The United Nations Special Session on Children, earlier planned for 19-21 September 2001, has been re-scheduled for 8-10 May 2002. This landmark meeting will bring together Heads of State, government leaders, NGOs, children’s advocates, and children and young people themselves to measure the progress made towards ensuring children’s rights since the historic World Summit for Children in 1990, and to agree on a new agenda for changing the world with children.

The Special Session on Children is the culmination of extensive worldwide consultations and meetings involving tens of thousands of participants, including children and young people. Often noteworthy events themselves, these meetings included high-level consultations and protracted debates at national, regional and global levels.

The preparatory process is perhaps best viewed as a pyramid. At the base are 165 national reviews in which countries assessed their progress, or lack thereof, on behalf of children. These national stock-taking exercises, facilitated by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), fed into a series of mini-summits at regional level and at the United Nations. All these events will culminate in the Special Session, which promises to draw many Heads of State and Government and usher in a new era of international action on behalf of children.

Alongside the formal preparatory process, a public campaign called Say Yes for Children has simultaneously been taking place around the world. In the campaign, people are asked to pledge their support for 10 fundamental children’s rights principles. Conducted through the Internet and paper ballots, the Say Yes campaign enables people from all walks of life to participate in the debate over children’s rights and to commit to ensuring achievement of those rights. The results of the campaign will be presented to the leaders during the Special Session by Nelson Mandela.

Say Yes for Children has been launched in over 160 countries. As of mid-February 2002, 50 million people rated the 10 principles as follows:

- Educate Every Child - 14.1%
- Leave No Child Out - 13.2%
- Fight HIV/AIDS - 11.4%
- Stop Harming and Exploiting Children - 11.1%
- Care for Every Child - 10.6%
- Fight Poverty: Invest in Children - 10%
- Put Children First - 9.2%
- Listen to Children - 7.4%
- Protect Children from War - 7.4%
- Protect the Earth for Children - 5.6%

Updated results per country can be accessed at www.netaid.org

Continue to pledge support for these 10 principles online at www.gmfc.org, by e-mail to pledge@netaid.org, or through the participating organizations.

“Here is an opportunity to let leaders throughout the world know that we expect them to act sooner rather than later to ensure the rights of every child ... And to each one of you who is hearing about this campaign, I remind you of your own power and obligation to make the world a better place for children.”

–Nelson Mandela
PROGRAMME OF THE SPECIAL SESSION
& SUPPORTING EVENTS

The official programme will be divided into three major sections:

Debate
The Debate in the General Assembly Hall will include statements by heads of official delegations, heads of UN entities, and a limited number of NGOs and children. For the first time, two children will address the General Assembly.

Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole
UN entities, regional organizations and – time permitting – a limited number of NGOs can use the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole as an opportunity to share their views on children’s issues.

Round Tables
Three Round Tables, each co-chaired by two Heads of State and Government, will discuss the overall theme: “Renewal of commitment and future action for children in the next decade.” The format will be as interactive as possible. Two children will deliver opening addresses in each Round Table.

Major supporting events being planned include:
• Children’s Forum
• Forum on Women’s Leadership for Children
• Financing a World Fit for Children
• Public-Private Sector Dialogue
• Parliamentary Forum
• Religious Leaders Symposium
• Signature and ratification of human rights treaties for children
• Events on issues pertaining to child health, nutrition, sanitation, basic education, HIV/AIDS and protection of child rights.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE
The direct participation of children and young people in the Special Session makes it unique. Their dynamic contribution to the preparatory process demonstrated their need for a central role in the Special Session itself. As those with the greatest stake in the success of the Special Session, children and young people will take part in many of its most important events:
• Children will be included in many government and NGO delegations throughout the Special Session;
• Child delegates from both official and NGOs delegations will take part in the Children’s Forum (5-7 May 2002);
• Two child delegates from the Children’s Forum will address the General Assembly;
• Two children or young people will address each of the three official Round Tables;
• Children and young people will address the Forum on Women’s Leadership for Children and other side events;
• Child-centred events organized by UNICEF and NGOs, including web debates, discussion groups and media workshops;
• Children will be encouraged to participate in other events organized by governments, UN agencies and NGOs.

