

## IPU-UNICEF PARLIAMENTARY FORUM ON CHILD RIGHTS

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

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

In a side event co-sponsored with UNICEF, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the largest global group of lawmakers, launched a number of important initiatives and commitments aimed at encouraging countries to protect and enhance child rights and participation. Plans include creation of a committee to monitor what national parliaments are doing for children, holding an annual parliamentary meeting about the situation of the world's children and establishment of a children's parliament to encourage young people's participation in social change.

In two hours of discussion, parliamentarians, NGOs and children offered their views and suggestions about how to protect children's rights and better engage children in the democratic process. "No more whys, only more hows!" said Glenys Kinnock, Co-President of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly of African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States and the European Union (ACP-EU). "We must child-proof our legislation," she said.

The 250 parliamentarians from 75 countries participating in the meeting faced tough questioning from the outset from Bintou Sonko, a 12-year-old delegate from the Gambia who was selected to represent the Children's Forum before the Parliamentarians.

"When are you going to live up to the promises you have made to children at conferences like this one?" asked Bintou. The young delegate said children want to see the creation of more schools, free testing for HIV/AIDS, medicines, laws to punish those who exploit children and the establishment of a children's parliament so that children can express their views directly and not filtered through adults. "We want youth to have a say in governance," she said.

A young person from Guatemala acknowledged that indeed it must be difficult to keep all the promises that have been made, "but a good beginning is to listen to us!"

Not surprisingly, the mobilization of resources was acknowledged as an urgent priority to end abuses and to turn promises into reality. "You can plan until you're blue in the face but without money behind it, we are wasting our time," the Gambian young delegate emphasized.

A parliamentarian from the Central African Republic warned that if poverty reduction failed in post-conflict situations, the exploitation of children would continue. A Liberian lawmaker said that unless arms-spending is reduced drastically, war and “the trauma of war instilled in our children will linger on forever.” An adolescent from Chad insisted that international debt should be annulled and invested in children orphaned by AIDS.

Other participants argued that the 20/20 Initiative – allocation of 20 per cent of ODA and of national budgets to basic social services – is a two-way street. Child rights cannot be realized if either partner fails to prioritize resource allocations for children. Urgently-needed increases in ODA must be matched by restructuring national budgets to provide sustainable basic services for children.

Other lawmakers and children agreed that enforcement of children’s rights requires more than money -- a child-friendly legal environment is also fundamental. Child rights must be enshrined in national constitutions, according to one European legislator. “Annual debates on child issues should be obligatory by law, and a ‘child-impact analysis’ should be conducted before any law is adopted,” he stressed.

"More important than money is children’s involvement in decisions,” said a youth from Albania. A young Mongolian advocated for a "child-friendly legal environment". Ebrahim Saloojee, a member of Parliament from South Africa and chair of the country's Portfolio Committee on Social Development, emphasized the importance of making sure that all legislation passed by national parliaments takes children's rights into account.

Some commitments, proposals and initiatives made by the Parliamentarians

- To enshrine the Convention on the Rights of the Child in national constitutions
- To establish ombudspersons for children accountable to their parliaments
- To set up formally-recognized parliamentary committees to monitor the impact of budgetary measures on children
- To ensure an annual parliamentary debate assesses the situation of children
- To introduce child-impact analyses prior to all legislative action
- To exert leadership and build consensus on the need to fulfil child rights, beginning with debates in their own communities
- To ensure that budgetary decisions are driven by children's issues at all levels, local, national and international.
- To encourage youth to fully participate in the realization of societal changes guided by the norms and standards of the CRC
- To establishment youth parliaments.