

GENERAL ASSEMBLY DEBATE

-

UNOFFICIAL HIGHLIGHTS

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

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INTRODUCTION

The 27th Special Session of the General Assembly brought together leaders and representatives from government, NGOs, intergovernmental bodies and observers, entities of the United Nations system and children in three full days of rich discussion and debate. The purpose: to review follow-up to the 1990 World Summit for Children, identify remaining challenges and emerging issues and renew commitments to children. In the prevailing conditions of unrest and insecurity characterizing the world scene, there was an acute sense of the high stakes involved.

“This is not just a Special Session on children”, declared UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in his opening address, *“It is a gathering about the future of humanity”*. Noting that the Session was truly special in offering for the first time an occasion for children to express their own views, he urged all adults to listen attentively, for *“To work for a world fit for children, we must work with children.”* Addressing himself directly to children, Mr. Annan acknowledged that adults had failed deplorably in upholding many of children’s most basic rights. The Millennium Declaration, however, was a promise to reverse that situation, with the Special Session a reminder that the promise was directed to the next generation. As Dr. Han Seung-soo, President of the General Assembly emphasized in his welcoming address, *“The children of the world are watching us. They expect us to deliver on the promises we make here. Let us not fail them”*.

After the opening statements, which included an address by Ambassador Patricia Durrant of Jamaica, Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee of the Special Session, a message from the Children’s Forum was delivered by two youth delegates: Ms. Gabriela Azurduy Arrieta of Bolivia, and Ms. Audrey Cheynut of Monaco (*see Panel on page 77 for full text*). This again underscored the significance of children as both the primary stakeholders and key participants in debates about the future. *“We are not the sources of problems; we are the resources that are needed to solve them”* stated the message from the children. *“We are not expenses; we are investments... You call us the future, but we are also the present”*.

Noting the historic nature of the gathering, UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy pointed out that *“This is the first time the General Assembly has addressed the issue of children in a Special Session. And never has a major UN meeting invited so many children and young people as official delegates...their participation is what makes the Special Session special”*.

SPEAKERS AT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

An impressive 187 government representatives took the floor during the plenary debate at the General Assembly, organized in morning and afternoon sessions over the full three days, and stretching late into the night on the last day. The speakers included 67 summit-level delegates (43 Heads of State and/or Government; 12 Vice Presidents; 2 Crown Princes; and 10 Deputy Prime Ministers). Four governments had youth representatives address the General Assembly (the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Togo). Representatives of eight United Nations entities also addressed the plenary, along with a representative of ECOSOC.

Twelve observers to the UN and two non-member states were represented, as were eight NGOs. In addition to the prepared statements, chairpersons of the three round-tables presented summaries of key points covered in the rich discussions that had drawn still more participants, among them youths. Further statements were delivered by member states, NGOs, UN system entities and observers to the UN at two sessions of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole.

Within the rich diversity of views flowing from such a wide array of stakeholders, some key common themes emerged, with highlights as follows.

HIGHLIGHTS OF MAJOR THEMES

◆ *The tragic events of September 11*

A number of speakers made reference to the tragic events of September 11, which served only to heighten awareness of the stakes involved in this session for children and to strengthen the resolve of the international community to come together to combat threats to peace and security. Sharing the grief of the United States, delegates also expressed sympathy to survivors and victims of terrorism around the world. *“We now know too well after the dreadful events of September 11, 2001, that tomorrow can only be guaranteed for the world’s children if we fight emerging threats to peace and personal security for all today. One terrorist act in one country is a terrorist crime against all.”* (Levy Patrick Mwanawasa, President of Zambia). Some delegates pointed out that children were abused not only as the most innocent victims of terrorism but as innocent recruits into terrorist activities themselves. The need for wide-scale cooperation and solidarity in fighting global terrorism was widely acknowledged, as was the importance of preventing conflict through investing in children and combating poverty.

◆ *Achievements, setbacks and renewed commitment*

Delegates passed in review both the progress and challenges encountered in efforts over the decade to secure the survival, development, protection and participation of children. A number made reference to the implementation of national programmes of action (NPAs) for children. Most concurred with the conclusions of the Secretary-General’s end-decade report, *We the Children*, that while much had been accomplished, much still remained to do. Some delegates noted that significant progress for children at the national level had been offset by remaining internal disparities.

Others noted that progress had been hampered by poverty, debt, war and the impact of HIV/AIDS. Still others highlighted the emergence of yet other new issues and challenges, all of which demanded real international partnerships and renewed commitment. In short: *“We must wend the unfinished agenda of the past decade with the future challenges facing children and their families.”* (Tommy G. Thompson, US Secretary of Health and Human Services).

Speakers saw the Special Session as a sign of hope and the outcome document as a pledge of commitment from the international community to act together to address these issues and truly work to build a world fit for children. It was now time to stand by the commitments made during the last decade and to act on them.

