

Children's Forum report

New York, 5-7 May 2002

Report on the Meeting
of Under-18 delegates to the
**UN Special Session
on Children**



We are here



UNICEF/02-0148/MARKISZ



UNICEF/02-0474/DECESARE



©Johnette Iris Stubbs



UNICEF/02-0120/MARKISZ

We care

We participate

We want you to listen



United Nations Headquarters New York, 5 May 2002

It was a rare sight indeed: Children seated in Conference Room 4 at the United Nations Headquarters. Children seated at the podium of the United Nations alongside UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy and Ambassador Patricia Durrant, Permanent Representative of Jamaica to the United Nations. They came to attend the Children's Forum, a first-ever official gathering of children selected to be delegates to the United Nations Special Session on Children by Governments and non-governmental organizations in their countries.

Aged eight to eighteen, the children travelled from remote villages. From capital cities. From suburban neighbourhoods. From rural communities. Many were the first in their families, some the first in their communities, to travel on an airplane.

They came by the hundreds to New York City – 404 in all – to send a message, loud and clear, to the leaders of the world. We are here, we care, we want you to listen.

Opposite page, top: Children speaking at different events during the Children's Forum and the Special Session on Children.

Opposite page, bottom: The Secretariat building in New York City, headquarters of the United Nations, during the Children's Forum.

Below: Opening ceremony of the Children's Forum in Conference Room 4 at the United Nations, 5 May, 2002



"Your presence here marks a new chapter in the history of the UN.... So far, adults have called the shots, but now it's time to build the world with children. Your voices will be heard, I promise."

—UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, at the opening of the Children's Forum

From left: Emmen Saeed, 16, Pakistan, one of the moderators of the Forum's opening ceremony, shares the stage with UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, Ambassador Patricia Durrant of Jamaica and UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy.

New York, 5-7 May 2002 First-ever Children's Forum at the UN

UNICEF and partner organizations held a Children's Forum so that children and young people could gather before the Special Session on Children to discuss important issues and come up with ways for governments, civil society organizations and children to work together to make the world a better place for everyone.

A total of 242 girls and 162 boys attended the Children's Forum. Two thirds of them, selected by their own governments, were members of the official delegations of 148 countries. The other 141 children attending the Children's Forum were chosen by NGOs to be members of the 106 different non-governmental delegations. Because the children came from 154 countries from all over the world, there was true global representation.

All of the children were selected at the national level – through competitions in schools or communities, for example, or through membership in youth parliaments, involvement in the 'Say Yes for Children' campaign, or involvement with NGOs back home. Many of them had participated in national or regional preparatory meetings – and were selected by their peers to represent them.

Some of the participants had been to UN headquarters before to take part in one or more of the Preparatory Committee meetings. Some others were children of ambassadors and parliamentarians and had travelled a lot and attended many conferences. Some, on the other hand, had never been outside of their village or home town. After many long hours on a bus, these children arrived at their

We want to work with you to make a world fit for children...



capital city for the first time, boarded a plane and travelled all the way to New York City.

However they were selected, and whether they were part of a governmental or an NGO delegation, all of the children were passionately committed to their common goal of improving the world.

The children worked in regional and topic groups to develop a message of action to present to world leaders at the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children, which was held in New York from 8 through 10 May 2002.

All of the participants were able to express their thoughts freely and take part in decisions, discussions, media events, celebra-

tions and other activities. Decidedly democratic from start to finish, groups elected their peers to represent them in drafting the action plan they developed, as well as two representatives to present their message at the Special Session on Children.

"Bring us your ideas, experiences, and opinions.... You are the ones who bring energy and excitement to this Special Session."

—UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy

Participants listen attentively to the opening remarks at the Children's Forum.

A world fit for us.



Following the opening ceremony, delegates participate in the first working session. There will be two more days of working sessions during the three-day Children's Forum.



Getting down to work: Children decide on key issues and solutions

Participants at the Children's Forum worked in large and small groups, much like those of the United Nations, to discuss eight key challenges facing children. The participants identified these challenges as priorities, which were in line with the Rallying Call of the Global Movement for Children and the 'Say Yes for Children' campaign.

Their goal: To draft a united response to the Special Session's Outcome Document, called 'A World Fit for Children'. This document paves the way for global action for and **with** children for the next 10 years. Children's participation in the Special Session meant that world leaders heard first-hand about the problems children face. And how children themselves will help make the world a better place for everyone.

Children at the Forum

ALERT: Important messages from the working groups of the Children's Forum to world leaders.

- What are the issues?
- What can world leaders do?
- What can children do?

Health

ISSUES: In many countries in the world, there are not enough qualified health care providers and services to ensure that children receive the care they need to grow up healthy. Even if there are health services, they are often too expensive or there is a lack of life-saving drugs.

Too many children still die from preventable diseases or from lack of information on health issues that could help them make informed decisions and save their lives. Children in jails, victims of war and child sex workers suffer even more from poor health care.

What LEADERS can do:

It is the responsibility of governments, the private and public sector to provide quality health care, information and services to all children. We recommend that:

- Governments spend more money to make sure everyone can get and can afford health care.
- Provide free health insurance to children from birth to age 12 and to women during pregnancy.
- Donate life-saving drugs to poor countries and governments to ensure that drugs are available and distributed equally in their countries.
- Impart health education information to children through schools, health fairs and the media.
- Create children's permanent health commissions at the national and international levels.
- Governments involve children in developing, implementing and monitoring national plans of action.
- Private sector (businesses like Coca-Cola and others) put health messages and slogans on their products.

