

# **A Children's Manifesto for Afghanistan**

**20 November 2004**

## ***Preamble***

Afghanistan stands on the verge of a new chapter in its history. The democratic process, embraced by millions of citizens, has renewed interest and debate on the nation's future directions and created a new focus on reconstruction, regeneration and development.

As a new Government takes shape in Afghanistan, and on the occasion of the anniversary of the creation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the children of Afghanistan draw attention to their situation and call upon all parties mandated to protect children's rights to listen to those who are often unable to speak out as loudly as their elders, those who are often the most vulnerable and at risk in communities, and those who will shoulder the responsibility of steering Afghanistan's course in the years and decades ahead.

It is noted that much progress has been made for children since 2001; not least in the area of increased enrolment in education, increases in access to clean water and sanitation, reductions in infant and child mortality, key legislation to protect children against conscription to the armed forces and commitments to providing improved social services for children in the community. However, attention is drawn to the impact of nearly three decades of conflict, internal displacement and drought on Afghanistan. It is noted that two generations of Afghans have grown up knowing nothing but war and isolation. It is recognized that the result of this history is now exemplified by high rates of poverty, weak or non-existent infrastructure, and a break-down in traditional family and community coping and support mechanisms. This is underlined by the key indicators related to women and children in Afghanistan, which show that:

- 1 in 9 children born in Afghanistan will probably die before the first birthday.
- 1 in 6 children will probably not survive until the age of five.
- The national illiteracy rate amongst Afghans over the age of 15 is 71 per cent.
- 45 per cent of all primary school age children are not enrolled in school, while nearly 60 per cent of primary school age girls are not attending classes.
- Nearly 90 per cent of births take place at home, and a similar percentage are attended by unskilled birth attendants rather than properly trained health practitioners.
- At 1,600 deaths per 100,000 live births, Afghanistan has one of the highest maternal mortality ratios in the world; and the majority of those maternal deaths are preventable.
- Diarrhoeal disease affects nearly 30% of children under the age of five
- 1 in 5 children under five years old suffers from acute respiratory infections.
- Nearly 60 per cent of Afghan households do not have a safe water point, while one-third of households do not have a sanitary latrine.
- Nearly 7 per cent of primary school age children age work for an income
- Nearly 6 per cent of children do not live with both parents
- 41 per cent of Afghan girls are married before the age of 17
- An estimated 8,000 children who are, or have been, associated with fighting forces
- Over 80 per cent of children in orphanages have a living parent

- There are 100 mine/unexploded ordnance injuries every month; 50 per cent of which affect children
- Gross National Income stands at just US\$ 250 per capita.

### ***Manifesto demands and commitments***

Following varied and wide-ranging consultations and discussions across Afghanistan involving children from all walks of life, the children of Afghanistan themselves identify key areas of action to address the indicators above<sup>1</sup>:

- The promotion of security in our country, on our roads, in our villages and for our parents.
- The promotion of peace between different people living in Afghanistan, to listen to people and children.
- The chance for our families and friends and all people of Afghanistan to live in good health, to make us stronger people, able to contribute to Afghanistan's future
- Adequate responses to our concerns over violence against children (especially inappropriate physical and psychological punishment, humiliation and degradation of our dignity), early and forced child marriage, child trafficking, and danger from the physical environment, including landmines and vehicle traffic.
- Protection of children against the risk of hazardous labour.
- Protection of children from all types of harassment and discrimination.
- The establishment of vocational skill training centres for street working children.
- The provision by Government of financial support to vulnerable children and our families.
- Better collaboration between the police and children, especially street/working children.
- Access to education for all children; the more we know, the more we can contribute to rebuilding Afghanistan.
- Children's participation in local and national decision making that affects our lives. We want our President to meet with us and listen to us. We want to be consulted on issues directly related to children in Afghanistan and on identifying solutions for problems Afghan children are faced with.
- The facilitation of children's gatherings every year, so that children can learn from each other, can speak with one voice and can promote non-discrimination and unity.
- The establishment of children's centres and children's groups, where we can learn and develop ourselves, where we can speak freely and discuss issues that affect our lives.
- Those responsible for protecting children, under the terms of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Children, such as the Government, the UN, international and national NGOs, our parents and families should all be accountable for fulfilling our rights.

