

PROMOTING HEALTHY LIVES

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

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

“A child is born and begins her journey through life. Her parents live on less than \$2 per day. Like other children in the poor half of our world, there is a one-in-five risk that she will have died before she is five. She, and millions of others like her, have no choice. They march into life like soldiers into killing fields.”

– Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland, Director-General, WHO

“The countdown on maternal and newborn mortality must start.”

– Tomris Turmen, Executive Director, Family and Community Health Cluster, WHO

Despite the progress made over the past decade, some 11 million young children continue to die each year from the effects of disease and inadequate nutrition. In some countries the toll rises to more than one in five dying before their fifth birthday, and many of those who survive are unable to grow and develop to their full potential.

It was against this backdrop that six panel meetings conferred on key issues for safeguarding children’s survival and development: protecting the inter-linked dyad of mother and newborn; guaranteeing a healthy environment; completing ‘the last mile’ towards the eradication of polio; following through on the initiatives of the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization; ensuring a ‘smart start’ for children by eliminating iodine deficiency; and combating malaria, still the chief killer of children in Africa. The International Pediatrics Association was only one of the numerous groups that convened additional meetings on these and related topics.

This document contains a summary of the following events:

Healthy mothers, healthy babies

The last mile to end polio

The Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization

Eliminating iodine deficiency

Reducing the impact of malaria on child health

Environmental Impact on Health

◆ **HEALTHY MOTHERS, HEALTHY BABIES**

Newborn health worldwide continues to be appalling, with 40 per cent of deaths before five occurring in the first 28 days of life. Maternal and newborn health are inextricably linked but too often fall between the cracks in existing public health programmes that have yet to remedy the dearth of skilled birth attendants and effective referral services for emergency obstetric care, especially in rural areas. The best nutrition and health outcomes result from supporting the mother/child dyad for at least three years, notably by promotion of sound breastfeeding practices.

As one of the two speakers opening the meeting, Virginia Gillum de Quiroga, First Lady of Bolivia, told the vivid story of one of her household staff who initially received faulty medical advice towards the end of her pregnancy and had lacked the self-esteem to question it. UNDP Administrator, Mark Malloch Brown underscored the importance of placing human beings at the center of development and subordinating institutions to their proper roles, while noting nonetheless that human beings cannot be equipped to fulfil their destinies and expectations without empowering women to breastfeed and implementing other interventions for healthy babies.

Dr. Vinod Paul, Director of the WHO Collaborating Center for Training and Research in Newborn Care based in New Delhi, described the challenges in India, whose annual tally of 1.2 million newborn deaths accounts for nearly 30 per cent of the worldwide total. Neonatal tetanus continues to cause the majority of these deaths, despite the accomplishment of slashing the number of cases from 300,000 a year in the early 1980s to the present 4,000 a year. Safe birthing has proved harder to achieve and is being tackled by such initiatives as training physicians and birth attendants, upgrading facilities and a new proposal for creating a cadre of community midwives.

Dr. Doyin Oluwole, Director of Family and Reproductive Health for WHO in Africa, stressed the need to assign far greater prominence to maternal and newborn care in public health systems. Maternal and newborn mortality continues to be high in Africa, the causes largely preventable and the same factors contributing to both. Emergency obstetric care and skilled personnel are most needed in rural areas, along with improved emergency transport, road and communication systems.

Janet Museveni, First Lady of Uganda, reported on the risks to newborns that followed the breakdown of health services in her country during the 1970s and 1980s. Current efforts focus on refurbishing district hospitals, establishing clinics near villages, improving transport and communication systems and supplying traditional birth attendants with the training and equipment for modern birthing practices.

A case study presented by Dr. Nabeela Ali, Manager of the Saving Newborn Lives programme spearheaded by Save the Children USA in Pakistan, showed how social mobilization has fostered behavioral change to reduce neonatal tetanus in high-risk districts. Committed partnerships with policy makers and a carefully researched communication strategy are key to success. An

alternative approach to behavioral change was described by Dr. Zilda Arns Neumann, founder of the Pastoral da Criança (Children's Pastorate) in Brazil, who explained how they organize groups of families and communities into a solidarity network for sharing the knowledge to protect the well-being of mothers and children under six.