What CHILDREN can do:

- Get involved in peer counselling to make children aware of their rights to basic and reproductive health information and care. This could be done through information centres and the Internet.
- Volunteer in organizations that work for children's health and development.
- Promote current and create new campaigns for corporate and government accountability in health-related matters.
- Develop youth exchanges to share experiences and strategies and create regional networks.
- Distribute decisions made at the Children's Forum and the UN Special Session on Children to community members and peers, use the media to inform the public about what country leaders have agreed to implement.



"The problem is that many parents think only about their sons and do not provide resources or education for their daughters. So we need to encourage girls that girls can do everything they want."

—Saadia Anwaar, 16, Pakistan

Education

ISSUES: Quality education ensures that all children can contribute positively in all aspects of society. However, there are many obstacles to overcome to make sure that all children have access to a quality education. Poverty often forces children to go to work instead of school. There are not enough community- or village-based schools, so many children have to travel long distances to attend. Many schools lack resources, such as qualified teachers, learning materials and supplies. In some schools teachers use corporal punishment, or worse, children are forced to do sexual favours for adults in schools in exchange for better grades, pocket money, books, etc.



UNICEF/02-0072/MARKISZ

Sandra Jiménez Loza, 15, of Mexico (right) converses with another youth delegate.

"Society has to change. The change must come from people, not just governments. Change isn't about who is in power."

—Sandra Jiménez Loza, 15, Mexico

Parents often do not see the benefits of education, especially for girls. When developing school curricula children should be included and curricula should be made more motivational.

What LEADERS can do:

To ensure quality education for all children, we recommend that decision makers:

- Make education free and compulsory: make sure every child in their country is in school.
- Governments must commit the necessary

resources to close the gap between the rich and the poor, and to ensure that children living in rural areas have access to school.

- Governments should also allocate funds to make sure that minority and refugee students have access to education.
- Stop discrimination against girls. Girls should be allowed to go to school too, instead of staying home and working.
- Make schools wheelchair accessible for students with disabilities.
- Change the school system so that girls can return to school after they have a baby. (Many girls who get pregnant are expelled from school.)
- Do not give in to corruption, for example, when children receive diplomas because their parents bribed officials.
- Address the problem of abuse in schools, because it teaches children to be afraid to go to school. If children are abused at school, they will associate learning with abuse.
- Provide a joyful learning environment for students.
- Include child rights in school curricula.
- Establish regional groups to share educational resources and experiences.
- Test teachers regularly to ensure that they are qualified.
- Increase budgets for education and spend money on education instead of army weapons.
- Establish youth educational advisory boards in every ministry of education.
- Private sector should help support education by providing resources and funding.
- Countries should gather regionally to share experiences and resources for educational programmes.
- The media should help create awareness of the importance of education to parents and others.
- Richer countries should help countries with fewer resources to improve their educational systems.

What CHILDREN can do:

- Take advantage of every chance to get an education.
- Raise family and community awareness about the value of education.
- Work with governments, schools and

communities to improve the quality of education.

- Advocate for and establish children's councils, networks and parliaments to discuss educational issues and implement changes.

Child Exploitation

ISSUES: Millions of children are exploited every day through child labour, sale and trafficking, abuse, gang violence, early marriage, discrimination and harmful practices (such as female genital mutilation, child brides and gender discrimination). Children also suffer from economic discrimination and physical abuse or corporal punishment.

All types of abuse should be addressed: physical, emotional and psychological (such as neglect, blaming, putting down), verbal and sexual. It is time to let children be children in safe and loving environments.

What LEADERS can do:

- There should be education for parents to prevent them from abusing their children, and to help them educate their children not to abuse each other (because sometimes older siblings abuse their younger sisters, brothers or cousins).
- Build safe spaces and communities for children so they are protected and nurtured.
- Support programmes that help victims of abuse and exploitation recover and rebuild their lives.
- Strengthen laws on child labour and sexual

exploitation and punish those who break the laws.

- Ban harmful practices.
- Treat all children with dignity and respect.

What CHILDREN can do:

- Educate others in the community about the Convention on the Rights of the Child and children's rights to be protected from sexual exploitation, discrimination, abuse, violence, war and dangerous work environments.
- Create peer education groups so children, both in and out of school, can learn about exploitation and their rights.
- Work with governments to make sure child-protection laws are enforced.
- Get in touch with governments and children's organizations to improve education and to reduce poverty and conflicts so fewer children will be victims of abuse and exploitation.
- Alert the media about child abuse, exploitation and discrimination.

Children and Armed Conflict

ISSUES: Children are the first victims of armed conflicts, because they are vulnerable and adults can manipulate them. There are many ways children are affected by war. They are injured and killed. They are forced to leave their homes and work. They become refugees. They lose their parents or friends. They don't receive an education or good health care. They are used as soldiers in

"Let us not make children pay for our failures any more. Children in this room are witnesses to our words. They and their peers in every land have a right to expect us to turn our words into action...and to build a world fit for children."

—Secretary-General Kofi Annan at the opening session of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children.

PROFILE IN ACTIVISM Runu Akter, Bangladesh, 16

"I am interested in underprivileged children and educational programmes. I myself am an orphan and have taken an interest in these issues—very personally. I work on vocational and technology training with these children. I am training these children how to repair electronics and electrical items. Young peo-

ple will then have a skill and can make a living. This work is basically with young boys who are working on electronics in Bangladesh. I am also working on cultural performances.... This usually takes the form of dance. I myself am on a training course to learn to repair electronic items, especially radios and televisions."



