

# A YOUNG PERSON'S GUIDE TO: THE 2002 UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL SESSION ON CHILDREN



**You are about to read a document that will tell you more about the 2002 United Nations Special Session on Children.**

This guide has been developed to give you a clear picture of what took place at the United Nations Special Session on Children which was held in New York,

May 8 - 10, 2002. On the following pages you will find information about:



- What was the United Nations Special Session on Children?
- Events that led up to the United Nations Special Session on Children.
- Details about what happened at the United Nations Special Session on Children.
- Information about documents that were discussed at the United Nations Special Session on Children.
- And more...



**Before you get started here is some important information ...**

● **The United Nations:**

Often referred to as the "UN" for short, it was created after the Second World War. It provides a place for all the countries of the world to discuss problems and deal with issues that affect them all. It has a key role in trying to maintain international peace and security. The United Nations is based in New York and Geneva, but also has offices in other countries.

● **The UN General Assembly:**

The United Nations is made up of 189 countries that are all represented in the UN General Assembly. The General Assembly is like a parliament of the nations which meets in New York to discuss the world's most important problems. Although the UN is not a world government, it is a place where countries can agree how they want to work together to tackle issues.

● **What Is A Special Session Of The UN General Assembly?**

Every year the UN General Assembly meets on a regular basis to discuss various questions. Sometimes the General Assembly decides to have a 'Special Session' to discuss a particular problem or issue for a few days. Since the United Nations was founded the General Assembly has held over 20 'Special Sessions'. They have looked at issues such as social development, women and disarmament. In June 2001 the General Assembly held a Special Session to look at how the world should deal with HIV/AIDS. May 2002 was the first time, in the history of the United Nations, that a Special Session on Children had been held.

● **Why Was There A Special Session On Children?**

In 1990 there was a major international meeting on children called the World Summit on Children. It agreed to 27 goals that the governments of the world would try and achieve for children. The 2002 Special Session on Children was an opportunity to look at what had happened to children since 1990 and to make new promises aimed at improving the lives of children for the next 10 - 15 years.

## ● **Definition of a child:**

Using the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child is considered to be any human being below the age of 18 [CRC Article 1]. The definition therefore includes babies, small children, older children and young people.

## ● **Official UN reports, documents and papers...**

have identification letters and numbers on them, for example: A/51/256 or 54/93. These number and letters are used so that documents don't get mixed up and confused with other documents with similar names or titles.

## ● **The Secretary General:**

Kofi Annan is the head of the United Nations, called the Secretary General. He was elected in 1997 as the UN's seventh Secretary General. He has since been re-elected for a second period of four years.

## ● **UNICEF:**

The United Nations Children's Fund, originally set up in 1946 as the UN International Children's Emergency Fund. This is the main organisation in the United Nations that works for the protection, survival and development of children. It works closely with governments around the world to provide services to children such as medicines, vaccines, water, food and schooling.

- This guide gives you a brief look at information relating to the Special Session on Children. If you want **more information** check out one of the web sites below. Good luck!

[www.savethechildren.net](http://www.savethechildren.net)

[www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)

[www.crin.org](http://www.crin.org)



# THE ROAD TO THE 2002 UN SPECIAL SESSION ON CHILDREN: HOW DID WE GET THERE?



## 1. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

On November 20<sup>th</sup>, 1989 the United Nations General Assembly promised certain things to children by formally adopting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (also known as the CRC). The CRC provides the framework for the promotion and protection of the basic human rights for all children, everywhere, all the time.

The CRC explains that children's rights include the right to:

- be protected from all types of harm;
- be provided with things they need to survive and grow;
- take part in community and political life;
- grow up in their own family, culture, language and religion whenever possible.

## 2. The 1990 World Summit on Children

In 1990 governments held a big meeting called "The World Summit for Children" in New York. The main goal of the meeting was to agree to promises and commitments to improve the lives of children. At this meeting they promised to always put the best interest of children first, in both good times and bad times. They made 27 promises for children which they said they would achieve by the year 2000 and which they put in a document called the "World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and Plan of Action".

