Unquestionably, countries with the most power in the global economy need to show leadership in the pursuit of child rights. But developing countries’ disadvantage does not exempt their governments from the need to demonstrate leadership on behalf of children. The rights of children are indivisible and paramount. No society should be satisfied until the rights of all are guaranteed and respected.

Investing in children is, quite simply, the best investment a government can make. No country has made the leap into meaningful and sustained development without investing significantly in its children. According to the World Bank, one of the significant reasons, along with good macroeconomic management, that the countries of East Asia were so much more successful than those of sub-Saharan Africa in economic development during the 1970s and 1980s is that they had invested heavily in children in the preceding decades. They were reaping the harvest, in other words, of seeds sown in the 1950s and 1960s in the fertile soil of children’s health, nutrition and education.49

Mother and son in Tunisia
Voices of Young People...

On discrimination

- Of the more than 100 million out-of-school youth, 60 million are girls.
- Between 60 million and 100 million women are 'missing' from the world's population – victims of gender-based infanticide, foeticide, malnutrition and neglect.
- 90 per cent of domestic workers, the largest group of child workers in the world, are girls between 12 and 17 years old.
- In some areas, HIV infection rates are five times higher for girls than for boys.

“I understand that father had no choice. But why is my brother going to school while I cannot?”
Girl, China

“Indigenous children are often prevented from having their own identity and self-image – which prevents them from studying – and their land is taken away due to lack of documentation, leaving them without a house or a home.”
Indigenous child, Costa Rica

“Today I work as a servant and live with a family in Arsi Negele. I cannot live with my family in the countryside. Girls who escape after being abducted are not accepted in our culture – they are hated. So instead of living with my family and being hated, I prefer to live and work with strangers and continue my education.... People in the community look at girls like me who have escaped abduction differently. They talk about what has happened to us and treat us as though we are not human beings. In my new school, people are OK because they do not know. Those who have heard, however, stay away from me.”
Shegitu, 16, Ethiopia

“I feel sad about not having the opportunity to go to school . . . at least I am being offered the opportunity to learn how to sew, but how I wish I could go to school.”
Abena, 13, Ghana

“Youth are definitely paid much less than older people at work. Even if their contribution is the same or more they are not considered as part of the workforce.”
Deepti, 17, India

“Youth don't have equality with adults, women don't have equality with men, and disabled people don't have equality with ordinary people. And this is the problem of the whole of the world: fighting these types of discrimination. And we are fighting too. I am feeling that I am changing something in this society, so I don't feel we have discrimination in this country. Even if we have, okay. But I feel that we're going to change it. We're about to reach equality.”
Layali, 17, Jordan

“As an African youth and a girl, I feel disadvantaged several times not because of my circumstances but because of the images and stories created by others and distributed about my life, my past, my dreams and even my future. When the time comes for me to play a role in the world, there is none left for me because others' prejudices, backed up by images which they have selected as 'African', have already determined a place for me without respecting my right to own my own image.”
Alison, 17, Kenya

“You can't go in peace to the shops or take a walk. Maybe if I was a boy these things won't happen to us.”
Nosie, 15, Namibia

“Imagine in a family where there is a boy and a girl, the girl will do all the work in the house. If there is any sacrifice to be made it will be the girl that will suffer it, for instance, when the family income is down the girl will be send to go and hawk, that is to sell things in the streets and along the highway. Most times they will push her out to an old man or introduce her into prostitution. Even our mothers are also guilty of this act. This is very wrong, people of the world should change their attitude towards girls and women.”
Taiwo, 13, Nigeria

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In the 1990s, moreover, UNICEF studied nine developing countries and the Indian state of Kerala. All were selected for their excellent results in health and education, which far surpassed those of countries facing similar economic conditions. The aim was to find out if there was any common denominator from which other developing countries could learn. The Governments – those of Barbados, Botswana, Costa Rica, Cuba, Malaysia, Mauritius, the Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe and Kerala state – were often very different in their political orientation, but all had made a point of investing in children through strong state support for basic social services. Thus, each of these countries has consistently spent a higher proportion of their national income on primary education than their neighbours and kept primary schooling free of tuition fees.50

In contrast, recent studies in more than 30 countries have shown that basic social services receive, on average, between 12 per cent and 14 per cent of total public spending.51 This is far from adequate: National governments should be aiming to spend about 20 per cent of their budgets on basic social services, a goal accepted as part of the 20/20 Initiative at the World Summit for Social Development in 1995.

Countries that do not invest enough in basic social services, that do not thereby equip their people to face the turbulence – or seize the opportunities – associated with globalization, put themselves at a serious disadvantage. Universal access to these services offers a ‘social shock absorber’ for travelling the bumpy road to a globalized economy, giving the people who are poor a greater chance of benefiting and making the whole process of globalization more democratic.52

**Strategic leadership**

Decisions by political leaders have profound effects in the private lives of families, from the earliest years of a child’s life through to school age; the learning years, broadly those of the primary-school-age range; and the adolescent years, when the child is grappling with the full complexity of the world.

**ECD**

The central importance of early childhood development (ECD) is much

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**Figure 1. Under-investment in basic social services**

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The family is the basic social unit where the child is reared and nurtured.” So states Her Majesty Queen Rania Al-Abdullah as she charges early childhood development specialists in Jordan to design national strategies to upgrade the way children are cared for.

“Any effort towards early childhood development should therefore be interwoven with a more embracing effort towards the well-being of the family as a whole,” says the Queen, “and of women in particular.”

Queen Rania’s National Team for Early Childhood Development is working to identify those areas in need of increased attention – the earliest years of childhood, for example, when children first develop their abilities to think and learn, while laying the foundation for their values and behaviour as adults. The National Team will eventually submit its recommendations to the Jordanian Government for ratification. According to Queen Rania, “We in Jordan therefore prioritize our interventions to focus on equipping our citizens – not only parents and communities, but also youth who are the parents of tomorrow – with the necessary parenting and child-care knowledge and skills. Only then do we fully capitalize on the talents and potential of children, who are indeed our future, at this critical stage of their lives.”

In Jordan, children are traditionally cared for at home until the age of six, in most instances by mothers, older siblings and sometimes by neighbours. Fathers generally have been absent or only slightly involved in raising their children. In 1996, as part of a long-standing commitment to support community-based services, UNICEF devised the Better Parenting Project. The project reaches parents, teachers and young future parents and assists them in developing the necessary skills to meet their children’s needs most effectively.

The first step was to assemble a nationwide team of trainers in Jordan, making use of existing agencies and staff in programmes in order to improve parenting skills and increase knowledge of health, nutrition and children’s cognitive and social development needs. Mass media and community outreach strategies were used to reach families and to disseminate information about childcare and development. Groups of parents, including fathers, met with facilitators to discuss areas of concern and to exchange ideas. Kindergarten and nursery teachers were also invited to improve their skills.

The Better Parenting Project has achieved remarkable success – after the first three years, more than 13,000 parents were reached (12,257 women and 960 men). Parents who participated gained more confidence in their childcare skills and noted positive changes in their children’s behaviour, all for the affordable cost of $3.75 per child.

