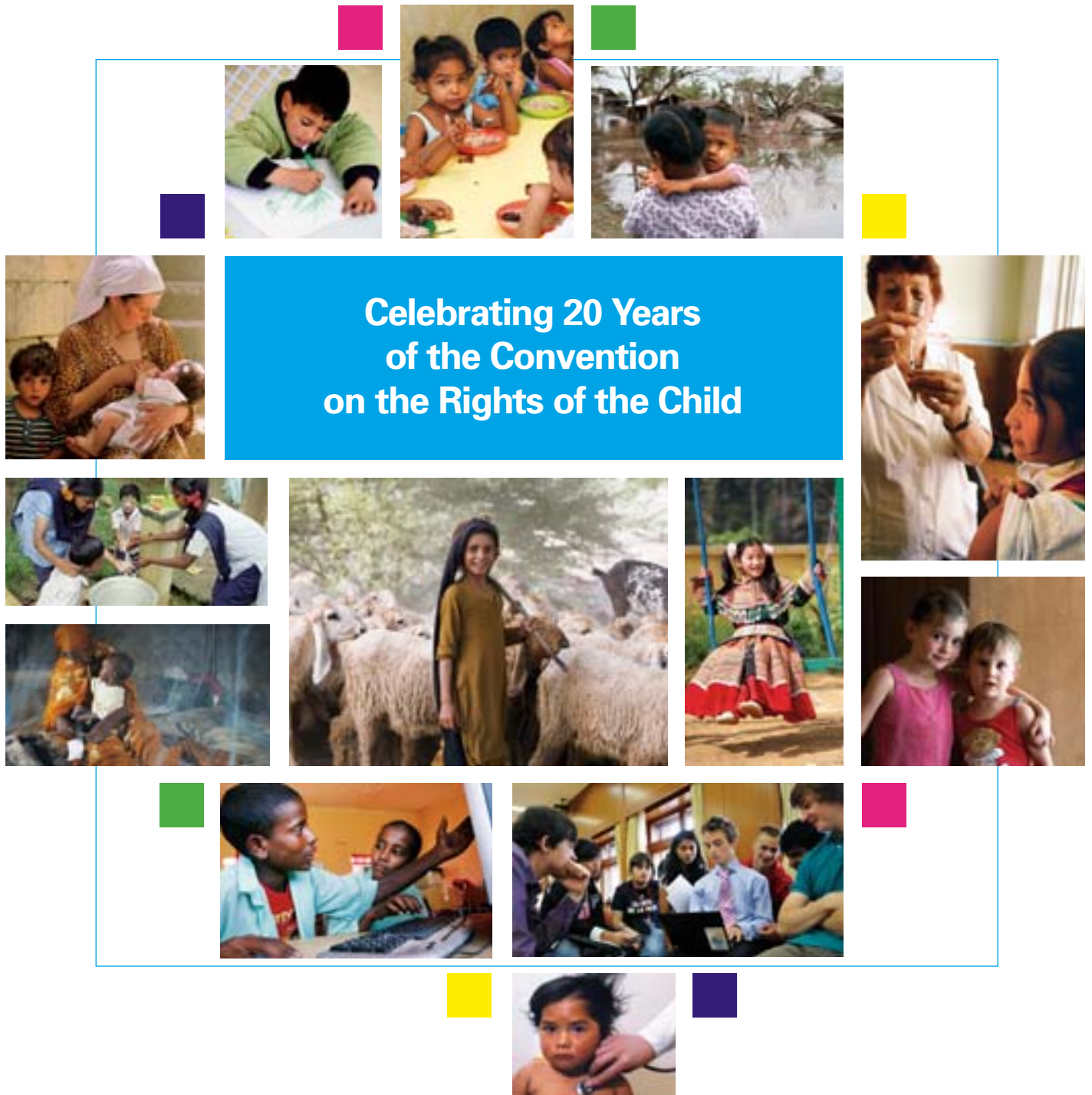


# THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN

SPECIAL EDITION



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Convention on the Rights of the Child stands as a universal standard for building a better world – a world in which the best interests of children are a primary concern of all. The challenge for the next 20 years is to build on the progress already achieved, working together to reach those children who are still being denied their rights to survival, development, protection and participation.

