

THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN 2008 – CHILD SURVIVAL

Malaysian Launch in conjunction with World Health Day 2008 • 15 April 2008 • Kuala Lumpur

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

WELCOME REMARKS BY MR. YOUSOUF OOMAR

UN Acting Resident Coordinator &

UNICEF Representative, Malaysia

Yang Amat Berbahagia Datin Seri Jeanne Abdullah
First Lady of Malaysia

Yang Berhormat Datuk Liow Tiong Lai
Minister of Health, Malaysia

Malaysia's Angkasawan
Dr. Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor

UNICEF's Special Guests for the Event
Four year old Muhammad Azeem bin Kamarul Baharin, and
Five year olds Andra Tai Li-Ying and Sanjay Emanuel

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests,

Members of the Media,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of UNICEF, I take great pleasure in welcoming each and all of you to share with us the Malaysian Launch of the State of the World's Children 2008 report in conjunction with World Health Day this year.

We are especially honoured by the presence of Malaysia's First Lady Yang Amat Berbahagia Datin Seri Jeanne Abdullah for her gracious support to launch the Report in Malaysia. Thank you Yang Amat Berbahagia.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A Child Survival Revolution

The birth of a child is a time of hope. Its new life is a symbol of potential for growth. Its death is a denial of progress.

Today, some 26,000 children will die before their fifth birthday, killing not only the hope of his or her parents, but also the hope for progress fluttering in the hearts of communities and the nation. Translating to a loss of around 9.7 million young lives each year, this is nothing less than a global tragedy which has immense humanitarian, economic and political consequences.

A majority of these child deaths are a result of pneumonia, diarrhea, malaria, and measles, all of which are preventable and treatable. Almost all are unknown as causes of death in the developed world.

Malnutrition, which weakens children's ability to ward off illness as well as the lack of safe water and sanitation, contributes to more than half of all child deaths. Threats to child health and survival are made worse by HIV, and in some parts of the world, due to conflicts and marginalisation.

With this year's *State of the World's Children 2008* theme Child Survival, UNICEF returns to the launch of our first report in the early 1980s by one of UNICEF's most visionary leaders, Mr. James Grant – to put children's survival, health and development first.

In a throw-back to the great disease campaigns of the 1950s, the Child Survival Revolution introduced in the eighties was dedicated to saving the lives of children, by vanquishing common infections of early childhood, using simple and cost effective medical technologies.

From the primary health care package, it singled out four techniques, which collectively were referred to as '**GOBI**':

- '**G**' for growth monitoring to keep a regular check on a child's well-being;
- '**O**' for oral rehydration therapy to treat bouts of childhood diarrhoea;
- '**B**' for breastfeeding as the perfect nutritional start in life; and
- '**I**' for immunisation against the six vaccine-preventable childhood killers: tuberculosis, diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, polio and measles.

One of the strengths of this prescription was that all the techniques were low cost.

Yes, we had our detractors. But we also found an extraordinary degree of worldwide resonance, for the cause of child survival, amongst a wide range of allies -- national, international, bilateral, non-governmental -- and from all walks of public and professional life.

UNICEF enlisted everyone in '**a grand alliance for children**'. Not just the media, but partners from every nook and cranny of society -- from religious leaders to Goodwill Ambassadors, from Heads of State to municipal mayors, from sports personalities to parliamentarians, from professional associations to trade unions -- to join the child survival and development movement and spread its message.

Most importantly, this Revolution made a real difference to the lives of millions of children and their families, transforming the "grand alliance" of commitment and hope to reality and joy :

- Globally, these interventions contributed to a more than 50 per cent reduction in under-five mortality since 1960.
- Polio cases were reduced by 99 per cent, tetanus deaths by 50 per cent, and measles cases by 40 per cent.
- Oral rehydration therapy reduced diarrhea-related deaths by half, and continues to prevent an estimated 1 million under-five deaths each year.
- More recently, twice-yearly vitamin A supplements saved more than 1 million lives between 1998 and 2000 alone.

Despite these impressive achievements, the momentum generated by the first "child survival revolution" slowed considerably during the 1990s. UNICEF hopes that with the launch of this year's State of the World's Children report, we will bring about and make a reality the second "Child Survival Revolution".

Then, as now, UNICEF and its partners aspire to reduce the number of child deaths by about half by a target date. Then, as now, we propose simple, effective, low-cost, practical solutions and strategies to reduce child mortality and improve child health.

Every individual concerned with development, equity and cooperation, can help by participating in advocacy campaigns, organising local events to raise awareness and encourage action within your own organisations and communities.

The overall message is to learn more. Through your place of worship, your community service groups, by researching online, you can learn about programs and projects that seek to make a difference for children in Malaysia and around the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

“... no task nobler than giving children a better future” (MDG 4 & 5)

There is no task more nobler than giving children a better future. The lives of children and women are the truest indicators of the strength of communities and nations.

If the youngest and most vulnerable are left to find their way alone, a country violates the rights of its people and sabotages its future as an equal partner in the global economy.

Weak and dependent children and women make for weak and dependent countries. In dramatic contrast, children and women empowered by their rights make for robust and self-sufficient societies.

Comprehensive early childhood care is a key to creating a world characterised by hope and change rather than by deprivation and despair, and to building countries that are thriving and free.

When the UN Millennium Summit convened in September 2000, 189 countries adopted the resolution for the United Nations Millennium Declaration, which affirms a global commitment to guarantee every human being the right to development and freedom from want.

Resulting from the Declaration are the millennium development goals, a set of 8 goals, 18 targets and 48 indicators which will serve to measure the progress of nations on their commitment made through the Declaration.

How achievable is it for countries to reduce their under-five mortality rates by two-thirds in a matter of twenty five years? Well, Malaysia is an example in action that this is possible.

Where once children died of preventable diseases, today many more survive because of immunisations and improved conditions and care. Where once the risk of mothers dying in childbirth was immense, today the country has a safe motherhood program that is accessible through all Hospitals, including the Ministry of Health’s Family Health Clinics.

Throughout Malaysia, these and other advances have reduced misery, stimulated economic growth, built a stronger society and enabled the country to modernise and engage with the global marketplace.

As a result of visionary leadership, a strong commitment to the wellbeing of children and investment in health and education, Malaysia has reduced its under five mortality rates from 22 per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 12 per 1,000 live births in 2006.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Community interventions at the heart of the second child survival revolution

The second Child Survival Revolution boldly envisioned by UNICEF's Executive Director, Ann Veneman, calls for a focus on delivering key interventions at the community level, with particular attention paid to the needs of women, of mothers and of newborn children.

UNICEF is confident that Malaysia will continue to prioritise its children and will likely reduce its under-five child mortality by more than two-thirds by 2015. Challenges will never cease. Malaysia must continue to remain vigilant to all forms of threat to its children if it is to honour its obligations and meet its commitment in reducing child mortality.

Strategies to improve the situation are known. All that is needed is for Leaders from all sectors, including communities, to act in a timely fashion with commitment and courage to scale up that which has proven to be successful.

On our part, UNICEF remains committed to a "grand alliance" with the Malaysian Government and its partners to ensure health, education, protection and equality for every child in Malaysia.

Children are the hope of mankind. They are the continuity of human species. They are our most precious resource and our future.

Let us never fail them.

Thank you.