For our world to survive and flourish, the first step is to give our children every chance they deserve to fulfil their potential. Jordan’s strong commitment to early childhood development and its integrated approach, with the Government, non-governmental organizations and international organizations all working together, is moving us in the right direction on the path to a better future.
more widely accepted than was the case at the time of the World Summit for Children in 1990. High-quality care in early childhood is a prerequisite of healthy human development. It is also a fundamental human right. The world’s leaders must ensure that every child, without exception, has their birth registered; that they start life safe from violence and abuse; that they have sufficient nutrition, clean water, proper sanitation and health care. And just as importantly, communities must ensure that the intellectual and emotional developmental needs of children are being met; that they are given the requisite stimulation and early learning opportunities; and that their parents and other primary caregivers receive enough support and information to provide a nurturing and enriching environment (see Panel 8). If national and local governments do not deliver these things, they will be making a costly mistake – as well as failing their moral and legal obligations as set forth in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Good ECD programmes encompass all of the child-survival goals with which UNICEF is traditionally identified: maternal health, safe childbirth, regular postnatal check-ups, immunization, growth promotion through breastfeeding, complementary feeding, provision of micronutrients and parental education about nutrition and health. But they extend also into the mental, social, emotional and spiritual development of children in their early years: both the physical and psychosocial care they receive and the stimulation they enjoy.

With every passing year additional scientific evidence accumulates that a child’s start in life goes a long way to determining the quality of life they will enjoy throughout childhood. There is a growth in understanding, for example, that learning starts at birth and is promoted by positive, nurturing experiences in the earliest years of childhood. In Dalmau,
In Malawi: Fighting HIV/AIDS from the classroom


It’s 10 a.m. as the class teacher, Martha Chadzamakono, asks an animated group of 10- to 12-year-olds at the Domasi Demonstration Primary School in Zomba, Malawi, “How do you avoid HIV/AIDS?” Mrs. Chadzamakono is clearly pleased with the responses. Now that the most obvious answers have been offered, only one hand remains raised. Rebecca has another answer.

“Avoid bars and bottle stores,” the young girl states emphatically. There is no need to elaborate, it seems, as her classmates nod in knowing agreement about the potential consequences of hanging about in places where alcohol is likely to fuel potentially life-threatening sexual behaviour.

Within the national strategy to stop the epidemic, the plan is to expand this life skills programme to all schools in Malawi. Because HIV prevalence in Malawi is lowest in the 10- to 14-year age group, classes like Mrs. Chadzamakono’s provide a special opportunity to affect the course of the epidemic. “These children will probably become sexually active when they are about 13 or 14,” said Ms. Chadzamakono. “At their age, the focus is abstinence. When they’re about 14 or 15 we’ll teach them about safe sex.” And she added, “Their parents are happy to know that their children are being taught the truth about HIV/AIDS.”

But the skills learned in these classrooms have a broader impact than fighting the spread of the disease, however pressing the need to do that might be. Life skills education provides a foundation that allows young people to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Rebecca and her friends are learning about more than how to avoid HIV/AIDS; they are learning about gender relations and about their abilities to take control of their lives.

Of course what one has to do is to empower the women so they are able to stand on their own economically and socially,” says Justin Malewezi, Malawi’s Vice-President and Chairman of the Cabinet Committee on HIV/AIDS.

One of Rebecca’s chores after school is to fetch water from a nearby well. As she walks home with a 20-litre bucketful of water balanced on her head, she does her best to avoid eye contact with a group of local boys.

While Davie’s grasp of how HIV is transmitted is fairly limited, there is a cavalier logic behind his theory that he is safe from infection because younger girls are less likely to carry the virus that leads to AIDS. What doesn’t seem to weigh on his mind as much is the possibility that he might pass the virus on.

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Thanks to her life skills classes, Rebecca is clearer about the situation. “I’m not scared about getting AIDS because we are taught about HIV at school,” she says. It is the self-confidence of her answer as much as any knowledge about HIV that offers hope for Malawi’s future.
India, for instance, ECD programmes increased school attendance by 16 per cent, while in Colombia those who had benefited from early childhood programmes were shown to be twice as likely to complete primary school. What’s more, investing in children at the very outset increases the likelihood of the child reaching adolescence and being able to continue learning while dealing with the challenges of work, sexuality and survival. Government funds invested early in the lives of children, especially for children at risk, can result in compensating decreases in expenditure later on for older children and adults.

If States are to fulfil their obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child they will have to stop seeing early childhood care as an issue of concern to families alone, as an optional extra, a soft alternative. Investing in ECD should now be second nature for the human family, as natural and inevitable to our lives as the sun and the rain on a field of rice.

Basic education

The case for investing in basic high-quality education – particularly in the education of girls – has been well established. Education does more than produce clerks or clerics: It enhances life and expands opportunities for all. The benefits can be seen across the board. Farmers who can read and have learned something about finding and sorting information will be better able to keep pace with developments in agriculture: A study of 13 low-income countries indicated that a farmer with four years of schooling produced an average of 9 per cent more food than one who had none. Education has been shown to act as a ‘vaccine’ against the twin dangers of hazardous child labour and HIV/AIDS (see Panel 9).

Girls given the opportunity to go to school, moreover, tend not just to improve their own life chances and potential but those of their future children and families – and of society as a whole (see Panel 10). Girls’ education has been proven to reduce child mortality, improve child health and nutrition, improve women’s health, and also to reduce population growth, given that educated women tend to marry later and have fewer children. Societies that invest in educating girls and boys equally reap huge development dividends. “Investment in the education of girls,” says the World Bank, “may well be the highest-return investment available in the developing world.”

More than just an investment, education is a fundamental right set out by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as the Convention on the Rights of the Child. What’s more, UNICEF firmly believes that improving girls’ education is the best and quickest way of tackling poverty and of creating more just societies. It coordinates the UN Girls’ Education Initiative, launched by the UN Secretary-General at both the World Education Forum in Dakar in April 2000 and the Millennium Summit in September 2000.

The existing African Girls’ Education Initiative has proved over the last five years that targeted programmes make a real difference. Among the strategies that are working: recruiting more women and training teachers to be sensitive to gender and child rights; rooting out gender bias from textbooks and educational materials; ensuring that parents and the local community are involved; increasing pre-school provision and care; ensuring that schools are located where girls can reach them safely; providing separate latrines for girls and boys; and eliminating tuition fees and other costs that deter the poor from sending their children to school (see Panel 11).

The knowledge is there: After the last decade of research and experience
Textbooks by donkey: Educating girls in Badakhshān

Children cluster excitedly 'round the donkeys as they arrive in this mountain village in the north-eastern province of Badakhshān in Afghanistan. This time the donkeys are carrying not supplies of food, tools or seeds – this is an area chronically short of food – but rather educational materials. These books and worksheets have been on a long journey, first purchased in Pakistan by staff of UNICEF Afghanistan. They have been sent in a convoy of trucks through the mountains into Badakhshān, on a journey made each autumn before the pass closes in the winter snows. Once in the province, the Norwegian Afghanistan Committee (NAC) organizes distribution of the materials, encouraging communities to take responsibility by sending donkeys and horses to collect them from central distribution points.