Children’s Forum: 5-7 May 2002
Children and young people who have taken part in the preparatory process for the Special Session have made two things very clear: they want to be treated as partners and they want their views to be taken seriously by the adult delegates. In addition, they want to be able...
to meet in their own space, their own time and in their own style. That is why UNICEF, in collaboration with other UN agencies, NGOs and children’s groups, is supporting a three-day Children’s Forum. The Forum, to be held in New York right before the Special Session, will give the under-18s who are part of the official government or the NGO delegations the chance to share their ideas before the Session actually begins.

**Purpose of the Forum:** The Children’s Forum will celebrate children’s rights and will give participants the chance to explore the issues highlighted in the draft outcome document of the Special Session, ‘A World Fit for Children’. They will discuss ways in which they, as children and young people, can be actively involved in the implementation and monitoring of the goals outlined in the outcome document. And they will identify constructive ways in which they can influence their governments, UN agencies, NGOs and other decision makers as they design programmes to benefit children.

**Expected outcome:** The outcome of the Children’s Forum will be presented at the plenary of the Special Session by at least two child delegates selected by the Forum itself. This will be the first time in the history of the UN that children will address the General Assembly.

**Participation of children not attending**

Children and young people who will not be at the Special Session can still take part, through UNICEF’s Voices of Youth website. By logging on at [www.unicef.org/voy](http://www.unicef.org/voy), they can share their ideas on how to build a world fit for children. Their comments will be shared with participants at the Children’s Forum.

Children and young people who do not have access to the Internet can also send their views, by mail or fax, to the Children Participation Unit in UNICEF and to the Voices of Youth contact person (see address, page 8).

**NGO PARTICIPATION**

NGOs will be in New York in their hundreds to attend the Special Session. The Session represents a unique opportunity for civil society to take part in a governmental process on the universal issue of child rights at every level – national, regional and global. As part of the process leading up to the Special Session, NGOs have mobilized themselves around child rights issues, formed partnerships in the Global Movement for Children, lobbied governments and actively contributed to the draft outcome document.

The NGO community, spearheaded by the NGO Steering Group, is organizing a number of events in collaboration with UNICEF to highlight the substantive work of NGOs around the Special Session. Listed below are the main activities that have been planned - please note all times and places are tentative:

- **NGO Orientation Session** – A two-hour session for NGOs that will include briefings from UNICEF, the Bureau and NGOs. It is planned for Tuesday afternoon, 7 May 2002.

- **NGO Reception** - An informal setting for NGOs to meet other NGOs, government delegates and UN/UNICEF staff is planned for the evening of Tuesday, 7 May 2002.

- **NGO Supporting events** - The NGO Steering Group is currently reconfirming space to hold the NGO supportive events. All these events approved for September will be allocated space in May. But NGOs must confirm that they will be reorganizing their workshops by responding to the correspondence that the Steering Group will send them.

- **NGO Plenaries** – Three Plenary Sessions for NGOs and Special Session participants are planned. These sessions, organized by the NGO Steering Group, may take place in the UN Secretariat between 1:00 – 3:00 p.m. on 8, 9, and 10 of May 2002.

For more information see:
- NGO Committee: [www.ngosatunicef.org](http://www.ngosatunicef.org)
- Child Rights Information Network (CRIN): [www.crin.org](http://www.crin.org)

**SIGNING AND RATIFYING HUMAN RIGHTS TREATIES FOR CHILDREN**

The two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, one addressing the protection of children from involvement in armed conflict and the other addressing sexual exploitation of children, have very recently achieved the required number of ratifications for them to enter into force. Many countries that have signed these Optional Protocols have yet to ratify them. UNICEF is encouraging governments that have not yet signed the Protocols to do so immediately, and is encouraging all to ratify them before the Special Session as a sign of unequivocal commitment to the protection of children.

