

# **OSLO INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CHILD LABOUR**

**27-30 October 1997, Oslo, Norway**

## **FINAL REPORT**

## Preface

In all parts of the world, the problem of child labour is occupying an increasingly prominent place. How to protect children against exploitation and how to promote their rights is being discussed at local, national, regional and international levels. The conference on child labour held in Oslo on October 27-30, was part of an ongoing process.

Child labour is both a human rights issue and a development issue. Addressing child labour is not only a question of political decisions and appropriate legislation, but also of fighting poverty and promoting positive social change. There is no single approach to child labour that is the most appropriate one. We need to combine many approaches. We have to address the problem from the bottom-up, through broad-based development, poverty eradication and social mobilisation, and from the top down, by establishing political priorities and appropriate legal frameworks.

The Oslo Conference on Child Labour took an integrated and holistic approach to child labour. We wanted to place the discussion on child labour within a broad development perspective. If child labour is to be effectively eliminated, the socio-economic conditions related to the problem must be properly understood and addressed. The connection between child labour and the economic and social conditions of the child and its family must be at the centre of any set of sustainable development policies. Conditions must be created that make child labour unnecessary and that, give children access to good quality basic education and adequate primary health care. Children also have the right to be protected against exploitation, and this means that political and legal measures are important.

We wanted to bring together the different partners in the fight against child labour at the Oslo conference. No single actor can solve the complex child labour problem alone. Broad participation and concerted action are needed. Therefore institutions and decision-makers from several different sectors of society were invited to the conference. By bringing together responsible government departments, representatives of trade union and employers, NGOs, independent experts, the research community, representatives of working children and others, helped us to identify complementary strategies to combat child labour at national, regional and international levels.

The different players brought with them different experiences and interpretations of the problem stemming from their own parts of the world. All of them were interested in hearing about others' experiences, and in sharing ideas and views. However, our ambitions went further. We wanted to channel some of our shared knowledge into a document from this conference, an Agenda for Action, that could serve as a guideline for policy development and formulation of programmes at national and international levels. Our aim was a final document setting forth a set of actions that we can all agree on, a document that could be useful in our future work on the problem of child labour both at the national and at the international level. At the same time, such an agenda should reflect the needs of those who are actually facing the problem.

The Agenda for Action has undergone an extensive preparatory process. In addition to a preparatory meeting in Canada, regional consultations were held in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, and many countries, organisations and individuals have submitted suggestions and

comments. As a result, the Oslo discussions were based on a growing consensus that resulted from earlier debates, meetings, and conferences and culminated in the adoption of the Agenda for Action annexed to this report.

This report does not reflect the process leading up to the Oslo conference. It does not even cover the conference as a whole. The intention has not been to cover the whole complexity of the issue as raised ahead of and during the conference, but rather to highlight some of the most important aspects and outcomes of the debate. A summary of the very lively debate during the technical session of the conference is contained in the report from the technical session to the political session (section II below) and the outcome of the political session of the conference is reflected in the statements by the ministers and heads of delegations in section III below.

The preparations for the Oslo International Conference on Child Labour brought together, in fruitful debate, many people who had not previously met. This in itself was an achievement. I hope that, through the preparatory process, the exchanges of experience and ideas during the technical and political sessions, and the adoption and follow-up of the Agenda for Action, this conference will be to the benefit of developed and developing countries alike in their joint efforts to eliminate child labour. Let us continue to work constructively together, with the best interests of our children at heart.

Hilde F. Johnson  
Minister of International Development and Human Rights

## Opening statements

In his opening statement Mr. Kjell Magne Bondevik, the Norwegian Prime Minister, made a clear distinction between exploitation of children through work and children helping their parents with chores as part of the socialisation process. He further highlighted the close connection between poverty and child labour, and underlined the importance of legislation, social mobilisation and education as the main strategies in the fight against child labour. The Prime Minister reconfirmed Norway's support for the 20/20 initiative and the goal of 1 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) for official development assistance (ODA). He promised to raise the percentage of ODA devoted to education to 15, and pledged additional support to the fight against child labour to the amount of NOK 200 million.

