

8 May 2003

# The United Nations Special Session on Children

A FIRST ANNIVERSARY REPORT ON FOLLOW-UP

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Health, Education, Equality, Protection  
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A first anniversary report on follow-up**

At the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children (SSC) in 2002, delegations from 190 countries committed their governments to a time-bound set of specific goals for children and young people, with a particular focus on promoting healthy lives, providing quality education, protecting against abuse, exploitation and violence, and combating HIV/AIDS. The Declaration and Plan of Action - *A World Fit for Children* (WFFC) - adopted at the SSC is the international community's pledge to act together to put children at the heart of development and to build a better world for children.

One year later, it is time for the international community to reflect on its actions so far, and to begin to assess their impact. This report presents a global picture of national follow-up mechanisms, highlights the actions already taken and their impact on fulfilling children's rights and improving their well-being, and calls for renewed efforts to achieve a world fit for children. Building a world fit for children will be a major contribution to the goals adopted by the international community at the Millennium Summit, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

**1. Recalling the commitments made at the Special Session on Children**

The Special Session on Children, held from 8 to 10 May 2002, was devoted exclusively to children, and was the first time that General Assembly delegations included children themselves as official members. It was convened to review progress since the World Summit for Children in 1990 and to re-energize global commitment to children.

More than 7,000 people participated, including 90 high-level national delegations, some 1,700 delegates representing NGOs from 117 countries, more than 600 children, and leaders from civil society, including cultural, academic, business and religious groups.

In addition to the goals and targets of *A World Fit for Children*, delegations committed their governments to a basic framework for moving forward. This includes the following:

- developing or strengthening of national and regional action plans for children, including a set of specific time-bound and measurable goals and targets, **by the end of 2003**, with wide involvement of civil society, including NGOs and children;
- strengthening national planning, coordination, implementation and resource allocation for children, and integrating the international goals into national government plans, policies, strategies, and programmes;
- establishing or strengthening national bodies for the promotion and protection of children's rights;
- regular monitoring of the situation of children at the national level, and periodic reviews of progress towards the fulfilment of the global agenda.

## 2. The Global Picture – One Year After

In the 12 months since the Special Session on Children, the world's attention and resources have been diverted to crises and war while pressing yet hidden challenges facing humankind - fighting against HIV/AIDS, child illness and malnutrition, illiteracy and child abuse - have been sidelined. Despite this unpromising context, however, the global follow-up to last year's commitments has gone forward. One hundred and five countries have taken concrete actions to translate the commitments into national action plans and/or to integrate them into existing plans and policies (see Annex for details). By the end of April 2003:

- 26 countries completed or drafted a new National Plan of Action for Children (NPA);
- 26 countries were in the process of or committed to developing NPAs;
- 13 countries have updated existing NPAs;
- 35 countries integrated the international commitments into existing national plans and policies, poverty reduction strategy papers, and/or sectoral policies;
- 23 countries strengthened or set up a committee for children or a cross-divisional working group to lead and coordinate the follow-up action.

Progress has, however, been uneven. Follow-up measures have been taken in 23 out of 37 countries (62 per cent) in Asia, and 20 out of 23 countries (87 per cent) in Central and Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Baltic States. However, countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa and the industrialized world have been lagging behind. Only 16 out of 33 countries (48 per cent) in Latin America and the Caribbean, 9 out of 21 countries (43 per cent) in the Middle East and North Africa, 22 out of 45 countries (49 per cent) in sub-Saharan Africa, and 15 out of 36 industrialized countries (42 per cent) have taken follow-up actions towards the commitments made at the SSC.

The development and strengthening of national and regional action plans for children is the only follow-up action defined in *A World Fit for Children* to be completed by the end of 2003. This is a critical step. It is a process to translate international goals and targets into national goals based on local needs and situations. It puts in place a mechanism to enable meaningful implementation, monitoring and review.

## 3. Highlights on follow-up actions

### Follow-up actions by Governments

Altogether, 105 countries have taken actions to strengthen or put in place mechanisms for the follow-up to the SSC. For example, in 2002, the President of **Armenia** signed into law several amendments to the national Law on Children's Rights that correspond more closely to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The amendments create an annual programme for the protection of children's rights

supported by the national budget. An inter-agency committee was created to develop the NPA, and its first draft was discussed at a national conference.

**Chile** developed its National Policy and Integrated Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents 2001–2010 in 2001. In July 2002, the President established a Ministerial Council on Children and Adolescents to coordinate different ministries and institutions, and to implement policies and programmes for children. Chilean parliamentarians who attended the SSC reported back to the House of Representatives. They called on their peers to formulate laws favouring children and ensuring total conformity of national legislation with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In **Ethiopia**, the Government established a National Steering Committee for the preparation of the NPA, including representatives from a broad range of government ministries, UNICEF, NGOs and children. The Committee meets regularly to develop Ethiopia's NPA taking into account issues identified by Ethiopian children, and recommendations made to the Government by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child.

