

Financing for Children's Development

Position Paper of the Global March Against Child Labour

Gathering next spring in Monterrey, Mexico, the world community will set forth its blueprint for financing global development. The plan will include numerous recommendations, commitments, principles, and proclamations in the hope of bringing equitable development to all. But somewhere lost in this bewildering mixture of structures and policies is the basic question: how will it all help children?

It is surprising how the interests of half the world's population can go unnoticed in this process. The Financing for Development Conference intends to ensure that the global systems of finance and trade fully support economic growth and social justice for all the peoples of the world. It further aspires to achieve a fully inclusive and equitable globalisation. This goal will never be achieved, however, if we do not put the needs of children first.

It is a searing indictment of our economic and political policies when we have entered the third millenium with countless children dying from preventable diseases, with hundreds of millions of children simply shut out of school, and 250 million children put to back-breaking labour. In a world that generates over 30 trillion dollars each year it is astonishing that these and other problems faced by children are to a large extent caused by the lack of resources. These facts should be a call to action and a call to common sense.

To ensure that children are protected and nurtured as our most precious resource, the Global March Against Child Labour calls for the following critical steps:

1. Time-bound commitments to achieve the target of 0.7% of GNP as overall development assistance, including at least 0.1% for children

The failure of developed countries to live up to their promise to contribute 0.7% of their GNP as development assistance has brought untold sorrow to the world's poorest people. Well-placed aid could work wonders in communities and countries struggling to provide clean water, empower women, protect their environment, and build their economy. Children, as an integral part of their communities, would be one of the major beneficiaries of this aid. While developed countries have regularly reaffirmed their support for the target of 0.7%, so far only 5 countries have actually reached it. The time has come for all developed countries to make good on their promise and fix a timetable to finally reach this goal.

Equally as important is the special allocation of development assistance to meet the needs of children. In addition to their general needs as members of their communities, children also have very specific needs during this critical phase of their lives. Some of these specific needs include: birth registration, neo-natal care, immunisation, early childhood development, quality basic education, prevention of child labour, and protection from abuse. Unfortunately, these very basic needs have historically been neglected in the development aid sector. This, even though

international cooperation for the best interest of children is a binding legal obligation of all 191 countries that have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

As an innovative and effective solution to meeting the most urgent needs of children, we call on all developed countries to contribute at least 0.1% of their GNP for children in the developing world. While this would be only one thousandth of their total revenues, so great is the disparity in global income that this amount, 25 billion dollars, should be enough to solve many of the problems facing children today. According to estimates from UNICEF, only 9 billion dollars each year is needed to ensure quality education for all children, and less than 2 billion dollars a year would provide universal immunisation with the latest vaccines.

If accepted, this specific pledge could be one of the most important and concrete outcomes of the Financing for Development Conference. It would also be a strategic step to build momentum towards the 0.7% target. Presently developed countries only contribute 0.24% of their GNP as development aid, and one effective way to start bridging the gap is to mobilise at least 0.1% for children. As there is already widespread public support in developed countries for aid to children, the world community should not hesitate to call for this much needed assistance.

2. Protection for children from the punishing burden of debt

The world often looks with pity on the situation of children growing up in the developing world. Many must fight for their survival, getting by without basic health care, sanitation, education, and security. The absurdity, however, is that while professing sympathy, the international community still keeps a debt burden of hundreds, thousands, or tens of thousands of dollars hanging over their heads. It should strike any fair-minded person that something is fundamentally wrong with our global financial system when children as young as 6, 7, or 8 are compelled to work because their country cannot repay its international debt.

Some encouraging progress has been made, but it is far less than what the world needs. We call for action without delay to remove the burden of debt. The G-8 and individual countries have responded to massive public pressure and promised to cancel billions worth of outstanding debt. These promises must be kept now. The World Bank should play a more constructive role for the cancellation of debt or arranging debt-for-education swaps. When most people in the developed world have little interest in collecting on poor countries' debt, the Bank should not be wasting everyone's time arguing against further debt cancellation, and should rather be showing how it can be done. The world has often demonstrated its ability to mobilise massive resources in response to a crisis or threat. Can we not find the will to end the punishment of unpayable debt? Too many children have suffered too much because repaying their country's debt leaves precious little for them.

3. First priority for the needs of children in local, state and national budgets

The fundamental importance of investing in children should be recognised as a cornerstone of sound economic and social policy. When children are denied an education, or exploited as a cheap source of labour, or deprived of basic health care, society incurs an immeasurable loss. The Conference will endorse the principle of

"foresight" in economic governance, but will this really mean anything if it does not lead to the protection of children during their critical years of growth and development? The governments of the world should agree on the simple and clear directive that the needs of children come first in local, state and national budgets. Countries often pass through periods of austerity and depression, but there is always a light at the end of the tunnel if the needs of children are met.

The Financing for Development Conference presents a unique opportunity for the world community to learn from the mistakes that have hindered global development in the past and to chart a new course ahead. The first step will be to recognise the fundamental importance of investing in children as the future of our world. This must then be translated into concrete commitments for development aid, debt relief, and budgetary allocations for children. These are straightforward steps but they will make a profound difference in the lives of countless young people today and in the hope for humanity tomorrow. When we endeavour to build a fair and just world, the very best way to begin is by caring for all children.