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<sup>1</sup> The requests, demands and commitment that make up this Manifesto are drawn upon the outcomes of several children's consultations across Afghanistan from 2002 – 2004, and may be considered representative of the views of the majority of Afghanistan's children.

In addition, as children of Afghanistan, we recognize that we too have a commitment and responsibilities to upholding children's rights:

- We will walk hand in hand with children who don't participate in community activities, who don't participate in education or play; through our encouragement they will be able to participate.
- Children with disabilities, children who are poor and children who have to work all have the same rights and all of us are willing to help each other. Through children's groups, we can change the lives of children in our villages. We will make sure that all children go to school. We will talk to parents and tell them that their children should go to school and when they then start school, we will help them.
- We will promote children's rights amongst parents, teachers, elders, government and international agencies.
- We will promote good works for the future of our country, in our communities, schools and families; we will promote peace, learning and development for all children of Afghanistan.
- We promise to respect and listen to adults. We ask adults to respect us and listen to us also. We are their future, so it is important that adults consult us about education, about development, about security for children, about play and sport, about health care and skills training.

## **A Framework for Action for Children in Afghanistan**

**20 November 2004**

As we stand on the threshold of yet another, more positive, chapter of Afghan history, we believe that never was there a more important time to reflect on the value of this country's children. When we plan the future of Afghanistan, we must do so by planning for its children. When we embrace the opportunities provided by democracy, stability, investment and development, we must put in place the structures and policies that allow children to benefit from such opportunities too.

Afghanistan must make its contribution to broader targets for children, not least the Millennium Development Goals which have set the standards for global development for the next decade.

Today, fifteen years since the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child was introduced onto the world stage, and ten years since Afghanistan itself ratified the Convention, we the undersigned call upon the Government of Afghanistan and its partners<sup>2</sup> in the United Nations, NGO, international assistance and civil society communities to renew their joint commitment to the principles of the Convention, to strive for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, and to respond positively to the Children's Manifesto and this related Framework for Action.

### **Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger**

The Government of Afghanistan and its partners should make a public commitment to achieving the Millennium Development Goal of eradication of extreme poverty by the year 2015, and ensure adequate financial, technical and human resources are made available to meet that goal.

#### *Specifically*

- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must place special emphasis on providing employment opportunities for vulnerable families, including displaced populations and women-headed households.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must work towards ensuring that there is a reduction in the current 7 per cent of primary school age children currently working for more than 4 hours a day to earn income by supporting the enrolment of working children to formal schools.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must ensure that families of children who choose to enrol in education, as an alternative to working for income, are provided with appropriate support to minimise the impact of the loss of income from the child. Working children who enrol in education must not work additional hours to make up for the time spent in learning.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must adequately support viable food security schemes that will meet the basic food needs of Afghan households.

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<sup>2</sup> By partners, it is implied all those actors with an interest in the protection of children's rights, and specifically those with the legal, financial, intellectual, moral and influential capacity to effect positive change for children in Afghanistan – the Government and its lawmakers, provincial and district administration, the United Nations and its specialist agencies, international assistance donors, non-governmental organizations, community and civil society organizations, religious leaders and shuras amongst others. This Framework for Action should be viewed as a checklist against which progress for children can be measured, and all these partners should be held accountable for their actions in contributing to this progress.

- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must take every effort to prevent the placement of children with family support networks into institutional care, and provide resources and technical support to the development of improved, professional social services, family and community-based care for vulnerable children at risk from forced marriage, hazardous labour and other abuses and exploitation.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must place special emphasis on the recruitment and training of Afghan professionals in the field of child psychology, child counselling and educators for children with learning disabilities, as these professions are in considerable demand.

#### *Indicators of Progress*

- % of children or primary school age who do not attend school or an alternative education programme because they have to work
- % of households with at least one member having employment with income of more than US\$ 1 per day in the last 12 months
- % of women-headed households where the head of household has access to regular income from employment.
- % of Afghan households that have access to adequate and affordable food every day.
- % of social workers who have undertaken comprehensive training to recognized standards,
- Implementation of a national standard of social work care in all provinces.

