



Press Release

## **15 years of struggle against child labour: Global March Against Child Labour**

16 January 2013: Basu, a core marcher of the worldwide physical march against child labour organised in 1998 reflects, *“I joined the Global March as the youngest core marcher, all of 9 years then. Today, after 15 years, I am amazed and delighted to see how the global march movement has spread so fast and so widely to impact and touch the lives of millions of children like me.”*

Fifteen years ago, on January 17, 1998, the Global March movement started with an 80,000 km physical march when thousands of people marched together to jointly put forth the message against child labour and slavery. Joined by trade unions, teachers’ organisations, child right organisations and children, the march crossed 103 countries building immense awareness for ending child labour. Back then in 1998, the state of child protection from exploitation, trafficking and slavery was rather different from what we see today. Child labour itself was not acknowledged, either in social or political domains, and was considered acceptable and a norm for children from poor and vulnerable backgrounds. Further, despite the pervasiveness of child labour across the globe, i.e., 250 million child labourers, there was no international legislation for tackling it, coupled with a lack of a collective campaign to push for its elimination. But, Global March that started with a small group of motivated partners and was later joined by many more during the course of the last 15 years helped to bring about significant changes. The physical global march of 1998 led to the first ever worldwide campaign to end child labour which facilitated in the formulation of the first ever international instrument of child labour, with the International Labour Organization (ILO) adopting ILO Convention No. 182 on “Eliminating the Worst Forms of Child Labour.” This has been the fastest ratified Convention with 177 country ratifications.

*“There has been a remarkable progress in the fight against child labour during the last 15 years. New laws, policies and programmes have been launched with a high level of engagement of society, state and corporate. But, this is not enough. Global March is committed to make child labour history. Therefore, we call for reinvigorated action, political will, corporate accountability and renewed efforts for education,”* remarked Kailash Satyarthi, Chairperson, Global March Against Child Labour.

Earlier there was a lack of policy coherence and understanding of inter-linkages of child labour with poverty and education. But over the years, there has been a paradigm in the approach towards child labour, and it has been recognised as a socio-economic economic issue with its linkages to other development issues. In 2005, the Global Task Force on Child Labour and Education was established with Global March as one of the founding members, along with Education International, ILO, UNICEF, UNESCO and World Bank to work on the inter-linkages between child labour abolition and education for all. With such efforts, child labour has now come to be recognised as an obstacle for the achievement of the Education for All goals, Universal Primary Education and other Millennium Development Goals.

*“Education International and its member organisations are committed supporters of the international struggle against child labour. Since the foundation of the Global March Against Child Labour, 15 years ago,*

*teachers and their organisations are at the core of the Education For All and child labour elimination initiatives and will continue to be committed to this cause,”* said Susan Hopgood, President, [Education International](#) one of the founding members of the Global March.

Fifteen years ago, child domestic labour was a non-issue with thousands of child domestic labourers, especially girls working in hazardous conditions akin to slavery across the world, without recognition for their plight, exploitation and loss of childhood. But a remarkable victory has been seen on this front as well with the recognition of child domestic labour as an invisible form of slavery. ILO Convention No. 189 on “Decent Work for Domestic Workers” adopted in 2011 recognises child domestic labour. Global March supported the campaign for the adoption of the ILO Convention No. 189, and highlighted the issue through World Day Against Child Labour observations in 2002 and 2011, and it will also focus on it in 2013.

While trafficking of children for commercial sexual exploitation was well recognised, trafficking of children for forced labour did not find a place in the policy discourse. As a result of consistent and persistent policy advocacy dialogues and engagement with partners, and sustained mass awareness campaigns, trafficking of children is now also being understood for forced labour and modern-day slavery. Be it the Children World Congresses, the Marches Against Child Trafficking, or regional and national consultations, trafficking of children for forced labour has been highlighted by the Global March and its partners.

As regards, child labour in agriculture, it was seen as a traditional activity and invisible as most of the work children did was considered as “helping out” on family farms. But, now the hazardous work of 129 million children in agriculture is being recognised and is receiving long-due attention from policy makers, international development organisations, etc. To put this neglected issue of work by children in agricultural and rural settings on the global policy agenda, Global March facilitated development of common agenda and action on child labour in agriculture, through the International Conference on Child Labour in Agriculture, organised in 2012.

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