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Towards a World Movement of Working Children: Origin, process and perspectives

"We, the Working Children and Adolescents organized in the World Movement, claim for a world where all the children and adolescent's rights are respected and protected; a world where we can grow up and develop our full potential and choose a work in dignity"

Working Children's World Movement Vision

February, 2018

1. Introduction

Since the MANTHOC Movement was born in Peru, more than 40 years ago, the working children and adolescents from all around the world are, little by little, raising their voices in an organized way. At the same time, the working children have their own organizations in different countries of Latin America, Asia and Africa and are exchanging experiences. In the last couple of years, the interest to coordinate action at an international level grew, as a response to the processes and impacts that the globalization has over the life and work of working children and their families. Finally, the working children's movements agreed to organize their own international or world movement.

The first international meetings of the national Working Children's Movements and their collaborators took place in the early 90´s. Through an exchanging process and the support of some international NGOs, the first International Meeting was held in 1996 at Kundapur, a small city in south-India, where Latin-American, African and Asian delegates gathered. Then, there were two *Mundialitos* as intercontinental meetings, in 1997 in Latin America, at Huampaní, Peru, and in 1998 in Africa, at Dakar, Senegal. Four years passed by until they met again in 2002, at the third *Mundialito*, this time in Milano, Italia, where it was agreed to organize the 2nd World Meeting at Berlin, the German capital. This Meeting was held on April 2004, and its motto was: "We, the working children and adolescents, are not the problem; we are part of the solution". Two and a half years later, on October 2006, the 3rd World Meeting was finally held in Siena, Italy.

2. The First International Meeting of NATs in Kundapur

The main reason for the Meeting in Kundapur was to get organized in order to influence with a sole voice in the drafting of a new ILO child labour Convention. This has inspired hopes that the policies of this organization, which is a specialized agency of the United Nations, would put an end to the idea of abolishing child labour and search for new means and measures to make a real contribution to the fight the organized working children are giving to have access to better working and living conditions. Thanks to the support from the International Working Group on Child Labour (IWGCL), working children were able to obtain a temporary participation in the debate to discuss this Convention. However, some European trade unions got involved and this space for debate was shut down once again; and now Convention N° 182 on the currently-called "worst forms of child labour" was finally passed by ILO in 1999. This shuttered the original hopes for good.

Today it is possible to say that the most important achievement of the Kundapur Meeting was getting, for the very first time, a core consent among Working Children's

Movements all over the world. This consent is drafted in the "Kundapur Declaration". This declaration serve as a guideline to the movements in different countries and may be considered as the foundation for the Working Children's International or World Movement.

KUNDAPUR Declaration (1996)

In 1996, in Kundapur (India), 34 NATs delegates, in representation of 33 Latin American, African and Asian countries took part of the first international NATs Meeting. The result is a ten-points platform that is a baseline for NATs idea of child protagonism and international solidarity.

- We demand recognition of our problems, initiatives, suggestions and organization processes.
- We are against the boycott of goods manufactured by children.
- We demand our work to be respected and safety be guaranteed.
- We demand an educational infrastructure that fits our situation.
- We demand a professional training suited to our context.
- We demand access to decent health care service.
- We demand to be involved in the decision-making processes that affects us, whether it is at a local, national or international level.
- We demand to fight against the circumstances that created our current conditions, and foremost against poverty.
- We demand more activities in rural areas so that children are not forced to migrate to the cities.
- We are against exploitation, but we demand access to work in dignity adjusted to our education schedule and leisure time.
- Concerning the Conferences that are being organised we demand participation on an equal footing (e.g. if there are twenty ministers, there should be twenty working children). We are prepared to discuss with ministers, but they do not represent us.

In the years that follow, it was not possible to carry out activities worldwide, but many experiences of the movements from different continents were exchanged mainly online and some others through the delegate's attendance at the corresponding international meetings.

