

Global March Against Child Labour

Pan-European and Euro-Mediterranean Regional Consultation

Sofia, Bulgaria, 23 to 25 July 2007

Emerging recommendations and strategic approach

“The Sofia Recommendation”

Foreword

In prefacing this presentation of the key set of emerging recommendations and conclusions from the Sofia consultation, the Global March International Secretariat and the participating organizations would like to clarify that this event bears a consultative status only. The event was not a decision-making forum, but one in which well-defined ideas and suggestions could be elaborated, discussed and set out in a working paper for submission to the relevant Global March membership. This working paper explores the twin pillars which underpin the work and future of the Global March in the region: firstly, identifying potential subject areas of key regional policy objectives; and, secondly, focusing on how the relevant regional organizational structures can be reconfigured and strengthened to support the delivery of these policy objectives;. The meeting organizers would like to express their recognition and thanks to the host organizations in Bulgaria and, particularly, to the participating organizations for the democratic, sensitive and inclusive manner in which they approached and discussed complex and challenging issues and sought to achieve consensus.

Context

Looking back over the years since Global March first launched its campaign to support the adoption of International Labour Organization’s (ILO) Convention No. 182 on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour, the socio-economic and political landscape of Europe – North, South, East and West – and the Maghreb has changed dramatically and fundamentally. There has been near universal ratification by the 55 countries concerned of the ILO’s eight core Conventions, including Convention No. 138 concerning Minimum Age for Admission into Employment and Convention No. 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour. There has also been universal ratification among these countries of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

At the same time, there has been rapid and extensive expansion of the European Union (EU). In turn, this has been accompanied by the move towards international trade union unity through the creation of the International Trade Union Confederation and the Pan-European Regional Council (PERC),¹ as well as the European Trade Union Confederation’s (ETUC) Euro-Mediterranean (Euromed) Trade Union Forum which incorporates the Maghreb region. Within this context, European Social Policy has experienced

¹ The ITUC’s PERC was formally established in March 2007. It brings together 87 national trade union centres affiliated to the ITUC, in 55 European countries, representing 85 million members. The PERC works to promote the strategies, priorities and policies of the ITUC and for social development, the consolidation of democracy and respect for human and workers’ rights throughout the region.

growing influence as has the role of the EU in supporting socio-economic and development-related programmes within and outside Europe, including engagement in the elimination of child labour and the pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education For All (EFA). Combined, these changes highlighted an urgent need for Global March to reflect upon its current form and activities and to consider how to most effectively manage critical adaptation and change.

Key policy objectives

Consensus was reached during the consultation on four overall themes for policy objectives in the Pan-European region.² These are set out below in no order of importance.

At National Level

The Pan-European Global March, through its national members, will seek to ensure that governments fulfil all obligations under international treaties relevant to the elimination of child labour, the pursuit of EFA, poverty reduction and the MDGs. This includes the ILO's Global Action Plan on the Elimination of Child Labour and governments' statutory obligations to consult with the social partners under ILO Conventions Nos. 138 and 182, both in reporting to the ILO on application of the Conventions and in developing national action plans, including the determination of hazardous work, under Convention No. 182. It also includes obligations under the UNCRC and the need for governments to support the overall pursuit of the global aim to establish free, formal, full-time and compulsory education delivered as a quality public service.

At Regional Level

The Pan-European Global March will lobby to ensure that European institutions fulfil obligations to provide strong and equitable support to the enactment of EU Social Policy. It will also ensure representation at appropriate EU and other European fora. In addition, as an urgent first step, it will explore and discuss effective relations and coordination with relevant trade union and civil society groupings in the region, for example, the ETUC, the PERC and the Euromed Trade Union Forum.

Inclusive education and social policies and programmes

The Pan-European Global March will lobby to ensure that European governments and institutions in developing and implementing policies, programmes and national plans of action on education and social protection will focus in particular on out-of-school children and those who are hardest to reach in society, for example, the marginalised and socially excluded, including children from the Roma community. The latest reports on child labour, EFA and the MDGs reveal that, although some progress is being made in the pursuit of these interrelated development goals, there is still a long way to go to ensure that the targets of 2015 and 2016 are reached. The number of out-of-school children is declining but declining too slowly and education and social policies and systems need to be more coherent with each other and more inclusive to respond more effectively to the diverse needs, expectations and circumstances of marginalised and socially excluded children.

² From here on, it will be understood that the Pan-European Region incorporates the Euro-Mediterranean Region, including the Maghreb.

