



CHILDREN'S WORLD CONGRESS ON CHILD LABOUR

10-13 May 2004, Florence, Italy

NARRATIVE REPORT

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Children's World Congress on Child Labour

1. Background

One out of six children in the world are still working. For such children the day starts with hawking petty goods on the streets, working in rich people's homes, taking up arms or selling their young bodies for survival. The first step to a brighter future, a chance to start school, a chance for a real childhood is a forgotten dream for them. They are left with few options to escape the vicious cycle of poverty and illiteracy.

Six years after the birth of the international movement against child labour which began with the children starting a march of 80,000 kilometers across the globe, grabbing the world's attention, and bringing to light the issue of child labour that before had been largely neglected. Once again, children took the reins in their hands for the first ever Children's World Congress on Child Labour in Florence, Italy from May 10 until May 13.

Children, more than anyone else, are concerned with the present situation. They have first-hand knowledge of the suffering that is brought by child labour. For that reason the children themselves must be the ones who analyse the situation from their own perspective, propose solutions, and, in their own language, tell the world about their problems, demands and responsibility.

With this concept, the Global March partners in various countries were mobilised to have direct participation of children in giving them the right to make decisions for themselves, over the last one year. This process also helped in raising awareness on the issue and mobilise action from different sectors against economic exploitation of children and promote education for all.

The goal of the Children's World Congress was to give children the opportunity to emerge as social activists and world leaders at the forefront of the fight for children's rights. Children's opinion of their needs, fears, hopes and desires are critical in identifying effective strategies to combat the problems they face. The very process of listening to children and involving them is an important step in helping them. The Children's World Congress was not just one international event but a process to empower children to make them realise that they are capable of creating a new world free of child labour.

150 child delegates, former child labourers and child activists, representing 50 countries gathered to share their views and to demand a child-labour free world. Unfortunately, 300 child representatives should have attended the Congress but at the last moment many children from Africa, Asia and parts of South America were denied visa.

The Congress, organised by Global March Against Child Labour and hosted by its European Coordinator Manitese and the Italian trade unions CGIL, CISL and UIL, ended with powerful children's declaration demanding a child-labour free world and to ensure education for all, that makes children's rights a priority and a march through the Centre of Florence.

2. Objectives And Achievements

Overall Goal

To empower children to lead worldwide efforts to end child labour and to ensure free, quality education for all children.

- ④ *To give children a platform to share their experiences and learn from one another while discovering other's challenges, accomplishments and dreams in order to further their role as leaders in the struggle against child labour.*

150 children from 50 countries got the opportunity to share their experiences and discuss the problems they face or fight every day. Initially, language acted as a barrier but children overcame this hurdle and exchanged their views and opinions in a very lucid manner.

The discussions during the various sessions infused children with a sense of authority that they have the right and capability to take actions for issues affecting their lives. Many children took the decision to become active advocates for children's rights. This was proved by the actions suggested while drafting the Children's Declaration. The child delegates have the capacity to become very strong advocates in future.

- ④ *To remind governments of the promises they made to children when they ratified ILO Conventions 182 and 138 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and urge governments to fulfill their obligations ensuring that child labour and education becomes both national and international priority issues.*

Some of the world leaders were challenged by the direct and clear questions of children during the accountability session. The leaders were reminded once again of their broken promises and were urged to take immediate action. The issue of educations was a major part of all the discussions, as the children understood perfectly its importance as a key element to eradicate child labour.

At the national level, children in many countries after going back from the Congress have presented the Declaration to representatives of their government with the aim that their recommendations on issues influencing the children's lives should be included in the National Plans of Actions.

- ④ *To enhance and strengthen child participation in all processes of decision-making, ensuring that children's participation becomes an important part of policy-making processes.*

Children through their Declaration have indicated that they have the ability to give their opinion in all matters that concern them and they want their views be included in the programmes and policies made for them. Also, children through their discussions and the questions that they put forth before the adults displayed their conceptual clarity as regards to why child labour should be eliminated, budgetary allocation by governments to give

education to all children, to have stringent laws to be made to end child labour and many such issues.

Children's World Congress has once again proven that child participation is a valuable process for actions directed to end child labour and to achieve education for all. It has made adults consider again the importance of integrating children's participation in making decisions that influence them.

The progressive involvement of children in policy planning with many more organisations working for child rights at local, national, regional and international levels will be the true achievement of this objective. The formation of children's parliament and to have a representative in local and national government will be a big triumph.