**Finland** has established a new coalition with members representing all relevant government ministries and NGOs. The coalition has agreed to develop a concrete plan of action with well-defined goals, budgets, and responsibilities for implementation. The plan will include not only internal goals but also the steps Finland will take to improve the situation of the world's children. Children will actively participate in the planning and implementation process.

In **the Gambia**, the government set up a taskforce under the leadership of the Vice President prior to the Special Session to prepare the country's participation in the SSC. The Taskforce is now mandated to prepare a National Plan of Action. The Government is also strengthening its capacity in data collection, analysis and use, and is developing a national database on the well-being of children. This will facilitate the generation and availability of data, and support the monitoring and review of progress towards the goals.

In **Pakistan**, the initiative to develop a new NPA was launched in June 2002 at the National Conference on Child Rights. Pakistan's plans are being developed at three levels: federal, provincial and district, given the decentralized nature of government systems. Civil society groups, NGOs and children have participated in the NPA development process. In 2003, the Government launched the Education for All Initiative, the Early Childhood Development Initiative, and TAWANA Pakistan Programme focusing on the nutritional status of the girl child, especially the most disadvantaged girls.

The Royal Government of **Cambodia** has decided that its follow-up will be integrated into existing mechanisms and actions. The goals and targets of its National Poverty Reduction Strategy take account of the goals and targets of A World Fit for Children. The Education Strategic Plan and Education Sector Support Programme, the Health Sector Strategic Plan, and the National Plan of Action against Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children have all set goals and objectives consistent with the broader goals.

## **Children's participation**

Children in many countries have actively participated in the follow-up process. In **Romania**, 125 children attended a special forum hosted by the President to discuss follow-up actions in the country. As a result of this meeting, a National Children's Action Group for the NPA was established with links to 15 local groups of action. More than 5000 children and young people have already met with government representatives to share ideas on how children can best be involved in the NPA process.

In **Tajikistan**, a Children's Forum was held in November 2002 to discuss children's involvement in the country's NPA process. As a result of the meeting, a Children's Reference Group will be set up within the government body responsible for coordinating the development of the NPA.

In **Bolivia**, representatives of child-led organizations have participated in the process to develop child-related policies, including the NPA.

In **Canada**, child delegates on the official delegation to the General Assembly meeting met in August 2002 to discuss how children would play a meaningful role in the follow-up. A small resource team of children and young people has been set up to promote awareness of the follow-up process. The resource team has been working with adults from government departments and NGOs to take forward follow-up actions. A youth representative sits on the Consultative Committee on Canada's National Plan of Action.

## **Follow-up Actions by Regional Organizations**

Many regional organizations have supported follow-up by coordinating among member countries, and by sharing information. In the **East Asia and Pacific region**, a Youth Forum was organized in December 2002 to share lessons learned and to seek ways to further strengthen their countries' follow-up actions. The sixth Asia and Pacific Ministerial Conference on Children, to be held from 5-7 May 2003, will review regional progress in implementation of the international commitments, identify priority challenges for children in the region in the coming decade and assess experiences in implementing and monitoring the CRC. It will help strengthen partnerships for and with children, adopt a Regional Commitment and Plan of Action in line with the international goals, and agree on strategies to strengthen national planning and ensure coordination, implementation and resources to fulfil commitments for children.

In the **Middle East and North Africa** region, the Arab Council for Children hosted a civil society meeting in April 2002, and the Arab Institute for Human Rights is going to organize a seminar on follow-up in May 2003. The Third Arab High Level Conference on Children is scheduled for June 2003.

In **Central and Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Baltic States**, the NGO Regional Network for Children (RNC) is committed to help develop national plans of action or other appropriate policy instruments to achieve the WFFC goals, and will promote this at its founding conference in June 2003. At the same time, the RNC will launch its first annual campaign – 'Leave No Child Out' – to mobilize support for follow-up.

## **Follow-up actions by civil society and NGOs**

Civil society organizations and NGOs have been strongly promoting the follow-up. **The Global Movement for Children Secretariat** has been mobilizing civil society action to implement the international goals and strategies. Similarly, the **Child Rights Caucus**, a global consortium of NGOs, has produced resources for NGOs on follow-up, and facilitated an exchange of information on follow-up actions in 67 countries. Their present report has been prepared collaboratively by UNICEF and the Child Rights Caucus. The **NGO Committee on UNICEF** has worked to promote joint action with UNICEF at the country level to pursue the commitments of the Special Session.

As an example of country level action, the **India** Alliance for Child Rights organized a series of consultations and conferences to involve civil society in shaping a national plan of action. A national consultation in July 2002 engaged 53 national NGO delegates and more than 60 children.