"War and politics are always adult games, but children are always the losers."

—Eliza Kantardzic, 17, Bosnia and Herzegovina, speaking on behalf of the Children's Forum at the UN Security Council Meeting on Children and Armed Conflict, 7 May 2002

armies. They suffer from sexual violence and they are 'brainwashed' by adults.

What LEADERS can do:

War is an adult problem. There is no reason why children should be involved and made to suffer. We recommend that decision makers:

- Resolve conflicts through dialogue, not wars that hurt and kill children.
- Keep children out of war.
- Provide safe places and support to children during war and conflict. Evacuate children first. We have the right to be saved.
- Demobilize and reintegrate child soldiers.
- Provide more assistance and protection for refugees and make sure that refugees can return to their homeland after the war.
- Respect international treaties and bring troublemakers to justice.
- Local governments should create a system in which children can participate and talk about political decisions, for example, what they think about war.
- Teach tolerance, understanding, peace and human rights in schools. Teach also that killing is not patriotic.
- When needed, provide education on war and conflict and landmines and how children can stay safe from them.
- The Leaders of bigger countries should stop the supply of war materials to other countries.

- Stop spending so much money on the production of arms and landmines.
- Financial leaders should provide care for children who are orphaned or disabled because of war.
- Media should put programmes on television that set an example for children, and programmes should not just show violence.
- Stop making violent toys.

What CHILDREN can do:

- Put pressure on governments to keep their promises to improve international cooperation.
- Help set up courses and activities in schools that encourage peace and tolerance.
- Advocate for peace through marches, games, theatre and music.
- Create a campaign for children against war to create more awareness about the effects of war on children.

HIV/AIDS

ISSUE: More than half of the people infected with HIV are young people aged 24 and younger. There are also millions of AIDS orphans, children who have lost one or both parents to the disease. These children are often left without the resources to support themselves and must leave school and go to work to care for themselves and their families.

PROFILE IN ACTIVISM

Cristian Acosta, Uruguay, 16

"I work for a NGO called Biblio-red, which teaches computer lessons to give people access to this kind of knowledge. I also participated in an intergenerational dialogue organized by ICRW, and I work with my mother and a group of teachers giving free sports lessons to children who cannot pay for them. I am interested in these issues because I live in a country where only the people who have money can enjoy a good life. All this began when I was a student in a pro-

gramme called 'Piloteando Futuros'. The main obstacle I had to face was my age; when you are young it is very difficult to be taken seriously, I mean, you have to earn the respect of adults. Among my achievements I think one of the best is to see that a child who was crying is now laughing. Besides, we managed to get into school children who were on the street before and now want to live. I am only one of many people who do things for others."



© 2002 Jeff Zucker

Dewi Sartika, 14, of Indonesia participates in the inter-generational dialogue with children from Asia, 9 May 2002.





Monica Rusk, 18, from the USA (right, at table) responds to a question during a press conference at the Manhattan Center, where the two final days of the Forum took part. Next to her (at left) is Khadija Iman, 14, from Kenya.

What LEADERS can do:

- Provide free HIV/AIDS testing and counselling and make prevention and treatment information available to the public.
- Provide life skills education to children from an early age. Life skills education should also be provided to parents.
- Provide home-based care and support to children who become heads of households when their parents die.
- Make adoption arrangements for children who were orphaned after their parents died of AIDS.
- Distribute funding and medicines evenly throughout regions within countries so that all people have equal access to services.
- Drug companies should price medication according to what a country can afford.
- Include children in HIV/AIDS prevention programme development and implementation.
- Traditional leaders, chiefs and religious leaders should break their silence and address the issues of AIDS in an open and honest manner.
- Promote abstinence as one of the best ways to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, encourage faithfulness and make condoms available.
- Provide education about cultural practices that contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS.
- Provide education to the caregivers of AIDS patients.

- Prevent discrimination towards people living with HIV/AIDS by educating the public.

What CHILDREN can do:

- Take an active role in educating others about HIV/AIDS.
- Present issues and solutions through the media.
- Establish international and regional networks of young people to exchange ideas about HIV/AIDS prevention programmes.
- Learn what individuals can do to prevent HIV infection.

Poverty

Poverty is the root cause of many problems facing children, including lack of access to education and health services; child labour, abuse and exploitation; HIV/AIDS; and violence and war.

What LEADERS can do:

To break the vicious cycle of poverty that affects the lives of millions of children, we recommend that leaders:

- Honour the agreement that developed countries will give 0.7% of their GNP to poorer countries.
- Establish national committees that include children and young people to look at causes of poverty and work out solutions.

"If you want to set up schools, make sure you have a teacher, a library. The promises of the past have left us disenchanted. The result is not what you said, which is why we are worried. Listen to the children not with your ears, but with your hearts."

—Gael Mbemba, 18, Chad

PROFILE IN ACTIVISM

Alexandru Bogdan Rosu, Romania, 16

"I'm especially interested in the issue of children's participation, because I've been at times (mostly in school) denied this natural right, and I've also observed that the decisions that are taken on behalf of children, and not with children, are mostly not viable. Promoting children's participation isn't an easy task: In Romania, we have a National Camp. I've been part of the camp's council, which was made up of children. The council took every major decision concerning the camp. Also, during

each day, we had workshops coordinated by children. Together with two other colleagues, we coordinated the camp's magazine, which contained the children's views. People's old mentalities and the lack of communication are the toughest obstacles to break. My best success is my participation in the Special Session on Children, which says a lot. I really love to interact with other people, I love having fun, and I'm really anxious for the follow-up of the Special Session!"