- ④ *To enhance child and youth movements against child labour in order to motivate young people to take actions against child labour.*

All the child delegates were motivated to take further actions to end child labour. Many children were associated with children's organisations and they were determined to get more children involved in this fight. The formation of children's network at national and at international level (presently the Declaration Drafting Committee) will give an impetus to children and youth led movements. Also, the creation of children's parliament will mobilise more and more children.

- ④ *To urge international organisations to increase their support to programs aimed at eradicating child labour, poverty reduction, achieving universal, free, and quality education for all children.*

The Declaration clearly points out the importance of solidarity and support from the developed countries and donor agencies to achieve poverty alleviation, eradication of child labour and free quality education for all. The Declaration is a very important and influential advocacy tool.

The Declaration has been handed over to officials of international organisations in many countries and it has been proposed to them to synergise their actions towards the elimination of child labour, to have education for all and alleviate poverty.

The accountability session also provided an opportunity for the children to remind these institutions of their role and what is expected from them. The children asked very pertinent questions that urged them to take actions.

With the successful implementation of the declaration children will directly or indirectly collaborate with these institutions and will continue their lobby to act with respect to their demands.

- ④ *To urge the international community to take concrete and effective measures to achieve tangible, time-bound goals to eradicate child labour and poverty and aim at achieving universal, free and quality education for all children.*

The accountability session had some representatives of the international community and also the adult's roundtable involved them in a discussion on the possible activities to bring synergy in policy and action on triangular paradigm of child labour, illiteracy and poverty. The Declaration has been widely circulated through newspapers, websites, and its distribution will continue as to reach the maximum of people. This will also contribute in building pressure on the international community to feel concerned and have concrete, time-bound actions.

- ④ *To elicit the interest of more people and organisations to support the cause of the rights of children.*

A number of newspapers, radios and televisions covered the Children's World Congress. Their coverage attracted the public's attention on the issue of child labour and universal education. And the fact that children were the main actors at the Congress has certainly maximised the impact on the public.

- ④ *To establish a standing children's committee, selected by World Congress participants, to facilitate the communication and implementation of the decisions made in the World Congress and to represent the voices of children in global, regional, or national discussions or actions on child labour.*

The members of the Declaration Drafting committee that was elected by all the child delegates in a fair manner along with the Children's Reference group members constitute the initial committee of children who are disseminating the Declaration they produced. This committee will be formalised after the follow-up congress and will have the selected children from that Congress also.

3. Report on Preparatory Activities

The 4-days of intense action in Florence were indeed the main event of the Children's World Congress, but it gains its importance and singularity from the preparatory activities and the selection process. In the year-long preparations all energy and efforts from the Global March Coordinators and partner organisations were directed towards involving as many children as possible and winning the support of the general public for the cause. It was a challenging task as the social, political and economic situations in countries differ a lot.

These activities on one level helped in creating awareness on the issue of child labour amongst the adults who affect children's lives - the government officers, civil society, teachers, business people and elected leaders. At another important level it laid the groundwork for the formation of a network of former child labourers and other child advocates who will be taking up the fight against child labour in the future. These children interacted at different forums at the local and national levels to discuss their views on child labour and future action plan. In turn, it was through these consultations that children selected their own representatives to participate in the Congress. This was a process of genuine child participation as their peers in a fair and democratic process selected the child delegates.

The child delegates represented both sexes equally, and were drawn from all races, religions and geographic regions. There was no discrimination of any kind based on a child's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or any other status. All the children who participated were personally motivated for the cause of ending child labour and promoting universal, quality education. The first priority should be given to candidates who have demonstrated their commitment and concern through their own actions against child labour and for education.

The Children's World Congress and all activities around it were precisely in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ILO Convention 138, and ILO Convention 182. One important point to highlight is that the Global March supports the progressive elimination of child labour. According to that our main priority continues to be in supporting and empowering the efforts of former child labourers and child activists to improve the lives of children everywhere as one important part in this step-by-step approach.

4. Report on 4-days of the World Congress

The Children's World Congress went beyond child participation. The children got the opportunity to come out of the shadows, raise their voices and make the world leaders accountable to their promises. Former child workers and child advocates took centre stage drawing from their own experiences, their opinions and urging for action to end child labour. Children demonstrated their personal success stories "from exploitation to education" and displayed their commitment and leadership skills by creating the Children's Declaration and putting explicitly what their demands are from different stakeholders like governments, international organisations, businesses, parents and other adults.