3. Towards a World Movement of NATs: Second and Third Encounters (or in Berlin and third in Siena)

The hectic neoliberal globalization processes as well as their serious consequences on the greater part of the countries in the Global South, in general, and children living in ever-increasing poverty conditions, in particular, boosted the initiative to create an International or World Movement of Working Children. Neoliberal globalization made it utterly necessary to respond with a globalization coming from below. This need was clearly seen in the emergence of many anti-globalization movements and the so-called World and Regional Social Forums. Some national Working Children's Movements took part in some of these Forums (Caracas, Mumbai, Bamako), though it was not possible to include in the Forums' agenda the interests and perspectives of organized working children. This is why some Movements reinstalled the idea of creating their own space worldwide to raise its voice and draw the attention to the working children's needs and rights.

The role of buffer and facilitator the IWGCL carried out in Kundapur, two new solidarity organizations took over, ProNATs in Germany and ItaliaNATs in Italy. At the beginning of the century, both organizations provided their support towards the creation of a real World Movement of working children. However, it were the national and regional movements themselves who made the decision to hold the 2nd and 3rd World Meeting in Europe, and not the abovementioned organizations. Working Children's Movements aimed at raising their voice within a continent where the great powers of globalization and many social movements against it coexist.

Until the World Meeting in Berlin, Asia was only represented by two movements from India, Bhima Sangha in the South and Bal Mazdoor Union in the North. All preparations leading to the Meeting encouraged members from India to try their best to get a wider representation from its continent. Finally, delegations from Bangladesh, Nepal, Afghanistan and Mongolia first partook of the Meeting held in Berlin. At the Meeting in Siena, after another *Mundialito* in Kundapur, both held in 2005, delegations from Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Tschachikistan partook as well.

The Working Children's World Movement was officially set up at the Meeting in Berlin. Due to lack of time, complicated procedures, delayed translations and different public events the delegates had to attend it was not possible to draft a document stating common principles and an action plan. The drafting of this document was made in Siena where it was agreed upon the structure and operation of the World Movement. The action plan comprises the formative areas and training, organization, communication and information, politic relations under the law and, as a highlighted issue, promoting access to a work in dignity.

It was not always easy to get consensus. There were many controversial debates in Berlin, mainly on whether to work in collaboration with ILO and its IPEC program for the elimation of child labour. Actually, the African Movement MAEJT/AMWCY is working in collaboration with this programme without giving up its autonomy. In Siena, the delegates present discussed on the importance of getting involved in the follow-up process of the 2002 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children (UNGASS), where again the African Movement had many expectations and drafted an alternative proposal that focused on working children's interests. African delegates regretted lack of solidarity from the Movements in other continents

regarding this initiative. Delegates from Asia focused on speaking out against labour exploitation from the working children and they expressed their concerns on the unlikely possibility of providing work in dignity. In addition, it was not always so easy to find the accurate translations for the written documents.

It is in these controversies and short-comes in understanding where we are able to somewhat see the differences in the working and living conditions as well cultural differences. For example, some of them are willing to risk creating a serious conflict in their countries of origin. Furthermore, it is worth highlighting that each Movement has different origins and histories and, of course, experiences.

In spite of the differences and misunderstandings, delegates were always able to get the consensus needed. In Berlin, they agreed to respect the differences and focus on the aspects of utmost importance. In Siena, consensus aimed at focusing on the fight for a work in dignity and creating a seal of guarantee for the export of goods.

Final Declaration
3rd International Meeting of Working Children and Adolescents
Siena, Italy
October, 15th – 29th, 2006

We, the working children and adolescents from Africa, Latin America and Asia, are gathered in Siena at the 3rd International Meeting to share our experiences and living conditions as well as to structure and strengthen our International Movement through common action.

This meeting has witnessed the launching of the International Movement and it is the result of a 10-years process that started in 1996 in Kundapur and continues nowadays thanks to several meetings the last of which was held in Berlin in 2004. This process has been carried out by working boys, girls and adolescents just like us and the support from many organizations and partners.