Roads in Badakhshān are few and far between, and the staff from the local education department, which surveyed every village in advance of the distribution, did much of their work on horseback or on foot, sometimes taking six weeks to cover a single district.

But the remoteness of many of these mountain communities is far from being the only obstacle in the way of educating the children of the province. Afghanistan has been ravaged by conflict since 1979. Amid the widespread destruction, education has been very low on the list of priorities. Even before the war, educational opportunities in the country were extremely limited, particularly outside the major towns and cities. The rate of gross enrolment in primary school in 1978, just as the conflict began, was 37 per cent for boys and just 8 per cent for girls. Two decades on, overall enrolment figures are no better and the gender divide even worse, at 53 per cent for boys and an appalling 5 per cent for girls.

The coming to power in 1996 of the Taliban, which now controls most of the country, drastically reduced the already poor educational opportunities for Afghan girls. Formal girls’ schools were closed in Taliban-held areas. In addition, women teachers were not allowed to work, an edict which also had a disastrous effect on boys’ education, given the dependence of many schools on female staff. UNICEF’s policy position, along with that of many other international organizations, is that the denial of girls’ education contravenes the Convention on the Rights of the Child. UNICEF has therefore suspended assistance to the formal education system in Afghanistan and instead supports non-formal programmes all over the country that make an effort to include both girls and boys.

Children in Badakhshān have derived some benefit from their remoteness from the capital, Kabul. Despite its general poverty and susceptibility to earthquake damage, the province has traditionally been more committed to education than most other areas of Afghanistan. In addition, Badakhshān remains under the control of the opposition Northern Alliance, which allows girls to attend school.

This has enabled international agencies to play a part in helping the under-resourced local education department – specifically in promoting the education of girls. The provision of educational materials has been a key area of support. Another has been offering training to local teachers, who are only paid around $2 per month – well below subsistence levels. In 2000, the World Food Programme, in cooperation with UNICEF and NAC, started a food-for-education programme aimed at encouraging school attendance, with a particular emphasis on girls. In five pilot districts, both teachers and students who attend school regularly are now receiving a monthly ration of wheat, and girls are being given an extra ration of edible oil.

Programmes like these are having a quantifiable impact. While in 1993 there were 45,000 children enrolled in school, 19 per cent of whom were girls, there are now nearly 64,000 children in school, 33 per cent of whom are girls. In addition, 29 per cent of the teachers in the province are women, compared with 15 per cent in 1993.

In international terms, these are dismal figures – and UNICEF will go on working to give every child in the province, male or female, the educational opportunity that is their right. The quality of the schooling in Badakhshān, moreover, still leaves much to be desired.

But in the context of the conflict in Afghanistan, and of the comprehensive assault on girls’ rights in the Taliban-controlled areas, the educational improvements in Badakhshān are encouraging. If a girls’ education programme can make significant strides even here, with the bleakest conditions imaginable, it can make a difference anywhere.
it is clear what works and what does not. What is required are individuals who will fight for the funding necessary to extend the opportunities for learning to all children. The international community took a significant step forward at the World Education Forum by reaffirming the goal of Education for All while also setting new goals and higher standards – in expanded and improved care and education in early childhood, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. It also set as its year 2015 target not only universal access to primary schooling as before but also the completion of high-quality primary education by all children, including girls, ethnic minorities and those in difficult circumstances. Dakar reaffirmed the centrality of girls’ education in any serious development strategy and stressed that the deadline for eliminating the gender gap in primary and secondary enrolment, unlike most of the other international development targets, has been set for 2005 rather than 2015. Four short years are left for the world to deliver equal rights for girls to learning, literacy and the empowerment of education.

Adolescence

The third opportunity for making wise investments comes during a child’s adolescence. The adolescent years are a period of very rapid development for young people in every way – physical, emotional, psychological, social and spiritual. This is in fact the most rapid phase of human development apart from the period just before and after birth. Yet it is also a time of great danger. It is these older children who are most vulnerable to some of the major threats to child rights – to HIV/AIDS, sexual exploitation, exploitative child labour, being caught up in conflict or used as soldiers (see Panel 12). Adolescents are forced to enter these arenas of risk often without the information, skills and access to support services that they need.

Adolescence is also a critical gateway to improving women’s situation. The well-being of adolescent girls is pivotal in breaking down the cycles of gender discrimination that relegate far too many girls to the same disadvantaged position as their mothers. It is in these years, for example, that the gender gap in education yawns widest: While 6 per cent more boys...
This is the real magician.

*It can only be considered magic that a human being*

- With little or no training
- With little support or professional guidance
- Who lives in a thatched hut, badly ventilated and scarcely illuminated
- With no shops close by, and water miles away
- At five or ten kilometres from school, that she or he will have to walk
- Two times a day (in the morning and the afternoon)
- Who receives a salary just enough to buy a week’s food, how many times paid late
- And that doesn’t even buy clothes or furniture

*...Is able to make a child...*

- Who walked five to ten kilometres to get to school
- After a night sleeping on a ragged mat
- In a hut with many cracks and roaming cold
- Not having eaten much
- After having had to complete domestic chores

*...Learn to read, write and count...*

- In the shadow of a tree
- Sitting on the ground
- In groups of 70 children
- With no chalk or didactic means
- With no books or notebooks
- With no pens or pencils

*It’s magic, for the esoteric; a miracle, for the religious. Heroism, for the people and for each child who, from that nothing, acquires knowledge and develops skills.*

*These are the anonymous heroes of each nation. They are not heroes of war. Their only weapons are a tremendous love for children and a tenacious desire to contribute to a better world. They are the heroes of peace.*

(From UNICEF country office Mozambique) Translated from the original Portuguese.
than girls in developing countries enrol in primary school, the gap opens up to 16 per cent in the secondary years – and in South Asia reaches an alarming 36 per cent. It is teenage girls who are most likely to be threatened by sexual abuse, trafficking or exploitative forms of child labour (see Panel 13); just as it is they who are compelled by cultural insistence or overt command towards early marriage and childbearing.

Specific provision for the needs of young people often falls by the wayside given the competing demands and priorities of adults, who can exert political pressure. But, again, governments that have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child must accept that adolescents have inalienable rights that are patently ignored at present. Adolescents have the right to relevant and reliable information from a variety of sources, including parents, teachers, the media and peer educators. They have the right to be taught the life skills they need for the teenage years when they are exploring their own identity and independence – skills in negotiation, conflict resolution, critical thinking, decision-making, communication and earning a livelihood. Adolescents depend for their well-being on a safe and supportive environment that includes adults who care about them. They also have the right to participate in decisions that affect family life.

