

## **WORLD CHILDREN'S DAY**

It's time to put children back on the agenda. It's time to put children first.

By Tanya Chapuisat, UNICEF Representative in Lebanon

Tomorrow on November 20, the United Nations celebrate World Children's Day, a global day of action 'for children, by children.' An annual opportunity to recommit ourselves to the equitable protection of the rights of every girl and boy.

On this Day, children around the world will unite to raise their voices in solidarity with the world's most disadvantaged and vulnerable children.

On this Day, each one of us must reflect upon our efforts to protect children and help them to reach their full potential.

The reality is, despite tremendous progress over the past decades, millions of children have their rights denied every single day. It is shocking to see that the lives of many children are still so heavily impacted by conflict, inequality, poverty, discrimination, displacement and natural disasters. Depriving children of their basic rights re-enforces the cycle of poverty and vulnerability from one generation to another. Yet we have the power to change that.

We hope you will join us to build a world where every child is in school and learning, safe from harm and able to fulfill their potential, and we know you do too. It's time to put children back on the national agenda.

Children are the future leaders of their societies. The future engines of their national economies. The future parents and protectors of the next generation. When we protect their rights, we are not only preventing their suffering, but we are not only safeguarding their lives. We are protecting our common future.

Ask yourself: What is a child right in times of conflict? What is key to promoting equity? What has the power of breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty and deprivation, and create opportunities and ignite hope? Education has that power. Imagine a vulnerable child living in Lebanon. To that child, education is a promise of a future. It keeps the child off the street, protecting it from abuse and exploitation, and provides it with the tools to build a life of dignity.

On November 20, let's celebrate a fun day with a serious message: promote child rights to create a better world for every girl and boy. Let's promote their right to life, health, education and to play, as well as the right to family life, to be protected from violence, to not be discriminated, and to have their views heard. Investing in children's rights allows them to become happier adults, have healthier children themselves and enable them to find and/or create dignified jobs, and can contribute to their own humanity.

UNICEF will continue making the voices of children heard and tirelessly advocate for the sacred child protection principle to be respected. Lebanon ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990, and successive Governments have renewed their commitments to create a living-friendly environment for all children living in Lebanon.

Unfortunately, huge challenges remain: more than 120,000 children, between the age of 6 and 14, living in Lebanon are still out of school; 4% to 7% girls and boys are engaged in child labour; 57% of children aged between 1 and 14 have been subjected to at least 1 form of violent discipline in their home; more than 27% of girls aged between 15 and 19 living in Lebanon are married; 35% of youth are unemployed; an estimated 85% of youth are out of learning.

What does all of this require? Political will. Institutional and financial investments. The buy-in of world leaders, willing to make the world a fairer one - for everyone. Investing in children, simply by committing to their rights, whatever it takes, is in everyone's interest.

So, Join us on World Children's Day. Let's work together and join our efforts to enable all girls and boys living in Lebanon to learn and grow, have their voices heard, reach their full potential, and ensure prosperity for the present and future of Lebanon.