"If we come together and walk together in one step, we can make a difference."

—Joseph Tamale, 12, Uganda

- Provide free education to all children.
- Extend support and funding for services for children who live in countries undergoing sanctions so that their needs are met and their rights respected.
- Provide skills training to people who are unemployed.

What CHILDREN can do:

- Work with NGOs in communities and governments on their plans of action to reduce poverty.
- Launch informational campaigns to let people know about the effects of poverty on children.
- Create anti-poverty committees that work to improve the standard of living, education and health care for children and families.

The Environment

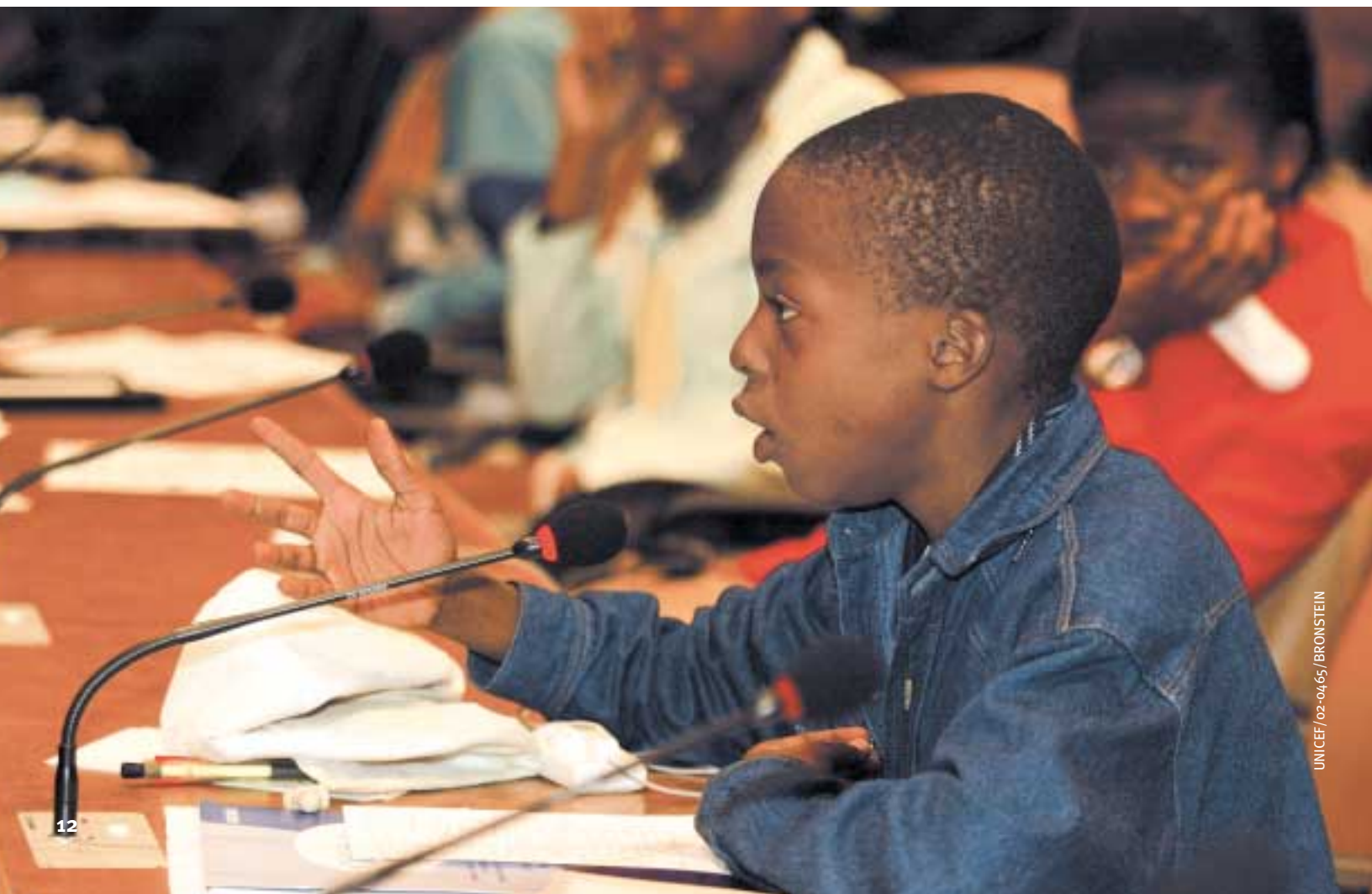
THE ISSUES: A world fit for children is a world that is clean, green and safe. It is also a world that respects the living environments of all

children, including those with disabilities. Some of the major environmental problems include water shortage and contamination; air, noise and other pollution; global warming and the destruction of green spaces and natural habitats.

What LEADERS can do:

- Pass and enforce laws that protect natural habitats and reduce pollution.
- Enact policies that conserve and protect natural resources and decrease the manufacture and use of packaged goods.
- Restrict and regulate development.
- Improve water and sanitation systems.
- Create more water purification systems so that more people have access to clean drinking water.
- Create healthy environments by decreasing noise, air and lead pollution and finding solutions to water problems.
- Tax businesses that pollute.
- Establish a global committee to monitor and find solutions to environmental issues.

"If we don't unite, we will be gone," 12-year old Joseph Tamale from Uganda told African leaders. He asked: "Who will pay those big loans when they come due in 20 or 30 years? It will be us."



What CHILDREN can do:

- Get involved with environmental groups at community and national levels.
- Do your part by conserving energy, recycling, using public transportation and protecting natural resources and habitats.