Mexico urged the international community not to wait another decade, but to mobilize the necessary conscience, will and resources to benefit those who represented the future of the

world. *The Lao People's Democratic Republic* identified the Special Session as an historic opportunity to renew commitment to jointly completing the unfinished agenda of the World Summit and address new issues in order to build a better world for children. *Botswana* emphasized the need to reaffirm international commitments to attain the outstanding goals of the WSC as well as to address new emerging issues.

Georgia stressed it was time to shift the focus of the international community to a results-oriented, realistic and flexible plan of action, with a real financial basis. *San Marino* launched an appeal to the international community for the promotion of a common civil and humanitarian conscience, a culture of peace and sound social development strategies so that improvement in the lives of children would be at the heart of all national issues. *Honduras* noted that just as business and trade had become globalized, the globalization of solidarity for infants and children would contribute to the creation of a better environment for the world's children.

◆ ***From the Millennium Summit to Johannesburg – children at the center***

Speakers emphasized that children were a priceless treasure and that their well-being must be at the heart of sustainable development. It was well recognized that challenges for children are not separate from the wider challenges in the political, economic and social environment. That is why a number of delegates pointed to the continuum of commitments linking the Special Session with the Millennium Summit, the International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey, Mexico (March 2002) and the Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg (August 2002) – all of which must, in the end, serve the interests of children. “*Children deserve to be at the very center of our development agenda and international cooperation.*” (Begum Khaleda Zia, Prime Minister of Bangladesh)

Delegates recalled that the Millennium Development Goals committed States to reduce child mortality by two thirds and maternal mortality by three quarters by 2015. To achieve these goals, accessible and effective preventive services must be developed. But many saw that rapid globalization challenges government efforts to ensure social protection, with social safety nets collapsing under pressures from emerging forces of change. Global actors and the UN were, therefore, called upon to find appropriate solutions to help ill-equipped societies meet both the Millennium Development Goals and the goals of the Special Session on Children. For as Norway stressed, “*Children are at the heart of one and every Millennium Development Goal, beginning with the battle against poverty.*” (Hilde F. Johnson, Minister of International Development, Norway)

Just as the Millennium Development Goals provide the international community with a useful strategic framework for overcoming poverty, the Monterrey Consensus represents fundamental and undeniable progress in international financing for development. Moreover, investment in children is key. “*We truly believe that investing in children must be done by all segments of the society as it is the best insurance that any country and the world could have for sustainable development and social, economic and political stability.*” (Korn Dabbaransi, Deputy Prime Minister and Head of Delegation, Thailand)

The Netherlands said that donors must live up to the long established 0.7 per cent of ODA target in accordance with specific time frames agreed at Monterrey. No low-income country with a

credible poverty-reduction strategy should fail because of lack of external funding. Developing countries, in turn, must put their own houses in order. The *United Kingdom* called for stepped-up commitments to the HIPC debt initiative as a means of building up a virtuous cycle of debt relief, poverty reduction and sustainable development, with good governance a critical element.

Morocco spoke of the need to give globalization a human face through rational use of available resources and the enhancement of south-south and international cooperation, referring to commitments made on financing for development by leaders in Monterrey, bringing hope that the level of public financing for development would rise up to the expectations of developing countries. *Venezuela* recalled its proposal at Monterrey for the establishment of an international humanitarian fund to benefit children in developing countries, which would be funded by a percentage of external debt repayments and a percentage of military expenditure.

◆ ***Enhancing international and regional cooperation***

Many delegates addressed the need for global solidarity and active cooperation at both regional and international levels if positive outcomes for children were to be achieved. Drawing attention to the increasingly Trans-boundary nature of threats to children's well-being, a number of speakers highlighted the benefits of regional cooperation. A number of delegates drew strength from participation in existing regional mechanisms of cooperation. Many noted positively the fruitful processes of regional agenda-setting and review linked to World Summit follow-up and preparations for the Special Session. In this regard, delegations referred to common commitments adopted in Beijing, Berlin, Cairo, Katmandu and Kingston as key guideposts for the future. Many speakers also highlighted the importance of international solidarity, cooperation and support in creating the enabling environment for the realization of children's rights.

Bosnia and Herzegovina stressed that the fight for child rights should take place at state, regional and global levels, so that a real difference could be made for the children of tomorrow. *China* called for effective international cooperation on child issues and a narrowing of the gap between north and south. *Saint Lucia* called on the international community to create an enabling environment to answer the legitimate call of children. *The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia* noted the vital importance of international support and regional cooperation as well the mobilization of resources and building up of partnerships necessary for extensive economic, social and institutional reform processes.

