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Conference Synthesis Document

Every child in the world has the inalienable right to a good quality education, and protection from exploitation. Well over 200 million victims of child labour are today denied that right in the various sectors of the global and national economies with agriculture having 70% share. Some progress been made in recent years, as attention has been focused on the plight of the world's working children, but this progress has been extremely limited when compared to the total number of children working. We thus seek the total elimination of child labour.

Child labour is not inevitable, nor is it acceptable. It is severely detrimental to the children concerned and to social and economic development. It is a cause and a consequence of poverty and poverty can never be eradicated while children are at work instead of school. The ILO estimates that the global economic cost of child labour is some \$5 trillion over 15 years. The cost of providing every child labourer with a school place in that time is around one-sixth of that amount. The benefits of action are clear, but the political will to act is often lacking.

Trade unions have historically led the fight against child labour, and the trade union commitment to end this scourge remains as strong as ever. Through their campaigning for universal, compulsory, good quality education and their action to fight against exploitation and discrimination of any sort in the world of work, unions will continue to be the mainstay of the global struggle to get children out of work and into school. Decent work for every adult is a key foundation stone for ending child labour. Where the rights of adult workers as enshrined in ILO Conventions are properly respected, household incomes are higher and the children of those adults are far more likely to be in school than at work. In addition, strong trade unions in the workplace and in the community are the most effective means to ensure that children in those workplaces and communities will not face exploitation.

Child labour is often directly linked to violations of other core labour standards. Where adult workers are denied the right to organise and to bargain collectively for decent wages and conditions, their children are more likely to be found at work as well. In many societies, girls are more likely to be denied the chance to go to school, perpetuating gender discrimination for future generations. Such discrimination in access to education is also suffered by children, both girls and boys, from particular religious, ethnic, and migrant backgrounds and other groups. And where forced labour exists, it frequently involves children as well as adults. Action against child labour must therefore be closely linked with action to promote compliance with the other core labour standards.

Special attention in programmes and projects to eliminate child labour should be given to the situation of children affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic and other infectious diseases, by armed conflict, or by other phenomena which disrupt or destroy the potential for social and economic development or undermine support systems which would otherwise enable children to participate in quality education and protect them from exploitation. Governments and the international community have a particular responsibility to ensure the provision of adequate support and protection to children in such circumstances.

The trade union movement has been a primary force in the achievement of the two ILO Conventions (138 and 182) which provide the globally accepted definition of child labour, and which set out the obligations of governments to establish and enforce the minimum age for entry into employment and to take comprehensive action, with special attention to the worst forms, to eliminate all child labour.

This Conference, bringing together more than 200 trade unionists, civil society activists and specialists from around the world, reconfirms our joint determination to carry forward the struggle to eliminate child labour. To do this we must tackle the problem in all its manifestations and with proper regard to its various causes and ramifications: in the formal and informal economy ; – both in rural and urban settings;; through the universal public provision of free, compulsory, quality education and other public services; through provision of family income support; by building and maintaining public awareness and commitment; and by campaigning for governments to ratify and fully apply the ILO Conventions, and for employers to ensure respect for these Conventions especially the core Conventions throughout their operations, including in their supply chains.

We must give special attention to the gender dimension, the different types of work which are done mainly by girls or boys, and the often lower participation in education of girls. We must put the spotlight on the so-called “hidden” forms of child labour such as domestic servitude, and redouble our efforts to end the most vicious forms of exploitation such as sexual exploitation, bonded labour and other forms of slavery.

We pledge to carry forward our global campaign and advocacy work by maintaining pressure on the international institutions to ensure that trade, economic and financial policies support the elimination of child labour rather than reducing access to education, social and health provision and undermining labour standards, which pushes more children out of school and into work. Supporting the continuation of campaign action for universal education must remain a priority objective into the future. Cooperation with the ILO and also with UNICEF and other international agencies must also be maintained and strengthened.

To achieve these goals, we must work together; trade unions and progressive allies in civil society. We must seek to influence governments and employers, and cooperate with those who are truly committed to ending child labour. Action by Global Union Federations in their specific sectors will continue to be a mainstay of the global campaign. This involves dialogue and negotiation with employers, promotion of action plans for corporate social responsibility, direct intervention to get children out of work and into school, support for adult

workers to organise and bargain collectively, and action to support education and other public services.

Events such as this conference also have their role to play, to enable trade unions and their allies to exchange ideas and experience, to sustain international campaign action, and to build cooperation into the future. The ITUC and the Global Union Federations has an important function in this regard as well, including through its cooperation with the Global March against Child Labour and the Stop Child Labour Campaign, and through working with the ILO's International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour.

Building and maintaining high public awareness about child labour will continue to be an important task. Such awareness provides the foundation for concrete action, and for worldwide support to achieve the objective to have all children in school and none in child labour.

An important opportunity to give a high profile to this cause will be June 12 World Day against Child Labour. We encourage trade union and civil society actions all over the world to highlight the issue, pressure policy makers and employers as well as to manifest our collective resolve to contribute in eliminating this scourge. The World Day for Decent Work, which the international trade union movement has chosen to take place on 7 October 2008, is another concrete event for action. Each of the three themes for the World Day – Rights at Work, Solidarity and Ending Poverty and Inequality – are intimately linked to action to eliminate child labour.

We encourage every organisation involved in action against child labour to take part in the preparations for the global days of action, and to carry out activities on these 2 concrete manifestations of our cooperation and coordination.

The appalling reality of child labour, in developing but also in industrialised countries, is an affront to human dignity. This Conference has served to enrich our knowledge and reinforce the desire and commitments of our organisations to carry forward and intensify the global struggle to end child labour and get all the children of the world into school.

Decent Education for Children and Decent Work for Adults!

End Child Labour Now!

Social Justice for All!

International Conference of Child Rights Organisers and Campaigners
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