Participation

The Convention on the Rights of the Child has a number of rights relating to children's participation in matters that affect their lives (articles 12 and 13). Because all too often parents and societies do not see the value of young people's involvement, children are not heard. Their opinions not taken into account.

What LEADERS can do:

- Enact policies to ensure children's participation is real and meaningful.
- Create and support children's councils and parliaments.
- Incorporate children's participation in national plans of action and pass laws that make

participation rights a reality.

- Incorporate children's rights in school curricula.
- The United Nations should set up an organization or committee made up of children to discuss and influence the issues that affect them.

What CHILDREN can do:

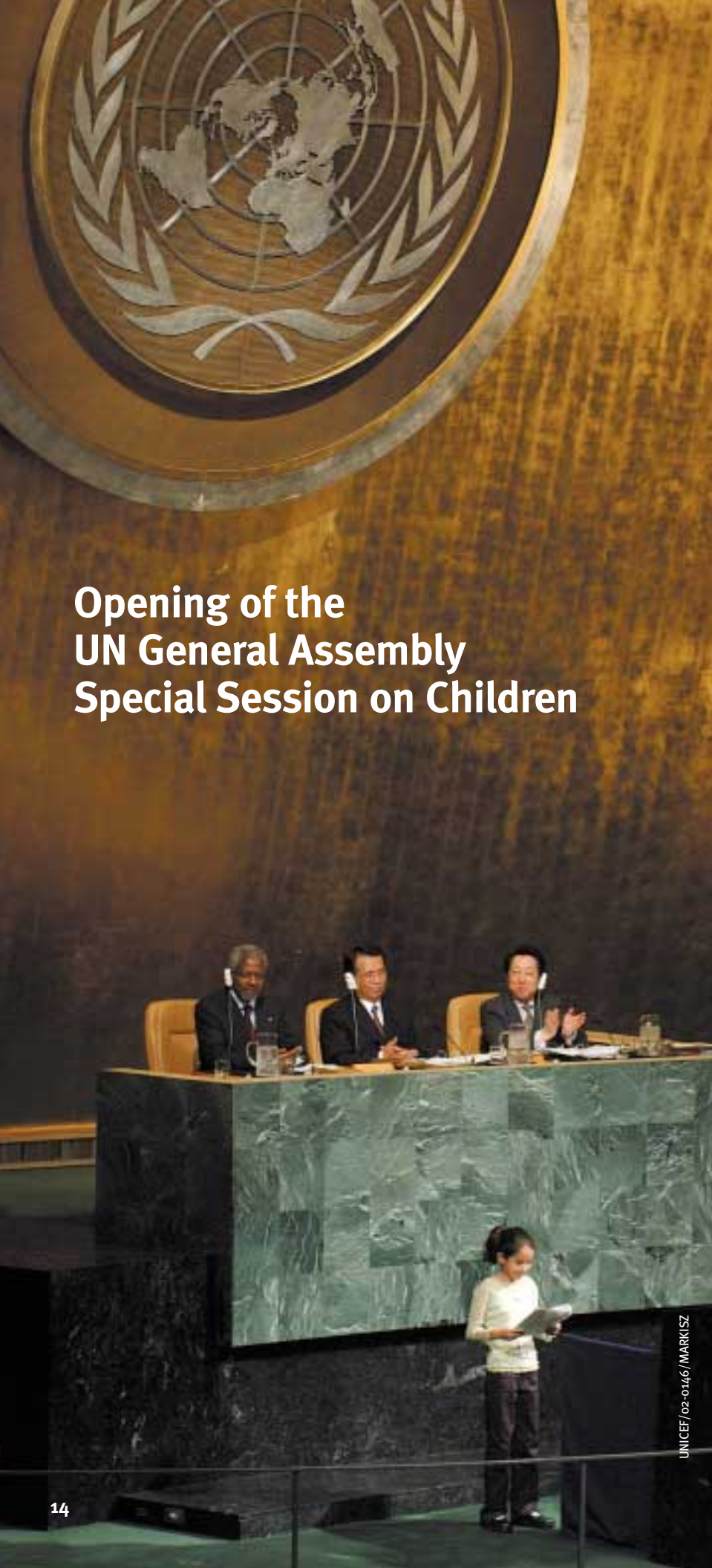
- Educate peers, family, teachers and decision makers about children's participation.
- Be active in community and national governments so children's voices are heard.
- Build child-led organizations.
- Establish national and global networks to share experiences and ideas about how to get involved in communities and governments.

"We children don't work because we want to, but because there is not enough to feed and care for our families."

—Miriam A. Melendez, 16, Guatemala

Miriam A. Melendez, 16, from Guatemala, speaks passionately about child labour at the inter-generational dialogue with children from Latin America and the Caribbean, 8 May, 2002.





Opening of the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children

8 May 2002

After three days of hard work, children at the Children's Forum agreed on the key challenges facing young people and on the ways that governments and children themselves can make a difference. They entitled their statement 'A World Fit for Us'.

The message was delivered to the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children by child delegates, Gabriela Azurduy Arrieta, 13, from Bolivia, and Audrey Cheynut, 17, from Monaco, on 8 May 2002. It was the first time that children addressed a formal session of the UN and a proud moment for children everywhere.

What would a World Fit for Children look like? Here is what the Children's Forum envisions...

A World Fit for Us

We are the world's children.
We are the victims of exploitation and abuse.
We are street children.
We are the children of war.
We are the victims and orphans of HIV/AIDS.
We are denied good-quality education and health care.
We are victims of political, economic, cultural, religious and environmental discrimination.
We are the children whose voices are not being heard: it is time we are taken into account.

