

CHILD-FRIENDLY CITIES: WORKING TO FULFIL THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

[This document, together with other information on the Special Session on Children, is available on the official site:

<http://www.unicef.org/specialsession>]

The panel on Child Friendly Cities (CFCs) brought together Mayors, NGOs UN representatives and children to highlight good practices in urban areas and identify strategies for local governments to advance the Global Movement for Children. The discussion incorporated utopian visions, dark realities and earthbound actions taken to support and sustain CFCs.

The Children's Forum sent a message to the Panel through a visual presentation by its representative, 18-year-old Jin Ling Yang from China. With an innovative and imaginative flair, she elaborated on a drawing that represented two opposite scenarios:

- One was a real city of today filled with polluted air, toxic waste and children working in the streets. This is a city, she said, where “children are not properly cared for by their parents who are too busy with their jobs and, as they grow up, they can meet bad company and pick up risky habits like taking drugs.”
- The second drawing was a ‘dream city’ of tomorrow with green places to play, schools for all children to attend, “without being punished by teachers,” plenty of hospitals...” and “a place where there is no child labour.” Municipal governments, she said, should make sure that parents take good care of their children. Children should have more time for play, shelter, health care and education.

The panel was a demonstration of good practices as several mayors and representatives from the UN and NGO communities described the history of child friendly city initiatives and particular efforts in promoting and modernizing municipal programmes and policies in defense of children and their rights.

The Child-Friendly Cities Initiative was launched at Habitat II in Istanbul in 1996 by UNICEF and UN-Habitat. Merging the goals of the Habitat Agenda and the CRC, said Anna Kajamulo Tibaijuka, Executive Director of UN Habitat, “we were jointly upholding the rights of children and urban dwellers.” The following year, the first child-friendly cities meeting was held in Accra, and issued a strong call to mayors and local authorities in Africa to create CFCs.

A CFC Secretariat was established in 2000 at the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre (IRC) in Florence to distill lessons from child friendly municipalities and a wide range of models focused on child participation in local governments, communities and families. "There is a new sense of citizenship being generated in children," said Marta Santos Pais, Director of the IRC and moderator of the panel. The CFCs Secretariat was created through a collaboration among UNICEF, UN Habitat, the Government of Italy, the Italian National Committee for UNICEF, and the Italian NGO, Istituto degli Innocenti.

Mayors from cities in the Philippines, Mauritania and Bangladesh shared perspectives on the common problems confronting urban families and children – overcrowding, disease, lack of sanitation, pollution, abuse and exploitation, youth unemployment and large numbers of rural children pushed into cities by poverty or orphaned by HIV/AIDS. Although diverse in nature, the programmes they described – which ranged from birth registration campaigns to annual “state of the city” reports or national networks - had the common denominator of multisectoral approaches to implement the CRC at the local level. These included a city-level agenda for children, a municipal legal framework for implementing the CRC, child impact assessments of all programmes, budget allocations and monitoring mechanisms to measure progress.

- Mayor Jose Atienza of Manila told the group that his city – "...plagued by overcrowding, poverty and unemployment" – is also one of 25 provinces and cities that are part of the growing Child Friendly movement in the Philippines. Fostering partnerships with community leaders, academic institutions, business and religious groups, the Manila Child Friendly Initiative has focused on mainstreaming children in the city’s development agenda and formulating new policies, legislation and structures to uphold and defend children’s rights. As an example, the mayor said that the national Child Friendly Initiative has strengthened coordination with the juvenile justice system so that cases of young offenders can be referred, dealt with and disposed of more rapidly and child witnesses can be protected from trauma and harassment.
- In 1996, a group of mayors in Mauritania created the Mauritanian Initiative of Mayors Defenders of Children, a network that now includes 72 out of 216 municipalities in the country. Mohamed Abdellahi Ould Mohamed Jules, President of the Mauritanian Mayors Initiative for Children, described a number of innovative, low-cost and child-friendly municipal programmes and policies in several cities, including his own municipality of Mederdra.

