

**SPEECH**



**FXB** international  
François-Xavier Bagnoud



## **Speech bestowing the first international Business Conscience Award to Charles Veillon, S.A. before the Annual Banquet of the Council on Economic Priorities**

Delivered at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York on 4 June 1996

**By Albina du Boisrouvray, Founder and President**

I would need much more than the allotted two minutes to describe the horrors of forced child labor, which we have seen first hand since 1989, when, after lobbying for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Association François-Xavier Bagnoud first denounced the sexual exploitation of children, set up the first western shelters for child prostitutes in Thailand, and rescued Burmese prostitutes, many of whom are HIV infected from the Thai-Burmese brothels.

In 1994, in the context of our Children's Rights Project, we set up a section to fight forced child labor worldwide. It was in that year that we snatched Carlos Bauverd away from the International Labor Organization and he began working with Jacques Zwahlen, the CEO of Charles Veillon, a Swiss catalog company which sells home furniture, clothing, rugs and woven material. Jacques Zwahlen was interested in broadening their product line to include the sale of rugs and sought our guidance. Children are exploited worldwide, sold into slavery for the equivalent of \$20, held in inhuman conditions and beaten. The ILO estimates that about 200 million children are held in child labor, but grassroots NGO's like Association François-Xavier Bagnoud believe it is closer to 400 million!

We need many more Jacques Zwahlens to put their economic resources and leverage to change those figures. He is an example and a pioneer in the new frontier.

Why?

Jacques Zwahlen did something simple, pragmatic and caring. He teamed up hand in hand with FXB, an ethical partner and children's rights specialist, to advise him on how to weave a code of conduct with seminars for his buyers. The seminars were designed to raise awareness, to eliminate middlemen and to provide systematic auditing of suppliers with surprise visits. He did not rely on a rug mark label, which I insist offers no guarantee, can be easily copied and still engages exploitative middlemen.

He did not boycott the products, which again is not a solution. It destroys a local economy without providing any alternatives. Wendy Diaz from Honduras is a grassroots child worker who has recently pointed out to us the necessity of engaging the system to provide progressive reform including health, education, decent salaries and so forth.

Charles Veillon, S.A., is a pioneer for adding to its purchasing code of conduct reform measures recommended by FXB, establishing a rehabilitation component and providing financing for it. These recommendations are becoming a pilot for other efforts on the Asian subcontinent for the eradication of exploitative child labor practices.

Most developing countries do not wish to implement the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or the Convention on Children's Rights. Since the disappearance of the Cold War, the economic chess board is the only one which carries leverage. However, the world has shrunk and there has to be solidarity on all continents. We are one extended family, all children are our children and the environment is our common nest.

We have only a 15-year window in which the US will play a leading role. APEC is only a forum of discussion, but by 2020 it will constitute almost one third of world population and almost one half of world production and international trade. The planet is a global village that must organize itself to the globalization of trade but it must answer this globalization with the protection of children.

Countries that want to shop with us should be required to submit to the social and environmental clauses as exchange conditions. Susan Rosen, of the US Department of Labor, has called for the World Bank and other international lending institutions to make the elimination of exploitative child labor a high priority.

We all know that the leaders of the major industrialized countries are meeting in Lyon in June and the leading Asian nations convene in July. Wouldn't it be a great opportunity to make plain that trade agreements must be tied with children's rights and the protection of the environment?

At the Stand for Children March, Marian Wright Edleman called for a "better America." Tonight we call for a "better Planet." We honor Charles Veillon for having the vision, commitment and courage to establish this code of conduct. CEP also wishes to acknowledge the Swiss Information Center for making them aware of this important work. Here to accept the international award for their child labor initiatives, coming all the way from Switzerland is Veillon's CEO, Jacques Zwahlen.