— Ann M. Veneman  
Executive Director, UNICEF



## THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN SPECIAL EDITION

### Executive Summary

The timeless relevance of the Convention . . . . .	2
Progress and challenges . . . . .	3
Risks and opportunities . . . . .	6
An agenda for action . . . . .	6
The road ahead . . . . .	9

### Unofficial Summary

The Convention on the Rights of the Child . . . . .	10
---	----

*To access a copy of the full report and any updates subsequent to printing, please visit our website at <[www.unicef.org/publications](http://www.unicef.org/publications)>.*

# Executive Summary

## The timeless relevance of the Convention

On 20 November 2009, the global community celebrates the 20th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The most widely ratified international human rights treaty in history, the 54 provisions of the Convention, and its Optional Protocols, articulate the full complement of civil, political, cultural, social and economic rights for all children, based on four core principles: non-discrimination; actions taken in the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and respect for the views of the child in accordance with age and maturity. These principles guide the actions of all stakeholders, including children themselves, in realizing their rights to survival, development, protection and participation.

Signed by every country in the world, and currently ratified into law by all but two, the Convention and its principles have taken root in national and local legislatures, motivating

governments worldwide to place children's rights and development at the forefront of their legislative agendas. Since 1990, more than 70 countries have incorporated children's codes into national legislation as part of law reform efforts based on the Convention's provisions.

The Convention has exerted a pervasive and profound influence on public institutions. This is reflected in increased usage of children's rights language and a stronger focus on child rights in national and international targets, policies, programmes and advocacy for human rights and social progress. The treaty has also encouraged national and local governments to adopt child-friendly budget initiatives, social protection



© UNICEF/NYHQ/2005-2251/Giacomo Pirozzi

## Progress on survival and development rights



### Child survival

The annual number of global under-five deaths has dropped from 12.5 million in 1990 to less than 9 million in 2008.



### Exclusive breastfeeding

for infants less than six months old has increased in all but one developing region.



### Micronutrient supplementation

fully protecting children in developing regions with two doses of vitamin A has risen from 16% to 62% since 1999.



### Routine immunization

of three doses of DPT3 vaccine has increased from 75% in 1990 to 81% in 2007.



### Vaccines

save millions of lives and have helped reduce global measles deaths by 74% since 2000.



### Malaria prevention

Use of insecticide-treated mosquito nets for under-fives has risen sharply in sub-Saharan Africa since 2000.

measures and human rights-based approaches to development cooperation for women and children.

The Convention has also helped foster greater awareness of child rights in businesses, schools, families and communities. Its impact on the media is clear in the development of codes of conduct for reporting on children, increased coverage of child protection issues and the inclusion of children's views on matters that concern and affect them. Religious leaders, too, are actively working for child rights, often addressing sensitive issues such as the stigma and discrimination that surround HIV and AIDS, and promoting girls' education. The Convention is also inspiring a new generation of children who are empowered partners in society.

The full significance of the Convention extends well beyond its legislative implications, and even the direct action in support of child rights it has fostered. The treatise has also help to transform attitudes towards childhood by defining the minimum standards for the treatment, care,

development, protection and participation that are due every individual under the age of 18. Its articles reinforce a common understanding among societies that to fulfil the rights of children it is imperative to protect childhood as period that is separate from adulthood, to define a time in which children can grow, learn, play and develop.



© UNICEF/NYHQ2008-0134/Giacomo Prozzi

## Progress and challenges

The era of the Convention has seen marked advances in child survival and development, expanded and consolidated efforts to protect children, and a growing recognition of the importance of empowering children to participate in their own development and protection. One



### HIV prevalence

has declined among women aged 15–24 attending antenatal clinics since 2000, in 14 of 17 countries with sufficient data to determine trends.



### HIV treatment

for children under 15 has risen dramatically, most significantly in sub-Saharan Africa.



### Improved drinking water

More than 1.6 billion people have gained access to improved drinking-water sources between 1990 and 2006.



### Primary school enrolment

The number of children out of school declined from 115 million in 2002 to 101 million in 2007.



