Since the earliest days of its existence, UNICEF has called the world’s attention to the situation of children – to the many of them bruised by the operation of national societies and the global economy, to the ways in which they have suffered because of their parents’ poverty, to how their health has suffered through lack of food or immunization and their development through poor health, abuse and neglect, and lack of education – and has taken action to offset the damage. During the 1980s, UNICEF focused its energies on the child-health revolution, driven by the knowledge that easy-to-understand processes such as immunization, breastfeeding and oral rehydration therapy would save the lives of millions of infants. The achievements were remarkable, demonstrating that when political will, knowledge and resources converge, seemingly intractable problems could be solved.
On the remote, hilly north-eastern corner of India bordering Myanmar lies Nagaland, a tiny state embroiled in nearly a half century of continuous conflict. The population of 2 million is tired of violence, threats of extortion and living in fear. A fragile ceasefire has existed for the last three years. One college student today writes, “I can recall peace only when I was a small child – not after that.”

With the support of the Chief Secretary of Nagaland, the highest-ranking bureaucrat in the state, a series of action research workshops were initiated in Nagaland early in 2001 to create change. In the workshops, individuals are asked to ‘Imagine Nagaland’ by focusing on what they want for their state rather than on the problems they currently face. Participants move through a four-phase cycle of interviews – Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny. Over 1,000 interviews have already been conducted and 20,000 more are planned. Each interview is to generate six additional interviews, setting off a ripple effect that will reach into every corner of Nagaland society, engaging adults and children in the common cause of creating their new society.

In April 2001, more than 70 participants drawn from diverse stakeholder groups and originating from eight districts gathered for a “Discovery Phase” workshop. They represented ‘Nagaland glue’ – junior, middle and senior government officials, media, teachers, legislators and NGOs, including church leaders and human rights activists. But importantly, almost one third of the participants were children and young people from different tribal origins. For many of the adults, this was their first experience of interacting on an equal footing with the younger generation.

Initially young people and adults began visioning exercises separately. When asked “What gives life to Nagaland?” adults spoke of their sense of pride in their rich cultural heritage, their stoic acceptance of the current situation, their classless and casteless society and strong religious convictions and their yearning for peace and development.

The younger group appeared more clearly focused on the future rather than the past. Children were concerned that “Nagaland needs more freedom from violence.” They spoke about community development as being more important than individual development. They appealed for parks and sports fields. And they expressed the need for primary education because, as they put it, “even a building without a strong foundation can fall.” One student wrote:

O’ future Nagas, let’s stop this evil
Let there be peace again
Stop the gun culture, it’s not ours
For we cannot survive in this pool of
Hatred, conflict and corruption.

By the end of the first day, the young people’s honesty and eloquence, represented in paintings, slogans and poems, had jolted the adults. Children summed up what they had “more of” in comparison with the maturity, experience and responsibilities of adults. “We’re more educated, more creative, more sincere and courageous and we’re more action-oriented.” Their wish-list was clear – peace, unity, reforestation, more state advances in science and technology and guaranteed employment on leaving school.

In a second workshop, two polls of both interviewers and interviewees were conducted on the 10 imperatives of the Rallying Call for Children. ‘Educate Every Child’ was foremost in everyone’s mind, followed by ‘Care for every Child’, ‘Fight HIV/AIDS’ and ‘Listen to Children.’ “Children are the leaders of tomorrow – so we must educate them properly if we are to be led properly,” wrote one respondent.

And a student echoed with, “I imagine a Nagaland where people have less complaints and criticism, children [are] eagerly involved in school because of the good facilities and extra-curricular activities, villages [are] involved in their own development and everyone [is] involved and aware of their cultural heritage.”

Will the dream stories that are told, retold and interpreted ultimately influence the inner dialogue of the people of Nagaland, and will such internal change give greater momentum to the social change that is needed? Yes, according to one college youth who wrote in a letter, “Obviously, what we are facing now would be the consequence of what our predecessors had already committed. So it is the right time to reshape our society again. Or else the future situation will again be the result of the present, and we will be held responsible for that.”

*Imagine Nagaland* logo created by Ms. Abokou Metha, a college student attending the Regional Meeting leading to the Special Session on Children.
And then, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1989 by the UN General Assembly and entered into force a year later, profoundly changed the world’s engagement with children. Just like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the Convention articulated something fundamental about humanity’s sense of itself and acted as a watershed and reference point for all future generations that had never been there before. The Convention presented a coherent vision of children’s rights and how society should provide for them – expressed in the terms of a legal document that asked national governments to sign up to those terms and thereafter be held accountable for them.

