

## Round Table 2

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

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

Thursday, 9 May 2002

Co-Chairs:

H.E. Mrs. Tarja Halonen, President of Finland

H.E. Mr. Vicente Fox, President of Mexico

*“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?”*

*Marie-Claire Umuhoza (17), Rwanda*

*“Give us, your children, a good today. We will, in turn, give you a good tomorrow.”*

*Toukir Ahmed (16), Bangladesh*

The importance of listening to children and young people in a true intergenerational dialogue was one of the major themes of this round table. Today, they made their voices heard. In addition to Marie-Claire and Toukir, the child delegates who opened the meeting, other young delegates told us of their concerns.

Marie-Claire eloquently described the devastating effects of violence on her family and her country, telling us that her parents had been killed and she and her three sisters had been forced to flee. “I am here without a father, a mother ... no one to call me ‘my child’. Call me your daughter. I need love.”

Amir spoke of the need to combat exploitation and abuse in a world where there was violence and cruelty, conflict and war, and where children required special attention, especially against child trafficking and child abuse.

The other young delegates stressed the importance of real participation by children and young people, as well as the rights of refugee children, girls and indigenous children. One said that the issue of participation was not taken seriously in the outcome document. Our biggest challenge, they said, is what to do when we go home to make our words a reality.

A major theme of the discussion was that every child must have an equal opportunity to grow and develop, beginning with a safe delivery and access to medical care and education, with children in vulnerable groups requiring special care and attention. The importance of

reconfirming rights was also stressed; according to one participant, for example, access to reproductive health services was a right, not a privilege.

Many participants stressed the importance of living up to existing international commitments. One said “this forum cannot accept that children are negotiable”. Another underlined the need for leadership and high-level participation from industrialized and developing countries at events like the Special Session.

The issue of ensuring adequate resources was raised repeatedly. There must be a genuine partnership between donors and programme countries, and a global plan for children. Within countries, more resources must be allocated to children. Many speakers appealed for debt relief in favor of children and for fair access to markets.

Many speakers stressed the special needs of Africa – affected by poverty, conflict and disease, particularly malaria and HIV/AIDS. Dr. Peter Piot, Executive Director of UNAIDS, said that AIDS prevention and care must be integrated into all development, humanitarian and peace-keeping operations “because it is part of life.”

Following the statement by Marie-Claire, many participants spoke of the harm done to children by conflict and war. There must be early warning systems and the United Nations has a role in preventing conflict. In addition to immediate relief, children affected by conflict require longer-term assistance and psychosocial care. Another reminded that man-made disasters were equally damaging to children’s well-being.

The importance of education, especially for girls, was underlined by many speakers. Mr. John Daniel, Deputy Director-General for Education of UNESCO, speaking on behalf of the members of the Education for All consortium, outlined progress made in terms of national plans and international developments such as the Monterrey Consensus.

The exploitation of children, child trafficking and hazardous child labour were condemned by many speakers. Governments were urged to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, in order to ensure accountability for these crimes. The Director-General of ILO, Mr. Juan Somavia, said that 180 million children are involved in the worst forms of child labour.

Speakers outlined measures they are taking to protect children’s rights, including the creation of ombudspersons for children and children’s parliaments and national plans of action. Countries are also enacting national legislation and reforming juvenile justice systems to conform to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Many countries are moving away from institutions and working with communities and NGOs to support foster families for orphans and other children without families.

The importance of regional and international cooperation, including for collecting data on children for monitoring and follow-up to international conferences like the Special Session, was stressed by several participants. Sharing of best practices by the United Nations system would help to accelerate progress.

Two common threads of the debate were the need to generate resources, and that economic development went hand in hand with human development. The Special Session on Children was part of a “cycle of virtue” which included the International Conference on Financing for Development recently held in Monterrey, Mexico, and the upcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development, to take place in Johannesburg, South Africa later this year. The overriding priority of this cycle was children and young people. The world must respond to the challenges facing young people and move from commitments to action.