The Congo called for consistent partnerships with developing countries at national, regional, and international levels. *Lao PDR* appealed to industrialized countries and international organizations to continue to render support and assistance to the least developed countries. *Guinea-Bissau*, appealing to the international community to mobilize significant support, stressed that the well-being of people, especially children, depends on a truly prosperous 'global village'. For *Comoros*, as long as there was one child without a future, the work of the international community would not be complete.

◆ ***Exercising leadership and political will***

Speakers were eloquent on the need for enlightened leadership and sustained political will to secure a world fit for children. Their words best speak for themselves:

- ◆ *“A renewed political commitment and adequate allocation of resources are key factors for the steady and complete implementation of our agreed objectives”*
(Mr. Ion Iliescu, President of Romania).
- ◆ *“We owe it to our children to marshal the necessary political will to provide for their basic needs. We ought not fail them. The situation is urgent.”*
(Dr. Ali Mohamed Shein, Vice-President of the United Republic of Tanzania)
- ◆ *“Our responsibility, as the leaders of today’s world, is to provide the coming generations with hope and perspective for life in the environment of greater understanding, mutual respect and the respect of the right to be loved”*
(Mr. Beriz Belkic, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina)
- ◆ *“Without firm political commitment at the highest level, it will not be possible to reform or refine our policies, programmes, budgets and institutions to ensure the best interests of children. It is the vision of leaders and the will of policy makers that could pave the way to a World Fit for Children “(Mr. Korn Dabbaransi, Deputy Prime Minister, Thailand)*
- ◆ *“The future of our children lies with leadership at all levels and in the choices leaders make.”* (Ambassador Ellen Margrethe Løj, Permanent Representative of Denmark to the United Nations)
- ◆ *“The implementation of the rights of the child is more than a question of charity; it is a political challenge – requiring a political vision, political will and conscious political decisions.”* (Ambassador Thomas Hammarberg, Sweden)
- ◆ *“Do we have the political will to give a concerted global response to global challenges? The answer cannot but be in the affirmative because we must safeguard our children and there can be no excuse not to care for our children.* (Dr. Attiya Inayatullah, Minister for Women’s Development, Social Welfare and Special Education, Pakistan)
- ◆ *“...we must realize and be convinced that the rights of the child require, first and foremost, a genuine political will and, equally important, the mobilization of the necessary resources, without which the situation will remain unchanged.”*
(H.H. Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al-Misnad, President of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs, Qatar.)

◆ ***Engaging broad-based partnerships and participation***

There was overwhelming recognition of the need for partnerships at all levels of society, with the widest possible array of actors and stakeholders to be drawn into an expanding movement for children. While the role of government was seen as vital, particularly in providing leadership, setting policy, and securing resources, it was recognized that government cannot and should not assume all responsibilities, but should draw on and support broad participatory processes involving NGOs and organizations of civil society, parents and caregivers, schools, religious authorities, women’s groups and the private sector. A number of delegates highlighted the

positive outcomes of just such broad-based participatory processes characterizing national-level follow-up to the World Summit and participation in the Global Movement for Children.

Thailand highlighted its success in mobilizing a substantial level of private-sector funding for children's programmes. The *Philippines* identified partnerships with the private sector, civil society and international organizations as 'best practices' in responding to needs of children over the decade. *Viet Nam* spoke of mobilizing the participation of families, care givers and community groups in implementation of programmes and policies. *El Salvador* spoke of the mobilization of public and private institutions. *Paraguay* placed great importance on the participation of NGOs, civil society and the private sector in identifying policies and programmes for children. *Kiribati* spoke of the work of government in partnership with parents, island councils, churches and civil society groups.

Cyprus referred to social programmes developed with NGOs and community organizations. The *Maldives* recognized the importance of empowering women as prime actors in the development of the country and in ensuring the best interests of children. In *Tonga* as well, women are seen to be particularly crucial partners, as are NGOs, which continue, for example, to bridge the gap between the mother as first teacher and formal primary education through early childcare facilities. In *Niger*, local community leaders are being encouraged to use their wealth of cultural and historical knowledge to promote the welfare of children. *Belgium* stressed that only reflection, collective action, volunteerism and commitment would give some sense to humanistic action and political responsibility. *Australia* encouraged partnerships between governments, business, communities and families to provide innovative children's services. *Federal Republic of Yugoslavia* highlighted government and NGO partnerships as a key element in making child rights a reality.

◆ *Overcoming poverty*

Poverty, "the common enemy of humanity" (*Algeria*), was identified by the vast majority of speakers as the most serious challenge to the well-being of children and the root cause of the infringement of children's most basic rights, presenting the biggest obstacle to further progress in survival, development and protection. Delegation after delegation described the unspeakable misery brought about by entrenched poverty and called for concerted action on poverty eradication, debt relief, international trade and commitments to development assistance. Also addressed was the need to link such measures to actions to ensure responsible governance.