The Convention is transforming the landscape not simply because ratifying governments have acknowledged a legal responsibility, but also because the acceptance of the idea of child rights creates its own dynamic. The world’s understanding of children is changing. Seen through the Convention’s lens, the child is an active and contributing member of a family, community and society. It is becoming evident that when adults interact with children in ways built on respect for their rights, everything changes.

This has been the quiet but vital drama played out in every country of the world over the last decade: children learning about their rights and families and communities learning how to embrace the principle of child rights and to change their attitudes and behaviours to match (see Panel 4).

**Children’s participation**

The child’s perspective is not an add-on: The world looks different from his or her vantage point. Children’s participation changes thinking and alters the design of projects and programmes. “If you listen to children, you do things better.”

When PLAN International UK started a housebuilding programme in Guatemala, for example, it at first intended to build houses with one room. But following consultation with the families who were going to

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**Leaders on behalf of children**

“Only a healthy society can generate healthy companies,” says Brazilian Oded Grajew, who founded Instituto Ethos, an association of companies dedicated to developing socially responsible business, and Fundaçao Abrinq, a child rights organization that promotes child-friendly companies.
The Youth Times
صحيفة ال‘يوث تايمز’

PYALARA: Young Palestinian leaders

Through panoramic glass windows of a sun-drenched office, young Palestinian men and women look out over one of the main crossroads near Jerusalem. They watch the heavy traffic pass by and reflect on their lives. They have reached a stage where choices have to be made. There will be lifestyles to follow, skills to learn, a future to plan.

They have come here – to the Palestinian Youth Association for Leadership and Rights Activation (PYALARA) – to join with others facing similar life decisions and to seek some peace from the horrors of conflict. At a time when many young Palestinians express fears that there is nothing more to lose; that they see no reason for living or working or studying; that they feel helpless and voiceless; PYALARA offers an alternative.

With support from UNICEF, Cordaid (the Netherlands), Friedrich Naumann Foundation (Jerusalem), European Union, Foundation for Middle East Peace and other organizations, PYALARA draws approximately 150 youth, 14–22 years old.

“We do not aim at converting young people, but we work hard to show the majority of our young people a way out,” said Hania Bitar, the director general of the Association. “Noam Chomsky sees creativity and not acquisitiveness as the most fundamental human need. We aim at making our young members play an active role in serving their country and in expressing their love and nationalism in a creative and constructive way,” she added.

PYALARA emphasizes empowerment through communication and media skills, ongoing workshops on leadership and children’s rights, peer solidarity and counselling. As one of several community service projects, it supports student journalists who publish The Youth Times, the first and only youth paper in the Palestinian region. Begun in 1998, the 16-page monthly newspaper, with a circulation of 7,000, is written in English and Arabic. The students, with training and guidance from staff and volunteers, craft the periodical from story ideas through final production. With a newly designed website www.pyalara.org, the paper is now available throughout the world.

More than 2,000 young Palestinians have submitted their writings to PYALARA, reaching out to the national, regional and international reader. In a world of journalism where adult voices control the highest notes, the pens and voices of these young Palestinian writers try to press on the right chords. This year the journalists are preparing a book with the working title ‘Young voices from Palestine’, introducing to the world first-hand accounts of the lives of young Palestinians.

But these young people are more than journalists; they are young Palestinian leaders. Recognizing the physical and psychological toll of the political situation, PYALARA launched an outreach component called ‘We Care’. This project trains college students in individual and group counselling, helping youth to help youth. With their willingness to give support, young adults eventually succeed in raising the spirits of their peers by releasing their tension, discussing their psychological, emotional and other problems and offering tangible solutions.

“When Ramallah was bombarded two days ago, I held my little sister closely...I shut her ears with my hands...I did not want her to hear the shooting and the bombardment..... I failed...she left me and rushed to my mom who herself was crying hysterically and feeling helpless,” explained Dima, an 18-year-old, first-year student at Birzeit University.

“At PYALARA hope takes a more concrete form,” explained Saleem Habash, an 18-year-old from Ramallah and one of the youth founders of PYALARA. “We realize our sense of purpose and belonging, we prioritize our needs and concerns and learn how to act upon them, we acquire skills in media and communication and learn how to spread awareness and open direct means of dialoguing with our peers in Palestine and elsewhere, and we learn ways of helping out our families, peers, society and above all, ourselves.”

The ‘We Care’ project came as a breakthrough providing for the emotional needs of children and young adults going through the psychological turmoil of the violence that pervades their lives. “We are the ‘children of the stones’ as the media calls us but we are not made of stone! We have broken hearts and misty eyes (not necessarily from tear gas!). Our loved ones are missing and our families are torn apart. The shelling on our cities, villages and camps left deep scars but not only on the crumbling walls,” were the words of some young Palestinians.

