

PRESS RELEASE

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UNICEF's State of The World's Children report commemorates 20 years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

NEW YORK, 19 November 2009 – A special edition issue of UNICEF's flagship *The State of the World's Children* report, tracking the impact of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the challenges that remain, was released today on the eve of the 20th anniversary of the Convention's adoption by the UN General Assembly.

"The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most ratified human rights treaty in human history," said UNICEF Executive Director Ann M. Veneman. "It has transformed the way children are viewed and treated throughout the world."

The Convention has 193 ratifications, the process by which countries decide to be bound by the articles of an international treaty. It articulates a set of universal children's rights, such as the right to an identity, a name and a nationality, the right to an education, and rights to the highest possible standards of health and protection from abuse and exploitation.

These rights are based on four core principles – non-discrimination; the best interest of the child as primary consideration in matters that affect them; rights to life, survival and development, and respect for the views of children.

The Convention also identifies the obligation of governments to do all they can to deliver these rights, and acknowledges the special role of parents in their children's upbringing.

The State of the World's Children report describes the timeless relevance of the Convention.

More than seventy countries have incorporated children's codes into national legislation based on the Convention's provisions, and awareness and advocacy on child protection issues have increased markedly since the Convention was opened for signature 20 years ago.

Considerable progress has been made through the past twenty years:

- The annual number of deaths of children under five years of age has fallen from around 12.5 million in 1990 to an estimated 8.8 million in 2008, representing a 28 per cent decline in the rate of under five mortality;
- Between 1990 and 2006, 1.6 billion people world-wide gained access to improved water sources;
- Globally, around 84 per cent of primary-school-age children are in class today and the gender gap in primary school enrolment is narrowing;
- Children are no longer the missing face of the HIV and AIDS pandemic;
- Important steps have been taken to help protect children from serving as soldiers or trafficked into prostitution or domestic servitude; and

- The age of children getting married is rising in some countries and the number of girls subjected to genital cutting is gradually falling.

But children's rights are still far from assured, according to UNICEF.

"It is unacceptable that children are still dying from preventable causes, like pneumonia, malaria, measles and malnutrition," said Veneman. "Many of the world's children will never see the inside of a school room, and millions lack protection against violence, abuse, exploitation, discrimination and neglect."

The rights of girls still require special attention. The majority of children who do not attend primary school are girls, and girls are more likely to suffer sexual violence, to be trafficked or to be forced into child marriage. In many regions they are less likely to receive essential healthcare.

The report includes special expert essays from public and private sector representatives, alongside examples of the child rights situation in a range of countries.

Many of the expert essays offer advice on the role the Convention can have, in an increasingly populous, urbanized and environmentally challenged world, over the next 20 years and beyond. The report also provides a range of suggestions that could ensure the protection of children's rights continues to advance.

More than 160 events are taking place worldwide commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Convention. The special edition of *The State of the World's Children* is part of UNICEF's contribution to those commemorations, which also includes jointly hosting, with civil society and government partners, a global commemoration and panel discussion to be held at the United Nations Headquarters on the 20th of November.

"The big challenge of the next 20 years is to firmly position the best interests of children at the heart of all human activity," said Veneman. "It is our collective responsibility to ensure every child's rights to survival, development, protection and participation."

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More on the CRC: <http://www.unicef.org/rightsite/>

About UNICEF

UNICEF is on the ground in over 150 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments.

Attention editors and broadcasters: Multi media packages including photos and b-roll will be available starting from 16th of November at www.thenewsmarket.com/unicef

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