All along, we have managed to create a structure to coordinate our joined actions and will represent us in any event. As a result of this Meeting, we have come up with a three-years plan of action and the activities thereof. They will serve as a means to become more popular and get to more working children and adolescents.

To us, the International Movement is a tool to be more solidary, stronger and to have a sole voice worldwide.

We have undertaken to promote our rights, develop actions that aim at reducing poverty and improve our working conditions, fight against exclusion and child trafficking as well as the violence against them, particularly against working children.

We defend dignified working conditions for boys, girls and adolescents.

We are the protagonists who ought to change our living and working conditions.

We resolve to create a brand to protect the products we manufacture.

The Movement can also be a way of promoting children and adolescent's participation as protagonists.

Through our questionnaire "a world worthy of ourselves… the children" we share our

activities with other children, following recommendations by UNGASS.

At this Meeting, we, the working children and adolescents, have decided to celebrate the "International Day of Working Children" on December 9th. This is a particularly important date for the Movement, since ten years earlier in Kundapur in 1996, they drafted the First Declaration of Working Children and Adolescents.

Our Movement has achieved many things, however:

- We demand our rights to be respected by governments and different communities. We want their support and to be considered as children and adolescents who are subjects and social actors under the law, just as any other children. We want our proposals to be heard and we demand to be involved in the decision-making processes that concern us

- International and national organizations should open spaces for us to engage in dialogues and to discuss problems concerning children. They have to recognize our movement and support our initiatives.

- Other boys, girls and adolescents should acknowledge us and accept us as peers.

Let's work together to respect the rights and the voice of the Working Children and Adolescents.
Long live the dignified work of Working Children and Adolescents!

Siena – October 25th, 2006
International Movements of Working Children and Adolescents

4. Role of the World Meetings in the construction of a World Movement of NATs

The International Meetings play a very important role for the cohesion and identity of the International Movement and its capacity to set in motion its initiatives. These Meetings show the diversity of cultures, traditions and the different ways in which working children are organized and put up their fight, but at the same time they show how the experiences and common interests of different children concur. For the children in Latin America, for instance, it is always an enriching experience to get together with other boys and girls speaking different languages and communicate with them. Communication has a playful quality to them; you speak with your whole body, not only with your tongue. However, the burden is heavier for adult attendants, especially those from Asian countries, since they have to translate from their own languages to the "official" languages of the meeting (English, French, Spanish, sometimes Portuguese, an ambiguous legacy from colonial times).

Some delegates are more experienced since they have attended previous Meetings, but that is not the case for most of them. They have to get used to the requirements of the work meetings, which sometimes are rather long and stressful. There is quite a difference between their everyday life and the activities carried out at the Meetings, even when the Meetings are held in European countries. It implies some risks for the

children, which we failed to anticipate at the Meeting in Berlin, because when they get back to their countries, cities, neighbourhoods, communities their workmates, their friends, their relatives see them in a different light. Likewise, the delegates themselves find it hard to get used once again to their previous environment. Particularly, there is a great responsibility over the delegates' shoulders, as their mates trusted them to pass on the new experiences and information. The experience from the Meetings in Berlin and Siena show how important it is for delegates to be well-prepared in their duties, whether it is during or after the Meeting is held.

Even though the Meetings are very important to the World Movement in general, there is more to it than that. The World Movement can only survive if it works on its ability to articulate and act in an autonomous, continuous and representative way. In order to achieve that, on the one hand, the Movement should set its own structure (raise its own funds, for instance), and on the other hand, it should guarantee the existence of other working children's movements in different countries and continents. Without them, the World Movement would never have existed. Furthermore, the World Movement can only survive if it has social awareness and is closely connected to the everyday experiences of the children.