With the help of UNICEF, a group of Palestinian ministries and NGOs decided to bring some happiness into the hearts of Palestinian children on the occasion of the Palestinian Child’s Day, 5th of April. Under the logo ‘We want our childhood’, PYALARA’s young members designed, worked on and presented special TV episodes for children that were broadcasted throughout April. According to Hania Bitar, the message was clear: “In order to survive, persevere and preserve the quality of our lives, we need to allow a space for laughter, for childhood and for innocence.”
live in them, it was decided to opt for a more expensive model with two rooms. Why? Because the consultation had involved not just the adults in the family but also their children. Girls told the researchers that they did not want to have just one room in which everyone would sleep because “then we get touched in places we don’t want to be touched.”

In a further example, PLAN was involved with a poor community in Nairobi. The adult starting point was that the community’s children needed better school buildings. But when the children were consulted separately they came up with their own list of priorities. Yes, they wanted school buildings, but more than that they wanted schools in which they were not beaten and where the teachers actually showed up; they wanted streets without so much rubbish; fathers who didn’t come home drunk; and protection from sexual abuse.

As in this case, children’s messages can be uncomfortable for adults – but the more uncomfortable the message the more likely it is that it would not have been understood or predicted without children’s perspectives being directly sought. This is particularly so in the case of physical or sexual abuse, which researchers have found to be a consistent theme in surveys that have carefully consulted children.

When UNICEF in Suriname consulted primary-school-age children during a child rights promotion campaign in Marowijne in July 1999, it found that among the most significant abuses were those involving corporal punishment. As a result, during 2000 it organized follow-up activities aimed at building adults’ skills in disciplining children both at school and at home without recourse to physical violence. In addition, adults attended two stress management workshops designed to help them develop self-control.

It can even be well worth consulting children of pre-school age. In a poor district of London, a group of four- and five-year-olds were asked to produce a mural depicting their local environment as it currently was and then as they would like to see it. The researchers found, to their surprise, that the children objected to having play areas covered with grass. Why? The children preferred concrete because grass made it difficult for them to see broken glass, dog excrement and needles discarded by drug addicts.

When it comes to designing projects to benefit adolescents there is something seriously wrong if their own views are not actively sought and taken into account (see Panel 5). The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) has experienced the value of this kind of consultation over two decades of experience. Not only has the input of adolescent girls fundamentally changed the character of BRAC’s schools and programmes, but it has also shattered the original perception of the NGO’s workers that such village girls would be more interested in marriage plans than in learning – indicative of the cultural traditions and expectations that constrain children’s participation and consultation in many regions of the world. Adolescent girls now train with BRAC as teachers and reading centre coordinators – and as photographers.

On a national level, adolescents in Bangladesh are being offered a voice on television: The new private channel, Ekushey Television (ETV), runs a news programme presented by teenagers called Mukto Khobor.

In Guatemala, youth groups suffered particular persecution during the periods of dictatorship and youth organizations remain weak. But there are signs of a renaissance and, given that youth organizations provide adolescents’ main experience of democracy, their strengthening will be an essential buttress to future human rights in the country. Their experience can be inspirational – not least in their effect on their own members’ lives. In the town of Villa Nueva, for example,
Children’s opinion polls

Nearly 40,000 children between the ages of 9 and 18 in 72 countries across East Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Central Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean were the subject of extensive interviews over the last two years, as UNICEF set out to systematically collect their thoughts and opinions on matters that affect them most. In one of the largest multi-country surveys of children’s opinions ever carried out, UNICEF queried young people on such topics as school, violence in their lives and their expectations of government. The findings offer a uniquely valuable perspective on the state of the world’s children through the eyes of the world’s children.

The right to education

About half the children in Europe and Central Asia and in Latin America and the Caribbean say they go to school in order to learn. Almost 60 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean spontaneously brought up the right to education when asked about their rights, and over 40 per cent wanted laws to protect that right. In East Asia and the Pacific, UNICEF found that half of those polled spontaneously mentioned education as a child’s right, and, not surprisingly, that school was the main topic of children’s conversations with friends.

When children in Europe and Central Asia were asked what they would tell their teachers if they could say what they thought, 20 per cent said they would ask for better teacher-student relations. In Latin America and the Caribbean, a negative relationship with their teachers was linked with perceived authoritarian attitudes and the lack of space for children to express themselves.

Seen, heard and loved

Over half the children interviewed in Latin America and the Caribbean felt they are not heard, either at home or in school. In Europe and Central Asia, over 60 per cent said their opinion is not sufficiently taken into account by their government. Only 30 per cent felt they can trust their government. Close to 20 per cent of the children thought that voting in elections is ineffective.