◆ THE LAST MILE TO END POLIO

It is estimated that 3 million children are able to walk today because of a campaign begun in 1988 to vaccinate all the world's children against polio. In 1988, polio paralyzed more than 1,000 children a day; the global campaign to eradicate polio has brought that figure down to fewer than 500 cases a year.

At a brief ceremony on 8 May, the leaders of the campaign pledged to end polio once and for all by 2005. Secretary Tommy Thompson of the US Department for Health and Human Services joined the directors of WHO, UNICEF, Rotary International and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States in signing the pledge, while UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador Roger Moore and two 16-year-old polio activists from Nigeria and Pakistan stood witness.

Dr. Dave Fleming, Acting Director of the US Centers for Disease Prevention and Control, summed up the spirit of the occasion by saying "The theft of human potential is about to come to an end."

But challenges remain before polio can be finally beaten back. The political commitment has to be sustained to complete 'the last mile'; all children have to be immunized, especially those in areas affected by conflict; and the campaign funding falls short by \$275 million. Chairman Luis Vicente Giay of Rotary International, a long-term supporter of the campaign, announced at the ceremony that Rotary would shortly be launching a new drive to raise an additional \$80 million.

◆ THE GLOBAL ALLIANCE FOR VACCINES AND IMMUNIZATION

Nearly 3 million people die each year from diseases preventable by immunization, and most are children under five.

The Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) was created in 1999, at a time when immunization levels were faltering in many countries and some preventable diseases were making a comeback. An innovative partnership of governments, international organizations, major philanthropists, research institutions and the private sector, the Alliance is currently chaired by UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy and has so far committed more than \$850 million to 55 nations where per capita income is below \$1,000 a year.

At the panel meeting on GAVI, Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland, Director-General of WHO, cited the Alliance as setting an excellent example for other public/private partnerships, noting that investment in health is essential for eliminating poverty but is under-funded both by the governments of developing countries and by the international community. "Initiatives like GAVI are bringing serious investments into the health sector," said Dr. Brundtland, "helping to reverse the trend of stagnating or deteriorating immunization services."

President Joaquim Chissano of Mozambique said that his country was benefiting from the support of GAVI and its fund-raising arm, The Vaccine Fund. Quadrivalent vaccine, which combines DTP and hepatitis B vaccines, and made available through GAVI in 2001, is successfully complementing national immunization efforts and reaching previously unreached populations. While technical and financing problems still remain to be overcome, President Chissano expected the GAVI partnership to be instrumental in dramatically reducing suffering and deaths in Mozambique.

Yang Qing, China's Deputy Director-General, Department of Community Health, Maternal and Child Health, outlined his nation's achievement in raising immunization rates above 90 per cent for the 19 million babies born every year. His Government and GAVI were about to sign an agreement whereby each will dedicate \$38 million to introduce free vaccinations against hepatitis B for every child within two generations.

The five-year grant to GAVI of \$750 million by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation was motivated partly by the desire to reinvigorate stagnant immunization systems to prepare for the arrival of major new vaccines, for example against malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. When asked what would happen after the grant ran out, Patty Stonesifer, Co-Chair and President of the Foundation, said that the grant had always been seen as an initial investment, though the Foundation hoped that governments would be financing immunization on their own within the five years.

Eveline Herfkens, Netherlands Minister for Development Cooperation, praised GAVI for placing resources and responsibilities into the hands of governments. Aid is useless without national ownership, she said. Minister Herfkens credited GAVI with pioneering public/private partnerships. Jacques-François Martin, President of The Vaccine Fund, noted that the trail had been blazed by Rotary International's outstanding work against polio.

Dr. Anne Peterson, Assistant Administrator of USAID's Global Health Bureau, announced at the meeting that USAID was committing an additional \$53 million to GAVI and The Vaccine Fund during the coming year.