In her statement on behalf of the developing countries, Dr. Ruth Cardoso, First Lady of Brazil and President of the "Comunidade Solidária" Council, emphasised the complexity of the question of child labour, and pointed out that there are no universal solutions. She also emphasised the need for a constructive dialogue and a broad partnership between the multilateral organisations, governments, non-governmental organisations, local communities, families and the children themselves.

Mr. Ad Melkert, the Dutch Minister of Labour, spoke about the handing over of the process from Amsterdam to Oslo. In Amsterdam the most intolerable forms of child labour had been in focus. He underlined the need for comprehensive plans, monitoring and a broad partnership.

The Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Carol Bellamy, stated that children have the same full spectrum of rights as adults - all firmly established in international law, and that child labour is a violation of these rights in all sectors, including domestic service, the sex industry, and military activity. She emphasised that relevant education of good quality is the single most essential, cost-effective tool for eliminating child labour and that in seeking solutions we must consult children. Child labour creates and perpetuates poverty and as such is also a threat to world-wide peace and stability. Child labour is both a national and an international issue. UNICEF, acknowledging the assistance of its many partners in the struggle, is committed to consigning "child labour to the oblivion it deserves".

In his key note address, Mr. Michel Hansenne, Director General of the ILO, stated that the war against child labour can be won in all countries in the course of the next 15 years. A large number of countries are seeking technical assistance from the ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC). Mr. Hansenne proposed four strategies to combat the problem: First, governments should commit themselves to the ultimate objectives of the total abolition of child labour. Secondly, the commitment should be backed up by a time-bound programme of action. Thirdly, the international legal framework should be strengthened by the adoption of an international convention to suppress all extreme forms of child labour. Fourthly, the global concern about child labour should be translated into a programme for international co-operation.

# Report from the technical to the political session

*As presented by Hedda Samson, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Netherlands*

I have the honour to present to you the fruit of work of over 300 participants from all the continents. I will present a summary of the rich discussions we had in the last two days during technical sessions focusing on education, legislation and social mobilisation.

The conference so far expressed a clear commitment to the elimination of child labour world-wide. A comprehensive strategy to this end is needed, including interventions in the field of legislation, education and social mobilisation. Action in these fields cannot be seen in isolation but in an integrated manner which can be mutually reinforcing. Child labour is both cause and effect of poverty. However, poverty does not have to be an obstacle for the elimination of child labour.

More political will is needed in order to effectively address the problem of child labour. Governments should practice what they preach and implement the obligations they have freely undertaken under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and ILO standards in particular ILO convention number 138 and number 29.

## **Legislation**

A first necessary step is the enactment and implementation of national legislation that should include provisions for a minimum age for admission to employment or work which should be linked to the age of the end of compulsory education. National legislation should contain provisions relating to its enforcement and monitoring including sanctions and penalties.

Measures of prevention and removal, rehabilitation and reintegration of children who are victims of child labour should also be addressed in national legislation. In particular the important role of school authorities in monitoring that children do attend schools and are not engaged in child labour should be recognised in labour laws.

Last but not least, legislation should cover all areas where child labour occurs, including the agricultural sector, domestic service, informal sectors and family undertakings and all laws relevant to child labour such as on education and health should be harmonised.

Good and comprehensive legislation only has meaning when effectively enforced and implemented. Lack of enforcement is the biggest problem in many of our countries. Strengthening enforcement should include not only the involvement and training of governmental officials such as labour inspectors and law enforcement officials, but should also involve the judiciary, employers and workers organisations, NGOs and other members of civil society.

There is a need to make visible the invisible, such as children in the informal sector, such as domestic service. Suggestions were made to register them, monitor their situation, and ensure close contact with their families in order to effectively implement legislative provisions regarding them.

International standard setting is important for the development of national legislation. A new ILO instrument on the most intolerable forms of child labour is widely welcomed. It should not, however, undermine existing international standards, in particular ILO convention number 138, but should complement them and set priorities for national and international action on the elimination of child labour. The new ILO instrument should make clear references to the importance of the role of education. It should require states parties to enact national legislative measures on prevention, removal and rehabilitation as well as penalties for violations of the national law. There should be provisions for the mobilisation of resources at national and international level and for the availability of technical assistance in order to meet the objectives of the instrument.