The Special Session will also be an excellent opportunity for governments to sign or ratify other human rights treaties.

UNICEF also joins the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and others in inviting Member States at the Special Session to approve the Amendment to article 43 (2) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This will increase the number of members of the Committee on the Rights of the Child from 10 to 18, a change that should expedite the review of State Party reports and ensure timely availability of Concluding Observations to State Parties.
REGIONAL PREPARATIONS

Many regional events have taken place since the previous issue of this Newsletter, all of them adding to the momentum for the Special Session.

IN AFRICA...

Summit of the Organization of African Unity establishes a Committee on the Rights and Welfare of Children

Zambia, 9-11 July 2001

The 37th OAU Summit held in Lusaka in July was a significant milestone for Africa, marking the formal end of the OAU and the birth of the African Union in the presence of 41 Heads of State and 7 Heads of Delegation. At the event children’s issues dominated, with many countries making eloquent and passionate calls for the protection of children and greater investment in their future.

The Secretary General of the OAU reported on the Pan-African Forum on the Future of Children and the “African Common Position” adopted in Cairo in May 2001, which gave rise to a lively and constructive debate.

The Summit made a major breakthrough by deciding to establish a Committee on the Rights and Welfare of Children and agreeing that Member States should report to this Committee every two years on their progress in child rights and well-being. The 11 members of the Committee were elected.

A resolution, initiated by the Heads of State themselves, urged countries that have not yet ratified the African Charter on the Rights and the Welfare of the Child to do so.

World Youth Forum adopts the Dakar Youth Empowerment Strategy

Senegal, 5-10 August 2001

The World Youth Forum of the UN System brought youth groups and representatives of UN agencies together for five days of debate in Senegal in early August. The Forum, hosted by the Government of Senegal, aimed to support the empowerment of youth to participate more effectively in every aspect of society, and adopted the Dakar Youth Empowerment Strategy. Among its recommendations, the Strategy called for the establishment of an Education and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) fund to promote North-South and South-South cooperation.

Other recommendations addressed youth concerns in 10 areas: education and ICT; employment; health and population; hunger, poverty and debt; environment and human settlements; social integration; culture and peace; youth policy, participation and rights; young women and girls; and youth, sports and leisure. Douty Lady, a participant from Togo, commented on the importance of education, saying: “The education of children is a right, not a privilege. For the young women and girls of Africa, we demand that efforts be made to prioritize their education by making their studies free.”

The Dakar Strategy, which also outlines the responsibilities of youth, governments and civil society in combating HIV/AIDS, will be presented at the Special Session. (See www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/forum)

Launch of the Girls’ Education Movement

Uganda, 15-17 August 2001

For the first time in history, girls from across Africa have taken the lead in the debate on the barriers that exclude girls from the education system.

At the launch of the Girls’ Education Movement (GEM) in Uganda in mid-August, girls from across Africa sat down with education ministers and prominent education experts to discuss ways to create girl-friendly education. The Movement recognizes that girls’ education is one of the most effective development investments that a country can make, and will focus on efforts to create girl-friendly schools and education systems.

The girls also prepared a GEM Platform for Action, which addresses safety and security, particularly in the face of the HIV/AIDS pandemic; gender in the curriculum; the digital divide; excluded children; decentralization and financing; as well as best practices and models of excellence that can be promoted and shared throughout the African continent.

The launch was hosted by the Government of Uganda together with UNICEF, the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) and girl delegates from across Africa.
IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA…

An Arab World Fit for Children – Conference on the Rights of the Child

Egypt, 2-4 July 2001

The Arab High Level Conference on the Rights of the Child brought together some 150 delegates from all 22 member countries of the League of Arab States at the League’s headquarters in Cairo in July. The delegations, most of them led by ministers, included civil society representatives, experts, and 33 young people who met separately before the conference in order to prepare themselves.