When polled on what they would ask of social institutions such as the Church, their mayor, government and laws, Latin American and Caribbean children listed helping the poor and needy as one of their two top concerns. Almost half the children polled in CEE/CIS and Baltic States wanted their country to be a place with a better economic situation and where everybody has a job. Children in all the polling regions asserted their right to be loved.

Violence in and outside of the home

In Europe and Central Asia, 6 out of 10 children reported violent or aggressive behaviour at home and just over one quarter of those interviewed in Latin America and the Caribbean complained of a high level of aggressive behaviour, including shouting and beatings, in their homes. In East Asia and the Pacific, 23 per cent said they are beaten by parents at home, and in some places like Cambodia (44%), East Timor (53%) and Myanmar (40%), the rates are even higher.

Nearly one in five of the children interviewed in Europe and Central Asia felt their neighbourhood was unsafe to walk around in. In the Latin America and Caribbean region, the feeling of insecurity was even higher at 43 per cent; about 15 per cent of the children interviewed have themselves been victims of a robbery.

HIV/AIDS

Only 15 per cent of the 14- to 17-year-olds interviewed in the East Asia and Pacific region claimed to know “a lot” about HIV/AIDS. Over half of UNICEF’s interviewees in CEE/CIS and Baltic States, and 40 per cent in Western Europe, say they have very little or no information on HIV/AIDS. One third of those interviewed in Latin America and the Caribbean feel uninformed about sex education, HIV/AIDS and drug abuse. In countries like Ecuador, Guatemala and Panama, the percentage of children who wrongly believed that in order to avoid becoming infected one must not go near an infected person was around 20 per cent. Four per cent of the respondents said that HIV can be transmitted by touching someone infected with HIV. In Thailand in the East Asia and Pacific region, the rate rises to 10 per cent.

Social justice and peace

Over half the interviewees in Europe and Central Asia believed that children from poor families are discriminated against, and 46 per cent thought that disabled children are treated unfairly. In Western and Central Europe, over 40 per cent felt that children of different ethnic groups are treated unfairly in their country. In Latin America and the Caribbean, about 12 per cent of the children polled listed the right not to be discriminated against as one of the laws they would make to help children and adolescents.

In the Latin America and Caribbean region, one out of five children wished for a country at peace, with an even higher figure of 50 per cent in the Andean countries. And in Europe and Central Asia, about 40 per cent of the children polled by UNICEF said their desires for a country without crime or violence and a country where there would be peace eclipsed their desire for full employment and a better economic situation.
the Iqui Balam youth group comprises around 50 members of two rival gangs. Following the death by cocaine of a gang leader’s younger brother, the group rejected violence and started to engage in theatre, music and community-health activities. They are now reaching a good artistic standard and are developing pieces drawn from personal experience so as to communicate messages about family violence, drug abuse and AIDS. The group is becoming an NGO with UNICEF support, and offering training in leadership as well as in small business management.

Yet the systematic soliciting of children’s and adolescents’ opinions has hitherto been rare. In an attempt to garner their views in a more systematic way, UNICEF has embarked on a series of regional youth opinion polls, with the long-term aim of constructing a database that will help the organization evaluate whether children’s rights are being respected (see Panel 6).

**Discrimination against children**

Hearing children’s voices in this way will make it clearer how the world needs to change if it is to respect their fundamental rights. The flipside of this is that the lack of interest in consulting children hitherto has left them invisible to policy makers at all levels of society and, as European Parliament President Nicole Fontaine has said, children’s invisibility has “an inherently discriminatory impact.”

The idea that children are discriminated against is a shocking one when people first encounter it. Even veteran activists for children’s rights may balk at the idea. After all, our first reaction is to object since children are appealing: they evoke a natural sympathy in us. How could there be such discrimination?

Discrimination against children is usually less direct, less naked than that, for example, against racial or ethnic groups. It is assumed that children and their interests will be represented and safeguarded by adults, whether by their parents, their teachers or other authority figures. But, children have no right to vote or to political representation nor any access to the courts (see Panel 7). In many countries they remain the only people whom it is lawful to hit. Their views are rarely solicited or expressed in the media in any meaningful way.

No one is assuming that young children should be given the vote: Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child says clearly that “in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child [should be] given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.” Yet it is odd, to say the least, that all over the world adolescents can be married or sent to war years before they are allowed to take part in elections. And in a democracy children’s lack of voting power can mean that elected representatives take no notice of children’s interests. The net result can be disastrous for children. Over the past 20 years, for example, there has been a growth in child poverty in almost every country in the European Union and the proportion of public expenditure on children has diminished – at a time when there has been a consistent period of economic growth during which overall wealth has increased.