There should be no exclusions for domestic service, work in agriculture, work in the informal sector, and work in family undertakings.

### ***Education***

A second crucial element of a comprehensive strategy to eliminate child labour is education. Every child has the right to education. Primary education should be free and compulsory for all children. Governments are responsible for this to be achieved. Any work or labour interfering with this right to education must be regarded as intolerable.

Education is more than primary education. It includes secondary education, vocational education and apprenticeship. It should also include proper early childhood care, focusing particularly on vulnerable groups .

In order to be all-embracing, education systems should be diversified and adjusted to the minds of particular groups, such as children from ethnic minorities, indigenous people, children removed from work and former child soldiers. The bottom-line is however that all types of education must lead into the formal education system.

Education must be relevant, of quality and accessible. The curricula must reflect the educational needs of children in order to prevent school drop-outs. Removal of hidden costs of education like schoolbooks, uniforms and so on is necessary. Provisions for special incentives for children of poorest households to attend school such as free meals at school should be adopted.

The gender aspect must be addressed throughout the education system. Young girls should be sensitised on their rights and special attention should be given to the education of girls.

### ***Social mobilisation***

A third element of the overall strategy against child labour is social mobilisations at all levels.

Social mobilisation is not merely information sharing but an essential process that expresses commitment for sustainable change with actions accrued out of awareness. It is a dialogue process which builds consensus regarding the existence, causes and solution of the problems. Consensus brings commitment.

The objectives of social mobilisation should be changes in attitude, changes in behaviour, and changes in national laws, policies, and practices.

The major aspects that need to be highlighted during the mobilisations processes are the protection of children from child labour, the provision of opportunities for education, the immediate start of programmes to eliminate most intolerable forms of child labour while simultaneously building the capacity of the families against child labour. Additionally, the mobilisation process should also include awareness raising on national and international legislation in the field of child labour. Child participation is an important aspect of the mobilisation process. In an integrated manner poverty eradication and education to children should be important strategies.

The first and foremost step regarding the mobilisation process is gathering information on the problem. This information helps to understand problems and solutions and helps create consensus when shared. A participatory approach to data collection and its dissemination is important.

Mechanisms for social mobilisation should be created with the different actors of the society. They include children, families, teachers, governments, NGOs, employers, trade unions, mass and traditional media, local communities, social workers and other sectors of society.

Strategies for the social mobilisation should be specific to the local situation, should initiate socialisation of the families, should advocate at the local political level, and should use primary health care structure to reach the unreached children. These strategies could help providing services and initiate dialogue with the groups.

At the moment we should focus attention on building awareness against child labour. The global march against child labour should be supported.

### ***Expectations***

The technical session thus provides us with some expectations for the future both at the national and international level.

Governments bear the primary responsibility for the elimination of child labour through the implementation of international standards and the adoption and implementation of national policies and programmes against child labour.

Governments should live up to and implement in law and practice the obligations they have undertaken under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ILO Conventions, in particular Convention No. 138 on the abolition of child labour and Convention No. 29 on forced labour. Countries should ratify these instruments where they not have already done so.

Governments should constructively participate in the drafting of a new ILO instrument on the most intolerable forms of child labour.

Governments should mobilise all relevant different actors in civil society in their fight against child labour, such as NGOs, employers, trade unions and teachers.

More resources should be provided for education, both by national and by donor governments.

The international community should assist individual national governments in their fight against child labour, including through supporting the 20/20 initiative and through developing adequate and comprehensive aid programmes.

Relevant international organisations and agencies should strengthen their co-operation and co-ordination in the field of child labour. There should be co-operation between the various monitoring bodies of relevant standards, including the supervisory machinery of the ILO and the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Finally, the fruitful co-operation that we see here in Oslo between the various participants, like governments, NGOs, employers and trade unions, teachers, should be continued in the future.

I hope that these expectations will inspire you in your work during this part of the conference.



## Statements by ministers and heads of delegations

The following represents a summary of the statements made during the conference. The authors of the report have tried to synthesise the content of all statements, while focusing on the main issues addressed. The compilation will evidently not do full justice to the richness of all the statements made. The summary has been organised as they reflect comments to items in the Agenda for Action. The ministers' individual statements are available on request.