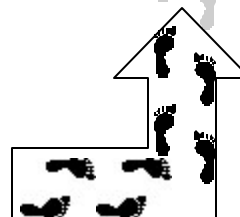
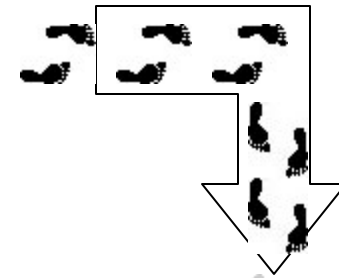
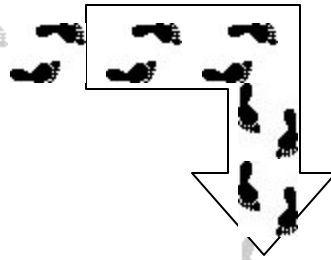
## 3. National Programmes of Action

After the 1990 World Summit for Children, world leaders returned to their home countries. They now had to look at ways to make the promises a reality in their home countries. Many countries developed what is called, "A National Programme of Action". These Programmes of Action explained how governments would achieve the goals and promises they had made. In order to do so, many said that they would work together with non-governmental organizations, other levels of government, the business community and civil society groups. These Programmes also explained how governments would collect information and see what was happening to the well being of children. This information would help them to develop programmes to deal with any problems that came up.

## 4. The Mid Decade Review

- REVIEW PROCESSES ARE LIKE A 'REPORT CARD' FOR GOVERNMENTS

In February 1996 countries were asked to submit a report detailing the progress they had made so far in achieving the goals and promises they had made at the World Summit for Children. Part of the reason for this was that some of the promises made at the 1990 World Summit for Children were meant to have been achieved by 1995. These short 5-year promises were supposed to make it easier to fulfil the other promises by the year 2000. By 1996 a few things had improved, BUT a lot of work still needed to be done. All the people and governments involved were asked to increase their efforts and remember their promises.

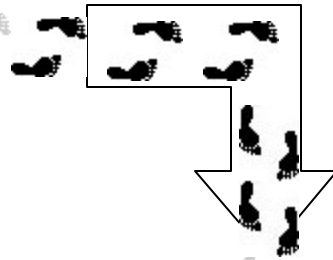


## 5. The 'End-Decade Review' Processes

10 years after the World Summit for Children, each government was expected to give a full report detailing their achievements and failures over the last 10 years. Governments were not the only groups to contribute to the reports. In some cases non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, religious groups, the media, children and young people and others would also contribute to the details of the report.

The results of these 'end-decade reviews' - the achievements and failures - can be found in the UN Secretary General's Report, "We the Children".

Visit [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org) for the full report



## 6. The 3 Prepcoms

To get ready for the Special Session on Children in May 2002, preparations needed to be made.

In the months leading up to the Special Session on Children there were 3 meetings of the Preparatory Committee (or 'Prepcom') responsible for organising the Special Session. These meetings were all held in New York at the United Nations building. Their dates were:

- The 1<sup>st</sup> Prepcom - May 2000
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> Prepcom - January 2001
- The 3<sup>rd</sup> Prepcom - June 2001

The main purpose of the Prepcoms was to look back on the successes and failures of the past 10 years, to discuss future priorities, to begin preparing the next action plan, and to make detailed plans for the UN Special Session on Children.

## 7. Regional Processes

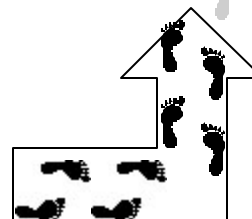
Regional preparatory meetings were held in 2000 and 2001.

These meetings were an opportunity for people to gather and discuss the key issues concerning children in their own regions. The main topics of discussions at these meetings were:

- A review of the achievements and failures since 1990
- Preparations for the 2002 Special Session on Children
- An opportunity to look forwards and think about new commitments in that region.

Five major regional meetings were held:

1. The 5<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Meeting on Children and Social Policy in the Americas  
Kingston, Jamaica October, - 2000
2. The South Asia High Level Meeting on Investing in Children  
Kathmandu, Nepal May, - 2001
3. The 5<sup>th</sup> East Asia and Pacific Ministerial Consultation  
Beijing, China - May, 2001
4. The Berlin Intergovernmental Conference for Children in Europe and Central Asia  
Berlin, Germany - May, 2001
5. The Pan- African Forum on the Future of Children  
Cairo, Egypt - May, 2001



## 8. The United Nations Special Session on Children

In May 2002 it was time for governments to think about their new promises for the next 10-15 years.

