

**UN General Assembly
A World Fit for Children + 5
Commemorative High-Level Plenary Meeting devoted to the follow-up to the outcomes of
the Special Session on Children**

Round Table 2: Providing universal quality education as key to achieving the Millennium Development Goals
and as the first line of protection against abuse, exploitation and violence against children

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Overview

A World Fit for Children laid out the vision for responding to the violations experienced by children around the world, and the Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals gave us the promises. Yet, what action have we seen? It is not enough to say that "some progress has been made".

In our daily work around the world, Save the Children sees the challenges millions of children face everyday, in places such as Darfur, DRC, Somalia and Iraq. Much remains to be done.

Protection

What's a request we often hear from children? Protect me! Keep me safe!

Two landmark studies have helped to further our knowledge and work on protection - the Graca Machel Report and Review and the UN Study on Violence against Children.

- ⇒ The decision to appoint both UN Special Representatives – on children and armed conflict and on violence against children – represents a historic opportunity. Save the Children asks for support for both UN Special Representatives, acting on their recommendations and defending their independence.
- ⇒ To support the most vulnerable children, Save the Children asks for the creation of a new Security Council Working Group on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict (as recommended by the Secretary-General last month).
- ⇒ We need to hold accountable the perpetrators as well as the over-seeing bodies, be it at the UN or at governmental or local authority level for *all* egregious violations against children. In addition we need:
 - To assist the victims and respond to their needs.
 - National protection plans included as part of an integrated social system.
 - Child protection to be a focus in all emergency responses.

Education

We need to do two things to fulfill the MDGs. Accelerate plans and take action NOW. A particular potent catalyst for all the MDGs is Goal 2 - universal primary education - as education is an enabler for all other MDGs. And education is one of the requests we hear from children – *let me go to school* - and also from their parents.

72 million children remain out of school worldwide, and children in conflict affected countries account for half of these children - 36 million. One in three children in conflict affected countries never realises the right to go to school. Children in armed conflict and emergencies also face increased risk of abuse, exploitation and forced recruitment into the armed forces.

Save the Children has stepped up globally to both do our part and call on others to meet the challenge of bringing education to these children. This is our first global campaign, aptly called *Rewrite the Future*.

- Within the first year of our concerted effort, working with Ministries of Education and international donors, we improved the quality of education for 3.4 million children, with 590,000 of them entering school for the first time. If this is what one global organization can do, imagine what we *all* can do.
- We have come one step closer to ensuring children caught up in emergencies will have education as part of the humanitarian response – with the establishment of an education cluster under the co-leadership of Save the Children and UNICEF. This is a historic partnership and we ask for continued support to ensure the success of this collaborative effort.

Each and every government must play its role. All governments should develop solid education sector plans which address issues of equity and quality, mobilize sufficient resources in accordance with indicative standards (10-15% of government budget), and ensure effective allocation and use of resources, especially for excluded groups of children.

Bilateral and multilateral development partners should abide by the Paris Declaration and other principles to ensure harmonization, alignment and effectiveness of their support. They must mobilize sufficient resources in accordance with indicative standards (>15% of ODA towards education), support education sector plans through long-term predictable commitments, and prioritize low income countries and conflict affected fragile states. And donors' humanitarian policies *must* include education.

Child participation

Making changes in the best interest of the child requires listening to children's priorities, recognizing and building on their experiences, and finding appropriate ways to involve children. In exchange, we must also be accountable to children, responding to their requests and delivering on our promises.

Conclusion

We all will do anything for our children. We love our children and want the best for them. Is what we have done thus far good enough? We have asked children and they have told us that we have not kept our promises.

In classrooms today, the leaders of tomorrow are forging the worldview that will guide them, and through them whole generations, into the future. Everyone here today was once that child in the classroom, no longer potential leaders of tomorrow, but actual leaders today. On our watch, it is imperative that all children attend and complete school, and they feel safe and protected. There is nothing more important for us to do. I call upon all governments, world leaders and donors to translate commitments to action, NOW. This is what we must do to create a World Fit for Children.