That poverty and inequity were increasing at a time of immense global wealth, astounding technological advances, and an emerging knowledge-based economy suggested that the real issue was neither a shortage of resources or capacity, but one of political will, political commitment, political priority and political vision (*Trinidad and Tobago*). Many delegates recognized that poverty reduction efforts have so far proceeded too slowly and that efforts must be stepped up, with good intentions and fine words translated into action (*Denmark*). Heightened solidarity and cooperation is essential, for "when it comes to children our duties do not stop at national frontiers". (Thomas Hammarberg, Sweden)

While all regions are affected, African delegations were particularly forceful in their depiction of the dire effects of poverty and gross underdevelopment on children – calling on the international

community to respond to the Millennium Declaration's appeal for a 'first call' for children in Africa. As the region with the highest child mortality, the lowest immunization and the lowest school enrolment, the combined effects of poverty intertwined with armed conflict and HIV/AIDS are such that the situation of children "*remains synonymous with anguish, physical suffering and despair.*" (Mr. Paul Biya, President of Cameroon).

While African leaders acknowledged their responsibility to ensure the well-being of their children and pointed to a number of achievements for children over the decade, they called for heightened international solidarity with African governments and the honoring of international commitments to mobilize resources. *South Africa* stressed that only by working together would African nations be able to address major issues plaguing efforts to improve the lot of their children – namely poverty and gross underdevelopment. A number of delegations spoke of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) as an important vehicle for advancing and sustaining the rights of Africa's children, women and poor people, rekindling hope for the future of Africa and its children. Others referred to the *African Common Position* as reflecting the joint vision of an Africa Fit for Children.

Speakers from Latin America and the Caribbean depicted situations of economic and social crisis and disintegration as well as rising inequalities affecting children in their region, drawing attention to linkages between poverty and unemployment, street children, drugs and prostitution. Countries in transition described problems associated with the social and economic upheavals accompanying their transition to a market economy, which were reflected in social sector budget cuts and deprivation for children. Asian delegates identified poverty as the greatest enemy of children and poverty eradication as a prerequisite for child development and protection.

A number of speakers from industrialized countries renewed calls for heightened poverty reduction efforts.

Canada called for common cause on the alleviation of poverty and its impact on children through vigorous pursuit of broader and better-delivered debt relief through HIPC combined with good governance. *Norway* stressed that additional resources were needed in the fight against poverty and that both developing and industrialized countries had to deliver. It urged rich countries to meet the UN target of 0.7 per cent of GDP for ODA and direct these funds to efficient poverty eradication. *Norway's* plan of action for fighting poverty in the south towards 2015 commits it to increase ODA to 1 per cent of GDP by 2005. The *United Kingdom* said a new development compact was needed whereby no country genuinely committed to good governance, poverty reduction and economic development should be denied the chance to achieve the 2015 goals through lack of resources.

◆ *Protecting children from war*

Passionate pleas were made for concerted international action and commitment to end the brutal violation of children's rights in situations of armed conflict. *St Vincent and the Grenadines* pointed to the "*universal shame*" brought about by the horrifying statistics of children at war. *Belgium* referred to the unprecedented intensity of ethnic conflicts and civil wars since the World Summit and the end of the cold war, with children becoming deliberate targets or 'collateral victims'. *Georgia* highlighted the existence of conflicts, separatism and ethnic cleansing in many

regions of the world, identifying indifference to the hardships these bring as “*the foremost enemy and sin of mankind*”.

Other delegations spoke out against conflicts generating “*a sea of refugees*” and about millions of innocent people dying through wars and violence sparked by greed and hatred. *The United Republic of Tanzania* stressed that peace is synonymous with development which in turn enables children to develop; it was thus the responsibility of the leaders to protect children from armed conflict. *Ghana* stressed that “*we need to take action to put an end to the awful impact of armed conflict on children*” and that “*the international community needs to be more forceful in bringing to justice all those who commit war crimes, particularly against women and children, to serve as a deterrent to potential perpetrators of these wicked crimes*” (H.E. Alhaji Aliu Mahama, Vice-President, Ghana).

The plight of Palestinian children was evoked with great concern by numerous delegates, who appealed for collective responsibility in stemming the bloodshed and seeking peaceful and just solutions for both sides in the conflict. “*Children are, in the final analysis, one and the same. They are innocent beings who view life with hope and must not bear the burden of the past because they belong to the future*” stated the first lady of Egypt (Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak, Head of the Delegation of the Arab Republic of Egypt). She, as others, warned that repercussions of the current conflict were being felt throughout region, sowing the seeds of fear and hatred and in the hearts of children on both sides, depriving them of the spirit of tolerance and creating an atmosphere of hopelessness and uncertainty which opens the doors to violence.

A number of delegations also addressed the negative impact on children of sanctions, embargoes and unilateral measures. *Iraq* spoke out strongly on the severe effect of sanctions on national development efforts and children’s rights, pointing to the sharp increase in child mortality. *Malaysia* urged that sanctions be imposed only as a measure of last resort and after a careful impact analysis.