The Pan-European Global March will make every effort to raise public awareness and lobby for education and social policies to be inclusive and coherent throughout the European region, particularly in transition countries, and will also lobby donor governments and institutions to ensure that development programmes and aid are more focused, coherent and effective as called for in the Paris Declaration.³

³ The “Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness” was a key outcome of the High-Level Forum held in Paris, France, from 28 February to 2 March 2005. For more details on the Forum and the full text of the Declaration go to: www.oecd.org/document/18/0,2340,en_2649_3236398_35401554_1_1_1_1,00.html.

Child Trafficking

The Pan-European Global March will take decisive action against the growing regional challenge of child trafficking and will support national and regional policy action to eliminate this problem. There is an urgent need for the Pan-European and Maghreb regions to work together to combat child trafficking from, into, across, within and outside the region. Key elements in this effort will include:

- To lobby for increased ratification and implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings adopted in May 2005 in Warsaw, Poland;⁴
- To lobby for increased support for and implementation of other relevant national and international instruments on trafficking;
- To follow-up the final conclusions and demands of the European Conference on Child Trafficking held in Esposende, Portugal, September 2005.⁵

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

The Pan-European Global March will work with European-based Multi-National Enterprises (MNEs) to monitor and support the implementation of their corporate social responsibilities, including appropriate withdrawal of and remedial action for children found working in supply chains. It is recommended that Global March members seek to be actively involved at their respective national levels in relevant CSR initiatives, such as the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) in the UK, and in support of relevant industrial relations structures, such as European Works Councils and European industry federations. In this context, Global March members concur with the ITUC and the Global Union Federations (GUFs) and their European regional organizations in their demands to MNEs that CSR initiatives must avoid the marginalization of trade unions and support the development of mature industrial relations.

Child participation

Meaningful and good quality child participation is a fundamental aim of Global March and underpins its policies and programmes for the elimination of child labour and the achievement of education for all. In this respect, the Pan-European Global March will actively campaign for and promote the meaningful participation of children, particularly those who are hard to reach, in any matter which concerns them directly or indirectly, particularly child labour, including trafficking, education, social protection and other relevant issues. The Pan-European Global March will encourage, support and strengthen the establishment of instruments and mechanisms supporting meaningful child participation at national and regional levels. The standards of these policies and programmes will be based on principles derived from the UNCRC and the relevant parts of ILO Convention No. 182 and its accompanying Recommendation No. 190.

⁴ For further details on the Council of Europe's Campaign to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings and the full text of the Convention, go to: www.coe.int/t/dg2/trafficking/campaign/Docs/Convntn/default_en.asp.

⁵ For the comprehensive list of final conclusions, go to: www.globalmarch.org/news/ecct.php3.

Global March Pan-European Regional Structure

Pan-European Interim Coordinating Committee

A fundamental premise in considering a new structure is inclusiveness to ensure that the expectations and needs of current and future members are met as much as possible while enabling Global March to coordinate and carry out its work at national and regional level. To facilitate this work in the period of reflection and discussion on this working paper, it is proposed that a small Interim Coordinating Committee of key NGO and trade union activists from different parts of the region be established. In this respect, discussions have taken place with the following organizations which will respond definitively following internal consultations: the Trade Union Solidarity Centre of Finland (SASK); the Confederation of Christian Trade Unions (CSC/ACV) and Solidarité Mondiale, Belgium; the New Perspectives Foundation, Russian Federation; and, the General Union of Algerian Workers (UGTA).

The Interim Coordinating Committee, once established, will be responsible for overseeing the process of transition within the Pan-European region of the Global March and providing coordination support for national coordinators and members until such time as the Pan-European Regional Office is established following the 2008 Pan-European Regional Conference (see below). In close collaboration with the Global March International Secretariat, the Interim Coordinating Committee will assist in the updating of the Global March membership list for the region and in coordinating preparations for the 2008 Regional Conference, including elaborating an information brochure on Global March in Europe, considering administrative and organisational implications of the new structure, drafting a short-term regional plan of action and budget and identifying potential resources.

Establishment of a permanent Pan-European office

Given the context of the region, its complexity and diversity, a strong proposal has emerged to work towards the establishment of a permanent office in Brussels, Belgium, which would assume responsibility for coordination of the Pan-European Region and would require the presence of permanent staff. This would have inevitable funding consequences, but it was felt that it would no longer be possible for one single Global March partner to effectively cover all 55 countries and also provide appropriate representation in European institutions and fora.

It was noted that these changes need to be closely examined by the Global March International Secretariat to analyze their constitutional, organizational and financial implications. The proposal is also to be considered by the Global March International Council. Issues for consideration include:

- Mobilising funds to support the administrative, representative and programmatic activities of the Pan-European office;
- Ensuring the official registration of the Pan-European office in Belgium in line with national legislation and administrative regulations;
- Discussion and preparation of budgets, plans, policies and programmes for 2008 through to at least 2010 and possibly beyond;
- Drafting appropriate administrative and organisational rules and regulations for the Pan-European Region.