### ***Context***

In the last few years there has been a growing tendency on the part of governments to take action against child labour. At the international level, increased collaboration has been found to assist countries in combating child labour. Child labour is now at the top of the global agenda.

Child labour is regarded as a problem that concerns all countries, rich and poor. The task ahead is to protect and educate children with particular emphasis on enhancing family welfare. Delegates recognised that work in a family situation and in rural areas may be very different from the conventional relationship between employer and employee in the formal sector. This requires new analytical approaches which allow an assessment of child labour in the informal as well as the formal sector.

Delegates recognised that there is no single or simple solution to child labour because child labour has several interrelated causes. Child labour has a negative effect on many aspects of a child's development. The fact that so many children work is a reflection of socio-economic and political conditions in many countries and at the international levels. Child labour is an extremely complex issue and its manifestation in any one context is influenced by such factors as gender, beliefs, cultural practices, economic opportunities, the legislative framework, law enforcement, and ethnic affiliation. Many delegates illustrated this complexity by describing the problem in their own country.

A recurring issue was the important and complex relationship between poverty and child labour. While it is recognised that because of poverty some families and children see no other alternative than resorting to child labour, it is also acknowledged that child labour is an unacceptable practice that perpetuates poverty by maintaining the cycle of poor health, poor education and low incomes, while simultaneously denying adults employment. Thus poverty is both a cause and a consequence of child labour.

The heavy debt burden and the impact of structural adjustment on countries that also have significant numbers of child workers was an issue raised by many delegates. It was underlined that the relation between debt relief and the elimination of child labour deserved serious attention. It was generally acknowledged that, at least in the short run, income substitution had to be considered as one way to compensating families for the loss of income incurred when a child stops working.

Many delegates linked this topic to the need to strengthen support for the social sectors in terms of both domestic action and development co-operation. A number of countries

believed that mechanisms for poverty alleviation are crucial for achieving this. Some delegates pointed out that poverty is only one of the causes of the problem, since child labour has often been found to be increased in countries with strong economic growth. While it was generally agreed that as long as there is child labour, there will be poverty, the delegates were also united in emphasising that the elimination of child labour is not dependant on poverty eradication.

There was broad agreement that a comprehensive approach is essential in order to combat child labour. Such an approach must reflect an understanding of the factors that contribute to the problem and of the opportunities inherent in the situation that may provide solutions. It was emphasised that each nation should formulate its approach to child labour in a feasible national plan of action that includes a timeframe, should during the process consult with the full range of stakeholders in child labour issues and actions, and should commit itself to sufficient resource allocation. These national plans must take account of the globalisation processes that are taking place, the resulting liberalisation of trade, and the potential impact of this on legislation and other aspects related to child labour.

Delegates stressed that any approach to the elimination child labour must include a combination of prevention, removal, and compensatory measures and will necessarily include interim measures to protect working children. Action to remove children from hazardous work must be accompanied by a set of protective and rehabilitative programmes to ensure that proper alternatives have been planned before children are removed. Those children that are removed from conditions that have negatively affected their growth and overall development may require compensatory measures before they can be effectively be integrated. A multi-faceted programme to ensure the long-term prevention of child labour was considered to be the major thrust of every national programme and funding agency support.

Many delegates pointed out the need to target special groups, e.g. rural working children, orphans, children in the informal sector and girls in urban jobs. Several delegations raised the issue of discrimination as a factor in selecting children for work. Other factors regarded as contributing to the selection of children for work included gender, ethnic affiliation, and geographical location.

Girls and boys often do different kinds of work and, despite the lack of accurate data, it is becoming evident that girls' work is often more invisible than that of boys. Furthermore, girls often need special protection because they are more vulnerable to a variety of kinds of exploitation, including sexual exploitation.

Some delegates pointed to the strong linkage between the rights of a child and women's rights. The situation and status of women is an important determining factor in how a society addresses the concerns of children. If the rights and status of women are strengthened and, their participation in decision-making processes, and their access to economic resources are increased, this will have a positive impact on the lives of children.

