

SYNOPSIS OF KAILASH SATYARTHI'S SPEECH
AT THE OPENING PLENARY OF III GCCL ON 08
OCT 2013

I have mixed feelings today. I am happy and angry too. Firstly, I am happy to meet many of my co-marcher friends who had joined me in the historic 80000 km Global March that went across 103 countries in 1998. I find them still young and full of energy.



I am happy because it is for the first time ever that a developing nation has demonstrated commendable leadership by hosting this historic conference. This indeed is a strong message that emerging economies and even poor nations will play an important role in combating the menace of child labour hereafter. This conference marks the onset of a new era of south-south cooperation.

I could clearly see the seeds of such leadership when I had first met the then Governor of Brasilia and my dear friend Cristovam Buarque, the father of Bolsa Escola, also travelled along with my other very dear friend Minister Lelio Bentes Corrêa across Brazil for preparation of the March. I can recall the unprecedented enthusiasm and passion among Brazilian society, when we launched the third leg of the March from Sao Paulo.

I am happy because I also share my joy with most of you who are behind the success of significant decline in the number of child labourers across the globe. The estimated number was 260 million in early nineties, approximately 250 m in year 2000, 215 m in 2008 and now 168 million. I know it is a personal

accomplishment for many of you, I being one. Personally speaking, each time a report on global decrease of child labourers is published, it heals the pain in my internal injuries and wounds which I had got during liberating child slaves.

More than 30 years ago, when I had embarked upon the fight against child labour, it was not even considered an issue worth any discussion. It was accepted as a way of life in India much like it was in other countries. Today no country or business or society can throw this issue away.

I am equally happy to note that the number of out of school children has dropped from 113 million in 2000 to 57 million until recently.

Sisters and Brothers I would like to congratulate you all.

For me, who lives and works with such children these are not merely figures or numbers. For e.g. Kinshu Kumar a former car cleaner who was rescued by my Indian organisation Bachpan Bachao Andolan had shared dais with Her Majesty – The Queen of The Netherlands during the Hague Conference. Some of you may even recall that Kinshu had talked about his dream of becoming an engineer. I am proud to say that earlier last month; he secured a seat in one of the prestigious engineering colleges of India. Just before, I was leaving for Brazil, I happened to speak to Kinshu. He sends best regards to all of you. But he also asks as to when would his remaining 168 million brothers and sisters would be freed?

Now the further fight against child labour is going to be tough and even tougher in case of worst forms. The bigger challenge to confront with is how to reach out to the hardest to reach children? ILO's latest report indicates that the goal of eliminating worst forms of child labour by 2016 may not be achieved at this pace.

Last month my colleagues and I had rescued a trafficked child domestic slave in Delhi. She had gone missing 4 years ago. Upon being traced her overwhelmed father stepped ahead to hug

his 15 year old daughter, but she receded. She did not want to face her father, because she was pregnant due to perpetual sexual abuse. In Indian society, becoming pregnant before marriage is quite a taboo. The girl that we rescued did not even consider herself a child any more.

In Bangladesh, I met a number of adolescent girls in the garment sweatshops whose only desire was to don at least once the beautiful branded apparels, but that remained a distant dream. A few months ago when I met a cocoa growing community in a remote village at Cote d'Ivoire, the children who worked in the cocoa fields confessed that they had never tasted a chocolate in their life and had never even dreamt so.

My friends, this makes me angry. Every child matters. If we fail our children, we are bound to fail our present, our future, faith, cultures and civilisations as well. We would prove to be a big failure both in polity and economy.

It is high time to acknowledge the elements of our successes and multiply them. It is also time we identified with full honesty the key challenges that are both causes and consequences of child labour.

We must appreciate that wherever a, the laws have been in place and implemented well; b, education has been prioritised; c, social protection programmes have been running; d, conditional cash transfers and other incentives were rolled out; e, civil society was vigilant and active; f, trade unions took up the fight; g, businesses were responsive; h, government ministries and departments were well synchronised; I, financial and technical support was provided by donors and UN Agencies and j consumers had a strong say, child labour declined substantially.

