

## **Children must be a priority in the electoral debate**

The Consultative Board of UNICEF Mexico, a group of Mexican citizens committed to the wellbeing of the children of our country, makes an urgent appeal:

- To the candidates for the presidency of the republic and other elective offices, to generate serious and viable proposals toward the universal fulfillment of the rights of Mexican children
- To journalists to incorporate the issue of children's rights in their interviews, reporting and coverage of the election campaigns in general
- To the citizenry as a whole to give priority to the quality of the proposals of the candidates on ensuring the wellbeing of children, as a criterion for deciding their vote

## **Why the rights of children?**

Because protecting the most vulnerable is an ethical and moral imperative. Children depend on us, the adults for their survival, wellbeing and development. Ensuring the basic conditions for the full development of their physical, intellectual and emotional capacities should be the greatest obligation and responsibility of society.

Because guaranteeing these conditions for all Mexican children is indispensable for the construction of a more equitable, inclusive, prosperous, cohesive and developed nation.

Because Mexico has already demonstrated that it is capable of achieving important progress in the fulfillment of the rights of its children, but still has a long way to go:

- 63% of the population under 18 is poor<sup>1</sup>
- 2.1 million children between 5 and 14 do not attend school<sup>2</sup>
- 3.3 million children work<sup>3</sup>
- Almost one in every five children under five suffer from chronic malnutrition<sup>4</sup>
- Mexico scored 5.71 on a scale of 0 to 10 in the Mexican Child Rights Index, published recently by the Consultative board of UNICEF Mexico<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> National Household Income and Expenditure Survey (ENIGH), 2002

<sup>2</sup> General Census of Population and Housing, 2000

<sup>3</sup> National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Information Technology (INEGI), 2002

<sup>4</sup> National Nutrition Survey, Ministry of Health, National Institute of Public Health, INEGI, 1999

<sup>5</sup> Mexican Child Rights Index, 0-5 years of age, 2003

## **What do we propose?**

Faced with these challenges, we make an urgent appeal to Mexican society and to the candidates for elective office, especially the presidency of the republic, to position as priority in the electoral debate, the issue of how to advance more rapidly toward universal fulfillment of the rights of Mexican children.

## **We should start by asking the candidates and asking ourselves as citizens:**

- How do we ensure that all Mexican children have access to good health care?
- How do we ensure that all children complete quality basic education in appropriate schools?
- How do we guarantee that all children grow up in an environment that offers protection, respect and freedom from violence and exploitation?
- How do we guarantee that all families have the economic resources necessary to offer children a worthy life?
- How do we ensure that all children are able to learn about and live fully their ethnic and cultural identities with pride and without discrimination?

Generating serious responses to these questions, transforming them into viable policy proposals and converting them into criteria for deciding our votes are indispensable for advancing firmly toward the construction of the nation we all desire: a Mexico with equality, social justice, liberty, democracy and prosperity.

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