

MEDIA RELEASE

Check Against Delivery

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY CAROL BELLAMY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND
AT THE OPENING OF THE 4TH WORLD SUMMIT ON MEDIA
FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS**

Rio de Janeiro – 20 April 2004

Mr. Mayor, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Conference Organisers, Representatives of the World's Print, Broadcast, Internet and Other Diversified Media Outlets – and particularly, young people taking part in the Adolescent Forum:

UNICEF is delighted to be a partner at this Summit. We are particularly proud of the many young people who have come to Rio under UNICEF auspices to make their voices heard. Many more are contributing to the Adolescent Forum through a global chat on UNICEF's *Voices of Youth* website.

And many of our media partners are here – practitioners of corporate social responsibility who are doing their part to help create what the UN General Assembly's Special Session on Children called *A World Fit for Children*.

For my parents' generation, radio was the miracle technology. For my generation, it was television. Today it is the Internet and the new digital media that are changing our societies forever – and the pace of innovation is still accelerating.

But because the Information and Communication Revolution is happening at such break-neck speed – and because its global, local, political, economic, social and personal implications are so far-reaching and complex – I doubt anyone can reliably predict where all of this is taking us. We have summoned the genie of bits and bytes out of the bottle, and we are not sure if it is our servant or our master.

But the fact that this meeting is being held here, in Rio de Janeiro, is an affirmation that the ways in which the media can serve the best interests of the world's children is everyone's business – people and communities everywhere, and not just the governments and corporate giants of the North. That is why we owe it to ourselves and to our children to put our heads and our hearts together here in Rio – not only to celebrate the media and its extraordinary potential for good, but also to find creative alternatives to media trends that are harmful, especially to children.

We as adults owe it to children to use the power of the mass media to help build a better world. It is our duty to promote and protect children's right to speak their minds and to freely seek, receive, and impart information and ideas.

Moreover, the mass media is obliged not merely to entertain young minds, but to help stimulate, inform and educate.

We owe them this not only as a matter of morality, but of law. For in ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 191 countries affirmed their obligation to recognize the central importance of the mass media in promoting child rights.

MEDIA RELEASE

This includes ensuring that children have access to a free flow of information and ideas; that the media offer material specifically tailored to their interests and linguistic needs, especially those of minority and indigenous children – and that all children be protected from potentially harmful uses of the media, such as inappropriate onscreen sex and violence.

Articles 12 and 13 state unequivocally that children have freedom of belief and freedom of expression. They go even further than that – they say that children's views must be listened to and taken into account in the decisions that affect their lives. And Article 17 makes explicit the responsibilities of governments and the media.

Gathered here in Brazil, where the inequities of globalization are on the forefront of public debate, we have to ask ourselves if we are moving toward or away from the ideals – and the obligations – that are set forth in the Convention.

Last month, the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization warned of the dangers of what they called "globalization without accountability," including the media.

Many young people are connecting the dots between the images of violence they see on TV and in the movies and the violence and the wars raging around them -- and increasingly, victimizing them – in the real world.

They think it is not only unfair – but unjust and inexplicable – that so many millions of their peers are denied access to the new communication technologies.

Kids everywhere love the media – but they are demanding something more, something better than what they are getting.

There is growing evidence that concentration of media ownership in fewer and fewer hands is leading to less and poorer quality children's programming, less diversity, more negative stereotypes, more images of violence and sex, more airtime devoted to commercials selling products that are harmful to children's health.

And yet, My Friends, we have much to celebrate here in Rio.

There are governments that take their media obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the child quite seriously, whether through support for quality public broadcasting and alternative or community media, or through creation of a legal and regulatory environment that holds privately owned media accountable to some minimum standards of "child-friendliness."

In this regard, I can cite the example of Norway that, together with UNICEF and media experts from around the world, issued in 1998 what became known as the Oslo Challenge – a powerful appeal to governments, media, parents, teachers, advertisers and children themselves, to fulfill their obligations under the CRC. Our MAGIC website – established with Norwegian support – is a showcase of best practice and information bank on all things relating to media and children. I invite you to visit and contribute to the page.

Indeed, there are countless examples of media outlets that take their social responsibilities toward children to heart – and we are delighted to see so many represented here this week. These media, large and small, from North and South, are helping to build more democratic, equitable, inclusive and peaceful societies, whether through courageous investigative reporting on violations of child rights; or creative programming that educates and empowers as it entertains; through news and shows that reflect a wide range of opinions, including those of children and adolescents; and through media projects that cut through "the digital divide" to empower poor communities.

MEDIA RELEASE

There are outstanding NGOs specifically devoted to improving media coverage of children's issues – and one of them, Brazil's ANDI, is now expanding to eight other Latin American countries. Yesterday, UNICEF signed a cooperation agreement with them that includes the establishment of a regional network of journalists for child rights.

These governments, these media, these NGOs, are champions of children's media rights. They have not forgotten that the airwaves and cyberspace do not belong to the broadcasters or to the advertisers. In the vast majority of countries, they belong, by law, to the people. Media companies are issued licenses with the proviso that they serve the public interest.

In this regard, and to conclude, permit me to make four suggestions.

First, make sure that the Summit's final declaration includes a strong appeal to the world's media and advertisers to take the media-related principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to heart.

Second, let us call on governments and parliaments everywhere to re-think their current media policies, laws and regulations in terms of their effect on children.

Third, that national commitments be made to improve the mass media for children, starting with television -- as a broad coalition of public and private institutions, including major media, is doing in Colombia.

And finally, I invite you to commemorate this historic meeting by opening an on-going global conversation on media and children – one that explores, with children and young people, what we must do to ensure that the potential of the next generation is fulfilled, and that their voices are heard

I wish you inspiration and success in your work this week.