Inaugural Session

The Congress began with welcome speeches from the Mayor of Florence, Mayor of the Tuscany region and a keynote address by Kailash Satyarthi, Chairperson of Global March Against Child Labour, who emphasised the importance of the participation of children in eliminating child labor and in creating a world fit for children. After that there was presentation of songs and dramatic theatre pieces about different child labour scenarios, facilitated by John Devaraj, an Indian artist.

Child Labourers Share Their Experiences

Be it Shiv, Dora, Kumar, Hermia, Alice or Ratana – They all come from different corners of the world, but they all shared the same experience, that they were working instead of playing and getting an education. When other children went to school, their childhood was spent in misery and servitude, working in a carpet factory in India, in a pastry factory in Mauritius, a garbage dumping ground in Ivory Coast or a fishing boat in Cambodia. And they are all sending one message, as Shiv, 16, from India said: "All children must get an education and the adults have to work instead of the children".

Workshops

Four thematic workshops of children were also organised to discuss: the role of children in identification and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, child trafficking and sexual exploitation, quality education, and girl child labour and education. All the child delegates were divided into smaller groups to discuss the above-mentioned themes and had to think

of answers to four questions: 1) How do you see the situation of the theme?; 2) What could be done by International Organisations to prevent child labour?; 3) What do you expect from your government? 4) What do you think you can do to change the situation?

The children agreed upon several common issues and problems and expressed their views on them. They noted their concerns on the lack of awareness about various child labour situations by the general public and their governments; they also expressed concerns regarding girls who are deprived of proper education when compared to boys and that governments are not living up to their promises. They also pointed out that unless better options are presented (such as income generating opportunities) parents would continue to send their children to work.

On the second day of the Congress children and adults once again discussed separately the different themes related to child labour. Two sessions for the children were held: one on the worst forms of child labour in the different regions and a Round Table to share success stories and interventions by children in combating child labour. In the -first one, children were divided into groups according to their region of origin. In those groups they had the opportunity to discuss the specific situation of child labour in their region and to find solutions to be taken up in this regard. Their discussions were very fruitful and their common presentation of the outcomes towards the end of the session reflected an in-depth understanding of the situation of their countries and viable strategies. During the second session, children gathered their own stories and initiatives that allowed them not to work anymore.

SCREAM

In the evening, ILO- IPEC presented the project SCREAM (Supporting Children's Rights through Education, the Arts and the Media). Through creative & innovative teaching methods, the SCREAM programme aims to inform children about the world in which they live with the focus on child labour, so that they can speak out on behalf of child labourers everywhere. The two theatre pieces on child labour, *From knees to Wings* and *Percosi minori*, by two Italian High Schools were illustration of the innovative role young people can play.

A Passionate Appeal to Make Children's Rights a Priority

After three days of children's workshops, that identified crucial issues of child labour, as well as dialogues with adult world leaders during the session on accountability, child delegates presented their final declaration on Child Labour at Palazzo Vecchio in Florence on Wednesday last week. The members of the declaration drafting committee, 15 children speaking 10 different languages and growing up with different cultures and backgrounds, developed a powerful appeal to the world to end child labour.

Children criticised governments for hiding and ignoring the issue of the worst forms of child labour, that damage the physical and mental well being of a child, and demanded an immediate end to this most exploitative child labour. Governments should criminalise child labour, but should never criminalise children. Children also accused governments for not having met their own promises with real commitment or resources and requested that they, along with governmental bodies at international and regional levels, protect children's rights and take the needs of children as a priority. Their Declaration reflects the determination of all children to take actions to end child labour. They also stressed their own commitment to creating a world free of child-labour. "We must work at the national level and establish a Children's Parliament, in every country, that is not just a symbol but a source of power for children to change the situations that we think are wrong. This Parliament would elect a representative to the country's government". For the future, they also plan to create an

international children's network on child labour in order to raise awareness, exchange information and develop together the power to take action.

It's All About Child Participation

A central message of the children was that governments should listen to children, that they should value their opinions and should include them in decision-making processes that affect their lives. In the "Accountability Session" that gave children a chance to address their demands to different world leaders and representatives from national government representatives from Brazil, Costa Rica, United States, Portugal, Italy, Mozambique, international organisations like The World Bank, Inter American Development Bank, UNESCO, International Labour Organisation, UNICEF, European Commission, and donor governments from the North, Trade union leaders and employers organisations. Children showed once more by their questions that they have a very clear understanding of international politics and that they can bring new perspectives in the struggle against child labour. Their questions expressed their disappointment that countries sign international treaties such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child without respecting them. They urged governments to fulfill their obligations ensuring that child labour and education become both national and international priorities. For example, a question was asked to World Bank Director Ad Melkert, "It is said that education is free. But what use is free education if parents still have to pay for things like school books and uniforms, which is a major expense for many poor families?" Then, Mr. Melkert acknowledged that this is still a big problem and said he would continue within the World Bank to put this point to governments.