Canada identified the Ottawa treaty, the Rome statute, the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Winnipeg conference on war-affected children as major milestones in efforts to address the problem. *Ghana* called upon all member states to stop recruitment and use of children as soldiers and to work towards rapid ratification and implementation of the optional protocol. During the Special Session itself, a number of governments signaled their commitment by announcing their decision to sign and/or deposit the instruments of ratification. Countries in post-conflict situations outlined their efforts in disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of child soldiers as well as capacity-building for children affected by war (*The Congo; Democratic Republic of the Congo; Liberia*). Others (*El Salvador and Guatemala*) pointed to peace agreements as the foundation for further progress. *Norway* urged the international community to invest more in conflict prevention.

Read more on a very relevant announcement made at the General Assembly on this issue: [UNICEF hails pledge by Peruvian President to shift military spending to basic services for children, at http://www.unicef.org/newsline/02pr27peru.htm](http://www.unicef.org/newsline/02pr27peru.htm)

◆ ***Fighting HIV/AIDS***

Numerous speakers described the devastating effects on children of the HIV/AIDS epidemic which, along with poverty and war, represents one of the greatest threats to the fulfillment of children's rights. Proposals and actions taken to address the situation were also highlighted. It was recognized that the battle against AIDS is a battle for the world's children and that urgent action is needed .

In *Lesotho*, HIV/AIDS, along with severe poverty, was largely responsible for the disintegration of families, lower school enrolment and child exploitation. *Botswana* spoke of the reversal of progress for children as a result of the tragic consequences of AIDS – with an increase in U5MR and a rise in the number of orphans. *Zambia* spoke of the magnitude of the problem of children orphaned by AIDS, with *Nigeria* reminding the assembly that Africa was the continent with the largest number of AIDS orphans. *Senegal* noted its participation in research on AIDS. *Burkina Faso* noted establishment of a trust fund for AIDS orphans. *Uganda* highlighted its successful national efforts to reduce transmission and *Uruguay* pointed to its reduction in overall AIDS mortality rates. In *Ethiopia*, national and regional HIV/AIDS councils and secretariats have been established.

In *Namibia*, the government has established a national AIDS control programme and is developing national guidelines for orphan care and protection. In *Swaziland*, a school health programme has been established, HIV/AIDS information is integrated into the school curriculum, and health clubs are promoted for peer education. In *Barbados* responsibility for a national commission for HIV/AIDS management rests with the Prime Minister. Strategic plans had been developed in a number of countries in other regions where AIDS was also recognized as a threat. A number of donors (for example *Australia, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States*) outlined their contributions to the global fight against HIV/AIDS, both domestically and through aid programmes, including support for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis.

◆ ***Protecting children from violence, exploitation, and abuse***

Recognition of the need to protect children from all forms of abuse has grown since the World Summit for Children, and delegates to the Special Session raised their voices in the outcry against such child rights violations as the exploitation of child labour; the use of child soldiers; sexual exploitation and abuse; child trafficking, prostitution and pornography; and the rising incidence of violence against children.

“Let those of us who use our children to wage war find it in our hearts to stop. Let those of us who abuse our children – whether we are parents, clergy, or strangers – stop.... Let us ensure that we see the future clearly and we take urgent steps to protect our world and our children from future desecration”. (Mrs. Girlyn Miguel, Minister for Social Development, Ecclesiastical and Gender Affairs, St. Vincent and the Grenadines. All nations were urged to “say no” to such shameful and degrading practices (*Rwanda*). The Special Session must send a clear message of condemnation of child abuse (*Andorra*), with efforts needed to strengthen prosecution and punishment of perpetrators of crimes against children (*Monaco*).

A number of countries outlined measures taken to protect children from abuse, including policy formulation and the enactment of legislation; the development of national action plans and programmes; and regional cooperation initiatives.

In follow-up to the Stockholm and Yokohama international conferences on the commercial sexual exploitation of children, a number of countries have developed national action plans and programmes to address trafficking in children (*Benin; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Cote d'Ivoire; Cambodia; Mali, among others*). Features include improved legislation to enable prosecution of perpetrators and intra-regional cooperation. *Myanmar* said it actively cooperates with other countries in the Mekong region and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region concerning transnational trafficking in persons, particularly women and children.

A number of Latin American countries identified challenges related to the protection and reintegration of street children into society (*Dominican Republic and Uruguay*). In *El Salvador*, a number of national programmes are being elaborated on child protection (labour, exploitation and trafficking) with laws passed on violence in the family and juvenile justice. In *Swaziland*, a juvenile court has been established and child tribunals have been established in post-war settings (*Central African Republic*). Substance abuse prevention and treatment programmes are critical in a number of countries (*Hungary; Kyrgyzstan; Suriname*). *Tonga* noted a rise in child prostitution, with emergency assistance and refuge established by the Queen of Tonga.