### ***The main objectives***

There seemed to be general consensus on the ultimate objective of total abolition of child labour. There was also a general awareness that commitments should be backed up by time

bound programmes of action aimed at ending child labour within an explicitly defined period of time. The strengthening of the international legal framework through the adoption of an international convention to suppress all extreme forms of child labour was supported.

Most of the delegates pointed out that the first requirement was to eliminate the most intolerable forms of child labour. In this connection they welcomed the development of a new ILO convention focusing on the most intolerable forms of child labour. It was pointed out that sexual exploitation of children was a problem where international measures were particularly called for. Furthermore the use of children as soldiers is unacceptable.

### ***Action at National level - Policy and programme development***

The conference was informed that a number of governments attending the Oslo Conference have already defined their national policy and programme of action against child labour, as part of their national development policy. Many countries have been implementing their programmes to address child labour problems with technical support from ILO, UNICEF and other international organisations. In addition, some developed countries are also providing assistance on a bilateral basis. Many more governments declared their plan to develop their national programme of action against child labour in the near future. The national programmes of action will focus on the most intolerable forms of child labour, taking into account the need of short term measures to improve the conditions of working children, while working towards the long term goal of effectively eliminating child labour. Some governments are in the process of collecting data to appraise the problem. In addition, several governments called for the establishment of national fora to co-ordinate action and share experience with other key actors within a country.

Many government delegates stated that they were determined to eliminate child labour in their country. In many countries, broadly attended national seminars or conferences that discussed and developed country-specific approaches and strategies for combating child labour, have proved to be the starting point of a policy-formulating process. In a number of cases action has already been taken, e.g. pacts have been made between relevant parties; rehabilitation centres have been established; advisory committees have been set up; awareness raising seminars and workshops have been arranged; conferences with representatives from ministries of justice, labour, education and health have been held; special programmes to save child labourers have been implemented; and compulsory schooling lasting nine years, school meals; scholarships for pupils; and longer hours have been introduced.

A number of delegates emphasised that governments bear the primary responsibility for the elimination of child labour through the implementation of international standards and the adoption and implementation of national policies and programmes against child labour. It was stated that governments should live up to and implement in law and practice the obligations they have undertaken under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ILO Conventions, in particular Convention No. 138 on the abolition of child labour and Convention No. 29 on forced labour. Many delegations highlighted the need for the ratification of these instruments where this has not already been done.

Even though it was agreed that the development of a national policy is primarily a government responsibility, many underlined the need for broad participation. In order for a policy to be an effective guide for action, it has to take into account the experiences and positions of a wide range of actors, such as workers and employers and their organisations and NGOs. The whole of civil society, including local communities, teachers, families, parents, and the children themselves, must be involved in the process. A national policy on child labour should be part of a more comprehensive policy framework that includes development or economic benchmarks.

Listening to children was considered to be an essential step if we are to find solutions to the problem of child labour. However, appropriate ways of consulting with and involving children as partners remain an ongoing topic of discussion. While it is recognised that adults may not always agree with the arguments advanced by children, it is essential that avenues for effective dialogue be found and kept open. Adults have many responsibilities to children--the most important being to protect them in order to ensure that they develop as they should. This responsibility must be carried out in ways that include taking account of children's opinions. Children should not be used to advance the interests of specific groups of adults, even for the best of motives.

The question of how to handle the wishes of children who want to work was raised. There is general agreement that children learn in a wide range of environments and that this should be encouraged. Concern was expressed, however, about why some children want to work. Is it because they understand at a too early age that without their labour they and others will lack the basic essentials? Is it because their school is not a child-friendly learning environment? Is it due to a desire for consumer goods? While all these questions indicate the advantages of work as an option for children, they also indicate the ways adults are failing to provide children with their full range of rights.

### ***Basic Education***

There was general understanding that child labour will never be effectively eliminated without the provision of good basic education. Education must be relevant, of good quality and accessible. The curricula must reflect the educational needs of children in order to prevent school drop-outs.

At national level, governments expressed their commitment to promote basic education of quality for all children, with special emphasis on education for girls. Many delegates drew attention to the need to address the gender aspect of the education system. Young girls should be made aware of their rights and special attention should be paid to the education of girls. Many governments recognised the need to strengthen the role of families in the fight against child labour. Economic measures targeting poor families will be given a key role.