Cooperation – a Key Success Factor

In adults' round-table on "the role and coherence of International Institutions, governments and social partners in combating child labour" leaders from NGOs, trade unions, governments, employers and international agencies, such as the ILO, UNICEF, UNESCO and the World Bank all agreed on the importance of the elimination of child labour. They also highlighted that coordination between different programmes and actions, coupled with tight cooperation between the parties, was necessary to improve the efficiency of initiatives to combat child labour. ICFTU General Secretary Guy Ryder spoke of the importance of education as the main tool to fight child labor, "Just taking children out of work is not a sustainable approach. Such programmes must be linked to free and universal primary education, and this must be linked to respect for the rights of adult workers. Any development projects which serve to perpetuate the involvement of children in child labour are counterproductive".

Willy Thys, Secretary General, World Confederation of Labour mentioned that the eradication of child labour must be part of a global strategy for sustainable development. This strategy must include actions such as: to fight against poverty, to enforce fundamental human rights, to generate decent jobs for adults, to foster the 'education for all' initiative and to put social issues at the very core of economic policies.

Sonia Rosen former Founder Director of the US Department of Labor's Child Labor Programme mentioned that Child labour work is not charity work – it has to be part of the broader decent work and development agenda. She termed the continuation of child labour as perpetuating poverty of options and choices. She termed it as gross violation of the rights of the children.

“Building a Triangular Paradigm for Future Actions”

In this session, chaired by Ad Melkert, Former Dutch Minister of Social Affairs and Employment, currently Dutch Executive Director at the World Bank responded that “all forms of child labour have to be eradicated”, noting that while progress in implementing ILO convention 182, on the worst forms of child labour, was an important first step, far more needed to be done in ensuring that there was full and comprehensive implementation of the ILO's convention 138 on the minimum working age. Panelists discussed the linkage between child labour elimination, poverty alleviation and education for all.

Assefa Bequele, Executive Director of Africa Child Policy Forum's stressed the fact that the impact of efforts in ending child labour could be increased by getting institutions with different responsibilities to work towards the same objective.

Ruth Kagia the Head of the Education, World Bank asserted that, “we risk a less knowledge driven future if human capital formation for such large numbers is compromised and also undermine the quality of future labour force: next 20 yrs, 730 m. new workers will join labour force, 90% from developing nations, about 1/3 un/under educated unless there is redress now. She claimed that this would perpetuate intergenerational poverty.

She asked for multifaceted efforts to be mounted to bring convergence in policy and laws against child labour, advocacy to change attitudes, adequate financing of education and to replace lost revenues for the children. She also suggested evidence based interventions (understand root causes, scale and distribution, push and pull factors) linked to macro level interventions on poverty alleviation and finally to develop common set of indicators for calibrating child labour within the ongoing efforts on PRSP's and EFA.

Frans Roselaers, Head of the ILO-IPEC, Geneva participating in the discussion reiterated that child labour and lack of schools are all undermining long term development, it is important to address these problems in a global and coherent way. He also reminded that child labour also affects the academic achievement of the considerable number of children who combine work and school. Quite often this results in these children dropping out of school and entering into full-time employment and said that girls are particularly vulnerable to exclusion from education.

Mr. Andrew Samet, Executive Board member of the International Center on Child Labor and Education, Washington D.C and formerly Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Affairs, Department of Labor in Clinton Administration questioned why those global institutions are failing us in their solemn responsibility to be united and focused on cross cutting issues of child labour, poverty alleviation and education for all. He agreed with the view of Mr. Satyarthi that quality education can make an important contribution to a culture of global tolerance – a huge challenge in itself. He said that we need to make greater progress with adequate accountability and adequate leadership. He suggested breaking down the institutional barriers nationally and internationally to accelerate the progress. He said that this can be achieved by instituting a Global Task Force on child labour and education as suggested at the Delhi Round Table Discussion in November, and we need to get it established now. He reminded that if we fail to do so it will raise doubts on our seriousness. He also asked to look seriously at some enhanced global rules on the use of child labour in global commerce. He mentioned that there is no reason and no inconsistency between more effective global rules on child labour, and other core labour standards, and the need for national laws and robust enforcement and investment in education that prevent such diversion of children to the informal and illicit sectors. He also

proposed Children's Summit with Global Leaders involving both national leaders and those from international organisations responsible to the children, to break down these barriers and increase accountability.

