

Press Release from Global March Against Child Labour, May 23 2002

FOOTBALL DREAMS STITCHED WITH CHILDREN'S HANDS:

India, China and Pakistan Still Harbour Child Labourers and Unfair Labour Conditions

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Child labour and highly unfair labour conditions for adult stitchers in the football industry are still common practices, despite the fact that the contracts between FIFA and sporting goods companies promise the opposite. This was revealed by the Global March Against Child Labour in a presentation of three new reports on China, India and Pakistan.

Efforts to improve labour conditions through the monitoring and rehabilitation programs of FIFA, UNICEF, ILO and the sporting goods industry have thus far yielded only limited results, particularly in India and Pakistan, the key centres for football stitching. The hands of children are still employed to stitch footballs, even at the price of their education and often their health. Adult football stitchers are still receiving less than the minimum wage, even though the footballs they stitch are sold for that much more. Women still face discrimination in wages, often earning five rupees less than men, since women are more likely to be home-based stitchers. A decided lack of freedom to organise and restrictions on personal freedom still pervade the multi-billion dollar football industry.

The India Committee of the Netherlands, a leading partner of the Global March's World Cup Campaign 2002, will shortly publish a new report on the Indian football industry in follow-up to their 2000 report "The Dark Side of Football". The summary of the report shows that many children are still working in and around the cities of Jalandhar and Batala in the Punjab, that wages are often still below the official minimum wage of Rs. 82 per day, and that women earn Rs. 4 or 5 less than men per ball they stitch.

This report also criticises the present FIFA-sponsored monitoring system implemented by the Sports Goods Foundation of India (SGFI), which includes 32 exporters. Monitoring only focuses on child labour and not other labour rights. It has many loopholes, including the fact that it has yet to cover a large part of the production of its own member companies.

On the positive side, the SGFI has instituted a monitoring system in Jalandhar and its environs. Moreover, the SGFI also supports awareness-raising programmes on child labour. Four transitional schools for rehabilitated child labourers have been adopted by the SGFI, in association with the Government of India. "These efforts are still insufficient to lead every child away from stitching footballs and into schools. The actual labour conditions do not reflect the FIFA agreement with the sporting goods companies. Child labour is still common and other labour standards are still grossly violated," said Kailash Satyarthi, Chairperson of the Global March Against Child Labour. The situation in Pakistan has improved over the last few years but it is still far from perfect. Children there were found stitching Coca-Cola and Adidas footballs, both of which are major sponsors of the 2002 FIFA World Cup. "The orders come randomly into the villages, they do not stitch Adidas or Coca Cola balls all the time. The middlemen, established in Sialkot, evade the monitoring system and manage to send the ball pieces from major

companies to the small villages," said Philippe Roy who led the investigation for the Global March in Pakistan.

A significant part of the investigation was conducted in a group of villages more than 250 kilometres away from Sialkot where the ILO has established a monitoring system on child labour in the sporting goods industry and helped provide education to almost 5000 former child labourers. The Report on the Working Conditions of Soccer and Football Workers in Mainland China, written by the Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee in April 2002, also reports an intolerable situation for China's workers. The list of labour violations cited in the report include wages below the legal minimum, long working hours and restrictions on personal freedom of the workers.

The World Cup Campaign 2002 initiated by the Global March Against Child Labour has been calling for the eradication of child labour and the implementation of fair and decent working conditions for adults in the past year. During the 2002 FIFA World Cup, petitions collected from around the world will be submitted to FIFA demanding that it fulfil its own promises to stop the exploitation of children. "We sincerely hope that this year's World Cup, already dedicated to children in a joint effort by UNICEF and FIFA, will present an opportunity for civil society groups, trade unions, governments, international organisations and the sporting goods industry to work together in establishing a reliable and transparent monitoring system on labour conditions. We hope that FIFA and the sporting goods industry will take the leadership to make football truly a fair game for all", declared Satyarathi.

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