We want a world fit for children, because a world fit for us is a world fit for everyone.

In this world,

We see respect for the rights of the child:

- governments and adults having a real and effective commitment to the principle of children's rights and applying the Convention on the Rights of the Child to all children,
- safe, secure and healthy environments for children in families, communities, and nations.

We see an end to exploitation, abuse and violence:

- laws that protect children from exploitation and abuse being implemented and respected by all,
- centres and programmes that help to rebuild the lives of victimized children.

We see an end to war:

- world leaders resolving conflict through peaceful dialogue instead of by using force,
- child refugees and child victims of war protected in every way and having the same opportunities as all other children,
- disarmament, elimination of the arms trade and an end to the use of child soldiers.

We see the provision of health care:

- affordable and accessible life-saving drugs and treatment for all children,
- strong and accountable partnerships established among all to promote better health for children.

We see the eradication of HIV/AIDS:

- educational systems that include HIV prevention programmes,
- free testing and counselling centres,
- information about HIV/AIDS freely available to the public,
- orphans of AIDS and children living with HIV/AIDS cared for and enjoying the same opportunities as all other children.

We see the protection of the environment:

- conservation and rescue of natural resources,
- awareness of the need to live in environments that are healthy and favourable to our development,
- accessible surroundings for children with special needs.

We see an end to the vicious cycle of poverty:

- anti-poverty committees that bring about transparency in expenditure and give attention to the needs of all children,
- cancellation of the debt that impedes progress for children.

We see the provision of education:

- equal opportunities and access to quality education that is free and compulsory,
- school environments in which children feel happy about learning,
- education for life that goes beyond the academic and includes lessons in understanding, human rights, peace, acceptance and active citizenship.

We see the active participation of children:

- raised awareness and respect among people of all ages about every child's right to full and meaningful participation, in the spirit of the Convention on the Rights of the Child,
- children actively involved in decision-making at all levels and in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating all matters affecting the rights of the child.

We pledge an equal partnership in this fight for children's rights. And while we promise to support the actions you take on behalf of children, we also ask for your commitment and support in the actions we are taking, because the children of the world are misunderstood.

We are not the sources of problems; we are the resources that are needed to solve them. We are not expenses; we are investments. We are not just young people; we are people and citizens of this world.

Until others accept their responsibility to us, we will fight for our rights.

We have the will, the knowledge, the sensitivity and the dedication.

We promise that as adults we will defend children's rights with the same passion that we have now as children.

We promise to treat each other with dignity and respect.

We promise to be open and sensitive to our differences.

We are the children of the world, and despite our different backgrounds, we share a common reality.

We are united by our struggle to make the world a better place for all.

You call us the future, but we are also the present.

The message was delivered to the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children by child delegates, Gabriela Azurduy Arrieta, 13, from Bolivia (at left) and Audrey Cheynut, 17, from Monaco (below) on 8 May 2002. It was the first time that children addressed a formal session of the United Nations on behalf of children, and a proud moment for children everywhere.

8-10 MAY 2002: The UN Special Session on Children



UNICEF/02-0466/BRONSTEIN

H.E. Mr. Joaquim Alberto Chissano, President of Mozambique, speaking on the importance of youth activism and encouraging children to stay involved. Intergenerational dialogue with children from Africa, 9 May 2002.

The First-ever UN Special Session on Children was held in New York, May 8-10, 2002

The Special Session was, indeed, special. Nearly 70 Heads of State and Government and other summit-level participants, 250 parliamentarians from 75 countries, almost 2,000 delegates from non-governmental organizations, more than 400 child delegates from 154 different countries, hundreds of journalists, including child journalists, and dozens of business leaders and celebrities took part.

Participants – including children – discussed what progress was made during the decade since the World Summit for Children and what should be done now for – and **with** – children to make sure they have the best possible lives and opportunities.

They agreed that children’s rights should be upheld and outlined many specific ways to make this goal a reality.

The forum also helped prepare the children for participation in the Special Session, at which many had the opportunity to play key roles. They addressed the General Assembly on the first day of the Special Session. They were involved in a number of high-level round-table discussions, workshops and intergenerational dialogues; they spoke directly with Heads of State and delegations. In all, many important precedents were set for future communication between young people and the officials who represent them, with a number of leaders pledging to continue the dialogue back home.

Children’s participation in the Special Session on Children

Participants from the Children’s Forum took active roles in numerous events of the Special Session. The following are key highlights:

- Five intergenerational dialogues were organized between children and heads of delegation and UN agencies, allowing them to meet in small groups to discuss issues of concern to them. In general, the dialogues were lively and informative. The children were usually well prepared as moderators, even though for many it was their first time in the role. Although adult participants were, as a rule, forthcoming and genuinely interested in exchanging points of view, some were unable or unwilling to respond to the children’s questions. For the children, this was a frustrating experience, showing, they said, that leaders still do not take them seriously.
- Participants gathered with government and NGO representatives to review the Children’s Forum and the issues it had covered. The event was planned and conducted entirely by the children themselves; eight young presenters – members of the

“We have the ‘right’ to participate, but in many countries this right is still ignored.”

Latoya Sumter, 17, Suriname, at the intergenerational dialogue with children from Latin America and the Caribbean, 8 May 2002.





