

Round Table 3

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Friday, 10 May 2002

Co-Chairs:

H.E. Mr. Sher Bahadur Deuba, Prime Minister of Nepal

H.E. Mr. Levy Mwanawasa, President of Zambia

“Listen to what we have to say, because it will help you make the right decisions for us ... and with us.”
Sara Mandić (16), Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

“We need you to believe in us and invest in us.”
Yang Ngen Fat (17), Suriname

The two child delegates set the tone for the round table discussion. Sara Mandić of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia spoke about the need for education and schools that are fit for children, saying that poor quality schools “can make us study but they cannot make us learn.” Yang Ngen Fat of Suriname stressed the lifelong toll of abuse and exploitation on children, asking participants to “imagine the many children who are abused ... who are sold ... who don’t have families to care for them” and asking, “where is their future?” Other young people joined the round table as part of their national delegations, speaking about violence in the home, drug abuse and the rights of indigenous children.

The question of resources was perhaps the main theme of the discussion because adequate resources are so central to achieving the goal of a world fit for children. The round table heard many calls for meeting international targets for ODA and for increasing resources for programmes benefiting children and women. There was a call for good governance and investment in people, as well as claims that aid for children not be subject to conditionalities. All participants agreed that the cycle of poverty must end if children are to have a good future. There were calls for fairer trading systems and open markets and for economic solutions that look at the realities of countries today.

HIV/AIDS is threatening the lives of children, especially in Africa, where the gains of the last 50 years have been lost in the last 5 to 10 years. In addition to drugs at reduced or preferential

prices, countries need appropriate infrastructures, clinics, trained health workers, voluntary counseling and testing and even clean water. Mr. Kunio Waki, Deputy Executive Director of UNFPA, said that we have to trust young people and empower them with knowledge about reproductive health.

Many participants stressed the importance of paying special attention to the needs and rights of girls to adequate nutrition, education and protection from abuse and exploitation, especially given the dangers of HIV/AIDS. In many families, girls still do not go to school because parents cannot afford fees for all their children and so send only the boys.

Education remains critical to children's development as productive and happy members of society, beginning with pre-school and through secondary school. The particular importance of quality primary education was stressed, with calls for quality education that trains children for our changing world, teaching them new skills and about entrepreneurship, science and technology. There must be adequately trained teachers. Access to computers and the Internet are critical for bridging the digital divide. Children must also learn about things that interest them and develop their creativity. Children must learn tolerance and respect for others, and for the environment. They must be taught about their rights so they may in turn educate their families.

There were a number of comments about corporal punishment in schools, with some speakers saying it was accepted in their countries. Yang Ngen Fat said that he had been hit and told he was dumb. He felt there should not be a "bossy" relationship between students and teachers. "Pay attention to our goals and don't put us down," he said. One participant said that positive disciplinary measures should replace corporal punishment.

The education of the child begins in the family, which ensures that children have a good start in life. Participants stressed the important role played by both mothers and fathers in the lives of their children. As one of the young speakers said, children have a right to live without violence in their homes. Several participants said their Governments had enacted legislation to protect children from abuse in their homes, but that it was also vital to teach and socialize policemen, children and families themselves and the rest of society to respect these laws. It was said that while the State had the main responsibility to protect rights, families, communities and NGOs also shared that responsibility. In some cases, families require financial or other support so they can send their children to school instead of working.

Many speakers spoke of the devastating effects of conflict on children. Conflict harms children physically – they are abducted as child soldiers and are maimed and mutilated, injured by landmines or wounded in combat. It also prevents them from receiving immunization and other health services and halts their education. Conflict also harms children emotionally and mentally and children affected by conflict need special care and attention. Other participants spoke about other forms of exploitation of children, especially sexual exploitation, and the recent Yokohama declaration on this issue.

The young people all said that words must be followed by clear action. Many participants at the round table spoke of the need for legal mechanisms to match political commitments, and to develop and implement national laws and judicial systems that reflect the Convention on the

Rights of the Child. The importance of reaching minorities and marginalized children was stressed by several participants. Many countries have children's parliaments and other means for children to express themselves, including newspapers written by children for children.

Many participants, including the young delegates, emphasized the importance of agreeing on the final text of the outcome document so that when everyone returned home from New York, they would have something positive on which to build. As one of the Co-Chairs said in closing, the future would be too ghastly to contemplate if the world did not move forward from here.