
0.1% for Children - From exploitation to education

Making a world fit for children is a dream we all share. But to make this dream a reality we need more than just plans or promises. The Global March Against Child Labour says it will require specific, measurable and significant commitments of funds.

The draft outcome document for the UN Special Session on children recognises that: “Promoting healthy lives including good nutrition and control of infectious diseases, providing quality education, protecting children from abuse, exploitation, violence, and armed conflict, and combating HIV/AIDS are achievable goals and are clearly affordable for the global community.”

The international community needs to go beyond just saying that these goals are affordable, and actually commit the resources needed. The cornerstone of this commitment is the target of 0.7 per cent of GNP for official development assistance. So far only four countries have met this target and demonstrated their commitment to a just and equitable world. As an essential step towards the elimination of poverty and the promotion of humanity, we call upon all developed countries to meet this target as soon as possible.

Children, however, also have special, urgent needs that must be met now. The Special Session’s plan of action promises many specific measures including: reducing infant mortality, implementing early childhood development policies, ensuring childhood immunisation, giving proper care for children with disabilities, providing free education of good quality, protecting children from sexual exploitation and trafficking, rehabilitating children removed from the worst forms of child labour, reducing the proportion of infants infected with HIV, and many more steps to improve the lives of children.

But this is all a hollow exercise, if it is not backed by the funds needed to implement these measures. As a specific and measurable solution to the need for funds, we call upon all developed countries to commit at least 0.1% of their GNP to development assistance exclusively for children. Being only one thousandth of the wealth they produce, this target is well within the means of all developed countries. Moreover, it is a contribution that would not only be acceptable, but even popular among the taxpayers of developed countries, as a demonstration of their compassion for children.

Even though 0.1% does not seem like much at all, this amount would mean 25 billion dollars each year for the world’s poorest children. This is a significant sum and should be enough to meet the gaps in providing for their health, education, safety, and development. By comparison, UNICEF estimates that an additional 9 billion dollars could ensure quality education for all children. Even smaller amounts are required to protect children from preventable diseases, to register their birth, or to protect them from exploitation. In total, this amount should be enough to ensure that the promises made at the UN Special Session realistically can be kept.

As specific wording, we thus propose that Point 47a of the outcome document read:

“Urge the developed countries that have not done so to strive to meet the targets of 0.7 per cent of their gross national product (GNP) for overall development assistance, and the targets of earmarking 0.15 per cent to 0.2 per cent of GNP as official development assistance for least developed countries as soon as possible, and to allocate at least 0.1 per cent of their GNP as official development assistance

devoted exclusively for the needs of children.”

Surely the world’s children can count on at least this much from us.

If you are interested in helping to promote this proposal, please contact:

Global March Against Child Labour
L-6 Kalkaji, New Delhi-19, India
Tel: (91 11) 622 4899 Fax: (91 11) 623 8919
E-mail: childhood@globalmarch.org,
yatra@del2.vsnl.net.in, globalmarch@yahoo.com
Website: <http://www.globalmarch.org/>

Children Asylum Seekers - “Where is the Safety Net”?

For many women and children who arrive in Australia as refugees, it is often difficult to obtain the support and assistance required to become part of our community. Stancea Vichie of the Asylum Seeker Project at Hotham Mission, North Melbourne tells us the (anonymised) stories of two families and the issues they have faced.

Sarah is an asylum seeker from Sri Lanka. She is a single mother with two children – Bijma who is nine and Sanjaya who is six months. When she arrived in Australia, she believed her worries were over and she would be able to build a better future for her children. . Since fleeing her homeland and applying for a protection visa from the Department of Immigration, Sarah has suffered violence, homelessness and poverty. The family have no access to Medicare and do not have any income support. Sarah is a very independent woman and would like to work to support her family, however, the conditions of her visa state that she cannot work. When she arrived in Australia, she believed her worries were over and she would be able to build a better future for her children.

Sarah and her children were not able to find appropriate accommodation on their arrival and thus were forced to stay in over-crowded and cramped conditions with her sister and brother-in-law’s family. After a few months, Sarah’s brother-in-law became increasingly violent and refused to support her family. He threw Sarah and her children out of the house. For the next two months, Sarah moved from place to place and into crisis accommodation.

Sarah could not afford rent as she had used all her savings. Adding to the family’s difficulties is that Bijma suffers from an acute asthmatic condition which requires regular attendance at Hospital emergency departments. The Asylum Seeker’s Assistance Scheme of the Red Cross has provided support letters for the family to access health care services however on more than one occasion, the family have been turned away by hospitals because the cost of treatment could not be recovered. On one occasion, Bijma was treated after Sarah took her to the hospital in an extreme emergency. Bijma was at serious risk after an asthma attack.

During the period that the family was homeless, Bijma was not able to attend school. This upset Bijma greatly, and while she tried to support her mother by way of helping to navigate through the city and acting as her translator, sometimes she felt angry. Once the family was able to settle in accommodation provided by the community sector, Sarah tried to enrol Bijma into school. At first the school would not accept Bijma saying she would have to pay as an overseas student. Sarah could not afford milk and books let alone school fees. Finally the school agreed to accept Bijma after a support worker negotiated with the school administrator.

Sometimes Bijma still feels angry and she can’t explain why. Other times she feels very sad when she thinks of her homeland and the family and friends she left behind. Bijma is a bright girl however she finds it difficult to sit still in class. It has been a long time since Bijma has attended school on a regular basis.

Kahin, is a Somali woman with two sons, Ahmed