Bill Gates addresses world leaders on child health

During the Special Session on Children, Microsoft's Bill Gates made a presentation on children's health. In part, he said...

"Is the world going to take care of its children? That is the question we came here to answer. While many important issues will be discussed at this historic Special Session, it's my belief that improving health is the best way to start improving the future for our children....We have to do three things:

"First, we must increase the visibility of what is happening to our children. Health inequalities continue to worsen. I believe this is because people who see the worst of it don't have the resources to defeat it, and the people who have the resources to defeat it don't see the worst of it.

"I believe that if you took the world and you randomly re-sorted it so that rich people lived next door to poor people – so that, for example, people in the United States saw millions of mothers

burying babies who had died from measles or malnutrition or pneumonia – they would insist something be done. And they would be willing to pay for it.

"Second, we can't just tell people about the problems. We have to tell them about effective, affordable solutions – about how little money it takes to save a life.

* If people knew that the measles vaccine costs only a quarter...

* If they knew we could prevent children from dying of malaria with a bednet that costs just \$4...

* If they knew we could prevent a child's death from diarrhea for 33 cents...

"If they knew these facts, more and more people would provide the resources needed to solve these problems.

"The third critical element is political leadership. This is something that only the distinguished guests in this room can provide. Foreign aid and foundation giving can achieve important advances, but the big examples of national successes have all required political leadership...

"With more visibility and more resources and more political leadership, we can eradicate diseases like polio. For 50 years children have suffered from a disease we know how to prevent. Let's end it. Let's eradicate guinea worm. Let's get vaccines to every child and save 3 million lives every year. Let's recommit ourselves to developing and deploying vaccines against AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. If we do this, we will change the world's view of what's possible.

"It all depends on our answer to the fundamental question: Is the world going to take care of its children? It's our choice. But we must choose now. Personally, I hadn't planned on getting involved in philanthropy until later in life when I could devote full time to it. But the more I learned, the more I realized there is no time. Diseases won't wait. So I committed myself to this cause, and I will keep that commitment for the rest of my life."

◆ ELIMINATING IODINE DEFICIENCY

Iodine deficiency, a threat wherever iodine is missing from the soil, is the world's leading cause of preventable brain damage and mental retardation. It can lower the average intelligence quotient of a population by as much as 10 to 15 points. Not only can iodine deficiency have tragic results for each child, it undermines economic progress for society as a whole. Iodizing salt is an effective, economical remedy.

Dr. Brundtland of WHO opened the meeting on a 'smart start' for children by announcing the launch of the Network for the Sustained Elimination of Iodine Deficiency, a unique partnership of the salt industry with national and international organizations that has pledged to end iodine deficiency forever by 2005.

The new initiative builds on progress since 1990, when fewer than 20 per cent of households in the developing world were consuming iodized salt; the figure has risen to 70 per cent, which means that 91 million newborns are protected each year from significant losses in learning ability, but 41 million are still born unprotected. The new Network's primary task will be to assist in the formation of national coalitions in all countries to complete the task.

National leaders reported on progress in their countries. Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia of Bangladesh noted that her nation has achieved 70 per cent salt iodization and the Government now plans to phase out its support to salt producers. Beriz Belkiz, Chairman of the Presidency of

Bosnia and Herzegovina, stated that all salt produced domestically is now iodized as the result of salt legislation and work with the country's leading salt producer to modernize the industry. Dr. Ali Mohamed Shein, Vice-President of the United Republic of Tanzania, described how similar measures have accomplished 83 per cent iodization.

All three agreed that the factors for success include political commitment, partnerships with the salt industry, and external support. The challenges remaining include reaching remote households, working effectively with small salt producers and maintaining quality.

Dong Zhihua, President of the China National Salt Association, stated that 90 per cent of households in China are now consuming iodized salt; his company and the Government are continuing their collaboration to distribute and promote it in the areas still unreached. Walter Becky, President of Morton Salt, spoke on behalf of North American salt producers to commit technical and marketing expertise for eliminating iodine deficiency worldwide. Floris A. Bierman, President of Akzo Nobel Salt and speaking for European salt producers, discussed China as an example where transfer of technology had played a significant role. Vice President Robert Moore of Kiwanis International, a key partner in the Network, described his organization's experience with advocacy and fund-raising and considered how civil society might contribute to the initiative.

