

Barcelona, 29 May 2011. The Bolivian Union of Working Children and Adolescents (UNATsBO) submitted a draft bill to “*recognise, promote and protect the rights of working children*” during a visit with the Labour Minister on the occasion of the Day of the Bolivian Child last month.

In Bolivia the number of working children ranges from 850.000 to over a million according to different estimates; many of them begin to work before they reach six years of age. The bill, which was included in the book “Mi fortaleza es mi trabajo” (my work is my strength) explains that “*Children work for many different reasons, and very different too are the conditions they work in, going from harsh and unhappy work in exploitative conditions to employment as part of the learning process, the development and life itself of peasant communities*”.

According to the authors of the book, the aim is not to feed the debate on child labour but to give a voice to its protagonists and find responses to protect their rights. As **Ernesto Copa**, a representative from UNATsBO, explains, this bill should be considered when drafting the modifications to the National Code on Children and Adolescents and the new Labour Law in Bolivia and he adds “

We want the government to draft a law to dignify us

[...]

We'd like the State to admit that work starts at 6 years of age and not at 14

[as the law now says]

[...]

We'd like our society to realize that we work to contribute to our families”.

According to professionals working closely with UNATsBO, one of the aspects that hinder better opportunities and a future for these children is “

the lack of recognition of child workers

” as it stops protection policies in child and adolescent labour from being implemented.

Broad participation process

The bill was included in the book *Mi Trabajo es mi Fortaleza: de las demandas a la propuesta* (My work is my strength: from the demands to the proposal) that UNATsBo – with over 5.000

members across the country – produced throughout 2010 as part of a broad consultation process among children, adolescents, workers, teachers, support organisations, professionals and local and national authorities. With the support of Save the Children and Terre des Hommes Switzerland and TdH Germany, they identified their specific demands for regulating their work and putting the proposal together.

During the drafting process, the UNATsBO had to go around a number of obstacles to draft a complete bill that met the legal criteria and found the balance between the necessary universal coverage and the specific claims of working children and adolescents in wording. As a source close to UNATsBO explains, “*often, when they demand their right to work, they have a good number of international conventions going against them [...] which easily lead to believe that they want to legitimise exploitation instead of actual labour*”. On the contrary, what this proposal to dignify their work is after is the protection of safe working conditions that respect their condition as children; this draft bill includes a list of labour activities that in their opinion should be forbidden because they are harmful.

Source: [Cristiano Morsolín - Observatorio Selvas](#) and [ProNATs](#)