But we must not forget that almost 60% of child labourers are still engaged in agriculture sector which is generally neglected. Child domestic labour linked with organised crime of trafficking is rampant owing to the demand of cheap, docile labour by the ever swelling middle class. 11.5 million Children predominantly girls across the world are engaged as child domestic labourers

behind closed doors and remain vulnerable to all forms of exploitation that one could think of. Child labourers in mining also remain invisible.

According to me there are six challenges which I would rather like to term as six **“Pressing Emergencies” or the 6Es.**

- Education Emergency
- Enforcement Emergency
- Employment Emergency
- Economic Emergency
- Ecological Emergency
- Ethical Emergency

Let's take them up one by one.

1.Education Emergency:

57 million out of school children are undeniably hardest to reach and remain at a high risk of exclusion. For over three decades, I have been strongly advocating that education and eradication of child labour are two sides of the same coin. Children cannot attend school till they continue to work. Education is one of the most effective, preventive and curative tools to combat child labour.

We know that education is the key to human development, sustainable economic growth of countries and enabler for personal emancipation. Education, my friends for sure saves lives. A child born to an educated mother is twice as likely to survive past the age of 5. Of course, we are talking about free, meaningful and equitable education of good quality. This would require 18 billion \$ or 3 day equivalent of the global defence expenditure or 1/4th of the money that Europeans spend on cosmetics. Are we really so poor and crippled that we cannot

take gun and tools away from the tiny hands of our children and replace them with books and pens?

The Governments must spend at least 6% of their respective GDPs on education and the donors must fulfil their commitments towards education. New innovative methods must be explored to bridge the gap in financing education for all.

Businesses have to step forward as well.

2. Enforcement Emergency:

We could be proud to say that 177 countries have ratified ILO Convention 182 on worst forms of child labour while 166 nations have ratified ILO Convention 138 on minimum age of employment.

By now most countries have domestic legislations at least to combat and criminalise the worst forms of child labour and legal provisions that guarantee education, but I would like to emphasise over here that the legal and judicial mechanisms in the countries remain grossly under-utilised.

It is appalling that laws related to slavery and trafficking are not enforced and implemented properly. The number of prosecutions and convictions in cases related to child labour, trafficking of children for forced labour and slavery are abysmally low. This clearly reflects the lack of political will to address these issues. We still have a soft approach on the perpetrators of crimes like worst forms of child labour.

The law enforcement agencies in various countries are both understaffed and lack the capacity and knowledge to effectively deal with these crimes. This requires systematic and sustained efforts on the part of Governments. The civil society must also be equally proactive in bringing up such cases before the courts of law.

The law enforcement machinery worldwide needs a compulsory overhaul in terms of capacity, robust accountability framework, fast track trial/ speedy justice delivery for the victims, composite and comprehensive rehabilitation of child labourers and their families into mainstream society.

Inter agency collaboration at all levels with integrated response entailing convergence of policy and programmatic interventions at grassroots level is a must have in the present times. Above all the Global Reporting Mechanisms have to be made more effective and the Global Task Force on Child Labour and Education must be revitalised.

3. Employment Emergency:

Sisters and Brothers, let's admit that we have not been able reap in the "Youth Dividend". Their energies and potential is not fully transformed into responsible citizenship and economic growth. Arab spring and other civil unrests are clear manifestations of our collective failure. The disillusionment in our youth is taking a violent turn.

We all know what happened in Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, Algeria, Iraq, Sudan etc. This uprising and unabated violence is a repercussion of the repression of youth aspirations.

Civil unrest and political instability will further fuel displacement of people, loss of livelihood and denial of quality education which in turn may increase exploitation of children.

I would like to underline that worst forms of child labour is systemic violence against children.

We cannot ignore yet another harsh reality that, while there are 200 million unemployed youth and adults across the world, 168 million child labourers continue to languish.