Securing and guaranteeing these rights would not only help young people, it would help human society as a whole. Adolescents make up a very large proportion of the population in developing countries, yet, as a group, they are too often ignored. They tend to be treated as a potentially delinquent, problem group instead of being valued for their energy and resourcefulness (see Panel 14). We depend on young people’s vibrancy and idealism for our capacity to change, to shake ourselves out of the corroded habits and patterns of cynicism that stand in the way of a better, more decent world. For that reason, among many others, young people’s participation in the UN Special Session on Children in September 2001 will be vital. When adolescents’ rights are fulfilled, their strength, confidence, creativity and passion can engender hope and solutions even in the most desperate situations.

**Responsibilities without borders**

All countries have every economic incentive to invest in children. Each State that has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child is bound by the stipulation that national governments must implement all of the children’s rights recognized in the Convention “to the maximum extent of their available resources;” and has accepted the legal and moral obligation to use the best interests of children as the mediating principle when tough economic decisions have to be made.

National and state-level finance ministers and financial institutions must accept their responsibilities for the ways in which countries use the public purse to invest in children. The Convention does add its own rider, however, stating that “where needed,” the resources should be sought “within the framework of international co-operation”. Developing countries must do all they can but it is abundantly clear that most of them will fall short of the 2015 targets reaffirmed by the international community at the Millennium Summit unless there is a significant increase in external assistance – and a major infusion of the resources from debt relief.

After all, the third large obstacle blocking the road to child rights, along with conflict and HIV/AIDS, is poverty, and there is a desperate necessity for those who benefit most from the increasing prosperity of the global economy to ensure that the

**Leaders on behalf of children**

Anglican Bishop Dinis Sengulane has called on churches in Mozambique to play an integral role in helping young soldiers, some drafted while they were children, to become members of peaceful society. His support of the Transforming Guns into Hoes programme has led many to exchange weapons – both real and play – for farm tools.
The involvement of children in armed conflict: Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child

On 25 May 2000, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. To date, 80 States have signed it and four have ratified it. Ten ratifications are needed to bring it into force.

The States Parties to the present Protocol,

Encouraged by the overwhelming support for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, demonstrating the widespread commitment that exists to strive for the promotion and protection of the rights of the child,

Reaffirming that the rights of children require special protection, and calling for continuous improvement of the situation of children without distinction, as well as for their development and education in conditions of peace and security,

Disturbed by the harmful and widespread impact of armed conflict on children and the long-term consequences it has for durable peace, security and development,

Condemning the targeting of children in situations of armed conflict and direct attacks on objects protected under international law, including places that generally have a significant presence of children, such as schools and hospitals,

Noting the adoption of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, in particular, the inclusion therein as a war crime, of conscripting or enlisting children under the age of 15 years or using them to participate actively in hostilities in both international and non-international armed conflicts,

Considering therefore that to strengthen further the implementation of rights recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child there is a need to increase the protection of children from involvement in armed conflict,

Noting that article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child specifies that, for the purposes of that Convention, a child means every human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier,

Convinced that an optional protocol to the Convention that raises the age of possible recruitment of persons into armed forces and their participation in hostilities will contribute effectively to the implementation of the principle that the best interests of the child are to be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children,

Noting that the twenty-sixth International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in December 1995 recommended, inter alia, that parties to conflict take every feasible step to ensure that children below the age of 18 years do not take part in hostilities,

Welcoming the unanimous adoption, in June 1999, of International Labour Organization Convention No. 182 on the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, which prohibits, inter alia, forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict,

Condemning with the gravest concern the recruitment, training and use within and across national borders of children in hostilities by armed groups distinct from the armed forces of a State, and recognizing the responsibility of those who recruit, train and use children in this regard,

Recalling the obligation of each party to an armed conflict to abide by the provisions of international humanitarian law, Stressing that the present Protocol is without prejudice to the purposes and principles contained in the Charter of the United Nations, including Article 51, and relevant norms of humanitarian law,

Bearing in mind that conditions of peace and security based on full respect of the purposes and principles contained in the Charter and observance of applicable human rights instruments are indispensable for the full protection of children, in particular during armed conflicts and foreign occupation,

Recognizing the special needs of those children who are particularly vulnerable to recruitment or use in hostilities contrary to the present Protocol owing to their economic or social status or gender,

Mindful of the necessity of taking into consideration the economic, social and political root causes of the involvement of children in armed conflicts,

Convinced of the need to strengthen international cooperation in the implementation of the present Protocol, as well as the physical and psychosocial rehabilitation and social reintegration of children who are victims of armed conflict,

Encouraging the participation of the community and, in particular, children and child victims in the dissemination of informational and educational programmes concerning the implementation of the Protocol,

Have agreed as follows:

Article 1
States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that members of their armed forces who have not attained the age of 18 years do not take a direct part in hostilities.

Article 2
States Parties shall ensure that persons who have not attained the age of 18 years are not compulsorily recruited into their armed forces.

most vulnerable – inevitably women and children in the poorest countries – also benefit. The fact is that, while there has been an overall increase in wealth, this is heavily concentrated in just a few countries. The gulf between the richest and the poorest countries on earth is actually widening with every passing day. In 1990 the annual income per person in industrialized countries was 60 times greater than that in the least developed countries; in 1999 it was almost 100 times greater.

In the last five years the international community has become increasingly concerned about reducing poverty – and with good reason. For the last decade-and-a-half, countries all around the world have been broadly following the economic policies of what has come to be known as the Washington Consensus because of its support by the United States Treasury and Washington-based institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. These policies have involved the pursuit of low inflation through fiscal discipline, trade and financial liberalization and widespread privatization. The emphasis rightly has been on efficiency and wrongly not on equity: The underlying assumption has been that the policies would result in economic growth that would benefit the poor.

The problem is that the poor have been conspicuously the last to benefit from the advantages of economic reform and globalization. In Latin America, for example, where most countries, whether out of choice or necessity, abided by the Washington Consensus with remarkable unanimity and single-mindedness in the 1990s, the new economic policies had minimal impact on income poverty. There were certainly overall benefits: single-digit inflation, a lower debt burden and an influx of private capital into the region. But, unemployment rose while nearly 80 million people remained in extreme poverty and the region retained the most unequal distribution of income and assets in the world.57

The deficiencies in the Washington Consensus are being increasingly recognized, not least by the World Bank itself.58 The poor have to be protected from the earth tremors of globalization by public investment in basic social services. If globalization is inevitable, and if it is to be a liberating rather than a damaging force, the universal package of minimum standards that it includes should not entail simply the removal of tariff barriers but also the guarantee of children’s rights.

Thankfully, there are at last signs that at least some of the richest nations are beginning to take their responsibility to combat global poverty seriously. There was a long campaign throughout the 1980s and 1990s by non-governmental organizations, religious groups and international organizations – including UNICEF in its yearly The State of the World’s Children reports – aimed at persuading the most powerful nations and international financial institutions to move more swiftly and surely to tackle the massive problem of indebtedness. The work of the Jubilee 2000 coalition, in particular, has been nothing short of heroic in transforming the issue of debt relief from a ‘fringe concern’ into a practical, serious proposition.