### Primary school completion

Survival to the last primary grade for children in developing countries was more than 90% in 2000-2007 according to international survey data.



### Gender parity in primary education

is improving, with the gender parity index at 96% or higher in most developing regions.

of the most outstanding achievements in child survival and development has been the reduction in the annual number of under-five deaths, from 12.5 million in 1990 to less than 9 million in 2008.

Fewer child deaths have resulted from the immense efforts of national governments, non-governmental organizations and the international health community to prevent and control diseases, enhance food and nutrition security, and provide comprehensive, integrated services at all levels of the health system. In particular, immunization against major vaccine-preventable diseases has been a life-saving intervention for millions of children in all regions of the world.

Other child rights to survival and development also show good progress. The prevalence of underweight under-fives has declined in all regions since 1990. Rates of exclusive breastfeeding for infants under six months, the most effective protection against childhood diseases, have risen in all but one region since the early 1990s. An estimated 1.6 billion people gained access to improved water sources facilities between 1990 and 2006. Efforts to combat HIV and AIDS have also strengthened, with the expansion of testing and antiretroviral therapy to pregnant women with HIV to prevent mother-to-child transmission of the virus, and to newborns and infants to protect them from HIV. The drive for education has also intensified, with an estimated 84 per cent of children of primary school age currently



© UNICEF/NYHQ/2008-1376/Tom Pierask

attending school, diminishing gender gaps in primary school enrolment, and high rates of survival until the last grade of primary school in most developing regions.

The Convention has paved the way for the consolidation of child protection as a holistic concept, offering children the right to be safeguarded against a broad spectrum of violence, exploitation, abuse, discrimination and neglect. Over the past two decades, advocacy on child protection issues has increased markedly, and UN special representatives have been appointed on key issues such as children in armed conflict and violence against children.

## Challenges of survival and development



**2.5 billion** people still lack access to improved sanitation facilities.



**1 billion** children are deprived of one or more services essential to survival and development.



**148 million** under-fives in developing regions are underweight for their age.



**101 million** children are not attending primary school, with more girls than boys missing out.



**37 million** infants are not receiving iodized salt to protect them from iodine deficiency.



**22 million** infants are not protected from diseases by routine immunization.

Though data gaps still obscure the full extent of child protection violations, international household surveys such as Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys and Demographic and Health Surveys have since the mid-1990s provided regular data on several important key issues, including birth registration, child marriage, child labour, and in recent years attitudes towards domestic violence and child discipline. Child participation, articulated by several of the Convention's provisions, has steadily gained wider acceptance and application during the past two decades. One highlight was the 2002 UN General Assembly Special Session on Children, in which more than 400 children from over 150 countries participated in the highest decision-making body of the United Nations. Initiatives at the national and local levels – from the numerous child-friendly cities programmes adopted by large and small conurbations across the world to the child participatory budgets employed in cities in Brazil, Spain and the United Kingdom, among others – underscore the merits of child participation in decision-making forums.

Despite these advances, much remains to be done to make the promise of the Convention a reality for children worldwide. The challenges are multiple and massive. An estimated 1 billion children are still living with one or more forms of material deprivation. Millions of children, particularly in Africa and Asia, lack access to quality health-care services, micronutrient supplementation, education, improved water sources and sanitation facilities, and adequate shelter.

On average, more than 24,000 children under five still die every day from largely preventable causes. Between 500 million and 1.5 billion children are estimated to experience violence annually. Around 150 million children aged 5–14 are engaged in child labour, in excess of 140 million under-fives are underweight for their age, and around 100 million children of primary school age are not enrolled in primary school. Child participation is still in its infancy and has yet to receive widespread adoption in industrialized and developing countries.

Disparities in realizing child rights are increasingly apparent in all countries. Evidence shows that some children are at greater risk of missing out on essential services and protection than others, particularly children from marginalized, remote and impoverished communities, those who are disabled, from minority or indigenous populations, or those living in families with low levels of mother's education. In education, girls are still more likely to be out of primary or secondary school than boys worldwide. Girls also remain at higher risk of being married before age 18 and of experiencing physical and sexual violence, although boys are also affected by these protection threats.

