

**Children's Declaration of the Children's World Congress on Child Labor
10-13 May 2004, Florence, Italy**

We are the Present, Our Voice Is the Future

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Introduction

We, the delegates of the Children's World Congress on Child Labor, have come to the city of Florence, Italy, from all different parts of the world, speaking different languages, growing up with different cultures and backgrounds, because we all know that child labor must be eliminated.

Absent Delegates

Although our Congress has been successful, we are missing some of our important delegates. These children were already selected to participate in the Congress. But, these children did not get visas necessary to come to Italy because the Italian government thought them as a security risk. These children who were not allowed to attend, felt very discriminated. We all missed their ideas at the Congress, because these children are from the regions where child labor is most common. At the next Congress, we would like to see them participate because their voice is their vision and the world must hear it.

Preamble

Each country had a different selection process to choose the delegates. All children who participated in the selection process had either faced child labor in their own experience or had learned about it and joined the fight against child labor. With the passion and desire to solve this terrible crime against 246 million children around the world, we were all qualified to take part in this Congress. This is why the discussions for the last 3 days have been very fruitful.

This is the responsibility, of all including the business sector and others who hold the power to help us in our struggle.

Peace

Before we even start to discuss about child labor, we must appreciate that the only way the children can have their rights is in the situation of peace. Peace is the most basic human right. We have to ask ourselves why everyone is not able to have something so fundamental. While living in peace, every child has not only a better chance of getting their rights, but also has a stronger potential to improve the world for their generations and those to come.

Common themes

When we started discussing about child labor, we found that many issues were common to all different parts of the world. We heard personal stories from the children about; child trafficking, sexual exploitation, working on fishing boat, cleaning car, selling things on street or in market, pornography, collecting garbage, transportation and shipping,

brick making and demolishing, the making of medical utensils and other dangerous materials, drug trafficking, domestic servants, bounded laborers, farming, mining, weaving carpets, child soldiers, working in factories and sweatshops. These children are misused everyday and have no one to speak for them.

While most people and governments are aware these problems exist, they are hidden or just ignored. This does not change the fact they all are very dangerous to the physical and mental well being of a child. These forms of child labor must be stopped.

The Roles of Governments and Civil Society

Most of the children have expressed that they are losing faith in the governments because of their empty promises. They have made many promises to end child labor through education and better social services. But they do not act. Their promises are not met with real commitment or resources.

While the governments put an enormous amount of money to weapons and war, there are still children who cannot read or write. They have no homes to live in or food to eat. The government must take the needs of children as a priority. They must provide all that is necessary to live while still protecting our rights.

As it is a responsibility of governments to protect our rights, end child labor, and provide free, equal education or good quality, we have many demands for the governments. When we speak about the governments, we talk not only about the role of national governments but also other governmental bodies at international and regional levels that are responsible for protecting our rights.

First and most importantly, governments must listen to children. The governments make the issues of the children a priority and include the children in the decision-making that affects our lives. Governments must also provide opportunities for children to participate and express their opinions because they are the future as well as the present and their opinion should be valued

Governments must criminalize child labor but should never criminalize the children. The children are victims of child labor. They must create and carry out laws that strictly punish the adults who have abused children for their own interest. Governments must support the children if they want to bring the cases of them being used as child laborers to court, by providing a free attorney. Children should be able to turn in the people who have abused them without fear of getting trouble. Instead, these children be rescued and rehabilitated.

Governments must fight against trafficking of children. They must enforce the laws they already have. But today's laws may not be enough so they must make more effective ones. The governments of countries where trafficking happens must work together to implement laws that criminalize the traffickers.

Governments must provide compulsory education of quality at free of cost. Schools must

provide skilled teachers who are qualified. There should be a mechanism to check that the teachers are doing their job well and these laws to provide education for all children are enforced. The teachers must get paid better. Education must also be provided equally to all children regardless of gender, race, economic status, religion, places of birth, citizenships, caste, disability, indigenusness or languages.

Every country has to make sure the issue of child labor is taught in every school.

Governments should encourage adults to work. Adults should work so they have enough money not to put their children to work. The rights of adults as workers have to be respected. Adult workers always have to be allowed to unionize in their workplace, because the union can help protect them from dangerous working conditions and provide them the minimum wage. It is important that adults are protected as workers so that the children do not have to work.

Governments must establish a National Plan of Action to end child labor. These plans should be made together with children.

Governments must make sure that overseas development aid (ODA) goes directly to its purpose and does not end up in the wrong hands.

Governments must make a system to put some trademarks for the products that are not made by child laborers.

Governments, not only should they work with other governments, they should also work with civil society and trade unions to be at most effective. In return, the civil society must understand the demands of the children and work together with us to watch them closely so that the governments will not fail us again. NGOs also have to use the resources that they have honestly and directly for the children.

Parents' Role

It is also parents' responsibility to listen to children.

The children need love, respect and dignity. It is in the hands of parents to provide with happy and stable family life. Parents must take their responsibility and vote. When they vote, they must also speak for the children and vote for someone who respects child rights. If the parents are not acting in the best interest of the child, the state must act on the child's behalf. Parents must talk about issues such as child sexual exploitation or abuse even when they are not comfortable because this is the only way a child will know his or her natural rights of safety and security. Parents must understand the importance of a proper education no matter of the gender of the child.

Children's Role

Having identified the current situation of child labor and our demands to the adults, we now show our commitment and the role in ending child labor.

We, the children, have to start initiatives to spread awareness about child labor in our own local communities and villages. We must educate each other about child labor, from a child to a child to promote child participation.

We must work at national level to 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. These representatives would also meet at a congress at regional and at international to look at the problems at a larger scale, and report back to their governments and local communities.

We have to start a **network** of children so that we can keep contact with each other in order to be educated on the issue all over the world. Only while working together, we can have the power to take action and to end child labor. This network will be made up of children from all over the world, and it will spread the stories of child labor and opinions. The network will help us plan more effective actions in our struggle against child labor. The network will also be a medium to report on the governments' falling or not falling their promises among the children of the world.

We believe that the use of art, dance, music and drama as a form of expression and means to spread awareness about child labor is very important. These are ways in which children from any background can connect with, understand and enjoy. There are many ways to spread the message against child labor, beyond borders, through performing art.

We must also use media to spread our voices. We would create our own form of media, such as newspaper developed by the children for the children, for us to freely express our opinion. Media must also be more friendly and tell the truth about child labor and help us combat child labor.

We have to bring the efforts to end child labor out to the villages, where the fight is not as strong. Information about child labor sometimes only reaches cities and people in the villages do not have information about the dangers of child labor. We must get them involved.

We promise to continue to take action to eliminate child labor and make a better world for children. Now, we ask all of you to join us, because only together can we truly achieve freedom for all. In this friendship, we will create a healthy and peaceful world for all.

Today, the power is in our hands. We define the future.

We are the present and our voice is the future!