A Global Movement for Children

Convention on the Rights of the Child is adopted by the United Nations	World Summit for Children	Children's Forum	Special Session on Children
<p>The Convention spells out children's rights and asks countries to protect these rights. These rights include education, protection, health care and survival. By 2002, almost every country in the world had ratified the Convention.</p>	<p>Governments met at the United Nations to agree on what action they would take to make sure children were healthy, educated and protected from war and exploitation. They outlined different goals and promised to get together again in 10 years at a special session for children to review their progress and set new goals for the next decade.</p>	<p>More than 400 child delegates to the United Nations Special Session on Children prepared for their participation at the Special Session. They discussed the many issues facing children today and ways young people can work with world leaders to make a difference in the lives of children everywhere.</p>	<p>A follow-up to the World Summit for Children, governments, world leaders, business people, NGOs and children looked at the progress made since 1990 and agreed on the next steps to take to create a better world fit for children.</p>
<p>20 November 1989</p>	<p>29-30 September 1990</p>	<p>5-7 May 2002</p>	<p>8-10 May 2002</p>



Children involved in a debate with key decision makers at the inter-generational dialogue with children from Latin America and the Caribbean, 8 May 2002.

UNICEF/02-0488/DECSARE

Rapporteur Committee – outlined the issues and then suggested what governments and young people can do to address them. The children recommended the establishment of leadership training workshops as well as national, regional and international children’s councils. These councils would meet regularly to monitor governments’ efforts to fulfil their promises to children. The children pledged to be active in their communities when they return home. "We take it upon ourselves to go back home and fight for ourselves," said one young person in the audience. "We know what’s best for us." Another said, "We are the builders of humanity – give us the warmth of the equator."

- The Inter-Parliamentary Union and UNICEF jointly convened a forum to mobilize parliaments in both industrialized and developing countries to take on children’s issues. About 250 parliamentarians from 75 parliaments attended the forum; a number of children represented children’s parliaments. Bintou Sonko from the Gambia represented the Children’s Forum. She told participants, "We want youth to have a say in governance." Of the floor’s 40 interventions, children made 10, mentioning, among other things, the importance of adopting a child-rights perspective in all legislative matters.
- Three representatives from the Children’s Forum – Mandisa Nakana (16, South Africa), Alexandru Bogdan Rosu (16, Romania) and Laura Kerstin Hannant (16, Canada) – were

chosen to join Mrs. Nane Annan, Carol Bellamy and moderators Sadako Ogata and Nafis Sadik at the forum on Women’s Leadership for Children. The three young people presented their own statement, eloquent and heartfelt, to the forum. They each took turns speaking and closed most movingly with these words:

"Coming away from this experience, it is our hope that more progress will be made in the next 10 years, than was made in the last.

"We pledge an equal partnership in this fight for children’s rights, and while we promise to support the actions you take on behalf of children, we also ask for your commitment and support in the actions we are taking.

"We are taking our step to the middle and extending our hands to you-, our question is, will you meet us halfway?"

- Three high-level Round Tables took place during the Special Session on the overall theme "Renewal of commitment and future action for children in the next decade." In each of the three round-table discussions, two children spoke directly with Heads of State and delegations. "I am the voice of all the children who have suffered throughout the world, you who are members of mankind, why have you let these things happen?" said Marie-Claire Umuhozo 17, from Rwanda who spoke about the impact of the country’s genocide on children.

To love, care for and protect us should be a lifelong privilege.

—Caroline Barebwoha, 16, Uganda, addressing one of the round-table discussions with Heads of State and delegations.

PROFILE IN ACTIVISM

Miryam Cunduri, Ecuador, 11

"I live in Ecuador, close to one of the highest volcanoes in the world. I was chosen to be the General-Secretary of Culture of the Parliament of Indigenous Girls and Boys from Ecuador. My responsibilities are to promote our culture together with that of

the rest of the country's children to show that all children have the same rights. The Special Session was a chance to discuss topics that are going to be crucial for a better world, in which children must be among the leading actors."



UNICEF02-0083/MARKISZ

Children spoke directly to the Heads of State of their regions at five intergenerational dialogues.

"When networks network with networks, your voice will be stronger. Find allies, work hard, and we will listen."

—Graça Machel, former Minister of Education in Mozambique, and expert on children and armed conflict.

Getting involved in creating a World Fit for Children

The Special Session is a part of a massive Global Movement for Children (GMC), which aims to build support for children's rights and investments in children. The Movement works with young people, organizations and governments to make a difference. Spearheaded by UNICEF, the Global Movement for Children outlines 10 key actions and principles designed to improve children's lives and futures. In the months leading up to the Special Session, more than 94 million people pledged their support for the 10-point calls to action through the world-wide 'Say Yes for Children' campaign. This extraordinary feat earned the pledge drive a place in the Guinness Book of World Records. For more information, check out the GMC website: www.gmfc.org

Youth Journalists: Telling it like it is.

There were more than 50 young journalists from around the world reporting about events at the Children's Forum and Special Session. Assigned to get the scoop on children's activities in their countries and their experiences at the Forum and Special Session, the reporters conducted interviews with youth activists, as well as decision makers from governments and the United Nations. One

group included 11 reporters from Quebec, Canada's 'Radio Enfant', who set up operations at the Manhattan Center, where the Children's Forum took place. The group broadcast panel discussions, one-on-one interviews and music and entertainment from the Forum. Young scribes – aged 12 to 15 – from the Belfast bureau of the Children's Express, United Kingdom, covered the Special Session events and another group of young reporters published a daily record of Special Session events in a newspaper called *On the Record for Children*.

There are many ways children can get involved.