Africa and Asia present the largest global challenges for child rights to survival, development and protection, with the regions of sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia well behind other regions on most indicators. Their progress in primary



**19 million**

infants in developing countries are born with low birthweight.



**8.8 million**

children worldwide died before their fifth birthday in 2008.



**4 million**

newborns worldwide are dying in the first month of life.



**4 million**

under-fives die each year from just three causes: diarrhoea, malaria or pneumonia.



**2 million**

children under 15 worldwide are living with HIV.



**>500,000**

women die each year from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth.

health care, education, and protection will be pivotal to accelerated progress on child rights and towards internationally agreed development goals for children.

## Risks and opportunities

The Convention on the Rights of the Child turns 20 at a volatile time. The year 2009 has been marked by the worst global financial crisis in 80 years. The resultant global economic downturn, coupled with historically high levels of food prices, has led to concerns that poverty and undernutrition will increase.

Climate and population shifts also threaten recent advances in child rights. Children are particularly vulnerable to their effects due to their physiological immaturity and the sensitivity of many of the main killers of young children – including undernutrition and vector borne diseases – to climatic conditions. Increasing evidence suggests that the world's least developed countries, which have burgeoning child populations, are likely to bear the brunt of environmental shifts. The growing correlation between civil strife and climate change is an area of particular concern for child rights. Greater stresses on economic resources, food and water supplies will potentially exacerbate existing inequities in income and access to essential services.

The risks to child rights from the current economic crisis and other external challenges must not be underestimated: There is a real danger that the repercussions of these shocks will have lifelong consequences that span generations, undermining efforts to advance children's rights for the coming decades. At the same time, history shows that such crises can be opportunities for change. Governments and other stakeholders can use challenges as an opportunity to renew their commitments to the principles and articles of the Convention and work together to consolidate gains in children's rights.

## An agenda for action

In these uncertain times, it is increasingly clear that the old way of operating is no longer applicable. The world has a unique opportunity to reconstruct itself – and dedicate itself afresh to safeguarding and nurturing not only the physical and economic spheres but also its most vulnerable citizens. The Convention on the Rights of the Child must have a central role in this realignment of priorities, based on four critical actions:

***Make children's best interests the primary test of governance.*** Every aspect of governance can affect child rights. Whether decisions are related to taxation or trade,

## Challenges of disparities



### Child mortality

among the poor is at least 1.9 times higher than among the rich in more than half of 90 countries with sufficient data to make an assessment.



### Underweight prevalence

is more than twice as likely for under-fives who are poor than for those who are rich in developing countries.



### Piped drinking-water connections

are more than twice as accessible for urban households than for rural ones.



### Improved sanitation facilities

are almost twice as accessible for urban dwellers than for rural ones in developing countries.



### HIV prevalence

among young women in Eastern and Southern Africa is 3 times higher than among young men.



### Comprehensive knowledge of HIV

among young men in South Asia is twice the rate of young women.



© UNICEF/NYHQ2008-0964/Shehzad Noorani

diplomacy or debt, there is no such thing as a ‘child-neutral’ policy, law, budget, programme or plan. The first challenge for States parties is therefore to assess the implications for children of a wide range of legislative and administrative actions. The second is to ensure that budgets, policies and programmes apply the Convention’s principles in all of their aspects.

At the national level, budgets and programmes, in particular, should prioritize services that are essential to meeting children’s right to survival, development, protection and partici-

pation. These efforts should harness and coordinate the resources of public and private sectors while monitoring child rights within countries and communities. In development cooperation, donors and recipient countries must consider how their assistance works for children. In districts and communities, local administrations must ensure that development initiatives are inclusive and participatory and that views of women and children are reflected in laws, practices, policies and programmes.

A further challenge is to strengthen and enforce laws in favour of child rights. This may require the establishment within government of permanent structures with the overall responsibility of promoting child rights and coordinating actions between sectors. The promotion of independent human rights officials, such as child ombudspersons, can also strengthen monitoring of child rights within countries and communities. Greater understanding of the situation of children, based on evidence derived from data, research and evaluation, are also critical components for evaluating effective implementation of the Convention.