The answer must be two-pronged. Recognizing the likelihood of discrimination, even of an indirect and non-malicious kind, governments must set up specific mechanisms to ensure that their policies and programmes respect child rights: Some countries have appointed ombudspersons to devise specific mechanisms for taking account of the views and perspectives of children and adolescents. In Bolivia, Offices for the Defence of Children have been set up in 158 municipalities, and the goal is to establish at least one in each of the country’s 314
Voices of Young People...

On HIV/AIDS

- Half of all new cases of HIV occur in young people 15 to 24 years old.
- There are an estimated 1.4 million children under the age of 15 living with HIV worldwide.
- 80 per cent of children under the age of 15 living with HIV are children living in Africa.
- 4.3 million children under the age of 15 have died from AIDS since the beginning of the epidemic.
- More than 13 million children aged 14 or younger have been orphaned by AIDS.

“I think we young people don’t listen to the elders because in most cases they preach water and drink wine which I think is not fair.”
Youth, Africa

“A system that allows young people to make informed decisions is of utmost importance. Most campaigns don’t involve young people in the design... maybe this is why they don’t work, because they’re just adult ministry of health campaign. They’re just not cool!”
Youth, Africa

“In Azerbaijan parents often oppose, while children welcome sex education.”
Youth, Azerbaijan

“But just knowing about HIV/AIDS is not sufficient to change the way we behave. There is another factor: power. AIDS preys most on those who lack power, and girls are the most vulnerable. They are often pressured or forced into having sex, or are denied information they need to help them make informed decisions. Girls frequently lack the skills to negotiate with boys or men and the confidence to challenge them; girls fear that being too assertive will make them unpopular. Even when a girl makes an informed decision, she may be unable to negotiate safe sex.”
Hortense, 19, Côte d’Ivoire

“They [the neighbours] all know. They assume that we are also HIV positive. People used to really like my mother. Her brothers would help her – and through an NGO she was able to get free testing. That is how she found out she was HIV positive. She then had us tested because she was worried that we would also be infected. Thank God we are all negative. Our neighbours are not like before – they have distanced themselves. They should be distancing themselves from the virus, not from us.”
Ammanuel, 13 and orphaned by AIDS, Ethiopia

“They [our relatives] want to split us up. They want us to be their servants. No one has suggested a way to keep us together and help us. They have picked who they want to take – to make us work for them – not to help us. And we are not willing to be separated. We want to stay together. We would rather eat nothing but beans, as long as we are together.”
Yemisrach, 21, Ethiopia, whose parents died of AIDS

“I have to say that even though I get lots of information about AIDS, I always have the feeling that it concerns somebody else and that it isn’t a direct problem for me.”
Lucie, 15, Central and Eastern Europe

“One thing is for sure, I want to do things that benefit others. The most urgent need these days is to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, for it is killing our country. Young people can play a big part in this prevention by helping one another stay HIV negative. Youth also meet to engage in constructive activities, working to improve their communities.”
Teleza, 13, Malawi

“We are normal human beings, we can walk and talk.”
Nkosi Johnson (now deceased), 12, South Africa

“I still get sad, but I want to live to see my daughter grow up – I want to live for my daughter.”
Lan, early 20’s and HIV positive, Viet Nam
municipalities. These offices have been active in denouncing abuses that would previously have gone unnoticed, as in a recent case involving the sexual abuse of an indigenous girl by 11 soldiers where the mobilization of public opinion and the local media resulted in a prosecution that in the past would have been extremely unlikely.45

However, governments must also find ways of taking more serious account of the views of children – and of adolescents in particular. The proliferation of youth parliaments, for example, is an important development. But these must be seen not simply as an educational exercise for the children and adolescents involved (as is often the temptation) but as important democratic institutions in their own right. Some of the emerging democracies of Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States – notably Albania, Azerbaijan, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova – are blazing a trail in this regard. In Moldova there is not only an elected Children’s Parliament that includes representation for institutionalized children but also elected youth councils which work in collaboration with the country’s 18 local administrations to involve young people in the decision-making process.46

In Azerbaijan, meanwhile, the Youth Forum not only allows adolescents to make recommendations to the Ministry of Youth and Sports, but in 2000 it also came up with its own recommendation to Parliament that a group of young people should be attached as consultants to the Social Policy Commission. In addition, Azerbaijan has a higher than average proportion of young people who have been elected as Members of Parliament, including the chairperson of the Children’s Organization.47 In Africa, too, children’s parliaments are an idea whose time has come, having been launched in

**Leaders on behalf of children**

Rodwell Jacha of Image Africa Advertising turned his private-sector savvy to benefit a public cause: the fight against child sexual abuse. A media campaign in Zimbabwe on the Day of the African Child 2000 raised awareness on the issue of child sexual abuse and increased the demand for more child-friendly information on child abuse and HIV/AIDS.
“Many adults had supported the Mandate [for peace in Colombia] because they saw it as an educational exercise to help Colombian children learn about good citizenship. Instead, by voting in such huge numbers, and by showing that we really understood what the war was doing to us, we taught adults a lesson – they were the ones who had been letting us down. They were the ones who had not taken part in elections, had given us a weak government and had allowed the war to continue.”