ACTION: Contact your government to learn about its plan of action to meet the goals set out at the Special Session. Find out how young people can contribute to its development and implementation.

ACTION: Push for child-friendly health services to prevent unwanted pregnancies and stop the spread of HIV/AIDS.

ACTION: Get involved in peer counselling and education to help other young people learn about their rights and ways to avoid risky or dangerous behaviours.

PROFILE IN ACTIVISM

Fama Amadou Diao, Senegal, 17

"I work for a charitable organization called SOLIKEN. This work doesn't prevent me from working also in the area of education. There are many children in the world – and also in Senegal – who don't have access to education. And when they have access to the schools, sometimes they don't receive the quality education they need for their future. A more sustained participation of governments, NGOs and young people themselves could help to develop this area and make it more profitable for everybody.

We are currently training young people on how to use the new information and communication technologies. This is working well and can be useful to integrate better NTIC [new information and communication technologies] into young people's education, both formal and informal.

I cannot think of any obstacle since our work has been very well received by a lot of people. There are many people who help us to achieve our goals."



© 2002 Jeff Zuckler

"...together we will build a world in which all girls and boys can enjoy childhood — a time of play and learning, in which they are loved, respected and cherished, their rights are promoted and protected, without discrimination of any kind, where their safety and well-being are paramount, and where they can develop in health, peace and dignity."

—‘A World Fit For Children’

say
YES
for children



**Global Movement
for Children**

Nelson Mandela, former President of South Africa and fervent promoter of children's rights receives the tally of the 94 million pledges of the 'Say Yes for Children' campaign at the closing ceremony of the Children's Forum, Manhattan Center, 7 May, 2002





Li Yi, 18, from China, one of the moderators of the intergenerational dialogue with children from Asia, 9 May 2002.

UNICEF/02-0468/DECESARE



Marleni Cuellar from Belize (at right), and Dinorah Cantu from Mexico (center), moderators of the Intergenerational dialogue with children from Latin America and the Caribbean, listen to Mr. Juan Somavia, Director General of the International Labour Organization, 8 May, 2002.

UNICEF/02-0485/DECESARE

ACTION: Make sure other children in your country know about their rights.

ACTION: Launch a campaign to educate the public about the effects of poverty and war on children.

ACTION: Get involved with local and national NGOs that help children and families.

ACTION: Take every opportunity available to get an education.

ACTION: Let the media know about the importance of children's issues and rights.

ACTION: Work with governments and organizations to create support for children orphaned or affected by AIDS.

ACTION: Learn more about the Global Movement for Children and connect with other young activists at Voices of Youth, UNICEF's website for young people, www.unicef.org/voy

"We...hope we have no air pollution and have instead a peaceful environment, free from violence, abuse and exploitation."

— Jin Ling Yan, 18, China, at panel 'Child-Friendly Cities: Working to fulfil the rights of children'.

"Children are change makers. We are not crawling insects, but butterflies. We are birds of freedom."

—Sanjog Thakuri, 16, Nepal

PROFILE IN ACTIVISM

Garri Shahinyan, Armenia, 16

"I'm very interested in the issues concerning children and their rights, or to be correct, our rights. I got interested in those issues after I saw for the first time the human rights textbook for Armenian schools. I've been involved in some processes in my country and in the creating of national plans of action too. But the greatest experience for me was the Children's Forum. I hope that the Special Session and the Forum won't be just another meeting of big bosses after which

nothing would be changed. And I'm almost sure it won't be, because for the first time we were actively involved in that kind of meeting and were free to express our views. The main obstacles are that most adults still can't realize that children and young people can have their own and valuable opinions. The successes are that I'm here in New York at the Special Session and I can ask questions to those who rule the world and get answers."



© 2002 Jeff Zucker

The Children's Forum in Facts and Figures

404 children from **154** countries

242 girls and **162** boys aged between 8 and 18 years old

264 children from **142** Government delegations

140 children from **106** NGO delegations

Breakdown according to United Nations regions:

- **Africa:**

Total participants: **116**

47 out of 53 countries represented:

89%



- **Asia:**

Total participants: **94**

36 out of 50 countries represented:

72%



- **Western Europe & other States:**

Total participants: **82**

26 out of 27 countries represented:

96%



- **Latin America and the Caribbean:**

Total participants: **75**

26 out of 33 countries represented:

79%



- **Eastern Europe:**

Total participants : **37**

19 out of 21 countries represented:

90%



More than 200 other children who could not participate in the Children's Forum attended only the Special Session on Children:

50 child journalists

107 children from NGO delegations

50 (approx.) children from Government delegations



"I felt very happy that I had made so many friends and gotten the chance to share my views with my brothers and sisters from other countries. I felt that the world's children are one, and nobody can separate them."

—Jehanzeb Khan, 12, Pakistan

It was not all work at the Children's Forum. Participants also had time to get to know each other, to laugh, to sing and to dance together.

From the first day of the Forum to the last day of the Special Session, children of different backgrounds, nationalities and languages connected.

There were hundreds of new friendships made and as many e-mail addresses exchanged. The children – united in a vision of peace and happiness – promised to meet again.



*"We are not
the sources of problems;
we are the resources
that are needed to solve them.
We are not expenses;
we are investments.
We are not just young people;
we are people
and citizens of this world."*

*From 'A World Fit for Us'
Message from the Children's Forum.*

Published by UNICEF
United Nations Children's Fund
October 2002

For more information contact:
www.unicef.org

With thanks to the Government
of Canada for their support

Printed on recycled paper

unicef 
United Nations Children's Fund

UNICEF/02-0077/MARKISZ