***Develop capacities to realize children’s rights.*** Achieving the promise of the Convention will require contributions from every person and institution. All need to develop their



**Youth literacy**  
among young men is 1.2 times higher than among young women in the least developed countries.



**Net secondary school attendance**  
in Latin America and the Caribbean for boys is 6 percentage points lower than for girls.



**Child marriage**  
among young women living in rural areas of the developing world is twice that of young women from cities.



**Birth registration**  
is almost twice as likely for children born in cities than those born in rural areas.



**Attendance of skilled health personnel at delivery**  
for women from the richest income quintile in developing countries is 2 times higher than for the poorest developing countries.



**Lifetime risk of maternal death**  
is 300 times greater for women living in the least developed countries than it is for those from industrialized countries.

capacity to understand, respond to and promote child rights. Concerted efforts must be promoted to enhance this capacity at all levels of government, particularly at the local level where it is often most lacking. Professionals in fields as diverse as education, health, security, emergency services and urban planning, among others, should be trained in child rights issues and made aware of their own responsibilities to act in accordance with those rights.

Families must be supported in their efforts to provide the assistance and protection required to meet child rights; in many cases, this entails enabling them to have access to quality essential services and greater knowledge of improved practices in health care and hygiene, and empowering their participation in decisions that affect their lives.

As rights holders, it is imperative that children know and understand their rights and are empowered to claim them. The Convention should be taught in schools, so that children can be advocates for themselves. Children also have responsibilities to other children under the Convention: Learning about their own rights entails recognizing and respecting the rights of others.

**Support social and cultural values that respect the rights of children.** The values and standards for the care, development and protection of children that are described in the Convention are not always upheld by long-established

traditions. Social and cultural practices such as a child marriage, female genital mutilation/cutting and discrimination all currently play their part in undermining child rights. Denying children their rights on the basis of gender, ethnicity, disability or any other discriminating factor is unacceptable.



© UNICEF/NYHC2009-0249/Josh Estey

Establishing a protective environment for children necessitates addressing all threats to their rights, including those posed by harmful traditional practices. Promoting open discussion of child protection issues, improving monitoring and oversight through better data collection, analysis and use, and building the capacity of families and communities to understand and realize child rights are vital steps to eliminating all forms of violence, exploitation and abuse against children and women.

**Work together to meet the promise of the Convention for all children.** Broad partnerships are vital to the acceptance and implementation of the Convention's principles and the rights it proscribes. Collaborations in health, education,

## Challenges of protection



**500 million–1.5 billion** children have been affected by violence.



**150 million** children 5–14 years old are engaged in child labour.



**145 million** children have lost one or both parents due to all causes.



**70 million** women and girls in 29 countries have experienced female genital mutilation/cutting.



**> 64 million** women aged 20–24 in the developing world reported they were married before age 18.



**51 million** children are unregistered at birth.

protection and participation have expanded markedly in recent years and offer the promise of faster progress on child rights and towards internationally agreed development goals. Greater collaboration is still required between national and international stakeholders, communities, local governments and individual citizens. Governments must work together with donors, non-governmental organizations, religious leaders, teachers, health providers, social workers and parliamentarians in order to meet the multiple challenges facing universal and comprehensive enactment of child rights.

## The road ahead

Much of the groundwork to meet the agenda for action is already in place. The Committee on the Rights of the Child, the body entrusted with monitoring the implementation of the Convention and its Optional Protocols, continues to dispense sound guidance on implementing child rights to States parties through its reporting process, general comments and days of discussion. National governments are increasingly adopting these recommendations, with consistent benefits and gains in children's rights.

Systems-wide approaches such as the continuum of maternal, newborn and child health care, child-friendly education and the protective environment paradigm provide comprehensive frameworks to address deprivations in child health, educa-

tion and protection, respectively. The human rights-based approach to cooperation presents a robust framework for addressing disparities and ensuring that actions are guided by human rights principles. Humanitarian action now takes into account the needs of the whole child, prioritizing education and protection as well as its traditional core commitments to supply essential commodities and services to fulfil children's basic physical needs. The rapid growth in access to information and communications in the developing world is providing the potential to bring vital knowledge to remote and marginalized communities.