It was agreed that every child has a right to education, and therefore policies aimed at making education a viable and rewarding option for all children were at the centre of the debate. Ideally primary education should be free and compulsory for all children. It was acknowledged that even low cost schooling can be expensive for poor families, especially when the family has been depending in part on income generated by the child. Removal of

costs of education like schoolbooks, uniforms and so on is necessary. Provisions for special incentives for children of poorest households to attend school such as free meals at school may need to be adopted.

Governments are responsible for achieving Education for All. Strong support was expressed for both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Jomtien Declaration on education for all in the context of every child's right to a complete basic education.

Some delegates expressed the view that the new ILO instrument on intolerable forms of labour should make explicit reference to the importance of basic education. Any work that prevents children from accessing and achieving primary education is not acceptable, and must be eliminated.

In order to be all-embracing, education systems should be diversified and adjusted to particular groups, such as ethnic minorities, indigenous people, children removed from work and former child soldiers.

It was pointed out that education is more than primary education. It includes secondary education, vocational education and apprenticeship. It should also include proper early childhood care, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups. Some delegates pointed out that non-formal approaches provide more flexibility for working children, but that it is important that they be of the same quality as other forms. Some delegates argued that even though education is essential it is not a magic solution.

### ***Legislation and law enforcement***

The governments declared their commitments to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Most have applied the principle of the ILO Convention No. 138 in their national policy and programme against child labour. Several countries are in the process of ratifying the ILO Convention No. 138.

The ILO's call for priority action to tackle the most extreme forms of child labour as a matter of national priority was endorsed. The preparation of the new ILO Convention to target the most intolerable forms of child labour received wide political support, and governments were encouraged to constructively participate in the drafting of the new instrument.

International standard setting was seen as important and necessary for the development of national legislation. Many countries are revising their national legislation in line with ILO-Convention No.138 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The new instrument should require states parties to enact national legislation to prevent, remove and rehabilitate child workers and to impose penalties for violations of national law.

There has been substantial progress in the development of a legal framework aimed at protecting children from exploitation through child labour. Some countries described the evolution of their legislative system regarding child labour and their follow up policy. Several countries that had gone through changes in their political systems in recent years had used the opportunity to strengthen implementation of the UN Convention on the Right of the Child while others had passed laws on protection, care and education of children. The challenge of implementing existing instruments was discussed. It was recognised that

children working in the informal sector, being almost invisible, represent a particular challenge.

Many delegates underlined that provision must be made for the mobilisation of national and international resources and for technical assistance in order for countries to be able to meet the standards laid down in international instruments.

The delegates recognised that one of the most important first steps is the enactment and implementation of national legislation. This legislation should include provision for a minimum age for admission into employment that is linked to the age of the end of compulsory education. The need to address prevention and the removal, rehabilitation and reintegration of child workers in national legislation was highlighted.

Legislation should cover all areas where child labour occurs, including the agricultural sector, domestic service, the informal sector and family businesses and all legislation relevant to child labour such as that governing education and health should be harmonised. Recognising the magnitude of this task, some argued that priorities should be assigned. There were different views on children working in the informal sector, which was defined broadly. It was suggested that they should be registered, their situation monitored, and close contact ensured with their families so that legislative provisions covering such children can be effectively implemented. Many delegates pointed out the potential role of school authorities in making sure that children do attend schools.

Comprehensive legislation only has meaning when effectively enforced. Strengthening enforcement should include not only the involvement and training of governmental officials such as labour inspectors and law enforcement officials, but also the judiciary, employers and workers organisations, NGOs, and other members of civil society.

Many countries stated that the government authorities should be solely responsible for enforcement. Others stated that government responsibility should be balanced and complemented by checks and measures implemented by other appropriate agencies.

### ***Social mobilisation***

It was also pointed out that governments should mobilise all relevant actors in civil society in their fight against child labour. Children, families, teachers, governments, NGOs, employers, trade unions, mass and traditional media, local communities and social workers should all be involved in social mobilisation against child labour.