One Tunisian girl summarized the young people’s recommendations: “We say ‘No’ to discrimination and ‘Yes’ to equal rights and opportunities, to respecting other opinions but reserving the right to differ and be independent, ‘Yes’ to optimism and to Arab unity.”

The Conference concluded with the adoption of ‘An Arab World Fit for Children: Mechanisms for Joint Arab Action and an Arab Common Position’, in preparation for the region’s participation in the Special Session on Children.

The documents review the progress made for children in the region over the past decade and identify gaps and future challenges. They also cover key strategies for future action for children and establish follow-up mechanisms, such as plans for children from the League’s Ministerial Councils on Health, Education, Social Affairs and Information, an annual report on the State of Children in the Arab World, and greater collaboration with civil society.

It was also suggested that ‘childhood’ should be a standard agenda item for every future Arab Summit and that another Arab High Level Conference on Children should be convened after the Special Session. The Conference also declared 2002 the Year of the Child in the Arab World.

IN EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC…

Protecting Children from Commercial Sexual Exploitation – the Yokohama Congress

Japan, 17-20 December 2001

The Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children was attended by more than 3,000 people, including government representatives from 134 countries, more than 100 young people and a large number of NGOs, international organizations and media representatives.

The Congress endorsed a worldwide effort against commercial sexual exploitation of children through a statement entitled the Global Commitment, Yokohama 2001. This commitment was strengthened by nearly 60 cabinet ministers and parliamentarians attending the Congress.

The Congress was preceded by regional preparatory conferences in Morocco for the Middle East and Africa, in Bangladesh for South Asia, in Hungary for Europe and Central Asia, in Uruguay for Latin America and the Caribbean, in Thailand for East Asia, and in the United States for Canada, Mexico and the US. The consultations produced analyses of the current situation, identified good practices and resulted in agreements on regional strategies that were presented at Yokohama.

Workshops organized for each region gave partners – including governments, NGOs and young people – further opportunities to discuss and reaffirm commitment to the regional strategies that will be the main platforms for carrying forward follow-up processes.

Six major theme papers presented by experts on different aspects of commercial sexual exploitation of children, three panel discussions of best practices and 110 workshops made the Congress a unique opportunity for sharing experiences.

Children and Young People’s Forum

Lao People’s Democratic Republic, 23-27 July 2001

Some 37 children and young people from 10 countries met at the East Asia and Pacific Children and Young People’s Regional Forum in Vientiane, in July. The Forum selected young delegates for the Special Session and drew up guidelines for their involvement. The Forum was organized by the East Asian and Pacific Regional Committee for Children.

Those taking part in the Forum reviewed the Beijing Declaration and ‘A World Fit for Children’. Their joint recommendations urged National Action Plans to follow up the Special Session, saying: “Together, we want governments, NGOs, children and young people to develop and implement the National Action Plan for children in each country… We want more budget allocation for social services that benefit children, people and their families.”

They emphasized their right to achieve their full human potential and enjoy the full range of human rights, identifying HIV/AIDS, disintegrating families, child trafficking and prostitution, school drop-out and lack of birth registration as the main issues in the region. They also suggested solutions to these problems, including the introduction of reproductive health education in the school curriculum, the banning of corporal and capital punishment and improvements in resource management.
IN SOUTH ASIA...

Eleventh Regional Summit
Kathmandu, 5-6 January 2002

The Eleventh SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) Summit agreed on a Summit Declaration that took into account major issues concerning the well-being of South Asian children and women. The Declaration invited the Council of Ministers to constitute a task force to review the status of implementation of past decisions relating to the social sector and suggest guidelines for more effective implementation in the future. The Council of Ministers was also asked to take concrete steps to give priority to investing in children as a strategy to reduce poverty in the long run. Heads of Government agreed to mobilize the necessary resources and intensify broad-based actions to achieve priority goals, such as polio eradication by 2005, reduction of mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS, provision of quality basic education and girls’ education. The Declaration also treats commercial sexual exploitation of children as a serious criminal offence.