A number of donor governments have long supported the elimination of iodine deficiency. Susan Whelan, Canada's Minister for Internal Cooperation, commented that the new Network should boost collaboration even further between public and private partners, especially the salt industry. Tommy Thompson of the United States recommended such partnerships between government, industry and philanthropy as bringing the best to bear from each sector. Eveline Herfkens of the Netherlands made the point that we must invest in children's brains if we wish all children to complete primary school.

A highlight of the meeting was the announcement that chess champion Anatoly Karpov has accepted the role of Goodwill Ambassador for eliminating iodine deficiency in his region – Central and Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Baltic States. Salt was once adequately iodized in the region, but following the collapse of the Soviet Union is now only just over a quarter iodized. He described iodine deficiency as a matter of "national security."

◆ **REDUCING THE IMPACT OF MALARIA ON CHILD HEALTH**

The world's malaria burden is estimated at more than 300 million acute illnesses and 1 million deaths a year, 90 per cent of them in sub-Saharan Africa. Wherever malaria occurs and particularly in Africa, the burden falls mainly on young children and pregnant women.

Roll Back Malaria, a global partnership founded in 1998 by WHO, UNDP, UNICEF and the World Bank, aims to halve the burden by 2010. Meeting in Abuja (Nigeria) in April 2000, the leaders of 44 African nations adopted the Abuja Declaration endorsing this goal.

Malaria is preventable and curable. Presentations at the meeting discussed the effectiveness of bednets treated with insecticide, which can forestall 20 per cent of children's deaths, and home

management of malaria; the majority of children with malaria die at home before their families have sought help, but the problem can be offset by educating families to seek treatment early and ensuring that the right drugs can be obtained in their community.

These interventions currently reach only a small proportion of those in need, but the ambitious goal of halving the malaria burden can nonetheless be met if backed by increased political commitment, increased domestic investment, and increased flows of international aid. In his keynote address to the meeting, President Mathieu Kerekou of Benin reaffirmed the commitment of the African nations to fight malaria, and noted that 17 countries so far have reduced the taxes and tariffs on treated bednets, to make them more affordable for poor communities.

Dr. Brundtland of WHO called for the Roll Back Malaria partnerships to be strengthened and national programmes scaled up, with funding to be provided by the new board of the Global Fund for AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

Dr. Anne Peterson of USAID stated that her government was dramatically increasing its support for malaria programmes to \$65 million for 2002, more than five times the \$12 million allotted in 1997. The new allocation is intended to support the scaling up of national programmes with a focus on children and pregnant women.

◆ CHILDREN IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM: ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ON HEALTH

Environmental degradation is claiming large numbers of young people as its victims. Every day 5,500 children die from diseases caused by consuming water or food contaminated with harmful bacteria or toxic waste, according to a new report jointly released by UNEP, WHO and UNICEF to coincide with the UN Special Session.

The report, *Children in the New Millennium: Environmental Impact on Health*, provides extensive evidence of the threats to children. "People are most vulnerable in their youngest years. This means that children must be at the centre of our response to unhealthy environments" said WHO Director-General Gro Harlem Brundtland.

"I am convinced that we need to elevate children's environmental health issues on the international agenda, both through the General Assembly's Special Session on Children and then the World Summit on Sustainable Development," said Klaus Töpfer, Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme.

Children in the New Millennium calls for increased national investment in early childhood care, including focusing on the immediate environments of children – homes, schools and communities. Governments and NGOs should build on past successes such as the transition to unleaded fuel, and direct programme support towards addressing environmental challenges to the wellbeing of children and adolescents.

In 'A World Fit for Us', the message from the Children's Forum to the UN Special Session, "conservation and rescue of natural resources" and "awareness of the need to live in

environments that are healthy and favourable to our development” were highlighted by children as essential features of the world they are seeking.