Now the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative, which was painfully slow and circumscribed at first, is finally starting to kick in. Debt relief has been late in coming. After many years in which Western governments and the international financial institutions held out against any kind of relief ‘on principle’, critics wondered if the HIPC Initiative was simply a smokescreen disguising a fundamental unwillingness to tackle the debt problem. By early 2000 HIPC had still only provided debt relief to four countries: Bolivia, Guyana, Mozambique and Uganda.59 Now, the ‘enhanced’ version of HIPC...
The sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography: Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child

On 25 May 2000, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. To date, 73 States have signed it and four have ratified it. Ten ratifications are needed in order to bring it into force.

The States Parties to the present Protocol,

Considering that, in order further to achieve the purposes of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the implementation of its provisions, especially articles 1, 11, 21, 32, 33, 34, 35 and 36, it would be appropriate to extend the measures that States Parties should undertake in order to guarantee the protection of the child from the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography,

Considering also that the Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child’s education, or to be harmful to the child’s health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development,

Gravely concerned at the significant and increasing international traffic in children for the purpose of the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography,

Deeply concerned at the widespread and continuing practice of sex tourism, to which children are especially vulnerable, as it directly promotes the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography,

Recognizing that a number of particularly vulnerable groups, including girl children, are at greater risk of sexual exploitation and that girl children are disproportionately represented among the sexually exploited,

Concerned about the growing availability of child pornography on the Internet and other evolving technologies, and recalling the International Conference on Combating Child Pornography on the Internet, held in Vienna in 1999, in particular its conclusion calling for the worldwide criminalization of the production, distribution, exportation, transmission, importation, intentional possession and advertising of child pornography, and stressing the importance of closer cooperation and partnership between Governments and the Internet industry,

Believing that the elimination of the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography will be facilitated by adopting a holistic approach, addressing the contributing factors, including underdevelopment, poverty, economic disparities, inequitable socio-economic structure, dysfunctioning families, lack of education, urban-rural migration, gender discrimination, irresponsible adult sexual behaviour, harmful traditional practices, armed conflicts and trafficking in children,

Believing also that efforts to raise public awareness are needed to reduce consumer demand for the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and believing further in the importance of strengthening global partnership among all actors and of improving law enforcement at the national level,

Noting the provisions of international legal instruments relevant to the protection of children, including the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, the Hague Convention on Jurisdiction, Applicable Law, Recognition, Enforcement and Cooperation in Respect of Parental Responsibility and Measures for the Protection of Children, and International Labour Organization Convention No. 182 on the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour,

Encouraged by the overwhelming support for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, demonstrating the widespread commitment that exists for the promotion and protection of the rights of the child,

Recognizing the importance of the implementation of the provisions of the Programme of Action for the Prevention of the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography and the Declaration and Agenda for Action adopted at the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, held in Stockholm from 27 to 31 August 1996, and the other relevant decisions and recommendations of pertinent international bodies,

Taking due account of the importance of the traditions and cultural values of each people for the protection and harmonious development of the child,

Have agreed as follows:

Article 1
States Parties shall prohibit the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography as provided for by the present Protocol.

Article 2
For the purposes of the present Protocol:

(a) Sale of children means any act or transaction whereby a child is transferred by any person or group of persons to another for remuneration or any other consideration;

(b) Child prostitution means the use of a child in sexual activities for remuneration or any other form of consideration;

(c) Child pornography means any representation, by whatever means, of a child engaged in real or simulated explicit sexual activities or any representation of the sexual parts of a child for primarily sexual purposes.
has at last begun to make a difference. Some 22 poor countries receive varying amounts of relief that should eventually amount to around $34 billion and should help reduce their debt to one third of what it was at the start of the process.60

Another extremely welcome development has been the announcement by the G7 countries that they will forgive 100 per cent of the bilateral debt owed them by HIPC-qualified countries. The Government of the United Kingdom has shown particular leadership on the international stage in this respect – and its decision, supported by the Canadian Government, to place any current debt-service payments from conflict-ridden countries in trust for when they attain peace is far-sighted. The UK has also taken a lead in abolishing the iniquitous practice of tying aid to the purchase of goods from the donor country’s own companies – and is now campaigning for other industrialized countries to follow suit.

The UK Government has also undertaken to increase its spending on overseas aid from 0.24 per cent of the gross national product (GNP) in 1999 to 0.31 per cent over the next two years, after many years of dwindling or stagnating aid. The increase is welcome as a first instalment but in this respect the leaders have long been the countries of northern Europe – Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden – who have consistently met or exceeded the UN recommended minimum of 0.7 per cent of GNP. As it stands, bilateral aid flows from the industrialized countries are $100 billion a year less than governments have agreed they should be. As long as aid levels are so low, rich countries are reneging on their side of the bargain. Agreed targets are agreed tar-

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**Figure 2. Official development assistance as a percentage of donor nation GNP, 2000**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Official Development Assistance as a Percentage of GNP</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
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<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
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<td>Norway</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
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<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Target figure of 0.7% of GNP**

Source: OECD, Press release, 20 April 2001

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**Leaders on behalf of children**

The Reverend Leon Sullivan, who died in April 2001 at 78, let nothing stand in his way in his pursuit of rights, even if it came to “moving mountains that stand in the way of freedom, justice, and truth.” He devised the ‘Sullivan Principles’, guidelines for American corporations investing in South Africa, and also designed the ‘Global Sullivan Principles’ to address company standards in the era of globalization.
"It was like seeing dead men walking...,” says Rosemberg Marín as he recalls the people going through the rubble in his native Cojutepeque, a community one hour east of San Salvador, the capital city of El Salvador. “There was practically nothing left from the houses,” he says, “...but the most painful thing was to see children who had lost not only that, but also somebody or everyone in their family.”

In January and February 2001, two major earthquakes and thousands of aftershocks jolted this country already suffering the socio-economic consequences of years of war, poverty, environmental degradation and overpopulation. El Salvador now had to deal with a natural disaster that buried entire villages, killed or wounded thousands and left almost one quarter of the population homeless. Damage to social structures, health and education infrastructures, the productive sectors and the environment amounts to 12 per cent of the country’s 2000 gross domestic product. Reconstruction costs are calculated at over $1.9 billion.

These earthquakes were the latest in a series of natural disasters increasing in frequency and severity, aggravating the ecological vulnerability of El Salvador. In the last three years alone, El Niño, Hurricane Mitch and La Niña pummelled the country, each compounding the impact of the previous event.

At age 18, Rosemberg, whose family home was almost completely destroyed in the quake, is somewhat of an expert in disaster mitigation. He has been volunteering with the Defensorías de los Derechos de la Niñez y Adolescencia (Defenders of Children’s and Adolescents’ Rights), a UNICEF-supported initiative set up since the time of Hurricane Mitch in 1998. The Defensorías train young volunteers in psychosocial rehabilitation and prepare them to work with traumatized children and adults. This is how 19-year-old Mirna Bulnes from San Salvador got involved, becoming a volunteer shortly before the hurricane raged through the country.

