

## GLOBAL MARCH AGAINST CHILD LABOUR

### **POSITION PAPER FOR THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY SPECIAL SESSION ON CHILDREN**

*Global March Against Child Labour*

*1 JUNE 2001*

The UN Special Session on Children is a critical event for the future of all children. Assembling so many of the world's leaders for the sole purpose of planning for the next generation, it is an opportunity to ensure that every child alive and every child still to enter this world will enjoy the full range of rights that they are guaranteed by birth. It is a crucial chance to focus the world's attention on the situation of children and to mobilise the political will, resources, and public involvement needed to make a fundamental change in their lives.

Over ten years ago, many Heads of State gathered in New York for the cause of children. At the conclusion of the first World Summit for Children they undertook a joint commitment and made an urgent universal appeal - to give every child a better future. They agreed that childhood should be a time of joy and peace, of playing, learning and growing, but they recognised that for millions of children violence, exploitation, poverty and injustice have meant a childhood of suffering. Together they made a solemn commitment to give high priority to the rights of children, to their survival and to their protection and development.

During the 90's the world witnessed steadily growing momentum in the drive to protect children's rights. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was rapidly ratified by almost all the countries of the world and today stands as the most widely endorsed human rights treaty ever. This Convention is the legally binding commitment of state parties to ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child, to provide the child education, to protect the child from economic exploitation, to give the child a chance to rest and play, and to protect many of the other rights essential for a happy and healthy childhood.

But many of these promises have gone unfulfilled. Since the conclusion of the World Summit for Children, over 800 million girls and boys have been exploited as child labourers, many in the most abusive of conditions. Countless children more have been denied the basic education they deserve. In a decade of a global economic boom, it is difficult to comprehend how these and other fundamental rights of children could have been so systematically violated. After proclaiming at the World Summit that "there can be no task nobler than giving every child a better future", where is the nobility in the results?

This Special Session is, however, a unique chance to learn from the mistakes of the past decade and chart a new course. The Global March Against Child Labour calls upon the delegates of the Special Session to act now with the vision, courage and determination needed for the children of the world.

**WE CALL FOR A DECLARATION AND PLAN OF ACTION THAT:**

## UPHOLDS THE RIGHTS OF ALL CHILDREN

We believe that the rights guaranteed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child are the basic minimum that the world owes to all children. The outcome of this Special Session should in no way compromise these rights or support a view that in this harsh world some children will just have to get by without their fundamental rights. The responsibility of the Special Session is to mobilise the resources and political will needed to ensure the rights of all children in the shortest possible timeframe.

## IDENTIFIES CHILD LABOUR AS AN URGENT PRIORITY FOR ACTION

Affecting 250 million children today, child labour is a massive problem confronting the world community. The practice of child labour is a critical link in the chains that spread illiteracy, suppress women, spur overpopulation, intensify discrimination, and perpetuate poverty. The Special Session and the Global Movement for Children both must identify child labour as a major area for worldwide action.

## PRESENTS A CLEAR, EFFECTIVE AND TIME-BOUND PROGRAM TO END CHILD LABOUR

The outcome of the Special Session should give hope to all, including especially child labourers themselves, that something will now be done to end their exploitation and restore their childhood.

The delegates to the Special Session should commit to a package of measures that will, in the shortest possible timeframe, protect all children from economic exploitation. We recommend that governments:

- \* Form National and Local Commissions for the Elimination of Child Labour, where they do not yet exist
- \* Develop National Programs of Action for the Elimination for Child Labour, in consultation with child labourers, their families, and other concerned groups
- \* Give priority to child labourers and their families in national programs to combat child poverty
- \* Within a year, set national and local timetables for the elimination of child labour
- \* Within a year, fix a minimum age or minimum ages for admission to employment, as required by Article 32.2 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and guided by ILO Convention 138
- \* Ensure that such minimum ages for employment are widely known and effectively enforced
- \* With immediate effect, stop the illegal recruitment of new child labourers and instead offer decent work to adults or older teenagers
- \* Improve the legal framework and change social practices to prevent the exploitation of children as domestic servants

- \* Investigate and prosecute commercial and household employers responsible for the exploitation and abuse of children
- \* Promote the ethical production of goods which, in particular, do not exploit children and provide fair working conditions for adults
- \* Identify and reach out to children at special risk of exploitative labour
- \* Pay special attention to the vulnerable situation of working girls
- \* Guarantee the proper rehabilitation and education of all children relieved of exploitative work
- \* Improve the data collection and monitoring systems on child labour, include questions about child labour in national census surveys, and register the birth of all children by no later than 2004
- \* Inform, sensitise and mobilise public opinion and concerned groups, including children and their families, to join in the efforts against child labour

#### ADDRESSES THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOUR AS A MATTER OF URGENCY

The Special Session should go beyond just recognising that millions of children are trapped in the worst forms of child labour, and actually commit to helping those children escape. Action must be taken with the same urgency and concern we would feel for children of our own family. We can no longer accept the exploitation of children in slavery, prostitution, armed conflict, criminal activities, hazardous work, and other intolerable conditions. As specific steps to address this crisis, we call upon governments to:

- \* Take all possible measures to prevent the entry of children into the worst forms of child labour, including public awareness programs and social mobilisation efforts
- \* Before the end of this year, determine the types of work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.
- \* Within a year, set national and local timetables for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour, and commit the resources needed to achieve these targets
- \* Within a year, expand and improve the legal and social protection machinery so that it can realistically address the worst forms of child labour
- \* Ensure that national and local laws effectively protect children from the worst forms of child labour
- \* Vigorously investigate and prosecute commercial and household employers keeping children in the worst forms of child labour
- \* Make a commitment in principle and practice to provide the necessary and appropriate direct assistance for the removal of children from the worst forms of child labour and for their rehabilitation and social integration

- \* Ensure access to free basic education, and wherever possible and appropriate, vocational training for all children removed from the worst forms of child labour
- \* Expand the scope of international technical cooperation to effectively address the transnational dimensions of child trafficking, child prostitution, the use of children in crimes, and other worst forms of child labour
- \* Whenever possible, consult with children involved in the worst forms of child labour when undertaking actions that will affect them

#### PROMOTES A STRONGER INTERNATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK TO PROTECT CHILDREN

The UN General Assembly should use the occasion of the Special Summit to strongly promote the universal ratification and implementation of international legal instruments to protect children. The outcome of the Special Session should specifically and emphatically call upon all states to:

- \* Ratify ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, and implement it in conjunction with ILO Recommendation 190
- \* Ratify ILO Convention 138 on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment, and implement it in conjunction with ILO Recommendation 146
- \* Ratify and implement the optional protocols on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography

#### FULLY RECOGNISES THE IMPACT OF CHILD LABOUR ON YOUNG CHILDREN'S HEALTH

The strategies and actions designed to promote healthy lives for children should include a clear recognition of the devastating impact of child labour on children's health. The use of children for endless hours of strenuous, repetitive, and hazardous work can cause serious injury, stunted growth, chronic illness, and sometimes even death. At a time when children can grow by leaps and bounds, to put them to hard labour is a crime. The elimination of child labour should be identified as a vital component of the efforts to break the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition and poor health.

#### REAFFIRMS EVERY CHILD'S FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT TO QUALITY EDUCATION AND SEEKS TO PROVIDE THIS RIGHT TO ALL IN THE SHORTEST POSSIBLE TIMEFRAME

The right to quality education is one of the most fundamental rights for all children. Education plays a critical role in determining a child's present and future life. In the coming years, this UN Special Session should be marked as a turning point when humanity finally accepted in earnest its responsibility to provide quality education for all. To this end, we call for:

- \* An immediate end to all financial barriers to education, including admission charges, book fees, and uniform expenses
- \* Urgent action to end the exclusion of girls from schools

- \* Vigorous efforts by education systems to find the children who are not in school and to design programs to include every child in education
- \* The development of gender sensitive education policies specifically directed at the integration of child labourers into school
- \* Involvement of children, parents, and the community in improving the education system
- \* A ban on all forms of corporal punishment in schools
- \* Provision of financial assistance as needed for the schooling of children at risk of child labour
- \* Expanded and improved programs for early childhood care and education, especially for children at risk of child labour

#### PLEDGES THE RESOURCES REALISTICALLY NEEDED TO ENSURE THE RIGHTS OF ALL CHILDREN

We finally call upon all government to ensure that the promises made at the Special Session on Children are backed by the required resources. In a world that generates \$30,000,000,000,000 of wealth every single year, it is absurd that young children must work for their very survival, or that poor children must end their education when they cannot pay minor fees. The real test of the world's commitment to children is if it will pledge the resources needed for all children's rights. We thus call for:

- \* First priority for children's needs in the budget setting process at national, state, and local level
- \* Within three years, at least 0.1% of the GNP of developed countries to be dedicated to official development aid exclusively for children, with two thirds of this aid to be allocated for girls
- \* A commitment by governments to allocate at least 6% of GNP for education, with two thirds earmarked for primary education
- \* A reaffirmation of the promise that no country serious about achieving education for all will fail for lack of resources
- \* Implementation of a Global Initiative to mobilise and coordinate additional resources for education and, within the next 5 years, the conversion of at least 10 billion dollars of debt into resources for primary education
- \* A commitment from the international community to support the efforts of national governments to set ambitious but achievable targets for the progressive elimination of child labour
- \* The donation by socially responsible businesses of at least 1% of their profits to meet the basic needs of children
- \* Guarantees from international financial institutions that their national interventions will support the fundamental rights of children, reduce child labour, and promote quality education for all.

We believe that in adopting and implementing the above recommendations, the world community can make an enormous difference for the children of today and tomorrow. These recommendations are not so simple, cheap, or easy, but they are nothing less than what is required to ensure the rights of all children. Now the world must show its courage and determination to make a world truly fit for children.