

Child Labour and Sustainable Development

Will We Lose Another Generation?

Beginning on August 26, 2002, delegates from around the world are gathering together in Johannesburg at the World Summit on Sustainable Development to chart a course for the future of the earth and everyone on it. Decisions are to be made to ensure that development that meets the needs of the present generation will also meet the needs of the next generation. Sadly we see that even now, almost 250 million members of the "next generation" are being exploited to meet the economic demands of today.

The widespread practice of child labour is one of the single greatest threats to any poverty eradication program. Child labourers become mired in a cycle of poverty. They are forced to work at the cost of their education. Denied the chance to develop their full potential, these children often remain illiterate and powerless. The cycle continues when they reach adulthood and are unable to earn a decent living that can sustain them and their family. They in turn will likely send their own children to exploitative work.

The child labourers of today are the generation on which sustainable development depends, but they are at risk of becoming a forgotten generation. Sustainable development requires participation by every nation and every person for it to be successful, and successful development cannot leave anybody behind. The delegates at Johannesburg must address the problem of child labour as one of their very top priorities.

The WSSD Plan of Implementation must commit governments to clear political, social, and financial targets to end a practice that threatens the very sustainability of development. The practice of child labour is a critical link in the chain that spreads illiteracy, suppresses women, spurs overpopulation, intensifies discrimination, and perpetuates poverty. The problem of child labour deserves more than a mere mention in the outcome of the WSSD. It must be comprehensively addressed as an essential step towards equitable and sustainable development.

We call on the World Summit on Sustainable Development to:

Commit to Effective and Time-Bound Programs to End Child Labour

The outcome of the World Summit on Sustainable Development should give hope to all, especially child labourers themselves, that something will now be done to end their exploitation and restore their childhood. The delegates to the Summit should commit to a package of measures that will, in the shortest possible timeframe, bring an end to the economic exploitation of children and

include all children in the promise of future sustainable development. We recommend that governments:

- Give priority to child labourers and their families in national programs to combat poverty
- Set national and local timetables for the progressive elimination of child labour
- 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
- With immediate effect, stop the illegal recruitment of new child labourers and instead offer decent work to adults or older teenagers
- 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 2005
- Inform, sensitise and mobilise public opinion and concerned groups, including children and their families, to join in the efforts against child labour

Promote a Stronger International Legal Framework to Protect Children

The outcome of the Summit should specifically and emphatically call upon all states to:

- Ratify and fully implement the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- 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

Pledge the Resources Needed to Ensure the Rights of All Children

We finally call upon all government to ensure that the promises made at the World Summit on Sustainable Development are backed by the requisite resources. In a world that generates \$30,000,000,000,000 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:

- A renewed, time-bound commitment to achieving the UN target of allocating 0.7% of the GNP of developed countries as official development aid to promote sustainable social and economic development and ensure universal human rights
- A pledge that, at the very least, 0.1% of the GNP of developed countries be dedicated to official development aid exclusively for meeting the basic needs of children in the developing world
- 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 funding for primary education
- A commitment from the international community to financially support the efforts of national governments to set and achieve time-bound targets for the progressive elimination of child labour

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 simple, cheap, or easy, but they are nothing less than what is required to ensure the rights of all children. Sustainable development depends on educated, healthy and empowered children. They are our only hope for the future.