Mayerly, 16, Colombia

“My mother, younger siblings and I fled Senafe together when the air bombardments started. We headed straight to the mountains like everyone else and stayed hidden in the mountain caves for several days. My mother decided I should continue the flight on my own because my siblings and her would only slow me down. I was scared and left all alone, but I managed to hitch a ride to Adi Keyih. There, I met some older boys I knew from my neighbourhood. I travelled with them all the way to Mai Habar. Now all of us live together in one tent. I have not heard from my mother or siblings. It has now been over two months.”

Mulugeta, 12, Eritrea

“What I don’t like is the [artillery] shelling. It comes almost every day. The shelling is the reason we had to move the school from the two previous locations. In our previous location, when the shells started to fall, we had to run into the caves for shelter. Some people [from the community] have been hurt by the shelling, but no schoolchildren. Still, I’m scared whenever I hear it.”

Hadgu, 12, Ethiopia

“The Omagh Bombing’...my best friend was killed....Although, I haven’t got over it, there is now a ceasefire in the North of Ireland, so there has been no more bombs, except the ceasefire is about to break down, and I now feel scared again to know that if the ceasefire breaks down...there will be people only a few hundred miles away being killed monthly, if not weekly, and I feel so helpless to know that there is people too young to understand why....”

Briain, 12, Ireland

“When happen conflict in Europe, in Kosovo, almost whole world looked at it and listened news. But in Africa are happening more serious things and none does anything. Is that a racism?”

Robert, 16, Latvia

“I want to get the bad, bad things out of my heart. I want to go back to school. I want to be born again as a child.”

Solomon, 16, Liberia

“The war affects us directly and indirectly...whatever we do, it is with us. We cannot escape from its reach. Like a rubber ball pushed under water, it will surface again and again.”

Mahesh, 16, Sri Lanka

“We have been crying to the world and many people come to take photos and promise to do something, but they never come back and we don’t see any result in the situation.”

Youth, Sudan

“I would like you to give a message. Please do your best to tell the world what is happening to us, the children. So that other children don’t have to pass through this violence.”

Girl, 15, abducted by the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda who was made to kill a boy who tried to escape

“I do not know why the death of a half a million Iraqi children from sanctions does not attract more world attention. I think a half of million children is a whole lot of children.”

Marwa, 10, United States
one form or another in nearly every
country on the continent.

As children attending the January
Preparatory Committee meeting for
the UN Special Session on Children
said in a joint statement: “We would
like adults to meet the promises they
have made to us so that we can aspire
to a better future.... We also call for
the participation of children and
young people because we know best
the issues which affect us. We call
for our governments to respect our
rights. The Special Session is for chil-
dren – you have to hear our voices.
After all, if not us, who else is all of
this for? Children should be seen and
heard, not ‘seen and not heard’.”

The Global Movement
for Children

The influence of the Convention on
the Rights of the Child during the
last decade of the 20th century has
been profound – and it continues to
augment, slowly but surely, with
every passing month. Every day new
come into contact with the
idea of child rights; every day new
officials in both national and local
government come to terms with the
implications of their legal duty to
respect children’s rights; every day
more children and adolescents gain
ground in exercising their right to be
listened to and to shape their world
by changing the perspectives of the
adults around them. This ground-
swell of opinion and activism for a
common purpose is bringing into being
a global movement composed of chil-
dren and their families and those who
care about child rights.

To help give this burgeoning mass
movement a public voice, six leading
organizations that work with children –
BRAC, Netaid.org Foundation, PLAN
International, Save the Children,
UNICEF and World Vision – came
together to announce their commit-
tment to building a Global Movement
for Children. This inclusive, worldwide
movement aims to draw in all those
who believe that the rights of chil-
dren must be our first priority: from
caring parents to government minis-
ters, from responsible corporations to
teachers and child-protection officers.
It is a movement that is gathering the
kind of momentum and moral force
that politicians will ignore at their
peril. In all its aspects – including the
fact that children are full and neces-
sary partners – the Global Movement
for Children is about leadership.