The challenge is to consolidate the progress of the past 20 years, mitigate the risks, and grasp the opportunities afforded by social, economic and technological progress.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child was long fought for and hard won. It is a precious document that charts our course to a world in which children's rights are fulfilled and in which all aspects of human well-being immeasurably improve as a result. As the end of the first decade of the 21st century draws to a close, we must seize the opportunity to put the Convention's principles and provisions into practice. The great challenge for the next 20 years will be to unite governmental accountability with social and individual responsibility. To make the vision of the Convention a reality for every child, it must become a guiding document for every human being.



**18 million**  
children are living with the effects of displacement.



**15 million**  
children have lost one or both parents due to AIDS.



**14 million**  
young women give birth between the ages of 15 and 19 years old.



**1.2 million**  
children were trafficked each year as of the year 2000.



**>1 million**  
children are detained through justice processes.

# Summary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

The following text is an unofficial summary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The full version of the Convention and its Optional Protocols can be found in the main report of *The State of the World's Children Special Edition: Celebrating 20 Years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, in the booklet *A World Fit for Children* and at [www.unicef.org/crc](http://www.unicef.org/crc).

## Preamble

The preamble recalls the basic principles of the United Nations and specific provisions of certain relevant human rights treaties and proclamations. It reaffirms the fact that children, because of their vulnerability, need special care and protection, and it places special emphasis on the primary caring and protective responsibility of the family. It also reaffirms the need for legal and other protection of the child before and after birth, the importance of respect for the cultural values of the child's community and the vital role of international cooperation in securing children's rights.

## Article 1

**Definition of a child.** A child is recognized as a person under 18, unless national laws recognize an earlier age of majority.

## Article 2

**Non-discrimination.** All rights apply to all children without exception. It is the State's obligation to protect children from any form of discrimination and to take positive action to promote their rights.

## Article 3

**Best interests of the child.** All actions concerning the child shall take full account of his or her best interests. The State shall provide the child with adequate care when parents, or others charged with parental responsibility, fail to do so.

## Article 4

**Implementation of rights.** The State must do all it can to implement the rights contained in the Convention.

## Article 5

**Parental guidance and the child's evolving capacities.** The State must respect the rights and responsibilities of parents and the extended family to provide guidance for the child that is appropriate to her or his evolving capacities.

## Article 6

**Life, survival and development.** Every child has the inherent right to life, and the State has an obligation to ensure the child's survival and development.

## Article 7

**Name and nationality.** The child has the right to a name at birth. The child also has the right to acquire a nationality and, as far as possible, to know his or her parents and be cared for by them.

## Article 8

**Preservation of identity.** The State has an obligation to protect and, if necessary, re-establish basic aspects of the child's identity. This includes name, nationality and family ties.

## Article 9

**Separation from parents.** The child has a right to live with his or her parents unless this is deemed incompatible with the child's best interests. The child also has the right to maintain contact with both parents if separated from one or both.

## Article 10

**Family reunification.** Children and their parents have the right to leave any country and to enter their own for purposes of reunion or the maintenance of the child-parent relationship.

## Article 11

**Illicit transfer and non-return.** The State has an obligation to prevent and remedy the kidnapping or retention abroad of children by a parent or third party.

## Article 12

**Respect of the child's views.** The child has the right to express his or her opinion freely and to have that opinion taken into account in any matter or procedure affecting the child.

## Article 13

**Freedom of expression.** The child has the right to express his or her views, obtain information and make ideas or information known, regardless of frontiers.

## Article 14

**Freedom of thought, conscience and religion.** The State shall respect the child's right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, subject to appropriate parental guidance.

**Article 15**

**Freedom of association.** Children have a right to meet with others, and to join or form associations.

**Article 16**

**Protection of privacy.** Children have the right to protection from interference with their privacy, family, home and correspondence, and to protection from libel or slander.

**Article 17**

**Access to appropriate information.** The State shall ensure the accessibility to children of information and material from a diversity of sources, and it shall encourage the mass media to disseminate information that is of social and cultural benefit to the child, and take steps to protect him or her from harmful materials.

**Article 18**

**Parental responsibilities.** Parents have joint primary responsibility for raising the child, and the State shall support them in this. The State shall provide parents with appropriate child-raising assistance.