5. Follow up of the Florence Congress

A Follow-up Children's World Congress without Discrimination

Although children declared the Congress a success they criticised the discriminating process that prevented the participation of a large number of the selected child delegates. These children, from regions where child labour is most common, were not issued a visa to enter Italy because the Italian government considered them a security risk. Therefore, Global March Against Child Labour is planning to hold a follow-up Congress. In their Declaration the children made clear: "At the next Congress, we would like to see them participate because their voice is their vision and the world must hear it."

The Children's Declaration is put into Action

National Coordinators will be responsible for enabling the children to follow-up and monitor the international reactions to their declaration and action plan after the Children's World Congress.

A series of actions in different countries have already been organised to implement the Children's Declaration. And many events are planned for which will be a link to the follow-up Congress.

The Declaration is being disseminated at all the levels both at the national and at the international level to have the contents and the spirit of the Declaration included in the actions and programs of all international organisations.

The Declaration will also be sent to Presidents and Prime Ministers who are influential on the international scene as well as of those in the countries where the children were left out. Also all the organisations working against child labour would be contacted to present on their website the conclusions of the Congress.

It was discussed in Florence that a good opportunity to initiate activities to put the Children's Declaration into action would be the World Day Against child labour. Many regions on this occasion organised some event. Synopses of some of the events held are –

South Asia

In South Asia the Declaration was translated in different languages and it was handed over to heads of the government the prime minister of those countries.

In Nepal, at that time there was a national meeting and consultation that was participated by government delegates, trade union members, teachers' organisation, employers' organisation and organisations working against child labour. Everyone appreciated and also agreed to whatever the children have said in the declaration. It was also decided to

influence the government to implement its commitments into action. The media also gave a very good coverage.

West Africa

The Declaration was translated into French and was sent to all the Francophone countries. A press release was to be released by all countries out on 12 June.

In Togo, on the 12th of June and 16 of June, which is the Day of the African Child, The official presentation of the Children's Declaration was held. The program was organised with the Minister of Tourism. The Declaration was read in front of many government representatives and also the Declaration was handed over to the Minister of Tourism to be given to the government and she accepted it.

Europe

Romania

The two children who participated in the World Congress from Romania are the most important persons to spread out the messages including the Declaration so, a National Forum of children was organised together with other NGOs with children coming from 15 places in Romania. Both the children who participated in the Congress told the other children what they did at the Congress, what were the messages, and they also read the Declaration. One day all the 200 children worked on the Declaration, they started to prepare the Declaration based on the national situation.

Then after another month the first meeting of the National Committee for the Elimination of Child Labour took place in its new formal structure because this national committee though existed since 1999 it was institutionalised now. It is a governmental institution including also NGOs in its structure. These 2 child had the opportunity to present before this Committee members - to the representatives from the government and NGOs what they had in the Congress and what is the message and how a March can be organised in Romania. After a week of this meeting a March was organised in Bucharest aiming to multiply what was done in Florence. This March was quite a good success as many important TV channels and newspapers wrote about the March and about the problem of child labour in the CEE region. Now the plan is to build new projects together with ILO in Romania.

South America

To mark the World Day Against Child Labour a high level meeting with the president of UNESCO, UNIOCEF, ILO and the Minister of Labour was organised in Chile. There was a meeting with all children including the 3 delegate of the Congress. The Declaration was read in the meeting and the children asked many direct and hard-hitting questions to all the leaders.

Other follow-up activities are planned for August and then in November. The anniversary of the Chilean Congress that framed the convention on child rights will fall in November and then there will be activities with children like reading of the Declaration at different levels national Congress i.e deputies and senates and the local government.

Before the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre next year, there will be a children's forum where children from South America and Central America will take part. This will be the opportunity to spread the message of the Children's Declaration at the regional level.

North America

Two of the American delegates have started a monthly Children's Newsletter that aims to build a network of children from all over the world who intend to act on ending child labour and to achieve education for all. The newsletter is like a watchdog over the actions by governments and international organisations. The newsletter is prepared in totality by children.

Making the Follow-up Congress a Reality

The follow-up Congress is our commitment to all those children who were denied visa. We promised that we will give them the platform where the world can hear their voice and it will be so. The follow-up Congress is tentatively planned for September-October 2005 in a country of Asia or Africa. It will have all those children from Asia and Africa who could not participate in the Florence Congress and those children who were the members of the Declaration drafting Committee and were democratically elected by all child delegates of the first congress. They will represent the rest of the world other than just Africa and Asia.