Over the months leading up to
the UN Special Session on Children –
which in September 2001 will review
the decade’s work since the World
Summit for Children and adopt goals
and standards for the period ahead –
this Movement has been mobilizing
support all over the world for a 10-
point agenda that aims to ‘change the
world with children’. Its Rallying Call
proclaims: “We, as citizens of every
nation and members of families, com-
munities and civil society organiza-
tions of every kind, hereby resolve to
help mobilize a Global Movement for
Children – an unstoppable crusade to
end, at long last, the poverty, ill health,
vigourance and discrimination that have
needlessly blighted and destroyed so
many young lives. Our determination
is rooted in the knowledge that in
furthering the best interests of chil-
dren, the most effective actions must
come from within the context of our
own lives and hearts, and from lis-
tening to children and young people
themselves. As members of the human
family, each of us is responsible. All of
us are accountable.”

This message is being taken into
villages, towns and cities all over the
world in a massive grass-roots cam-
paign in which UNICEF is playing a
major role. Young and old alike are
being asked to ‘Say Yes for Children’,
opting for what they think are the top
priorities for action. The same ques-
tion is being asked on the Internet as
people log on to www.gmfc.org and
offer their support.
Global Movement for Children: A role for everyone

Note: This Action Matrix is managed by Save the Children on behalf of the Global Movement for Children.
More detailed discussion and ideas for action are also being encouraged and the results of this ‘action matrix’ are being collated and analysed by the Save the Children Alliance (see Panel 7). The Global Movement website has been set up and maintained by Netaid.org – itself a joint public-private venture between the UN Development Programme and Cisco Systems of the kind the Global Movement aims to inspire – and which another founding partner of the Global Movement for Children, World Vision, is making a particular effort to promote.

The national launches of ‘Say Yes for Children’ all over the world beginning in March 2001 were spectacular for both their diversity and their high profile: presidents and prime ministers, musical and sports celebrities, religious leaders and writers joined forces with thousands of children to reach out to the widest possible audience. The following were among the highlights:

- In Azerbaijan, Say Yes was launched at the International Freestyle Wrestling Tournament, because of the popularity of the sport in the country. World Freestyle Wrestling champion Namiq Abdullayev was among the first to pledge.

- The President, Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition in Bangladesh all signed pledge forms in April, demonstrating an impressive cross-party consensus that the cause of children must be a priority.

- Say Yes was officially launched on March 26 in Belgium and covered widely by national media and youth publications. A group of the country’s leading children’s advocates joined forces to promote the campaign, with assistance from the Ministry of Education, the Youth Movement and others. Pledge forms in Dutch and French were widely distributed.

- President Stoyanov of Bulgaria signed the pledge in April in Sofia while there was a simultaneous launch in 10 other cities. National television broadcast the Say Yes appeal every day after children’s programming and before the main evening news.

- The launch of Say Yes in Burkina Faso took place at the Pan-African Festival of Film and Television in Ouagadougou. Film-makers present left their handprints in clay as a graphic way of making their pledge for children.

- In Cambodia, Prime Minister Hun Sen launched the campaign in a special prime-time television broadcast, filling out the first pledge and urging all Cambodians to follow his example.

- Chilean President Lagos used the Say Yes event to launch a National Policy and Integrated Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents, and announced that he would be ceremonially presented with the results of months of pledging in mid-August, on Chile’s Day of the Child.

- President Gbagbo of Côte d’Ivoire made the country’s first pledge before an audience of 2,000 children, traditional chiefs and business leaders who watched young circus artists, singers and dancers as well as listened to the President of the Children’s Parliament.

- In Georgia, the bells of the main Sameba Cathedral announced the Say Yes campaign on June 1 as First Lady Nanuli Shevardnadze led the launch at the Children and Youth Palace. With pledge stations around the city and young volunteers distributing pledge forms, 10,000 pledges were received by the end of the day. On 12 June, President Eduard Shevardnadze signed his
A victory for hope. The truth is that the world has not been kind to children. The truth is also that the status quo doesn’t have to remain the status quo. The ‘Say Yes for Children’ campaign, launched by UNICEF as one of its contributions to the Global Movement for Children, has mobilized communities around the world, encouraging public discussions about the rights of the child and gathering pledges from millions of people who believe that every child has the right to live in health, peace and dignity. Pictured clockwise from top right: UN Secretary-General Kofi A. Annan; Harry and Julie Belafonte in South Africa; former Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina; Jordan’s Queen Rania; Graça Machel, Kamo Masilo and Nelson Mandela in Mozambique; and in every photo, children eager to change the world.
pledge and announced his commitment to attend the Special Session on Children in September.

- At the launch of Say Yes in Ghana, President Kufuor promised the Children’s Parliament that he would implement free, compulsory basic education and an expanded teacher-training programme.

- Against the backdrop of Haiti’s current political and social turbulence, thousands of children and NGO representatives heard President Aristide commit himself to attend the Special Session on Children and to ensure education for all by 2004. Children spoke spontaneously and pleaded for their rights to be respected and for an end to violence against Haitian children.