Central American geological structures are prone to seismic movements, hurricanes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, floods and droughts. But there are also important man-made factors that aggravate the impact of these disasters. Land cleared by indiscriminate deforestation loses stability and fertility within a very few years. Steep hillsides quickly become eroded without investments in soil conservation. Intense population density, as is the case in El Salvador, often provokes rapid, unplanned growth of human settlement in vulnerable areas and leaves inhabitants unprotected.

Primarily, it is the poor who live in these environmentally marginal and vulnerable areas, on land that no one else wants, far removed from services or employment, in isolated rural areas, or on steep hillsides. The mutually reinforcing relationships between poverty and population growth and environmental stress constitute a vicious circle through which poverty helps maintain high rates of population growth and increase environmental stress, both of which contribute in turn to the perpetuation of poverty. This interaction of poverty, population growth and environmental deterioration is actually one problem.

This year’s earthquakes in El Salvador were to a large extent a disaster foretold. Warnings that these problems had accumulated to the point at which disaster was inevitable had abounded for years. Numerous studies, books and assessments pointed to the need for a national strategy for disaster prevention and adequate laws and institutions to protect the environment and ensure sustainable development.

“Our country needs a strategic disaster-prevention plan that focuses on risk mitigation in areas of high vulnerability,” says Mirna. And she wants young people involved: “We young people want to get involved and participate actively in all the actions aimed at preventing this type of disaster so that we can achieve political and social awareness in my country.” Rosemberg sees a solution in disaster-prevention education for young people. “It would give us a certain degree of hope that these youth or children would have the capacity to organize their community.” He wants a strong Ministry of the Environment, and the Government to focus its public policies around social, economic and ecological issues.

Do Mirna and Rosemberg think that their country can be rebuilt? “Not only do I trust that my country can be reconstructed,” says Mirna, “but I am also confident that everybody will contribute to this change, and that we will all live one day in a country with better opportunities for social and economic progress.” Rosemberg thinks that “if we all unite as Salvadorans, without expecting financial rewards for helping others, we can defeat anything.”
gets; and if they are so conspicuously ignored by the world’s most powerful economies, how can those governments in all conscience preach to their counterparts in developing countries who have infinitely fewer resources to work with?

Nations that claim leadership of the global economy must set behind them the broken promises of the last century. They must respond to the call by the Managing Director of the IMF, Horst Köhler, for “a campaign to mobilize public support for action by all OECD governments and parliaments to reach the 0.7 per cent target within this decade.” That public support will not be difficult to enlist: A recent poll in the United States found that respondents believed their government to be spending well over 20 per cent of the federal budget on foreign aid. When asked what they considered to be an appropriate level of foreign aid, the answer averaged out at 14 per cent of the budget. The actual proportion of the US budget that goes to aid is 0.3 per cent.

In Spain, meanwhile, some municipalities have shown leadership on this issue by agreeing to devote 0.7 per cent of their budgets to assisting municipalities in developing countries.

An encouraging event took place in London in February 2001. The UK’s Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown and International Development Secretary Clare Short convened a one-day conference on International Action against Child Poverty. It marked a notable change of emphasis. Taking seriously the call of the Global Movement for Children for everyone, whatever position they hold in society, to do all they can to deliver children’s rights, Gordon Brown brought his influence as finance minister in one of the world’s richest economies to bear. Finance ministers from many parts of the world were invited, along with the heads of the World Bank, IMF and delegations from key UN agencies and NGOs – all of them put on the spot as to what they could contribute. It was a recognition that the development goals that the international community has undertaken to meet by the year 2015 have no chance of being met unless all parties work together with markedly more commitment than has been shown hitherto – and most particularly unless the finance ministers and international financial institutions who control the resources are on board.

“What can be achieved together by unity of purpose is far greater than what we can ever achieve acting on our own,” says Gordon Brown. “It is by putting the needs of the young and the poor not only at the centre of social policy but at the centre of financial decision-making, economic policy and international diplomatic action, that we can ensure a better future – a future of health and hope – in which no child is left behind and every child, in every country, has the opportunity to make the very most of his or her abilities.”

Speaking by satellite link at the same event, Nelson Mandela challenged those in the audience, “We must move children to the centre of the world’s agenda. We must rewrite strategies to reduce poverty so that investments in children are given priority.”

Among the initiatives launched at the conference was a proposal from the Italian Government, using its leadership position chairing the G7 countries, to create a special Trust Fund for Health to which the 1,000 largest corporations in the world would contribute a minimum donation of $500,000 each. The governments of industrialized nations would then match those donations to arrive at a fund of at least a billion dollars that could be dedicated to helping countries to meet the year 2015 goals on health.

This is exactly the kind of partnership between rich countries and poor, governments and corporations, UN
In a small shop near the market in Maliana, Agusta and Victoria da Silva serve customers from behind a rough wooden benchtop. Next door, Dulce Maria sits at a foot-pedalled sewing machine making a T-shirt. These three women help run the Nove Nove Cooperacion shop, selling hand-made items such as clothes and baskets, along with manufactured items, most of them imported from Indonesia.

The women are all members of the self-help group Nove Nove (Nine Nine). Altogether, the 48 members of Nove Nove have more than 200 children, but not a single husband. The men were all killed in September 1999, at the height of the violence that swept East Timor after the 30 August vote for independence from Indonesia.

The impact of those riotous weeks was both immediate and long-lasting. Government services ceased to function practically overnight as buildings associated with the administration were looted and razed to the ground and the staff who worked in the administration left en masse. Schools were destroyed, village health posts burned to their foundations and around two thirds of the population was displaced. Most of the vehicles, fishing boats and personal belongings disappeared, as did several thousand people.

Today, many agencies are working together to train the people who will run East Timor when it achieves full independence. The current vacuum of policies and structures is both a threat to the rights of children and an opportunity to put issues that affect children and young people on the national agenda.

Regina Leite lives with six of her children in a large house on a hillside overlooking the town centre of Maliana. She has two more children in Dili and one in Australia on a scholarship. Her husband was the local leader of the CNRT, the umbrella body for the East Timorese independence movement. The name Nove Nove refers to the date of his murder—9 September, 1999. Regina is currently ill with a relapse of malaria, but still willing to talk to strangers.

“I decided to form Nove Nove because I realized there were many women in the same situation as me. I also realized that it helps to talk about what happened with other people who had the same experience,” she says. The women in Nove Nove started by getting together to discuss their everyday needs: how to collect water, feed their children and send them to school, how to rebuild the houses that were burned in the violence. “We would talk together, cry together. It helped us to feel better to know we weren’t alone. Sometimes, if one woman cries, her friends will joke with her to cheer her up. We know when we can joke and when we need to cry.”