Social mobilisation was seen as an essential process that facilitates sustainable change through actions resulting from awareness. The objectives of social mobilisation should be to achieve changes in attitude and behaviour, in national legislation, policies, and practices. The mobilisation process should also include awareness raising with regard to national and international legislation in the field of child labour.

Governments should facilitate the work of NGOs. This would reinforce their capacity for self-help and release their creative potential for actions to eliminate child labour. Furthermore, experience suggests that initiatives for children are more successful when communities and family networks are mobilised at the design stage and sustained throughout the project.

It was emphasised that mobilisation processes should be linked to poverty eradication strategies and should also provide education opportunities if these are not available. Programmes to eliminate child labour should also strengthen the capacity of families to provide safety nets for their children. Children's participation is an important aspect of the social mobilisation process.

Many delegates pointed out that strategies for social mobilisation must be specific to the local situation. There was general acknowledgement that priority should be given to raising awareness of the evils of child labour.

### ***International partnership to combat child labour***

Delegates underlined the necessity of translating the concern about child labour into a programme for international co-operation in the field of economic and social policy. A global approach consisting of international co-operation and mutual assistance in fighting world poverty and child labour and combating the international aspects of the problem, must be strengthened. Priority must be given to the immediate suppression of all extreme forms of child labour and to implementing preventive measures, especially through the provision of free and relevant education of good quality.

There was considerable emphasis on the need for resource allocations to prevent child labour. Donors were called on to live up to their commitments and agreements to increase allocations to development assistance in general and to child labour issues in particular. This concern was also voiced with a good deal of force in the closing statements. The need for an increase in ODA from the relevant countries to increase it to 0.7 per cent of GDP was emphasised. Both donors and recipient countries were asked to heed the 20/20 initiative whereby 20 percent of development allocations are devoted to the social sectors such as health and education. Several delegates noted with concern the tendency to devote a rather large amounts of national budgets to defence as compared with allocations for human resource development. There were also strong calls for the more efficient use and reallocation of existing resources.

It was argued that all relevant international organisations and agencies should strengthen their co-operation and co-ordination in the field of child labour. There should be co-operation between the various monitoring bodies of relevant standards, including the supervisory machinery of the ILO and the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

The question of the appropriate role for external agencies was raised by a number of delegations. The importance of a broad partnership against child labour was acknowledged. However, it was also regarded as important that agencies from outside the country should recognise the sovereignty of national governments.

In the course of the debate it was indicated that the existing international technical assistance to help countries solve their child labour problems provided by the ILO, UNICEF, development banks and other international institutions will be strengthened in the coming years. Two countries announced their support for the ILO-IPEC programme, in addition to the existing 14 donor countries who will be continuing their support. One country stated that it had decided to join the IPEC and pledged additional support to UNICEF for assistance for children in special difficult circumstances.

Delegates argued that more resources should be provided for education, both by national governments and by donors. Support for the 20/20-initiative was pledged by a number of countries, some of which were already on the way to implementing the 20/20 initiative.

Lack of accurate data and information about child labour was seen as a major difficulty in diagnosing the problem. Many delegates set a high value on accurate information on progress being made towards the elimination of child labour. International agencies, in particular, were urged to devote both financial and human resources to more extensive data collection in order to facilitate the development of useful monitoring systems. Some countries called for more support to the ILO/IPEC's SIMPOC. It was agreed that much more attention should be paid to the development of appropriate indicators for invisible child labour.

Nevertheless, there was general agreement that sufficient information is available for immediate action to be taken. Ongoing action should be continually revised in light of new information as it is generated. Monitoring progress toward the total elimination of child labour should be conducted at the national level. There was considerable support for linking monitoring of child labour to international mechanisms such as monitoring the Convention on the Rights of the Child. At the same time, some countries felt it was very inappropriate for international mechanisms to be set up since they have a tendency to undermine national processes and sovereignty. Furthermore, serious reservations were expressed about the linking of monitoring to other processes and actions, such as protectionism and trade sanctions, which may have many unforeseen consequences.