- In Honduras, there was a launch in May and there will be a nationwide vigil organized by the various religions in the country in August. The national soccer team is showing its support by playing international matches while wearing Say Yes T-shirts.

- Prime Minister Patterson launched Say Yes on May 1st in a nationwide radio and television broadcast to kick off Jamaica’s National Child Month. The campaign will piggyback on planned events such as market days in the country’s capital in June, summer camps organized by church and community groups and NGOs in July, a national agricultural show in August and a Children’s Parliament in September.

- Queen Rania of Jordan launched Say Yes in May and in just 21 days the campaign exceeded its target by gathering 1 million pledges.

- President Ratsiraka of Madagascar made a personal pledge to ensure child rights are realized in the country and to protect children from discriminatory treatment. He declared: “We continue to affirm today that the child is king!”

- During Mongolia’s Mother and Children’s Day on 1 June, the President, Prime Minister and Governor of Ulaanbaatar all urged the country’s citizens to Say Yes. National pop star Ariunaa was named a UNICEF Special Envoy for Children and she released a Say Yes song that she had composed and performed with other artists on the launch day.

- Royal support was also forthcoming in Morocco, where Princess Lalla Meryem launched a nationwide drive on National Child Day in May.

- Say Yes took off in Mozambique on April 26 at a well-attended launch, marked by the participation of 150 students, the promise of governmental support from the Ministry of Women and Social Welfare and the spirited performance of top female vocalist Julia Mwithu. National NGOs have distributed forms and collected more than 50,000 pledges so far. On June 1, International Children’s Day, President Joaquim Chissano cast his vote before thousands gathered in Maputo.

- On June 1st, in a festive all-day celebration that saw the launch of five major child-rights initiatives, more than 500 children, parliamentarians, teachers and caregivers gathered as four South African Cabinet Ministers logged on to fill out South Africa’s child-friendly version of the pledge, called ‘Hear My Voice’ <www.children.gov.za>, and to launch Say Yes on the new website of the Office on the Rights of the Child in the Presidency.

- Renamed ‘Say Yes to Peace for
Children’, the campaign is gaining momentum in Sudan where a group of artists, led by well-known actor Ali Mahdi, is preparing to take a grand ‘March for Children’, stopping at villages on the way to make theatre presentations and collect pledges. In southern Sudan – one of the most conflict-ridden and isolated regions in the world – paper pledge forms are being distributed and collected through schools, medical outreach and immunization programmes under the umbrellas of Operation Lifeline Sudan. Pledges are also being collected in 500 ‘Child Friendly Villages’ in Darfur, Gedaref, Kordofan and River Nile areas.

In Tanzania, President Mkapa presided over the official start of Say Yes and listened to an impassioned plea by children from 20 regions of the mainland and the island of Zanzibar for the abolition of school fees.

The Makednski Posti company in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia provided prepaid postcards for distribution through daily newspapers and at schools and community centres nationwide. Top local hip-hop artist Vrcak will be campaigning for Say Yes through to September.

The regional launch for Central and Eastern Europe, Commonwealth of Independent States and the Baltic States took place in Istanbul, Turkey, at a spectacular and colourful televised show to celebrate national Children’s Day. Children from 41 countries urged the world’s leaders to make the protection of children their top priority.

In a regional launch, children, young people and adults from all walks of society came together on April 25th to set Say Yes in motion at the largest children’s museum in Mexico City. The campaign got off to a momentous start with children voicing the 10 points of the Say Yes pledge and several notable Mexicans making the country’s first set of pledges.

In West Africa, 300 traditional chiefs from Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal signed the Rallying Call of the Global Movement for Children. They lent their considerable moral and religious authority to an appeal for children’s and women’s rights and spoke out for girls’ education and against early marriage.

The launch of the Say Yes campaign right across the world in 2001 has been a remarkable phenomenon: in many cases political leaders have urgently requested that they be put under as much pressure as possible by their own populations to ‘deliver the goods’ at the Special Session. It is up to all of us to ensure that this pressure on our leaders is sustained not just through September but in the years ahead. We can do this by making our own individual pledges, adding our own voices to the swelling international chorus that is Saying Yes for Children.

None of us is too important or too insignificant to make a pledge to this cause. As the Global Movement for Children makes clear: “We are calling on every one of you, everywhere, to do as much as you possibly can for children in your own time and in your own way.”

One of the few Ghanaian women who has studied engineering, Akosua Mfumuwaa founded Akos Engineering Service, a company that makes machinery for the harvest activities usually handled by women who spend long hours supporting their families. She also trains young rural women in learning a trade and starting their own businesses.