

Statement of the President of the UNICEF Executive Board On the Beslan Tragedy

Last Saturday, September 11th marked the third anniversary of the terrorist acts against the United States of America. These acts left many children psychologically scarred and emotionally traumatized for life as a result of losing at least one parent. We have over the last three months seen the images of frightened and hapless children and women in the Darfur region of the Sudan, and these conjure up a feeling of hopelessness and helplessness. The senseless acts of marauding and pillaging by the Janjaweed, against the Africans have driven thousands upon thousands of children and women into destituteness. These and other acts of terrorism directed at innocent people throughout the world severely affect the children. The world is witnessing a rising tide of violence directed at children. The climax point of this terror against children was the cold-blooded terrorist hostage taking and kidnapping of children in Beslan in the Russian Federation, at the beginning of September. It is an act of terrorism unprecedented in its callosity, inhumanness and cruelty. The perpetrators who took hundreds of hostages, mostly children, and turned their weapons against these helpless children, are nothing but murderers. More than 150 children on their first day of school for the year, with all their innocence, full of joy, hopes and aspirations, were cold-bloodedly deprived of their most precious gift “their lives”. Hundreds were wounded, and are fighting desperately for their lives in hospitals, possibly maimed for life physically, and most certainly permanently injured emotionally and psychologically. In these despicable acts, all international instruments and conventions relating to the rights, and well being of children were breached. The perpetrators of this evil act have stepped over the limits of the supreme moral underpinnings of humanity: -

- ❖ The sanctity of childhood,
- ❖ Love and care for our children, our pride and joy, our hope, our future.”

It is impossible to comprehend, accept, forgive and forget such heinous crimes committed against the most vulnerable members of any society, “Children and Women.”

In my capacity as the President of the Executive Board I would like to condemn in the strongest terms all acts of terrorism, and to express my

deepest sympathy and condolences to all the victims and their families and to the people and the Government of the Russian Federation.

I would like to invite the Board members to rise and observe a minute of silence in remembrance of all children, their parents, relatives and teachers who died in Beslan at the hands of terrorists, as well as all children who are victims of acts of violence.

(Stand up for minute of silence)

On behalf of the Board let me reiterate our commitments, contained in the outcome document of the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children “World Fit For Children”: Children must be protected against any acts of violence, abuse, exploitation and discrimination, as well as all forms of terrorism and hostage-taking.

The difficult times we live in demand of us to join our hands and heads so that together we can continue with our efforts to promote development, and strive for real peace; and to help win hearts and minds of all towards working for the achievement of these goals. It is not acceptable under any circumstances that our children should become victims and targets of acts of violence and terrorism; they have their rights to enjoy their childhood; and we have the solemn duty of guaranteeing and safeguarding these rights.