We must inculcate entrepreneurship, employability, empowerment and a sense of social protection in our youth through appropriate educational measures, particularly among the age group of 14-18 years. But how is it possible without protecting adolescents from economic exploitation and ensuring quality education for them?

Before we leave Brazil we have to pledge for transforming hazardous child labour into decent employment for the youth.

4. Economic Emergency:

The world continues to reel under the aftermath of global financial crisis. Paradoxically high unemployment and low growth rates are being registered even in some of the most developed countries. This is obviously resulting in ODA decrease and social sector budget cuts. Additionally natural calamities, armed conflicts and displacement of indigenous communities may actually reverse the progress made towards elimination of child labour thus far.

Investments in education as well as towards sustained interventions to eliminate child labour are strong methods of mitigating the economic crisis in the long run. No country has ever achieved continuous and rapid economic growth without first having at least 40% of its adults able to read and write. There is ample evidence to prove beyond reasonable doubts that a farmer's yield is directly proportional to the education attained. A single year of primary schooling increases the wages people earn later in life by 5-15% for boys and even more for girls. In case of secondary schooling this increment can be as high as 15-25%. It is important to note that every dollar spent on elimination of child labour today will return 7dollars after twenty years.

One of the foundations of healthy economy is sustainable business. For businesses to in turn ensure sustainability it is imperative that they consider their responsibilities

towards people and environment with utmost diligence. Corporate houses must ensure that their supply chains are free from child labour and other labour rights' violations. Similarly decent working conditions for adults are non-negotiable.

It is the private sector that benefits the most from educated and skilled workers yet ironically its contribution to education is less than 5% of all aid to education. This is less than even 0.1% of the profits of two of the world's biggest oil companies.

5. Ecological Emergency:

Fifth emergency pertains to climate change. Not only is it affecting the ecological equilibrium but more importantly hitting the poor. Mankind's reckless approach towards the environment has started yielding devastating results. Natural calamities lead to destruction of life and property compelling the indigenous population of the affected areas to dislocate. This in turn results in loss of livelihood paving fertile ground for organised nexuses of child traffickers and recruiters to operate and exploit. There are several examples from different parts of the globe, Asian Tsunami being one of them where child traffickers had bet big on natural calamities.

Government agencies should have a child friendly approach towards disaster management. The rescue and relief agencies must be sensitised, trained and prepared to meet such eventualities at all times. Evidence based research on the impact of ecological imbalance on vulnerability of children is equally important for awareness raising of the policy makers and the service providers.

6. Ethical Emergency:

The overall decline in morality and ethics in politics, business and social life is largely responsible for perpetual

abuses and exploitation of children. We make big promises to improve the lives of children and shamelessly break them. We talk high but act low. Hypocrisy towards children is the biggest sin, for me. We must reflect personally and collectively as to how honest are we to these most exploited children?

Friends, We must collaboratively fight these emergencies for sustained elimination of child labour. More pro-active and sincere measures must be taken without further delay. We as the Governments, workers, employers and civil society must declare a war on child labour. This war cannot be won without strong, committed, coherent and well resourced worldwide movement. Equally needed is a genuine and active coordination between intergovernmental agencies at the highest level.

I would rather appeal the UN Secretary General to find a way where the agency heads could come together and jointly give a strong message to the world that child labour is unacceptable.

Global March Against Child Labour and others had campaigned to incorporate child labour elimination in the Millennium Development Goals. We strongly believe that child labour is an obstacle in attaining at least half of the MDGs. I urge to all of you to demand inclusion of child labour in the Post 2015 Development Agenda.

I call upon the ILO and the host Government to launch a Global Leaders' Initiative to mobilise political will and resources.

Before I wrap up I would earnestly call upon each one of you that whatever decisions we take here in this conference will have a bearing on the lives of the most marginalised children who look at us with a lot of hope to restore their childhood. You are the leaders and you have to demonstrate your leadership in your communities and countries. My friends, we must

remember that each day lost in the life of a child labourer is irrecoverable.

Thank you.