lives, we have hope. We can overcome". And so we decided to keep on, to raise awareness for her and for every person who finds him or herself in indecent working conditions; or worse, forced labor.

The reality of forced labor is not visible. The workers do not understand or have access to their rights.

The exhibition you see here tonight is the result of a drawing contest spearheaded by French satirical cartoonist Plantu, and his initiative, Cartooning for Peace, created with United Nations' Secretary General, Kofi Annan. The objective was to use the drawings as a vehicle for workers to understand their basic human rights. Rather than a complicated document containing their code of conduct, we provide companies with posters, to visually represent the concerns of their employees. Then we organize exhibitions like this one, and publish books and tools for unions and companies to both identify and fight against forced labor and indecent work conditions in the supply chain.

Our goal is to illuminate the fact that it is neither fair, nor equitable, nor effective, to keep looking for the cheapest possible options in the workplace, while refusing to see the consequences. That the health and lives of these workers are put at risk to make a product cheaper. That many of them are forced to take out an incredibly high loan, just to buy their right to work. That passports are taken away from migrant workers to keep them dependent on their employers. That children are made to work in the field growing cocoa without even knowing what chocolate is, never mind having ever been able to taste it.

This drawing contest was met with great success. Approximately 120 artists from 47 countries around the world provided us with a total of 315 cartoons, which you will see on the walls behind me, and in the pages of the books you see here.

The outcome was an uncompromising collection of drawings - often harsh, sometimes violent, but consistently reflecting the toughness of a reality that neither the exhibition nor the book wishes to hide or tone down.

Gathering together these drawings, reading and interpreting their messages in all their diversity, truly reveals the ambiguities and the enormous complexity of the conditions of migrant workers in our modern global economy.

Again, thank you Monsieur l'Ambassadeur, cher François, madame Steward, Plantu, Diane, Dimitri, Charles, et tous ceux qui ont apporté leur contribution.