**Article 19**

**Protection from abuse and neglect.** The State shall protect the child from all forms of maltreatment by parents or others responsible for the child's care and shall establish appropriate social programmes for the prevention of abuse and the treatment of victims.

**Article 20**

**Protection of a child without family.** The State is obliged to provide special protection for a child deprived of the family environment and to ensure that appropriate alternative family care or institutional placement is available in such cases. Efforts to meet this obligation shall pay due regard to the child's cultural background.

**Article 21**

**Adoption.** In countries where adoption is recognized and/or allowed, it shall be carried out only in the best interests of the child, and then only with the authorization of competent authorities and safeguards for the child.

**Article 22**

**Refugee children.** Special protection shall be granted to a refugee child or to a child seeking refugee status. It is the State's obligation to cooperate with competent organizations that provide such protection and assistance.

**Article 23**

**Disabled children.** A disabled child has the right to special care, education and training to help him or her enjoy a full and decent life in dignity and achieve the greatest degree of self-reliance and social integration possible.

**Article 24**

**Health and health services.** The child has a right to the highest standard of health and medical care attainable. States shall place special emphasis on the reduction of infant and child mortality and on the provision of primary and preventive health care and of public health education. They shall encourage international cooperation in this regard and strive to see that no child is deprived of access to effective health services.

**Article 25**

**Periodic review of placement.** A child who is placed by the State for reasons of care, protection or treatment is entitled to have that placement evaluated regularly.

**Article 26**

**Social security.** The child has the right to benefit from social security, including social insurance.

**Article 27**

**Standard of living.** Every child has the right to a standard of living adequate for his or her physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. Parents have the primary responsibility to ensure that the child has an adequate standard of living. The State's duty is to ensure that this responsibility can be, and is, fulfilled. State responsibility can include material assistance to parents and their children.

**Article 28**

**Education.** The child has a right to education, and the State's duty is to ensure that primary education is free and compulsory, to encourage different forms of secondary education accessible to every child, to make higher education available to all on the basis of capacity and to ensure that school discipline is consistent with children's rights and dignity. The State shall engage in international cooperation to implement the right to education.

**Article 29**

**Aims of education.** Education shall aim at developing the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to the fullest extent. Education shall prepare the child for an active adult life in a free society and shall foster in the child respect for his or her parents, for his or her own cultural identity, language and values, and for the cultural background and values of others.

**Article 30**

**Children of minorities or indigenous populations.** Children of minority communities and indigenous populations have the right to enjoy their own culture and to practise their own religion and language.

**Article 31**

**Leisure, recreation and cultural activities.** The child has the right to leisure, play and participation in cultural and artistic activities.

**Article 32**

**Child labour.** The child has the right to be protected from work that threatens his or her health, education or development. The State shall set minimum ages for employment and shall regulate working conditions.

**Article 33**

**Drug abuse.** Children have the right to protection from the use of narcotic and psychotropic drugs, and from being involved in their production or distribution.

**Article 34**

**Sexual exploitation.** The State shall protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse, including prostitution and involvement in pornography.

**Article 35**

**Sale, trafficking and abduction.** It is the State's obligation to make every effort to prevent the sale, trafficking and abduction of children.

**Article 36**

**Other forms of exploitation.** The child has the right to protection from all forms of exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of the child's welfare not covered in articles 32–35.

**Article 37**

**Torture and deprivation of liberty.** No child shall be subjected to torture, cruel treatment or punishment, unlawful arrest or deprivation of liberty. Both capital punishment and life imprisonment without the possibility for release are prohibited for offences committed by persons below age 18. Any child deprived of liberty shall be separated from adults unless it is considered in the child's best interest not to do so. A child who is detained shall have legal and other assistance as well as contact with the family.

**Article 38**

**Armed conflicts.** States shall take all feasible measures to ensure that children under 15 years of age have no direct part in hostilities. No child below 15 shall be recruited into the armed forces. States shall also ensure the protection and care of children who are affected by armed conflict as described in relevant international law.

**Article 39**

**Rehabilitative care.** The State has an obligation to ensure that child victims of armed conflicts, torture, maltreatment or exploitation receive appropriate treatment for their recovery and social reintegration.

