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Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
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Dear Committee Secretary,

I am writing on behalf of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, Uniting Church in Australia, to endorse the submission of the ACTU supporting ratification of *ILO Convention No. 138: Convention concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment*. The reasons for doing so are for Australia to:

- demonstrate its support for an end to exploitative child labour;
- encourage universalization of the Convention; and
- complete universal ratification of the eight fundamental ILO Conventions.

The Synod notes the ILO is pursuing the objective of universal ratification of the eight fundamental conventions by 2015. At present, over two-thirds of the ILO's 185 member states have ratified all eight of the fundamental conventions and 165 have already ratified ILO Convention No. 138.

The Synod recognizes the ratification of the Convention will be unlikely to make any difference to the situation of employment of children in Australia. The harmful child labour situations addressed by the Convention have already been largely addressed by Australia's ratification of *International Labour Organisation Convention No. 182: Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour*.

The Synod was actively involved in consultations and working groups with the Victorian Government and business groups in Victoria regarding Victoria's *Child Employment Act*. We therefore realize the need to exempt employment in areas such as arts and entertainment from age restrictions, with State Governments regulating the conditions of employment to protect the welfare of children and ensuring that the employment does not have any negative impacts on any aspects of the child's development.

Given the fact ratification of the Convention is extremely unlikely to result in any changes to the employment of children in Australia and no additional compliance costs for employers, there are no legitimate reasons to oppose ratification.

In 2012, the ILO estimated there were 20.9 million people in forced labour in the world, of which 5.5 million are children. Over half the people in forced labour, 11.7 million, live in the Asia-Pacific region. There can be no doubt there are goods entering Australia that are produced using exploited child labour, meaning there is a direct link for Australia to seek an end to the use of exploited child labour in



our region to seek to ensure goods produced through such criminal human rights abuse do not enter our market. The US Department of Labor has identified a wide range of goods that involved the use of forced labour and exploited child labour that are imported into the US. The most common agricultural products identified were: cotton, sugarcane, tobacco, coffee, rice and cocoa.¹

Many of the same goods from the same countries are imported into Australia (see Table 1). Goods imported into Australia where forced labour may have been used in the production of the goods include cocoa, bricks, pavers, cotton clothing and fabric, carpets, rice, palm oil, and embroidered textiles.

Table 1. List of goods imported into Australia produced with high risk of child labour by country.²

Country	Good	Value of imports to Australia 2009-2010 ³ (\$ millions)
Bangladesh	Footwear	0.12
	Textiles	17.4
Côte d'Ivoire	Cocoa	
Ghana	Cocoa	2.9
India	Bricks	22 for all construction materials
	Carpets	40
	Footwear	25.9
	Garments	92
	Gems	142 gems and pearls
	Rice	24
	Silk Fabric	45 in textile yarn and fabrics
Nepal	Bricks	
	Carpets	1.2
	Embroidered Textiles	0.13
Pakistan	Bricks	
	Carpets	5.4
Philippines	Rice	
	Rubber	14.6 in rubber tyres, treads and tubes
Thailand	Garments	66.8

¹ US Department of Labor, Bureau of International Labor Affairs, Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor and Human Trafficking, 'The Department of Labor's List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor', 2009 and US Department of Labor's Bureau of International Labor Affairs, Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor and Human Trafficking, 'US Department of Labor's List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor', 2011.

² Ibid. 13-20 and US Department of Labor's Bureau of International Labor Affairs, Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor and Human Trafficking, 'US Department of Labor's List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor', (2011) 7-23.

³ Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Composition of Trade to Australia 2009-2010* (2010).



The countries and goods listed in Table 1 are far from exhaustive in terms of goods imported into Australia that are likely to involve child labour in the production of the goods. For example, Uzbekistan is the fifth largest exporter of cotton globally. Forced child labour is used extensively in the harvesting of the cotton.⁴ Of the cotton exported from Uzbekistan to developing countries, 99.5% is exported to Asia, including 52% to China and 35% to Bangladesh.⁵ Most of these countries then mill the cotton and the fabric is converted into textiles and garments for export to countries like Australia.

The Synod has been concerned about child labour, and its harmful impacts, for a significant period of time. In 1995 the Synod meeting of church representatives resolved:

- (a) *to request the Synod Commission for Mission to publish (for distribution to parishes) a list of products made with child labour;*
- (b) *to encourage Uniting Church members and their families to not purchase products made with child labour.*

The 2006 Synod meeting of 400 church representatives resolved:

- (a) *To oppose all forms of exploitive child labour and any form of labour for children that interferes in their spiritual, moral, social, mental or physical development, health or education (noting that the international definition of a child is anyone below the age of 18);*
- (b) *To support all Governments around the world ratifying and implementing the International Labour Organisation Convention No.182: Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour;*
- (c) *To call on the Australian Government to ratify the International Labour Organisation Convention No.182: Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour without further delay.*

Yours sincerely,

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⁴ International Labor Rights Forum, *Pick All the Cotton: Update on Uzbekistan's Use of Forced Child Labor in 2009 Harvest* (2009).

⁵ Correspondence from South and Central Asia Branch, Department of Foreign Affairs, 15 June 2010.