For example, the ‘Our School, Green and Open’ programme, targets 10 schools with vegetable gardens, trees planted in courtyards and playgrounds and a fence to keep out livestock. Sales from one-half of the vegetable produce contributes to a small fund, which the children use to finance projects and school celebrations. The remaining produce is donated to the municipal Nutrition Center to improve the meals of children suffering from malnutrition. Expanding its impact, this Initiative integrates school and community, makes children aware of the importance of nutrition and teaches them respect for the environment in this ecologically-fragile country of deserts.

- In the city of Rajshahi, Bangladesh, a focused campaign to promote birth registration has proven a most effective entry point to building a child friendly and child rights movement. During the 1997 Child Rights Week, explained Mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu, the city carried out a door-to-door campaign registering births of all children under five years old.

Over 38,000 children were registered in a single week, he said, and a new system of birth data registration was introduced, assigning new tasks to the city health department.

Having set up the system, the mayor described the next steps and multiplier impact of this campaign. First, he said, the campaign heavily promoted the importance of the birth certificate so that people would demand one for their children. Using electronic software in Bengali, birth registrations were then linked with the database of immunization extension programmes to improve coverage and facilitate follow-up. The system set offers a model for all of Bangladesh to follow, he ventured, adding: "This is how cities become trendsetters within countries."

- The Child-Friendly Mayors' programme initiated by Brazil's Abrinq Foundation supports municipal administrations that plan and implement integrated public policies and programmes to protect children and adolescents. The Abrinq Foundation was created by a group of businessmen in the toy manufacturing industry to earmark a portion of their profits to advance the rights of children and adolescents in urban areas and municipalities

In order to qualify for funding, cities must develop a diagnostic map of children and adolescents, an ongoing assessment process based on clear and measurable social indicators, the creation of networks linking local government agencies, NGOs, the private sector and young people. So far, 821 mayors have joined the initiative, representing 15 per cent of Brazil's municipalities and 26 per cent of its population. Descriptions of 6,000 local projects are available on the project's website and awards were presented to the 20 best practices and public policies.

The Child-Friendly Cities Initiative is also being developed in a number of industrialized countries, Italy being the most prominent example. To date, some 400 Italian mayors have embraced the initiative. Since 1998, Italy's Environmental Ministry has awarded best performing cities a prize of Euro 100,000. In Child-Friendly Cities, schools, NGOs and municipal governments together analyze the situation of their city as it is and envision the city of their dreams. Then they set to work to transform dreams into reality through concrete projects to improve local conditions and services.

Several young people present observed pointedly that a truly child-friendly city does not yet exist anywhere in the world. They demanded proof that that the utopia of a child-friendly city can really be achieved in deeds and actions.

KEY COMMITMENTS AND ACTION POINTS

- a) At the UN Special Session on Children, Mayors reaffirmed their commitment to be active spokespersons for Children's Rights and called for:
 1. Mayors and Local Authorities all over the world to develop action plans for their cities to become child-friendly and proactive of children's rights.
 2. Mayors and Local Authorities to promote the participation of children and adolescents as actors of change in decision-making processes in their cities and in the process of implementation and evaluation of municipal policies.

3. UNICEF, UN-HABITAT and other partners to continue to promote child-friendly cities all over the world and to enhance capacity building of local authorities towards this end.
4. Called on UNICEF through the Child-Friendly Cities Secretariat to make Child-Friendly experiences and good practices widely available.

b) Mayors have further committed to:

- Advance a global network of Mayors promoting child-friendly cities
- Promote exchange of information, experiences and good practices at the local level
- Engage others as advocates for the promotion of children's rights, including parents and teachers.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS

The Child-Friendly Cities Secretariat was asked to:

- 1) Support the networking and information exchange on children and cities to ensure that these experiences are collected and made widely available;
- 2) Highlight NGOs' work at the municipal level to better incorporate their actions to safeguard the rights of children in the city development agendas.
- 3) Facilitate South/South exchanges between mayors and municipal technical staff to better implement and monitor child-focused policies and programmes.

UN-HABITAT proposed that UNICEF and Habitat continue to work together to mutually support work at the city level. And also that the Child Friendly Cities Secretariat continue to link with UN-HABITAT at the global level.