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# THE PROGRESS OF NATIONS

*The day will come  
when nations will be judged  
not by their military or economic strength,  
nor by the splendour of their capital  
cities and public buildings,  
but by the well-being of their peoples:  
by their levels of health, nutrition and education;  
by their opportunities to earn a fair reward for their  
labours; by their ability to participate in the  
decisions that affect their lives; by the respect that is  
shown for their civil and political liberties;  
by the provision that is made for those who are  
vulnerable and disadvantaged;  
and by the protection that is afforded to the  
growing minds and bodies of their children.  
The Progress of Nations, published annually  
by the United Nations Children's Fund, is  
a contribution towards that day.*

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## Foreword

**T**he *Progress of Nations* charts the advances made since the 1990 World Summit for Children, at which governments pledged to take specific steps to improve the lives of their children.

Each year, the report challenges—even provokes—countries to fulfil those promises, and the 1997 edition is no exception. It assesses such fundamental areas as the quality of basic education, people’s access to hygienic sanitation and the effect of AIDS on child death rates. It also highlights issues that have been less visible on the development agenda, such as violence against women and girls, how justice systems handle young offenders and the protection of breastfeeding from unethical practices to market infant formula.

In detailing a broad range of both achievements made and challenges remaining, the report calls on every country not just to fulfil the pledges explicit in the goals established at the Summit, but to maintain children at the very top of their national agenda.

I am proud to commend *The Progress of Nations 1997* to you.



Kofi A. Annan  
Secretary-General  
United Nations

# Introduction

## Charting progress for children

**T**he *Progress of Nations*, an annual scorecard of the social health of nations, records achievements in the form of statistics that measure fulfilment of minimum human needs. The knowledge it unearths is fundamental to solving problems, because information is the first ingredient needed by those with the will and the means to make change.

*The Progress of Nations 1997* tells both good news and bad, and some news that is both. For example, mortality rates among children under 5 have declined impressively over the past 15 years—but HIV/AIDS is undermining that success in about 30 countries. A code is in place to protect breastfeeding from unethical infant formula marketing practices—but enforcement of the code is spotty. Safe water supplies have expanded dramatically in recent years—but access to sanitation is falling.

This year's edition takes a broad view, assessing not only basic social conditions but also progress and disparity in areas that are more difficult to measure. Many of these have a profound impact on children's lives. No statistic can capture the impact of violence that is directed against girls and women simply because they are female, yet that violence thwarts their development as well as that of their nations.

And as for children who come into conflict with the law, few nations keep track of how many young people are in custody, for how long and why. Though some coun-

tries in both the developing and the industrialized worlds are reforming their juvenile justice systems, too many young people still suffer harsh treatment and enjoy fewer legal protections than do adults.

Recognition of the importance of such topics has grown as the concept of child rights has taken hold in the world community. With all but three nations having ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the idea is gaining ground that bettering children's lives is not a matter of government largesse but a fundamental legal requirement.



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Legislation upholding the rights pledged in the Convention is being enacted at all levels of government, and children throughout the world are learning to claim their rights. For some young people, implementation of the Convention will guarantee a birth certificate or a seat in the classroom. For others, including those in industrialized countries where 'over' development brings its own problems, the Convention will back efforts to improve the physical and social environment.

This year's *Progress of Nations*, the fifth, presents another indicator of development: improved statistics. When we conceived the publication, we hoped that the report in itself would inspire governments to sharpen their statistical self-knowledge. That has proved correct. *The Progress of Nations 1997* is filled with evidence of improvements in both the quality and the quantity of the data, revealing both the advances and the declines in children's well-being.

It is clear that, buoyed by knowledge, committed governments have a far better opportunity to achieve the goals agreed to at the 1990 World Summit for Children. Fulfilment of these goals will ensure that all children, especially the least advantaged, have a real chance to survive, grow up healthy and well-nourished, go to school and achieve their full potential.



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