The World Movement's perspective is not merely the sum of all other national, regional and continental Movements. It goes beyond just coordinating the Movements' activities; it also implies perceiving and introducing themselves with an identity that is only theirs, planning and carrying out activities that go beyond whatever any particular Movement is doing at the time. The greater challenge is to have a major impact on social policies drawn up by international organizations and institutions (such as ILO, UNICEF and so on) on the matter of child labour and human rights for working children and adolescents. Thus trying to gradually reduce and finally tear down the hegemonic idea and policies that consider working children merely as "objects" or "human capital" ready to be subjected to technocratic and, sometimes, repressive measures. Another great challenge entails influencing the idea of those social movements that have a critical approach to globalization, so that they learn to respect the working children as actors of the social spectrum and as counterparts within the fight for a fair world for the future.

Among all the actions agreed to be carried out at the World Meetings held in Berlin and Siena it is worth mentioning that the delegates' speech highly focused on improving working conditions and promoting work in dignity. They have settled on the following:

- set in motion more productive experiences to carry out craft workshops, microloans, etc.;
- hold meetings to exchange experiences of dignified work and economy in solidarity;
- organize formative workshops on productive, technical and administrative matters;
- hold a working children's world meeting on fair trade;

- create a seal of guarantee for the export of products manufactured by children in dignified conditions.

In the matter of planning and fighting for children's dignified working conditions, the World Movement has a positive message that accurately contrasts policies that promote the abolition of child labour. Such an aggressive position only aims at the elimination of child labour without taking into consideration the negative consequences it implies to working children and their families. The fight for dignified work not only ponders the need to perceive an income and to provide for the families living in neglected conditions, but also includes an alternative idea that holds children as a social actors and takes into account their learning and personal development processes. Therefore, the Movement sets forth educational proposals that combine children's schooling with work and consider the particular conditions and experiences of working children.

Another important demand, already voiced at the Meeting in Kundapur and reinforced in Siena, is that of a participation with equal rights at all international organizations on children matters in general and those of working children in particular.

The International Day of Working Children and Adolescents Dignity celebrated on December 9th, when the Kundapur Declaration was drafted has a high symbolic importance. From 2007 onwards, on this day working children and adolescents show their simultaneous presence in different communities around the globe.

In order to provide stability to the Working Children's International or World Movement and increase the possibilities for the activities planned to be carried out, it is essential to devise a parallel structure of support from adults' organizations. With this in mind, at the Meetings held in Berlin and Siena it was decided to create an "International Forum in Solidarity with Working Children" (IFSWC). This forum was formally set up at the Meeting in Siena and it was agreed with working children's delegates that it should have an autonomous structure; however, it should coordinate all the activities with the World Movement. The main objectives of the forum were to advocate for extended spaces to engage in political debates, provide information, offer conceptual and methodological support including training and investigation and raising the necessary funds to carry out the activities.

5. The International Meeting of Bolivia

Since the 3rd World Meeting in Siena there was only one occasional exchange of experiences between working children's movements and the solidarity organizations from different continents. It took MOLACNATs (Latin American and Caribbean Movement of Working Children and Adolescents) eleven years to organize another International Forum, which was held in La Paz, Bolivia on October 2017. This forum was followed by an International Meeting held by working children's and other social movements under the motto "Let's globalize dignity!". Delegates and collaborators from Latin America and two delegates and a collaborator from the African Movement MAEJT/AMWCY (delegates and collaborators from Bhima Sangha participated

temporarily via Skype). In addition to a Bolivian foundation (La Paz Foundation), the network known as EuropaNATs undertook to provide any support needed. Currently this network consists of national solidarity groups from Belgium, Germany, Spain and France. An assessment of the results of both events is still pending (see final declarations of both events).

The World Movement of Working Children and Adolescents, and its ability to set in motion are always in its early stages. In order to turn the challenge into a long-lasting reality it is essential to gather the efforts from working children throughout the world and their adult collaborators, always respecting and supporting children's autonomy.

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