The Special Session on Children was held in 8-10 May 2002. Governments were the main participants but many other organizations and people were also included, such as, non-governmental organizations, children's advocates and children themselves. It gave the world a chance to see how children's lives had improved over the past 10 years and what still needed to be accomplished for the future. It was also an opportunity to improve the way the world views and treats young people.



## WHAT HAPPENED AT THE UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL SESSION ON CHILDREN



There were 4 main things that happened at the Special Session;



Governments decided what they should do to improve the lives of children over the next 10 years. Their discussions resulted in a document that explains the promises governments have made and the actions they will take to improve the lives of children. This document is called 'A World Fit for Children'. The document says that there are four key issues facing children that need to be looked at in particular - health, education, HIV/AIDS and the protection of children from violence, abuse and exploitation. The 'Plan of Action' in this document is supposed to guide what governments will do for children in the future.

A child friendly version of the document, 'A World Fit for Children' is available at [www.savethechildren.net](http://www.savethechildren.net).



While governments discussed the future and the next steps that needed to be taken, they also looked back at the past and the promises they had made at the 1990 World Summit for Children. The progress made during the 1990s in improving the lives of children, and the obstacles governments faced, can be found in a report called 'We the Children' which was written by UNICEF on behalf of the head of the United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan. Its main conclusion is that the governments did not keep most of the promises they made to children in 1990 because they did not invest enough money in children (for example, in schools or clean water supplies). In addition, the rich countries did not give enough help to poorer countries to help them achieve the goals. However, lots of good things did happen and many children have benefited from these achievements and from the efforts that governments made.

A child friendly Summary of this report is available at [www.savethechildren.net](http://www.savethechildren.net).



During the 3 days of the United Nations Special Session on Children, there were 3 'roundtables' where governments discussed key issues about the new promises they were making to children around the world. A 'Roundtable' is a way of describing a meeting where different people make presentations and governments readout statements they have prepared earlier. Each of the 3 roundtables had 2 children as official speakers and other children were also present representing their governments.



There were also lots of other events going on in the UN building and outside it. Some of these were organised by governments and some by Non Governmental Organizations. They discussed a wide range of problems and issues that affect children. They were not part of the main business of the meeting but were an opportunity to hear from children and adult 'experts' about what should be done for children. Children and young people played a big part in many of these events - chairing them, speaking at them and being in the audience.



## WHO ATTENDED THE SPECIAL SESSION



The Special Session was a meeting of governments who agreed together on what they wanted to do for children. The main people at the Special Session were government 'delegates' - people who represented their governments. Some of them worked in New York for their government and others came from the capital of their country. Some of them were heads of state (such as Presidents) but there were also Prime Ministers, ministers and other politicians. Most of the government delegates however were civil servants or officials. There were also many government delegates who were under 18 years of age!

There were also many 'delegates' from non-governmental organisations [NGOs] who came to the Special Session to talk about the situation of the children in their country or to highlight particular issues such as child labour or refugee children. There were many Under 18s among these delegates too.

There were also representatives from UN and other international organisations. The largest number came from UNICEF, which had done a lot of the work to make the Special Session happen. Others represented agencies such as the UN organisation looking after refugees or the World Bank (which lends money to poor countries to help them develop).



## WHAT HAPPENS NOW



After the Special Session, governments returned home and began to work on how they will be able to fulfil the new promises they made to children. By the end of 2003 many governments will have developed a 'National Plan of Action' [NPA] to help achieve the goals set out in the Outcome Document. Governments will have to make regular reports on how well they are doing.



Children and Non Governmental Organizations should be involved in trying to develop their country's National Plan of Action and in making sure that the governments do their best to keep their promises.



Save the Children consulted with thousands of young people around the world and asked them to share their ideas and experiences about how they think young people might be involved in preparing their country's National Plan of Action. These ideas have been brought together into a report called 'Shaping a Country's Future with Children and Young People'. Accompanying the report are a set of guidelines for governments, civil society and also for children and young people on how they can be involved in developing their country's National Plan of Action. This 'Starter Pack' can be found at [www.savethechildren.net](http://www.savethechildren.net).