THE PROGRESS OF NATIONS 1999

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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

Nearly a decade ago, leaders and representatives from more than 150 countries, gathered at the World Summit for Children, set out a number of ambitious global goals for children and development for the 1990s. It would have been all too easy for these goals to have remained an eloquent statement of good intentions. They became, instead, a practical blueprint for action and, together with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, they have placed children at the centre of the world's development and human rights concerns.

Many countries can point to significant gains made during this decade towards achieving the World Summit goals and upholding children's rights: young lives saved by improved health and nutrition, children protected from hazardous and exploitative labour, futures transformed by the opportunity to attend school. In other cases, however, conflicts, debt, economic crises and mistaken priorities have taken a terrible toll on children, who always pay a high price for the failures of adults.

The Progress of Nations plays an essential role in monitoring global advances towards the goals set in 1990 as well as in recording the setbacks. This year's edition documents the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS on children, while celebrating the enormous strides that have brought the world so close to the eradication of polio. In 1999, the world will welcome the 6 billionth member of our human family. *The Progress of Nations* uses the occasion of this landmark birth as a lens through which to examine the widely divergent prospects that await this child – and indeed all children – on the eve of the millennium. The report's final commentary spotlights the need to lift the catastrophic burden that debt imposes on children and families in some of the poorest countries on earth.

The Progress of Nations 1999 not only provides new and valuable data on vital issues affecting children, but it also helps governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations focus their priorities more effectively towards attaining the World Summit goals and upholding all children's rights.

Kofi A. Annan
Secretary-General
United Nations