#### **Achieve universal primary education**

The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must make a public commitment to achieving the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education by the year 2015, and ensure adequate financial, technical and human resources are made available to meet that goal.

#### *Specifically*

- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must create a learning environment in which every child has access to free, quality education, including recognition and support for non-formal and community-based schools.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must take special measures to promote girls' rights to education, including support for the recruitment of women teachers, improved facilities, ensuring adequate sanitation at all schools, protection of girls' schools against intimidation or other attempts to prevent girls' attendance, and civic education and advocacy to increase girls' enrolment.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must ensure that efforts are made to improve the quality of teaching and learning, to encourage more families to enrol all their children in schools, and that schools are safe, violence-free environments for all children.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners will ensure that resources are made available to provide additional training to teachers to support children with disabilities in the classroom, including specific pre-service training and in-service orientation on support for children with disabilities.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must place special emphasis on the construction of learning spaces closer to communities where no such space exists, to reduce barriers to children attending classes. A national school building programme must be developed to meet increasing demand, and improve the learning environment.

- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must ensure that teaching staff receive an appropriate salary related to their experience, skills and performance, in an effort to recognize the professional status of teachers.

*Indicators of progress*

- % of primary school-aged children attending education
- % of children under 18 years of age who have completed primary level education
- % of household with at least one parent or caretaker (15 years or older) able to read, write and do basic mathematics
- % of households with at least one child under 18 years of age attending or having completed secondary school or vocational education
- % of teachers holding recognised teaching qualification, or having undertaken recognized in-service training.
- Number of new learning spaces established in communities with no current existing school.
- Reduction in student:teacher ratios at both primary and secondary school levels.
- Introduction of legislation outlawing violent punishment in schools, and reported number of cases of violence against students and teachers in schools.

**Promote gender equality and empower women**

The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must make a public commitment to achieving the Millennium Development Goal promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women by the year 2015, and ensure adequate financial, technical and human resources are made available to meet that goal

*Specifically*

- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners will strive towards the development of a culturally sensitive school curriculum, which includes modules on gender equality, taught to girls and boys. Such a curriculum must include discussion of domestic violence and abuse of girls and women.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must promote the rights of girls to enter any profession, and ensure equal access to training and educational opportunities for girls to acquire the necessary skills to enter the profession of their choice.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must ensure that places are available, and appropriate resources and facilities provided, to enable all girls who wish to enter higher education to do so.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must ensure that adequate resources are made available to the promotion of sports and recreational activities for girls, and that suitable facilities are made available in the community for girls to participate in such activities.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must ensure that the legal age of marriage, now set at 18 years, is not breached.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must ensure that those girls under the age of 18 who are already married have access to education up to the age of 18.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must ensure that those women who are the victims of abuse and neglect are not imprisoned or otherwise treated as criminals, and that legal advice must be available for girls and women who find themselves the victims of abuse or neglect.

#### *Indicators of progress*

- Awareness amongst children and household of domestic violence, number of official complaints and reports made to authorities of domestic violence and abuse
- Number of reported cases of domestic violence investigated fully by authorities.
- Number of girls married before 18<sup>th</sup> birthday
- Number of girls completing full course of education
- Number of girls entering higher education
- % of school-aged girls regularly participating in sports and other recreational activities

### **Reduce child mortality**

The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must make a public commitment to achieving the Millennium Development Goal of reducing child mortality by the year 2015, and ensure adequate financial, technical and human resources are made available to meet that goal

#### *Specifically*

- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must ensure that a comprehensive programme of primary health care is developed nationwide, and that hygiene education is a core element of the national school curriculum, and that resources must be provided for a national programme of community-based hygiene promotion.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must provide opportunities for the recruitment, training and skills development of Afghan doctors and child health practitioners.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must allocate resources and technical support to the promotion of improved child nutrition, including support for micronutrient supplementation and enhanced feeding practices.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must ensure that information on basic health care and child nutrition is made available to those who are illiterate.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must strive towards the establishment of integrated health services for children and families in every community throughout Afghanistan.