These issues will be included among the debates to take place at the proposed 2008 European conference.

Closer working relations with ILO-IPEC and others

The proposed Pan-European Regional Office will seek to establish close relations with the ILO's International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour (ILO-IPEC) across the region, particularly in countries where the ILO-IPEC programme is operational. This embodies Global March's aim to ensure that ILO-IPEC works effectively in the field with the social partners and relevant NGOs and that the Global March can, in turn, provide appropriate support to ILO-IPEC in carrying out its mandate.

In addition, the Regional Office will seek to establish close collaboration with other related development initiatives at the regional level, for example, the "School is the best place to work" alliance. The platform for collaboration will be to promote coherence between initiatives, policies and programmes to avoid duplication of effort and resources and to work closely with others genuinely committed to the elimination of child labour and the pursuit of education for all. In addition, the Regional Office will encourage Global March national coordinators and members to establish similar alliances at national level.

Respect for sub-regional coordination

The current proposal for a Pan-European structure does not seek in any way to pre-empt or undermine any efforts to establish sub-regional coordination as and when appropriate. Indeed, collaborative efforts of this nature would be strongly encouraged and supported as they can contribute to the emergence of a more coherent regional coordination. However, there was general agreement that an established set of criteria needs to be elaborated in terms of appointing national coordinators and a more clearly defined proposal will be circulated in due course. Key elements will include the need for national coordination to be carried out by organizations that have the ability and capacity to coordinate.

National-level discussions of the Sofia Recommendation

The Sofia Recommendation has been prepared and endorsed by the participants of the consultative meeting held in Sofia, Bulgaria, in July 2007. Nevertheless, it is a working paper elaborated for wider discussion by the Global March membership in the Pan-European region. Therefore, it is being circulated among Global March national coordinators where they are active to be shared with national members. All Global March members are invited to consider and discuss the working paper and prepare constructive comments for amendments. It is recommended that these discussions take place at national level where possible to ensure the submission of consolidated responses. In addition, the working paper is to be discussed by the Global March International Council. This will facilitate the elaboration of a final proposal to be presented for discussion and adoption by a European conference (see below) in 2008.

The aim of the national-level discussions is to present clear and concise amendments to this working paper which will facilitate the emergence of a new Pan-European Global March structure based on due democratic process.

European conference to adopt regional structural proposals

It is proposed that a Pan-European Conference of mandated representatives of Global March members be organized in 2008 at a venue and date to be confirmed. The aim of that conference will be to consider and discuss this working paper and to take democratic decisions on its outcome.

Timeframe

A clear timeframe has been drawn up to take into account the various key elements of the process in setting up the Pan-European Interim Coordinating Committee and the proposed Pan-European Regional Office and in preparing for a Global March Pan-European Regional Conference in 2008.

- The proposed Pan-European Interim Coordinating Committee will aim to be operational by the end of September 2007. It is recognised that this is dependent upon internal discussions within each organization and agreement to move forward. The proposal is to be considered by the next meeting of the Global March International Council for ratification. This meeting will take place in The Hague, Netherlands, and the members of the proposed Coordinating Committee will be invited to participate in that meeting.
- During August 2007, this working paper will be circulated to existing national coordinators and members for consideration and discussion. It is hoped that the process will re-launch and strengthen national coordination and members. Consolidated comments on the working paper will be sent into the Global March International Secretariat by the end of October 2007 and these will be transmitted to the Interim Coordinating Committee for discussion and the finalisation of a working paper for the 2008 Pan-European Regional Conference.

Ongoing efforts will be made, supported by the International Council and the International Secretariat, to plan the venue and date of the proposed Pan-European Regional Conference as soon as possible in 2008 to ensure the restructuring transition is as effective and efficient as possible. In this respect, it is vital that national coordinators and members respond quickly and comprehensively to this process. The strength of Global March lies in the diversity of its membership which is united around the major goals of the global elimination of child labour and achievement of education for all.

The European region needs to be remobilised and revitalised to further reinforce the success of the global movements to achieve these aims. This requires detailed assessments of national efforts to help Global March's aims and objectives to benefit more effectively from an expanding and stronger European region. Coherence must underpin this approach among and between national memberships which requires a review of national plans of action, including child trafficking, and mobilisation of resources. These national efforts will make a significant contribution to ensuring that the planned Regional Conference in 2008 will achieve its aim of unity and solidarity throughout Europe and the Mediterranean and in pursuit of the MDGs, the Global Plan of Action to Eliminate Child Labour and EFA.

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