### ***Other issues (Trade)***

Some delegates warned that sanctions and protectionism were not fruitful ways of tackling the problem. It was argued that restrictions on trade would only harm those whom we aim to help by forcing them into other forms of child labour that are less well regulated. These delegates also argued that there are other, more positive, approaches to be considered.

In some countries, producers, exporters and non-governmental organisations have joined forces in developing and introducing labelling systems to identify goods that have been produced without child labour. Some delegates were concerned about the proliferation of labels and the lack of control, and suggested that the ILO play a role in this matter.

Some delegates noted the value of informed consumer movements in their countries which served as another way of focusing on child labour. As market forces become increasingly liberal, they see these movements as a welcome means of enforcement by civil society. The development of codes of conduct related to child labour by corporations active in geographical or market areas where there is a potential for exploiting child workers, were mentioned as a promising new initiatives.

The globalisation of the world economy was addressed from another angle as well. Lack of regulation also provides opportunities that can be exploited in negative ways. As a result concern was expressed that without very careful monitoring and prompt action, even those the gains that have been made in the struggle against child labour could be lost.



# **The Adoption of the Agenda for Action and Closing statements**

## ***Agenda for Action***

The Agenda for Action was adopted unanimously. It will serve as a guideline for policy development and the formulation of programmes at national and international levels.

The Agenda for Action is based on three main areas. These are basic education, legislation and social mobilisation. While these are not the only areas where action is required for effectively eliminating child labour, it is recognised that they are critical elements of any multisectoral strategy. The Agenda for Action addresses each of these in some detail within a more comprehensive framework.

## ***Closing statements***

In his closing statement Mr. Assane Diop, the Senegalese Minister of Labour and Employment, commented that the developed countries' commitments of 0.7% of GNP for ODA did not represent a step forward. He pointed out that the objective of protecting children from economic exploitation, needs an economic solution. With regard to ¶ 2.2 and ¶ 2.3 of the Agenda for Action, concerning, adequate alternatives for children who stop working and their families, he believed that the agenda should contain a reference to the need to establish an international fund to finance family-oriented micro-projects for such alternatives. He also suggested that the ILO, UNICEF and Norway should take steps for follow this up further.

In her closing statement Ms. Mervat Talawy, the Egyptian Minister of Social Affairs, commended donor countries that are positively inclined towards international co-operation through the United Nations. She welcomed the initiative presented by the World Bank and mentioned it had taken 25 years for them to be convinced. She stated that the UNDP should be recognised along with UNICEF, ILO and the World Bank, as an organisation that can play a crucial role. She agreed with Senegal's statement that the commitments could have been more forceful and hoped the target of 0.7 per cent of GDP to ODA would soon be reached.

Mr. M.P. Veerendra Kumar, the Indian Minister of Labour, welcomed the Agenda for Action and believed the Conference had been constructive in fostering a better climate for the discussion of the problem of child labour. He noted the smoothness and rapidity of the process from Amsterdam to Oslo via Lahore, Brasilia and Pretoria. The Minister described the policy and actions taken in India. He recalled the enormity and complexity of the problem and pointed out the need to adopt strategies appropriate to specific situations. He stressed that no matter which approach is chosen, it must not interfere with the basic rights of sovereign countries. He maintained that the Agenda for Action will serve as a common foundation even though context-specific solutions will have to be found in each case.

Mr. Jorge Arrate MacNiven, the Chilean Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, commended the close co-operation between UNICEF and the ILO. He noted that many different views on the solution of child labour had been presented, but believed that the Conference had shown that we all have certain common views and values in this regard, and that child

labour issues are ethical in nature. He stated his agreement with the statements of Egypt and Senegal, and underlined that the solution of the child labour problem is the responsibility of all countries. He welcomed the fact that delegations to the Conference were so heterogeneous and called for continued partnership and progress in the efforts to do away with child labour.

Ms. Alette van Leur, of the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, congratulated the hosts on the Conference and was convinced that a major step had been taken forward towards eliminating child labour.

The chairperson, Ms. Hilde Frafjord Johnson, the Norwegian Minister of International Development and Human Rights, thanked the hosts of the regional consultations and the two co-organisers of the conference, the ILO and UNICEF. She promised that Norway would undertake consultations to follow-up the Agenda for Action.