

## Campaigning for an End to Child Labour

1. The campaign to end child labour, led by trade unions and campaigning groups around the world, has brought unprecedented international attention in recent years to the scandalous exploitation of children. Despite this, over 250 million child labourers, 60% of whom are girls, are denied the right to a childhood and access to a proper education. Over 1 billion adults are today illiterate largely because, as children, they had to work instead of going to school. Millions of their children in turn have to work in order for their families to survive, perpetuating a vicious circle of poverty, inequality and underdevelopment.

2. Children work in factories, workshops and fields in every continent. They produce shoes, clothing, food, tobacco, carpets, metal products and other goods for sale at home and abroad. They work as domestic servants and in mines, polishing diamonds and gemstones, making bricks, fireworks and glassware, and worst of all, they are forced into sexual slavery and made to kill or be killed in armed conflicts across the globe. Tens of millions of children live in city streets or survive from one meal to the next in subsistence agriculture.

3. The trade union movement, since its earliest days, has been at the forefront of the struggle to stop child labour. Great successes have been achieved in many countries. In far too many countries, however, children are denied their rights, just as trade union and other human rights are frequently denied to their parents and their families. The hugely successful Global March Against Child Labour mobilised millions of people world-wide and helped bring about a strong new International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 182 on Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour. This Convention and Convention 138 on Minimum Age for Employment, form the main international legal basis for campaign action on child labour in the coming years.

4. In the new millennium, the international trade union movement must renew and intensify its campaign work against child labour, based on the experiences of the campaign to date and taking account of the mounting challenges of the era of globalisation. The Charter Against Child Labour, launched by the 112th meeting of the ICFTU Executive Board (Elsinore, December 1998), sets out five main areas on which this campaign work should be based.

### **Education for all Children**

5. In every country which has successfully tackled the child labour problem, this has started with the political will to get all children into school, rejecting the fallacy that economic and social progress can be achieved through the sweat and toil of children. For this reason, the international trade union campaign against child labour is above all a campaign for the fundamental right of every child to a proper education, laying the foundation for economic and social development. In particular, action must be taken to ensure that girls, who are often denied the chance to go to school, have access to education.

### **No More Exploitation**

6. Tens of millions of children are exploited for profit every day. Those who gain from child labour must be stopped, and must help to undo the damage they have done. They must help to pay for the full rehabilitation and education of the child workers, and be made to face the full penalties for exploiting children. Trade unions should campaign for a complete end to the recruitment of new child workers, and for the rehabilitation of existing child workers and their replacement by adults, where possible from the same extended family.

### **Economic Security**

7. Most children work because their families are poor. Creating decent jobs for all adults and providing comprehensive social security are essential steps in ending child labour. Action against child labour must therefore be closely linked to action for debt relief and equitable development. Too often, however, governments claim that the only real cause of child labour is poverty, and that until poverty is eliminated, they will not be able to provide school places for all the children in their country. Many of these same governments nevertheless allocate massive amounts to military expenditure. Poverty is an important factor in child labour, but it should not be used as an excuse for inaction. Child labour in itself is a major cause of poverty and underdevelopment, and reliance on child labour can only worsen the economic plight of the countries concerned.

### **Rights for Children and Rights for Adults**

8. Exploitation of child labour is rarely, if ever, found in isolation from violations of other labour standards and fundamental human rights. Action against child labour must be integrated with action against

exploitation of adults. The international trade union campaign against child labour must remain an integral part of the struggle for respect for core labour standards and other human rights world-wide.

### **Unions at the Centre of a Global Alliance**

9. Trade unions, working closely with other child labour campaign groups, were instrumental in the success of the Global March Against Child Labour during the late 1990's. This movement, unprecedented in its international impact, clearly demonstrated the potential for successful broadly-based campaign action on issues of concern to the trade union movement, and the ability of the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) involved to mobilise enormous public support. At the same time, the Global March has also shown the importance of building co-operation on the basis of clear acceptance of the role and function of trade unions as the legitimate representatives of working people's interests. Efforts by other organisations which, while claiming to represent the interests of working children, seek to replace trade unions, or to undermine the principles of freedom of association and collective bargaining, must be strongly and publicly challenged.

### **Future ICFTU Campaign Action on Child Labour**

10. The ICFTU, in its own work, and as a platform for developing cohesive international trade union action, must continue and develop its campaign for the elimination of child labour. This campaign, organised through the ICFTU Child Labour Task Force, must be comprehensive, targeting the social and economic conditions which allow the continued exploitation of children. The adoption of ILO Convention 182 provides a basis for immediate action to end the worst forms of child labour, and campaigning for ratification and implementation of this Convention and Convention 138, form the centre-piece of the ICFTU's actions.

11. Recognising the need for sustained and long-term trade union commitment to eliminating child labour, Congress calls on the trade union movement world-wide to give priority attention to eliminating child labour, and resolves to strengthen the ICFTU's campaign against child labour, in particular in connection with action to promote respect for the Core ILO standards. The primary objectives of the campaign are:

- ◆ Achieving universal ratification and full implementation of ILO Convention 138, in particular ratification by the end of the year 2000 by those countries which have already indicated an intention to ratify;

- ◆ Achieving universal ratification and full implementation on ILO Convention 182 within the shortest possible time frame;
- ◆ Eliminating the use of child labour in the production of traded goods;
- ◆ Tackling the economic, political and social factors which cause or permit the exploitation of children;
- ◆ Reaching out to children in the least visible and most abusive forms of child labour, and supporting the rights of adult workers to organise and bargain collectively for decent wages and conditions;

12. In order to achieve the above objectives, Congress mandates the ICFTU General Secretary to:

- ◆ Promote and support action on child labour and related action on trade union organising and collective bargaining by ICFTU affiliates, International Trade Secretariats (ITS) and friendly organisations;
- ◆ Act to ensure understanding of the child labour issue amongst trade unionists and the general public, through trade union education and campaign action, and through media awareness activities;
- ◆ Undertake capacity building work on child labour within the trade union movement at national and regional levels;
- ◆ Support international action on the economic and social causes of child labour;
- ◆ Continue to work closely with NGOs which share the policies and approach of the trade union movement on tackling child labour;
- ◆ Promote and support campaigns for the right to education, particularly ensuring public basic education for all girls and boys;
- ◆ Work closely with affiliates and ITSs to identify and take action against the exploitation of child labour in international trade; and,
- ◆ Maintain close cooperation with the ILO, ILO Workers' Activities branch and the International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour, stressing the importance of tripartism.

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