The need to combat domestic violence and abuse was voiced by a number of delegates. *New Zealand* spoke of its country's family violence prevention strategy paving the way towards the goal of families living free from violence. *Germany* also promotes a violence-free upbringing. NGOs take the lead in support services to victims of domestic violence in the 15 *Pacific Islands Forum countries*. In *Grenada*, April has been designated child abuse prevention and awareness month. Several countries have programmes to combat female genital mutilation (*Benin; others*). *Haiti* issued a law against corporal punishment on its bicentennial celebration.

Other countries highlight legislation on child abuse and neglect (*Belize; Cuba; Papua New Guinea*). Many countries are addressing the problem of child labour, including in the context of the ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), to which numerous donors contribute. The two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child were held up as key international instruments to enhance child protection; countries were urged to sign these and other key instruments such as ILO Convention No. 182.

◆ ***Ensuring a quality education for all***

Many countries emphasized the importance of education as a fundamental right and a keystone for development, noting both progress and challenges in this domain. A number of speakers pointed with pride to successful efforts to establish free and comprehensive basic education of good quality, with special efforts to reduce the gender gap (*Bangladesh; Benin; Ecuador; India; Kazakhstan; Malawi; Namibia; Nepal; Yemen; Zambia*). Special efforts have been made in a number of countries to reach the excluded (drop-outs in *Venezuela*; nomads and displaced populations in *Sudan*; aboriginal children in *Canada*.) Inclusive programmes for the disabled were highlighted by a number of delegates (*Botswana; Dominican Republic; Saudi Arabia; Spain*). *Afghanistan* reported that more than 2 million children are attending schools since their

reopening, including 673,000 girls. Educational reforms have been launched in a number of countries to enhance quality (*Latvia; Marshall Islands; Sri Lanka; Tunisia*). Some countries highlighted progress in extending access to secondary education (*Costa Rica; St. Kitts and Nevis*), with special efforts to guarantee adolescent mothers an opportunity to continue their education (*Saint Kitts and Nevis and Zambia*).

Numerous speakers noted the importance of early childhood education and development (*Estonia; Senegal; Saint Kitts and Nevis; Trinidad and Tobago*), with *Uruguay* highlighting its achievement of wide-scale coverage of 4- to 5-year-olds. The value of education as a weapon against AIDS was noted by countries such as *Botswana* and *Uganda*. Some promoted the use of advanced communications and information technologies as a key component of national development (*Jordan*). Also highlighted was the role of education as a purveyor of values such as tolerance, respect for diversity and democracy (*Armenia; Malawi; Monaco*).

Investments in education were described as investments in the future. It was acknowledged that the future of a country depends on how it educates children (*Kyrgyzstan*). *Russia* announced that for the first time in its modern history, current educational expenditures exceeded those for national defense. *Norway* stressed that education must be seen as the single largest exit door from poverty. Education was described as a priority in the international cooperation programmes of a number of donor countries (for example *Italy; Japan*). The United Kingdom called for the richest countries to back the World Bank initiative to accelerate Education for All by 2015.

◆ *Promoting health and nutrition*

A number of delegations pointed to efforts to strengthen and extend primary health care services, with positive examples given of reduction in infant and child mortality, improved malnutrition, expanded immunization coverage, provision of safe water, and success in combating vitamin A deficiency and iodine deficiency disorders. Polio eradication efforts were also highlighted. Some delegations shared experiences of sector-wide approaches to child health (*Zambia*); others spoke of efforts to promote health as a shared responsibility involving communities and grass-roots participation in primary health care initiatives (*Marshall Islands*).

Offsetting such clear signs of progress, however, were reports of resource-starved health structures, little improvement in maternal mortality and continuing malnutrition and mortality among children. Malaria was identified as a major killer in endemic areas. Household food security was a concern for many (*Kenya; Malawi; Turkmenistan*), as were diseases related to changing life styles, the abuse of drugs, alcohol and tobacco (*Lebanon; Luxembourg; Palau; Vanuatu*).

A number of delegations also spoke out on the reproductive health rights and the needs of adolescents. Observing that adolescents are sexually active all over the world, the Danish delegate said: “*We can deny it, we can silence it, but it is a fact. And with silence we seal the destiny of yet more millions of adolescents as they fall victim to HIV/AIDS, early and unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions and sexually transmitted diseases.*” (Ambassador Ellen Margrethe Løj, Permanent Representative of Denmark to the United Nations)

◆ *Harnessing advances in technology*

A number of countries drew attention to the need to bridge the ‘digital divide’ and close the widening technology gap between north and south, strengthening the role of technology transfer in international cooperation (*Equatorial Guinea; Honduras; Pakistan*). With technologies growing by leaps and bounds, the enormous potential must be fully and equitably tapped (*China; Guyana*). Advances in science and technology – particularly research – must be harnessed to benefit children in developing countries (*Jamaica*).