In addition, a convention on the trafficking of women and children and another on child welfare were signed by the seven SAARC nations – Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The conventions deplore the “evil of trafficking in women and children” as a “violation of basic human rights.”

UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy congratulated the South Asian leaders for addressing children’s and women’s issues at a time when their nations were grappling with the dual threats of war and terrorism. She welcomed their commitment and said that lasting peace and stability could not be achieved without respect for human rights, including the full rights of children and women.

Symposium of Early Childhood Experts
Maldives, 2-4 July 2001

A three-day symposium on early child development in the Maldives in early July called for more support for early child development programmes. South Asian experts called for stronger advocacy for investment in integrated child development. They stressed the need for a comprehensive approach to children’s programmes to enhance the capacity of families and communities to provide good quality care in every area including health, nutrition and early learning. Participants also discussed the role parents, grandparents and other family members can play in the development of very young children.

The specific recommendations made at the symposium included the sharing of best practices through regional networks. Several examples were reviewed, including child development communication initiatives in Maldives and Pakistan, community-based child development in Nepal, improved home-based care for young children in Sri Lanka, and the Integrated Child Development Services of India. The symposium also recommended the creation of a regional early child development website and the training of programme staff in the latest thinking on early child development and on its links to health and nutrition.

The meeting was convened by the Government of Maldives and UNICEF’s Regional Office for South Asia.

The Rawalpindi Call for Partnership and Action – South Asia Girl Child Symposium
Pakistan, 23-25 July 2001

The South Asia Girl Child Symposium met in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, in July to share examples of best practices at family and community levels and make recommendations for policies and actions to transform the lives of South Asian girls. The three-day symposium was attended by 26 girls and 5 boys from six South Asian countries, who were full participants in the meeting alongside the adult delegates.

The young delegates at the Symposium prepared the Rawalpindi Call for Partnership and Action, which was adopted by all participants. The call highlights the need to include girls as equal partners in development, empowering them to take part in decision-making. It also focuses on such critical concerns as equal care in the family, access to quality health services and ending harmful practices. It emphasizes education, calling for fulfilment of the right to good quality education, free and compulsory primary education and gender-sensitive school curricula.

The central role of young people in the symposium demonstrated their ability to play a key role in tackling gender discrimination, violence and abuse to create an environment of equal opportunities for girls and boys. They proved that they can assess their own situation and organize themselves to bring about positive change.

The symposium was organized by the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, the Pakistan UNICEF Country Office and the Government of Pakistan.
IN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA…

Personal Representatives of Heads of State and Government Meet

Geneva, 29-30 November 2001

Personal Representatives of Heads of State and Government appointed for the preparatory process of the Special Session, other high-level government officials, NGO representatives and selected young people from 25 countries participated in this two-day event co-chaired by UNICEF and the Governments of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Germany.

The meeting discussed how to sustain the momentum of the Global Movement for Children in Europe and Central Asia. Participants highlighted the need to ensure the highest possible representation at the Special Session and stressed the need for an early consensus on the draft outcome document, ‘A World Fit for Children’. There was agreement on the importance of defining the role of the Personal Representatives beyond the Special Session.

Civil society should be mobilized to ensure the rights of children and to monitor progress on commitments made on behalf of children. The meeting suggested that guidelines be provided for the preparation of national plans of action. Data collection and analysis were recognized as key elements in the follow-up process. Main partners were encouraged to learn from successful programmes across Europe and Central Asia. Children and young people were urged to become actively involved in the making of decisions that affect them. Young people said they needed opportunities and mechanisms to facilitate the expression of their views and called for the building of relationships between young people and adults based on trust.