Although talking helped, the women soon realized that it would neither solve their problems nor help in their struggle to feed and clothe their children. At this point, Mrs. Leite attended a leadership training course run by UNICEF in Maliana. During the three-day programme, she and 34 other women learned how to run an organization, including how to draw up a plan, set objectives and come to decisions in a group. She also travelled to Dili, where FOKUPERS, the East Timorese Women’s Communication Forum, also supported by UNICEF, held a workshop on how to manage cooperative enterprises.

“The training we had from UNICEF was good for us, not only in the business but also at home. We all have children to bring up and households to organize, so time management, for instance, is very useful. However, we need more skills and we need to be able to reach out to other women.”

While Nove Nove is a success and an inspiration, formidable challenges remain for East Timor. Every area of social welfare, especially those related to children, lacks resources. The student: teacher ratio is above 60 to 1 in primary schools and most health services are currently being provided by NGOs. UNICEF has trained teachers in participatory methods and is working with what will become the education department to develop a training programme for the mostly inexperienced school principals. Because the current situation has pushed young people and women into leadership roles for which they were not prepared, UNICEF and others run leadership courses for women’s and youth groups, training hundreds of people in how to set up and run organizations.

Through literacy classes, thousands of women in remote districts like Bobonaro and the Ambeno enclave are learning to read and write. Mrs. Leite also finds time to help lead one of these literacy groups, although it hasn’t been easy. “They [her children] are all studying, so it has been a very heavy load for me to carry. I have to force myself every day, but I want them to go to school so I have to be strong for them.”
agencies and NGOs that was lacking in the last decades of the 20th century – and which the Global Movement for Children seeks to inspire and promote at the start of the 21st. It is up to all of us, from teachers to government ministers, volunteers to corporate chief executives, social workers to bankers, to make our own contribution to that movement. The face of global poverty must no longer be the face of a young child.

The Special Session on Children

The UN General Assembly’s Special Session on Children in September 2001 is the culmination of years of work by literally thousands of organizations. The ground has been prepared for it, as with any major UN conference, by a series of preparatory gatherings at which key issues have been debated and explored, and guiding principles and targets for future actions have been adopted. The issue of accountability has gained new prominence, in particular as it relates to commitments to children in the coming years.

Unlike any other UN conference, the widest possible range of civil society organizations working with and for children has played an active part in the debate from the start. Representatives of NGOs have had broad access and contributed significantly to the process and the draft documents. Organizations both small and large from all over the world have risen above their differences to support a common agenda. They have created a multi-pronged alliance aimed at ensuring that the world takes seriously the idea that children have fundamental human rights, that they must have the first call on our energy, commitment and resources.

It is an alliance, moreover, which does not just aim to represent children’s needs and concerns but to be founded on their participation. Children’s right to participate is nowhere more appropriate than at the Special Session and the major meetings leading up to it. So it was that in Jomtien, Thailand, in April, there was an unprecedented gathering of children aged between 11 and 18 from countries all over East Asia. They met to discuss the problems of children in the region, to formulate their vision of how things should be and to make their own recommendations to the governments and NGOs who will be

Leaders on behalf of children

Ms. Tho, a social worker at the Rose Warm Shelter for sexually abused girls in Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam, has devoted her life to helping child victims of sexual abuse and trafficking recover from their trauma and lead productive lives.
present at the Special Session. In the same month, children from 27 countries across Europe and Central Asia met in Budapest to work on a Young People’s Agenda for Europe and Central Asia. There was a similar Regional Youth Forum in Amman in November 2000 involving children from the Middle East and North Africa: They stressed that children must be included in all efforts to end the inequality, violence and injustice that undermine children’s rights and human development. In April 2001 in Kathmandu, a group called The Change Makers, representing children from the eight countries of South Asia, presented their own vision of the future to corporate leaders from the region. “We want a world,” they said, “where there is no discrimination between boys and girls, between the able and the disabled, between the rich and the poor. We want a healthy, safe and clean environment suitable for all. And we want a decent education and opportunities for play, instead of having to work.”

A world fit for children

The Special Session will be a unique opportunity for the world’s nations to make a clean break with the tradition of leaving hundreds of millions of children abandoned in poverty or exploited in labour, condemned to everyday hunger or denied the benefits of learning. Those present at the Special Session will have the chance to be part of an historic moment in which the world’s leaders commit themselves to creating a world fit for children within a generation.

The work has already begun on a regional basis. At the 10th Ibero-American Summit in Panama in December 2000, 21 Presidents and Heads of State signed a Declaration pledging to deliver free and compulsory education for all children by 2015, to halve maternal mortality by 2010 and to crack down on the trafficking, kidnapping and sexual exploitation of children. Panamanian President Mireya Moscoso will take to the Special Session a proposal for a more integrated system for monitoring the way governments’ commitments to children’s rights are being implemented.

In Lebanon in April 2001, a regional symposium met to draw up a plan of action called An Arab World Fit for Children. This was followed by a conference of Arab and African finance ministers in Morocco in May, which recommended formal assessments of the impact of government policies on children; it also proposed the creation of national committees that would press for child-focused budgets. In China in May 2001, governments from across East Asia and the Pacific undertook to put children’s well-being at the top of their agenda, accepting that it represented “the most important indicator of national and economic social progress.” The fifth such regional meeting to review progress towards the goals of the World Summit for Children, this was the first that had featured the active participation of children and adolescents. In Nepal, meanwhile, finance ministers from South Asia met in that same month to discuss the urgent need to increase investment in children – and came to a consensus on how to do it. They agreed that governments needed to forge new alliances with the private sector, with civil society organizations and with children themselves in order to generate the necessary resources. In Berlin, too, there was a regional meeting for Europe and Central Asia that produced a 20-point action plan. “If we are to create a better world and better future for our children,” Zlatko Lagumdzija, Foreign Minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina, told delegates, “we must put children and child rights at the top of our political agenda.”

We have learned a great deal over the decades of development about the way in which promises are discarded...
or evaded – always leaving children to bear the brunt of the betrayal. We have learned that targets and goals have to be specific, time-bound and measurable – and that progress towards them has to be carefully monitored and reviewed. Delegates to the Special Session will therefore be asked to commit to concrete targets in child health, in education, in combating HIV/AIDS and in protecting children from abuse, exploitation or violence. More than that, though, they will be asked to agree to account for their progress or their failure.

To make the achievement of the goals possible, delegates will be asked for a commitment to mobilize the resources of which the world’s children have been starved. We encourage government leaders in developing and industrialized countries to work closely together to meet the following targets:

- All countries who have not done so should strive to meet the long-agreed target of 0.7 per cent of GNP for overall development assistance;
- Full financing in order to speed up debt relief, particularly in least developed countries, and cancellation of all official bilateral debts;
- Easier access to exports for the least developed countries, free from duty or quota restrictions;
- Social spending over military expenditure;
- Domestic resources should be used for social development and to reduce disparities at the international and national levels;
- Both aid and government expenditures should be restructured along the lines of the 20/20 Initiative, in line with the Oslo and Hanoi Consensus documents, to achieve universal access to basic social services.