Technology and knowledge from private enterprise should be used to generate more social projects (*Peru*). It was recognized that lack of access to modern educational tools and communications equipment hindered the progress of young people and placed them at a particular disadvantage in the labour market (*Panama*). A number of countries accordingly highlighted efforts to upgrade the use of information technology in the school system (*Australia; Georgia; Mauritius*). At the same time, concerns were raised about the need to shield children from the negative aspects of the Internet (*Mauritius*).

◆ ***Protecting the environment for children***

Environmental health threats to children were identified by a number of delegations. These included the continuing health consequences for children of Chernobyl (*Belarus; Moldova; Ukraine*) the residue of toxic chemicals left over from war (*Viet Nam*); the negative effects of environmental degradation and climate change (*Micronesia and Samoa*) and urgency related to water management (*Tajikistan*). Particular problems related to the urban environment were also identified (*Vanuatu*). National legislation on the environment has been adopted (*El Salvador*) and the importance of the environment in education was mentioned by a number of countries.

Canada cautioned that economic development must not degrade the global environment. *France* raised the principle of intergenerational justice in environmental protection to ensure that children grow up in an environment free from pollution and that future generations are bequeathed a protected and sound ecosystem, including protection of biological diversity. Environmental protection was identified among the needed objectives of the agenda of the international community for the next decade.

◆ ***Implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child***

Many delegates urged that actions for children should be firmly rooted, anchored and framed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child which, along with its Optional Protocols, provided the legal basis, the moral imperative and the essential touchstone for international efforts for children. As the most universally ratified human rights treaty in history, delegates argued the Convention must remain at the heart of efforts for children, with full implementation needed to ensure that its principles are translated into practice and that rights become realities.

Numerous speakers drew attention to the powerful influence of the Convention over the decade; in terms of standard setting; as an instrument of advocacy and social mobilization; as a spur to legal reform and the development of new institutions; as the basis for an expanded vision of children; and as a guide to action, placing children high on the international agenda. *Viet Nam* observed that over the past 10 years the CRC had become a motivating force and noble goal for all States Parties, leading to a heightened consciousness among world leaders of their obligations to children. *Monaco* emphasized the need to respect and protect the rights of children in

accordance with the CRC, with member States, whether party to Convention or not, duty-bound to protect children.

A number of delegates expressed commitment to the full implementation of the Convention and to ensuring that the CRC remain the cornerstone of follow-up to the Special Session. In this regard, for example, *Hungary* pledged that “*We will do our best to have a final document that describes priorities and target-oriented aims in terms of the full respect of the rights of the child*” (Mr. Imre Szakács, Secretary of State, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Hungary) and *New Zealand* urged that we must strive to implement the Convention “*with the aid of the Platform of Action adopted by this Special Session*” (Mr. Steve Maharey, Minister for Social Services and Employment, New Zealand). As noted by *Papua New Guinea*, the Convention implies not only the rights of children, but the obligation of adults towards succeeding generations. For many gathered at the Special Session, this served as the clarion call for commitments to building a world fit for children.

◆ ***Recognizing and supporting the central role of family***

Most speakers emphasized the importance of the family as the fundamental unit of society and of parents as the primary caregivers of children. The family environment, as the source of basic social values and education, was acknowledged to be critical in shaping the destiny and future of children. Families fulfilled that most basic right of children – the right to be loved and cared for in a warm and nurturing environment. Moreover, realization of the rights of the child was seen to be intimately linked to the realization of the rights and duties of the parents. Policies in support of parents and families were to be promoted, and social assistance programmes established to support, strengthen and complement their caregiving roles.

In cases of family breakdown or the death of parents, alternative support structures, including community-based ones, were particularly important. A number of speakers outlined national policies and plans in support of the family. Others pointed to challenges threatening the family environment and the child within. There was general agreement that strong support for families continued to be an important element in the promotion and protection of the rights of the child.

Hungary observed that an aim of the Hungarian government had been to become the ‘government for families’ – with creation of a national family policy and family allowances to enhance standards of living, consolidate family security, and reward families for bringing up of children. In *Costa Rica*, where growing numbers of unmarried and unprepared adolescents are becoming mothers, programmes exist to improve childcare capacities of adolescent mothers, and an innovative new law on responsible fatherhood has been adopted. *Slovakia* noted its special protection of children born outside of marriage. A number of countries outlined policies of parental leave aimed at giving children a good start in life. *Finland* stressed that cooperation between public authorities and labour market organizations should promote a balance between work and family life. *Greece* has introduced a national action plan on social inclusion which contains benefits for large families and day care. *Estonia* spoke of the problems of children in families that were ‘job rich, but time poor’ who were likely to suffer from loneliness and distress.