**Article 40**

**Administration of juvenile justice.** A child in conflict with the law has the right to treatment that promotes the child's sense

of dignity and worth, takes the child's age into account and aims at his or her defense. Judicial proceedings and institutional placements shall be avoided wherever possible.

**Article 41**

**Respect for higher standards.** Wherever standards set in applicable national and international law relevant to the rights of the child are higher than those in this Convention, the higher standards shall always apply.

**Articles 42–54**

**Implementation and entry into force.** These articles notably foresee:

- the entry into force of the Convention 30 days after its ratification or accession by 20 States;
- States parties' obligation to make the rights of the Convention widely known to both adults and children;
- the establishment of a Committee on the Rights of the Child to consider the reports that States parties are required to submit two years after they have ratified the Convention and every five years thereafter;
- States parties' obligation to submit said reports to the Committee on measures they have taken to fulfil the Convention and the progress being made in their implementation;
- States parties' obligation to make their reports widely known in their own countries;
- international cooperation in the field covered by the Convention achieved by inviting UNICEF and the specialized agencies of the United Nations – such as the International Labour Organization, the World Health Organization and United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization – along with 'competent' bodies such as non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the UN to attend Committee meetings and provide expert advice on areas within the scope of their activities, and by the Committee's referring to them States Parties' requests for technical advice and assistance;
- the Committee's right to recommend to the General Assembly that special studies be undertaken on specific issues relating to the rights of the child.

*The rights of the child articulated by the Convention are further reinforced by its Optional Protocols on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, and on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict.*

## The evolution of international standards on child rights

- 1924** The League of Nations adopts the Geneva Declaration on the Rights of the Child. The declaration establishes children's rights to means for material, moral and spiritual development; special care when sick, disabled or orphaned; first call on relief when in distress; freedom from economic exploitation and an upbringing that instils a sense of social responsibility.
- 1948** The UN General Assembly passes the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which refers in article 25 to childhood as "entitled to special care and assistance."
- 1959** The UN General Assembly adopts the Declaration on the Rights of the Child, which recognizes rights such as freedom from discrimination and the rights to a name and nationality. It also specifically enshrines children's rights to education, health care and special protection.
- 1966** The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights are adopted. The covenants advocate protection for children from exploitation and promote the right to education.
- 1973** The International Labour Organization adopts Convention No. 138 on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment, which sets 18 years as the minimum age for work that might be hazardous to an individual's health, safety or morals.
- 1979** The UN General Assembly adopts the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which provides protection for the human rights of girls as well as women. It also declares 1979 as the International Year of the Child, which sets in motion the working group to draft a legally binding Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- 1989** The UN General Assembly unanimously approves the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which enters into force the following year.
- 1990** The 1990 World Summit for Children adopts the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children, along with a plan of action for implementing it in the 1990s.
- 1999** The International Labour Organization adopts Convention No. 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour.
- 2000** The UN General Assembly adopts two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, one on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the other on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.
- 2002** The UN General Assembly holds a Special Session on Children, meeting for the first time to specifically discuss children's issues. Hundreds of children participate as members of official delegations, and world leaders commit themselves to a compact on child rights, 'A World Fit for Children.'
- 2007** The five-year follow up to the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children ends with a Declaration on Children adopted by more than 140 governments. The Declaration acknowledges progress achieved and the challenges that remain, and reaffirms commitment to the World Fit for Children compact, the Convention and its Optional Protocols.

On 20 November 2009, the global community celebrates the 20th anniversary of the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the unique document that sets international standards for the care, treatment and protection of all individuals below age 18. To celebrate this landmark, the United Nations Children's Fund is dedicating a special edition of its flagship report *The State of the World's Children* to examining the Convention's evolution, progress achieved on child rights, challenges remaining, and actions to be taken to ensure that its promise becomes a reality for all children.



United Nations Children's Fund  
3 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA  
[pubdoc@unicef.org](mailto:pubdoc@unicef.org)  
[www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)

Design and prepress production: Prographics, Inc.  
ISBN: 978-92-806-4448-7  
© United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
November 2009