At the Special Session governments must show they have finally understood that, for the good of all, the rights of children must come first.

Leaders on behalf of children

Leszek Zawadka, a Polish musician who lives in Mexico, founded Niños Cantores de Valle de Chalco, a children’s choir, considered the best in the country, in one of the 10 poorest municipalities in the state of Mexico. The choir regularly gives concerts and has toured Europe and Latin America.


Voices of Young People...

On poverty and education

- Children are the hardest hit by poverty: it causes lifelong damage to their minds and bodies.
- More than half a billion children live on less than $1 a day.
- Education is the key to ending poverty.
- More than 100 million children are out of school because of poverty, discrimination or lack of resources.

“For six years, my school has been a railroad car. It is difficult to learn. There is not glass in the windows. During the summer it’s impossible to stay cool and during winter it’s impossible to stay warm... I don’t have any gloves, so it’s terrible to write. After one or two lessons in the cold, the teachers usually let us leave.”

Isa, 17, Azerbaijan

“[And] when you see hope, your sense of humour returns. You can even tease your parents.”

Xiuhua, 15, on getting a job, China

“My name is Eilyn. I quit school at 13 years because of economical problems. At 15, I tried come back, but I wasn’t accepted anymore.”

Eilyn, 15, Costa Rica

“I am always frightened at night. Drunk men come to bother me all the time. One day, I tried to run away with my siblings. But, we had nowhere to go, nothing to eat, and nowhere to sleep. So we came back. Now it is even worse. There aren’t many like me; most families have one parent; we are always poor; we never eat or drink well when others do.”

Zewdi, 14, Eritrea

“How can I continue education without having enough to eat?”

Street vendor, 12, Ethiopia

“There are some of us who are very privileged who will get good education and good exposure. And some who do take advantage of opportunities given to them. However, there are some who don’t take advantage or are deprived of opportunities, say by going into child labour. Child labour is more profitable in the eyes of their parents, because they will be making money for the family instead of studying. Studying would be an investment for families, which would not be affordable in many cases.”

Deepti, 17, India

“Before being released by Bachpan Bachao Andolan, I worked in the stone quarries of Faridabad in North India. Here I was beaten regularly on one pretext or the other. The loan, which my father had taken, never seemed to be repaid. Year after year I worked until one day Bachpan Bachao Andolan stepped in! Today I understand how important it is to be educated. No one will now be able to make me or my family sign on blank sheets of paper and make us bonded slaves.”

Kaushalya, 14, India

“We don’t like this work because it is hard and we feel very tired when picking tea, but we know how to pick tea because it helps us in many ways. It helps us to get food, money for paying school fees and also clothes and other things, and also we want to stop it.”

Betty, 13, Kenya

“Even if I could enrol in standard one for free, there would be no money for supplies.”

Piana, 13, Lesotho

“I live in roofless and damaged former government building with my fourteen-year-old sister, and my three children – one son and two girls (twins). The oldest is my four-year son and the twins are one and a half years old. When I go begging, I take my children with me. My sister also goes begging. We eat together what we get.”

Refugee girl, 16, Somalia

“I married young (at 14) and am uneducated. But I will not allow my daughter to marry young and be uneducated. I will give her the chance to be educated and let her get her own income prior to getting married. The civil war forced me to marry young. I will protect the mistakes of early marriage and lack of education from my daughter.”

Militia girl, 20, Somalia

On poverty and education

Children are the hardest hit by poverty: it causes lifelong damage to their minds and bodies.

More than half a billion children live on less than $1 a day.

Education is the key to ending poverty.

More than 100 million children are out of school because of poverty, discrimination or lack of resources.

“ACTIONS THAT CAN CHANGE THE WORLD

For six years, my school has been a railroad car. It is difficult to learn. There is not glass in the windows. During the summer it’s impossible to stay cool and during winter it’s impossible to stay warm... I don’t have any gloves, so it’s terrible to write. After one or two lessons in the cold, the teachers usually let us leave.”

Isa, 17, Azerbaijan

“And when you see hope, your sense of humour returns. You can even tease your parents.”

Xiuhua, 15, on getting a job, China

“My name is Eilyn. I quit school at 13 years because of economical problems. At 15, I tried come back, but I wasn’t accepted anymore.”

Eilyn, 15, Costa Rica

“I am always frightened at night. Drunk men come to bother me all the time. One day, I tried to run away with my siblings. But, we had nowhere to go, nothing to eat, and nowhere to sleep. So we came back. Now it is even worse. There aren’t many like me; most families have one parent; we are always poor; we never eat or drink well when others do.”

Zewdi, 14, Eritrea

“How can I continue education without having enough to eat?”

Street vendor, 12, Ethiopia

“There are some of us who are very privileged who will get good education and good exposure. And some who do take advantage of opportunities given to them. However, there are some who don’t take advantage or are deprived of opportunities, say by going into child labour. Child labour is more profitable in the eyes of their parents, because they will be making money for the family instead of studying. Studying would be an investment for families, which would not be affordable in many cases.”

Deepti, 17, India

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As Nelson Mandela has said: “Any country, any society, which does not care for its children is no nation at all.” Heads of State and Government, ministers and civil servants, experts and activists who will gather in New York carry with them an accountability to all those who are a part of the Global Movement for Children. Every individual who has said ‘Yes’ for children, whether in the mountains of Afghanistan or the jungles of Peru, the cities of Germany or the townships of South Africa, has pledged in support of a 10-point plan to change the world – a plan that will continue to play out in daily lives long after the Special Session ends.

Now it is the turn of those who hold political power and the public trust – those with the greatest opportunity and the greatest responsibility – to bring about change. The millions of people in every country of the world who have pledged their support to the cause of children’s rights will be watching more closely than they have ever watched before. Those who would call themselves leaders must give all that is needed – no less will do – to create a world fit for children.

Birthright and promise

The idea of birthright is an ancient one that occurs in all cultures and religions. With our feet still fresh on the sand of the new century, let us make a sacred promise to deliver to the children who will be born into our world the health and nutrition, the education and protection, that is their birthright.

We know far more than we have ever known before about how to make this happen. As a global community, we have more resources than we have ever had before that can be put to work to bring it about.

It is already late for Ayodele and other children of the 1990s, for all those who were born around the time of the World Summit for Children. But the decisions made in September 2001 and the action taken in the years ahead could change the fate of the next generation.

In our hands rests the opportunity to consign neglect, abuse and exploitation of children to the history books and to write our own new page. If we squander this new opportunity, our children will judge us harshly and we will have again betrayed a most sacred trust. The promises we make now are the promises we must keep.

This time there is no excuse. The task is set and the road is clear. Let’s go to work.

Leaders on behalf of children

When Princess Lalla Fatima Zohra of Morocco spoke publicly about AIDS earlier this year, she broke one of her country’s taboos. The number of AIDS cases in Morocco quadrupled last year to 20,000 and the region is on the verge of an epidemic. Princess Lalla Fatima is ensuring that silence and denial won’t be another factor in the spread of the virus.