Mexico stressed the importance of good communication between parents and children. *San Marino* stressed that the family must be put at the center of efforts to eradicate poverty, and to

break the vicious cycle of aggression, violence and abuse of minors. *France* stressed that a key to improving the lot of children lay in strengthening support for adults so that they could better fulfil their roles. In *Ireland*, there was a strong commitment to support children by empowering their families and communities. For *Saudi Arabia*, child rights are a responsibility of parents, society and the state, with relationships to be based on faith and a system of beliefs and values. In *Libya*, child protection and development are based on the principle that ‘the family is both the child’s cradle and his or her social umbrella’, with a particular accent on the role of the mother. *Iran* upheld the primary responsibility of the family for the protection and upbringing of children, reaffirming the importance of the family in the country’s development plans and strategies.

◆ ***Promoting child participation***

There was overwhelming consensus on the value of children’s participation in society, which is to be promoted through respect for their freedom of expression and their right to be heard on issues that concern them. It was clear from numerous statements that a new vision of children and young people as citizens, participants and partners is growing. Delegates stressed that children must never be seen as part of the problem, but rather as part of the solution. ‘*They are our most important asset. They are our partners for the future. They are our future.*’ (Ms. Hilde F. Johnson, Minister for International Development, Norway). The Special Session had helped foster and cultivate a transformation in perspective, with children and young people no longer to be considered as objects of protection or passive recipients of services, but as persons in their own right, with rights and capacities to participate in decision-making on matters that concern them. Young people present at the gathering demanded no less.

YOUTH DELEGATES IN PLENARY DEBATES

Willmyn Aerdt, a youth representative from *the Netherlands*, observed that her presence at the podium meant that youth participation was taken seriously, but stressed that it needed to be taken even more seriously. ‘We are experts in our own field. We must not only be consulted, but we must be involved in the whole decision-making process’. She also urged governments to open up their eyes to young people’s sexuality, and fulfil Cairo commitments to make reproductive health services available without discrimination – as a right not a favor. Heidi Grande, child delegate from *Norway* spoke of the change brought about by the Convention on the Rights of the Child – from victims to citizens in their own right, and stressed the importance of the participation of children and adolescents as ‘experts’ on being 8, 12, or 17 years old in their respective communities.

Consulting with those experts would make international efforts on their behalf more effective. Maja Frankel, *Swedish* youth delegate also highlighted the importance of political will for the meaningful participation of young people who should be seen as a resource rather than a burden. Mabel Fati Houenouwa, president of the *Togo* Children’s Parliament outlined the global challenges of child labour, trafficking, HIV/AIDS and economic sanctions, expressing the hope for fewer unhappy children on the planet.

Some delegates linked child rights and participation to the system of rights and duties that every human being should enjoy and to an expanding notion of citizenry: *“Any real progress in this regard must be measured by the extent of evolution of public freedoms, participation in decision-making, and the expansion of the functions and roles of civil society organizations whose great importance in human development is universally recognized.”* (H.H. Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al-Misnad, President of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs, Qatar).

In *Ireland*, listening to and involving children was a key goal of the country’s first-ever national children’s strategy developed in 2000. In a number of countries, children’s parliaments, youth councils and other fora were seen as essential structures for the cultivation of participation in democratic societies, With children taking part in the long-term development of their country, it is necessary to change mindsets and treat every child as a person with potential to enrich the lives of others (*Lesotho*). Recognizing the essential role children play in overall national development, *Latvia* expressed the hope that its young participants in the Children’s Forum would return home and share their experiences with parents, community leaders and friends.

More information is available in the [Child and Adolescent Participation](#) page of the Special Session website.

ADOPTION OF THE OUTCOME DOCUMENT AND CONCLUSIONS

At the end of the plenary discussions, the final outcome document was presented and adopted, following which a number of statements were made clarifying positions and interpretations. General Assembly President Han Seung-soo (Republic of Korea), applauding the work of government leaders, civil society and children, noted that the Special Session was not an end in itself, but a milestone in a long journey that had begun in 1990 with the World Summit, gathering momentum during the 1990s. It was this process that had eventually led to the international community agreeing on a plan for the future of children in a world where their basic needs would be met and their rights respected.

Carol Bellamy, making concluding remarks on behalf of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, said the three-day event marked the first General Assembly where children were not only seen but also heard. *“They captured our hearts, they captured our minds. They inspired us with their energy and enthusiasm. They reminded us of our past promises and they asked for action now... The Secretary-General has repeatedly recognized that investing in children is the first essential step towards breaking the cycle of poverty.* Noting that the goals adopted in ‘A World Fit for Children’ are at the very heart of the Millennium Development Goals, Bellamy stated *“On behalf of the Secretary-General, I would like to remind you that now is the time for action.”*

More information is available on the [‘A World Fit for Children’](#) page of the Special Session website.