

Launch of UNICEF Child Rights Booklet

In conjunction with NGO Dialogue 'Universal Children's Day – Working together for children's rights'

Tuesday, 18 November 2008 • Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA

ADDRESS BY

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UNICEF Malaysia Representative

Mr Stephen Holloway

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Representatives of NGOs and groups working for child rights,

My respected friends from the media,

Honoured guests.

It is a pleasure to be here with you this morning to commemorate Universal Children's Day, which takes place on 20 November.

For UNICEF, Universal Children's Day marks our very reason for being; it underlines our mandate and our vision for children.

Universal Children's Day marks the day, nineteen years ago, that the world came together to say yes to children. To say yes, that children have the same basic human rights as adults – the right to survive and develop to the fullest; the right to be protected from harm; the right to participate fully in family, cultural and social life; and the right to be treated equally.

This was the day that the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in 1989. The Convention, which is the most universally accepted human rights document in history, guides all that UNICEF does around the world and in Malaysia.

In laying out these rights within a legally-binding international treaty, the CRC reminds the world that specific measures need to be taken to uphold children's inherent human rights – and also illuminates the many situations in which children suffer violations of their rights.

To ensure that governments live up to the standards of the CRC, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has been established to monitor State commitments and legislation, to ensure that they actually transform into real change in children's lives.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Malaysia – achievements, challenges and the way forward

Having ratified the CRC in 1995, Malaysia is committed to the protection and wellbeing of her children. The Government has made significant efforts towards improving national laws and policies that respond to the protection of child rights, particularly with the Child Act 2001.

In striving to fulfil these basic rights for children, Malaysia has achieved many of the targets set by the Millennium Development Goals, in terms of health, nutrition, water and sanitation, formal and non-formal education, and welfare services for deprived children in poor urban areas.

Yet disparities still exist among pockets of children – particularly those living in rural and remote areas, those from indigenous and Orang Asli communities, and those made vulnerable by HIV and AIDS.

UNICEF is also working with cross-sectoral partners to identify areas where disparities exist, and where violations of child rights need to be assessed and addressed. Our work in this area is guided by the concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, made to the Government in 2007.

Universal Children's Day: Working Together

This month, we commemorate Universal Children's Day with a significant event that will propel Malaysia forward in accomplishing real change for children.

I am pleased to be able to launch a very special booklet today – a UNICEF resource document that provides an overview of Malaysia's progress in achieving the standards of the CRC, and the

recommendations made by the Committee. The booklet looks at areas of child protection that still require urgent attention, and highlights how the CRC empowers all members of society to champion children's rights.

We all recognise that child rights cannot be protected by government alone. Children live in families, schools and communities – not in parliament houses or government buildings. As such, civil society, the community and families are duty bound to protect and guarantee the rights of children.

In this respect, I am very encouraged that the Malaysian Child Resource Institute has taken the initiative to organise today's dialogue among leading child rights-focused NGOs.

The NGO community provides a unique perspective, as it can identify children's vulnerability at the community and grassroots levels – and complement the government's efforts in responding to the recommendations of the Committee.

Today's NGO dialogue is the beginning of an important process that will continue as the groups work together to establish a structure for assessing the country's progress in achieving children's rights.

I look forward to more of such promising commitments from civil society and community groups, who are eager to take ownership of child rights issues and work together towards equality, justice and respect for children. This is a sign that Malaysia can move forward effectively as a leader for children.

Thank you.