



A Union of Professionals

Why should ending child labor be a priority?

All children deserve a quality education, regardless of where they live or the economic status of their family. Today, more than 130 million children across the globe routinely, sometimes systematically, are denied that basic human right every day. Why is this important to the AFT? Democratic values cannot thrive in nations where tens of millions of children become adults without ever learning to read. Ignorance and illiteracy destroy lives, undermine civic institutions, contribute to instability and threaten the health and peace of every nation. Without education, there can be no civility, no true peace.

Eliminating child labor and improving access to quality basic education go hand in hand. Resources have to be made available for schools to be built and staffed and countries have to mandate that their children be in school -- not working full time. Employing children, who are always paid less than adults, is a cause of poverty -- not a cure for it. Employing children creates downward pressure on adult wages and delays the development of an educated workforce. Basic education is key to eradicating poverty.

But today, more than 130 million children between the ages of six and 14 never go to school -- 130 million children denied an education and kept imprisoned in poverty. That number is equal to the total number of children in North America and Europe combined. For millions of other children, a lack of teachers, books, and classrooms means that their education is inadequate and incomplete. Young girls, in particular, face a problem in the developing world. In many countries, entrenched discrimination keeps them from entering school. In other countries, tradition and poverty force them to work rather than study.

Yet, we know that giving girls a basic education has a profound impact on family life and on a nation's economy. With an education, girls postpone marriage; when they do marry, they are better able to provide for their children and maintain a healthy, stable family life.

In 1999, more than 200 of the world's citizen and teacher organizations joined forces to create the Global Campaign for Education, to mobilize public pressure on governments to fulfill their promises to provide free basic education to their children. The Global Campaign includes non-governmental organizations and teachers' unions in 180 countries, including ActionAid, Oxfam International, Save the Children, the Global March Against Child Labor and Education International, an organization of teachers unions from around the world.

Working together in common cause, teachers unions and NGOs in the Global Campaign for Education are driven by the conviction that education for all children can be achieved. We know that a commitment to this effort can succeed. Education funding in recent years has had a positive impact in several countries where literacy has increased substantially, including Ghana, Zimbabwe and Uganda. But much more remains to be done. Providing every child in the world with a basic education is one of the great challenges we face in the years ahead.