IN THE AMERICAS AND THE CARIBBEAN…

Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents

Lima, 23-24 November 2001

The Tenth Ibero-American Summit adopted the Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents that will guide Ibero-American nations over the next decade in their efforts to meet the priority needs of children and adolescents. The previous Summit, held in Panama in November 2000, had adopted a Declaration that provided a clear basis for institutional strengthening to implement integral policies for children and adolescents.

The commitments undertaken by the 200 participants at the Generation in Jeopardy Conference are reflected in the Stockholm Manifesto, which stresses the need for social policy reform; the recognition of civil society, the private sector and young people as partners in social reform; and the urgency of children’s needs for a family-oriented upbringing.

The conference added to an emerging consensus that children’s rights must be at the centre of policy reform in the transition countries. Corporate social responsibility towards children was one of the key themes of the conference and was, therefore, a contribution to the Global Movement for Children.

IN THE AMERICAS AND THE CARIBBEAN…

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The 14-member Caribbean Community, CARICOM, has taken the lead in providing political support, mobilizing resources and monitoring progress in the implementation of various initiatives. The fulfilment of the Kingston Consensus emanating from the Fifth Ministerial meeting in October 2000 and the Outcome Document of the Special Session on Children will present the biggest challenge in keeping promises to children. During their most recent Summit in the Bahamas in July 2001, Caribbean countries were urged to mobilize all necessary resources for children and ensure their high level participation at the Special Session.

Adolescents join hands during a workshop for youths from poor urban and rural areas to promote community leadership and self-esteem, and combat drug use and violence.
The Global Movement for Children (GMC) was launched during the second Preparatory Committee meeting of the Special Session in January 2001 by the six founding partners, to help create a broad movement for everyone committed to making a ‘world fit for children’ through full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Plan of Action from the Special Session on Children. It brings together the global community of all those who share this common vision and aims to provide a focus for their work. It is also a catalyst and support for new partnerships, new commitments and renewed efforts to achieve this vision.

The main activities of the GMC since its launch:

**At the international level:** The partners jointly developed the 10 imperatives for the Rallying Call for Children and the Say Yes for Children campaign. The founding partners also developed a website to provide basic information on the GMC and the Special Session, and convened a workshop, Making the GMC a Reality during the Third Preparatory Committee meeting in June 2001 to share information, experiences and ideas on the development of the GMC. They have also been involved in the planning of ‘sector-based’ supporting events that will take place during the Special Session – Private/Public Partnership Dialogue and the religious leaders forum – to bring new actors into the GMC.

**At the national level:** A range of activities have taken place, many linked to the promotion of the Say Yes campaign, but including other campaigns, advocacy and public education initiatives. In some countries coalitions of civil society organizations (CSOs) have emerged as local expressions of the GMC.

A workshop was held in London in July 2001, attended by nearly 90 representatives of CSO organizations from around the world, to discuss the future of the GMC after the Special Session. Follow-up consultative meetings of core partners, joined by CARE, agreed to form a convening committee of the GMC and create a small co-ordinating secretariat.

Throughout these consultative processes on the GMC there has been a clear agreement that its focus is on action at the national and local levels, where the real impact can be made. There is also an overwhelming agreement that children should be at the forefront and centre of the movement, and ways must be found to engage children meaningfully at all levels of GMC activities.

As the Say Yes campaign was the main activity of the GMC leading up to the Special Session, the results will be used to further heighten the interest and commitment of governments, CSOs, media and other sectors at the national and local levels for a successful outcome of the Special Session. Nelson Mandela will present the results from the Say Yes campaign to the United Nations General Assembly. The Special Session on Children, therefore, will be a critical moment for the GMC.

For more information or to get involved, see the GMC website at [www.gmfc.org](http://www.gmfc.org) and the Child Rights Information Network at [www.crin.org](http://www.crin.org).