#### *Indicators of progress*

- % of household using community-based primary health care systems.
- % of mothers with children less than 6 months old who are exclusively breast-fed.
- % of mothers with children under 5 years of age who manage diarrhoea with Oral Rehydration Therapy.
- % of mothers with children under 5 years of age who take their children with systems of Acute Respiratory Infections for treatment.
- Number of trained doctors and child health practitioners and numbers of new students enrolling in health-related training programmes.
- Distance between households and the nearest child and maternal health facility.

### **Improve maternal health**

The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must make a public commitment to achieving the Millennium Development Goal of reducing child mortality by the year 2015, and ensure adequate financial, technical and human resources are made available to meet that goal

*Specifically*

- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must provide more resources and opportunities to recruit, train and retain professional maternal health practitioners, including community midwives, female obstetricians, and community-based health workers.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must ensure that women's access to health care is promoted, that all women have an understanding and access to safe motherhood and obstetric care programmes, and that civic education programmes are undertaken to promote the right of all women to adequate health services.

*Indicators of progress*

- % of women of child-bearing age who have been vaccinated against tetanus toxoid coverage
- % of women who give birth either in equipped health facilities, or at home with skilled health practitioners in attendance.
- % of households who understand the main risks associated with pregnancy and childbirth, and can identify sources of professional medical care for women experiencing complications in pregnancy and childbirth.

**Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases**

The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must make a public commitment to achieving the Millennium Development Goal of combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases by the year 2015, and ensure adequate financial, technical and human resources are made available to meet that goal.

*Specifically*

- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must ensure that the facilities and technical resources are made available to ensure that every child is immunized against vaccine-preventable diseases on a routine basis.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must ensure that support is provided to the production and availability of iodised salt throughout the country to eliminate iodine deficiency disorders.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must ensure that appropriate information campaigns are undertaken to raise awareness of causes of transmission of HIV/AIDS, and the measures that can be taken to reduce risk of contracting HIV/AIDS.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must ensure that impregnated bed-nets are available to all households in areas known to be malaria-prevalent.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must ensure that resources and trained professionals are made available to develop and implement a comprehensive strategy for treating mental illness amongst children and families.

#### *Indicators of progress*

- % of children aged 12 – 23 months who are fully immunised against the six major antigens
- % of households using iodised salt as part of their regular diets
- % of households who are aware of the causes of HIV/AIDS transmission
- % of households in malaria-prevalent areas who own and use impregnated bed-nets.
- Increased number of mental health professionals recruited and trained at provincial level.
- Reduction in number of children living with mental health conditions living in institutional care

#### **Ensure environmental sustainability**

The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must make a public commitment to achieving the Millennium Development Goal of environmental sustainability by 2015, and ensure adequate financial, technical and human resources are made available to meet that goal

#### *Specifically*

- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must allocate adequate resources to reduce by half the proportion of people (households and schools in both urban and rural areas) without sustainable access to safe drinking water, by 2015.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must allocate adequate resources to reduce by half the proportion of people (households and schools in both urban and rural areas) without sustainable access to basic sanitation facilities, by 2015.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must promote sound water resource management within Government, private and civil society sectors, including educational programmes and support to programmes that maximise efficiency of water use.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must allocate resources and technical support to the establishment and strengthening of sustainable community-based operation and maintenance of water supply facilities, including emergency preparedness mechanisms.

#### *Indicators of progress*

- % of population with sustainable access to an improved drinking water source, in urban and rural areas.
- % of population with access to improved basic sanitary facilities in urban and rural areas.
- % of school going children with at least 80 per cent understanding of causality factors and prevention measures of diarrhoeal disease.

#### **Other special protection measures**

The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must make a public commitment to ensuring the protection of children who are especially vulnerable or at risk, and ensure adequate financial, technical and human resources are made available to meet that goal

#### *Specifically*

- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must ensure that children in conflict with the law are provided with special protection, including ensuring

that deprivation of liberty is used as the last resort and for the shortest time possible, that such children are not accommodated with adults, that alternatives to imprisonment are promoted, that such children are provided with appropriate legal support, and that every effort is made to help the child reintegrate into the community.

- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners will ensure that those responsible for implementing juvenile justice, including judges, advocates and law enforcement officials receive adequate training and sensitization on children's rights and the implication of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child on the administration of juvenile justice in Afghanistan.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must fully support the National Plan of Action against child trafficking, and ensure adequate resources are made available to prevention, law enforcement and victim support.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must develop a similar National Plan of Action against child labour.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners will ensure that no child is recruited or conscripted into any armed unit, that special support will be provided to those children who are demobilized from such units, and that the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, ratified by Afghanistan, is fully implemented.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners will ensure implementation of the International Mine Ban Treaty ratified by in 2002, with a special emphasis on Mine Risk Education programmes addressing the safety of children and their families.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners will ensure every child is registered upon his/her birth, safeguarding the basic right to identity, nationality, and subsequent access to health and education services.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners will ensure that children with disabilities and their families are provided with the necessary support to enable them to play a fully active role in their communities, including access to mainstream education, recreational facilities and training opportunities.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners will ensure that children are protected from all forms of violence and abuse, including excessive physical and corporal punishment, and humiliating and degrading punishments that strip a child of his or her dignity.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners will take special measure to protect children against sexual abuse, including specific legislation that outlaws the institutionalised sexual abuse of boys.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must ensure that the placement of children in residential institutions will be limited to those children who have no living parents and relatives and for whom no other alternative family and community based care can be found.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners will ensure that children in residential facilities have access to services that ensure their full and healthy development.

*Indicators of progress*

- % of children in conflict in the law not detained in adult facilities.
- % of judges, advocates and law enforcement officials who have undertaken comprehensive training on child rights.
- Number of former child soldiers enrolled in reintegration programmes
- Establishment of effective monitoring system for production, stockpiling or use of landmines

- % of mine/unexploded ordnance victims per month who are children.
- % of children under the age of five whose births have been registered.
- % of children with disabilities attending formal schools.
- Number of reports of child trafficking fully investigated and % of reported cases resulting in prosecutions of traffickers.
- % of provinces where juvenile courts and juvenile rehabilitation facilities are established
- Introduction and/or revision of legislation to make Afghan law compatible with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Number of children formerly in residential care institutions that have been successfully reunited with their families, or for whom alternative, appropriate family-based care has been found.

### **Promotion of children's rights**

The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must make a public commitment to ensuring that all sections of society in Afghanistan are fully aware of the rights of children, and that adequate financial, technical and human resources are made available to promote children's rights.

#### *Specifically*

- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners will provide support to civil society organizations, media and other agencies to enhance their ability to promote children's rights.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners will take appropriate actions against those citizens or groups which attempt to violate, limit or obstruct the promotion of children's rights as established in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners will make available resources and create opportunities to enable the active and meaningful participation of children in the decision making processes that affect them, including but not limited to the inclusion of children's representatives in policy-making forums, participation of children in the media, and active encouragement of debate and discussion by and with children through the education system.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners will take all actions possible to ensure that services, programmes and policies fully recognise the cultural, ethnic and socio-economic diversity of Afghanistan, are based on the best interest of the child, and ensure that no child is discriminated against on the basis of that diversity.
- The Government of Afghanistan and its partners must support awareness raising campaigns to reduce the stigma associated with disability and provide opportunities for children with disabilities to maximise their potential.

#### *Indicators of progress*

- % of media outlets producing programmes or editions dedicated to children's issues, or created by children themselves
- Number of legislative instruments and decrees that contain specific reference to upholding the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, or its various Articles.
- % of legislative instruments, decrees and policy-making forums that include provision for direct representation from children.
- Number of legislative instruments or decrees that contain specific reference to; being in the best interest of the child, non-discrimination – or positive promotion – of children from ethnic minorities, children with disabilities, or

children from marginalized groups (street working children, nomad children, children deprived of parental care etc.)

This Framework for Action is respectfully presented to the Government of Afghanistan and its partners, on behalf of children in Afghanistan, by the following child rights' organizations:

Aschiana  
Child Fund Afghanistan  
Children in Crisis  
Enfants du Monde, Droits de l'homme (EMDH)  
Save the Children Sweden  
Save the Children USA  
UNICEF