Save the Children in **Bulgaria** launched a campaign together with the Children's Parliament to celebrate the anniversary of the CRC. Some 5,000 young people sent postcards to the Bulgarian Prime Minister declaring their commitment to participation in Bulgaria's NPA process.

In **Mexico**, the NGO Network for the Rights of the Child organized meetings and training seminars on the content of the WFFC throughout the country. It also distributed information on the Special Session and its follow-up widely via the internet.

## **Strengthened international cooperation**

Many bilateral and multi-lateral development agencies have taken actions to strengthen their support to the follow-up. The **German** Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development is reviewing its policies with the aim to increase its support. The **Canadian International Development Agency** has organized internal consultations to mobilize support through its overseas development programmes.

The Global Fund on AIDS, TB and Malaria (**GFATM**) approved \$658 million in grants for programmes in 17 countries in 2002. These additional resources will enable these countries to pursue the goals and targets of WFFC in these essential areas.

## **UNICEF action**

UNICEF has been strongly engaged in the follow up to the Millennium Summit Declaration and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), together with United Nations sister agencies and other partners to ensure that child-specific goals are given prominent attention in this process. UNICEF's medium-term strategic plan for the period 2002-2005 was explicitly developed, and is now being pursued as a contribution to the Declaration and Plan of Action of the Special Session.

UNICEF has also been working closely with other United Nations agencies and the World Bank to develop a monitoring system for the MDGs and the WFFC goals. The Multiple-Indicator Cluster Survey, developed by UNICEF jointly with other partners in the 1990s, will play a major role in monitoring the MDGs and the goals of the Special

Session, as will the *Childinfo* software that helps present such information graphically for effective advocacy.

### **Public-private dialogue**

In many countries, public-private partnerships are being promoted to support actions for children. For example, in April 2003, the Prime Minister of **Peru** signed an agreement with Peru 2021 (private sector), Save the Children, Grupo De Iniciativas para la Niñez (GIN) and UNICEF to support a 'Dialogue for Children' between leaders of the Public and Private Sectors. In May 2003, the Dialogue will culminate in a high level interaction involving the President of Peru and six cabinet members, the Executive Director of UNICEF, leaders of prominent organizations in Peru, and Chief Executive Officers of international and regional corporations, such as Procter and Gamble and IBM. Participants will discuss collaboration between the public and private sectors for investing in children as the best way to fight against poverty. The Dialogue will seek to build an alliance for the implementation of the NPA. This dialogue represents the first national follow-up to the global public-private dialogue held during the Special Session.

### **4. Impact**

Follow-up is not limited to developing plans and policies. Concrete actions have been taken in many countries since the Special Session to fulfil children's rights and to build a world fit for children. Of these, two of the most dramatic examples have been the '**Back-to-School**' programmes in Afghanistan and Kenya.

After 23 years of conflict and the ban on girls' education under the Taliban government, the massive back-to-school campaign in **Afghanistan**, supported by UNICEF and other partners, enabled 2.9 million children to return to school in 2002. This resulted in a dramatic rise in girls' primary school enrolment from 5 per cent of total enrolment in 2001 to 30 per cent in 2002. UNICEF led a vast supply and logistics operation. Some 74,000 educational kits were assembled. Efforts were made to reach every known school with needed educational supplies, including through the use of 3,000 donkeys to gain access to remote rural areas. Teachers received training on the use of the education kits.

This massive effort has been sustained in 2003. Some 3,200 tonnes of educational supplies were distributed to 4 million children and more than 50,000 teachers before the beginning of the school year in March. During 2003 the Afghanistan Ministry of Education together with UNICEF will provide training for some 70,000 teachers, support the rehabilitation of 15 teacher training colleges, rehabilitate schools, and aim to increase girls' enrolment by 500,000 by focusing on low enrolment provinces.

In January 2003, the newly elected government in **Kenya** pledged to provide free primary education to all the nation's children as one of its first initiatives in fulfilment of Kenya's Children's Act. The Government abolished all fees and is establishing a Universal Primary Education Fund.

Primary school enrolment soared as a result. An additional 1.5 million children showed up for the start of the school term. In response, UNICEF immediately raised US\$2.5 million in additional resources to support the initiative and encourage girls'

attendance in school. Basic education kits were provided to 450,000 children in grade 1-3 in Nairobi and eight other districts, 5,000 teachers were trained to create 'child-friendly' classrooms. A programme of repair and rehabilitation of primary school classrooms and school water and sanitation facilities was also initiated. The latter is especially important to ensure girls' attendance.

Results have also been achieved on other fronts. In 2002, about 50 countries, many of them the least developed, increased **birth registration**. Birth registration is important for realising a child's right to a name, nationality and, in many cases, access to basic social services. It can be used as a means to protect a child from underage military recruitment, child labour, and becoming victim to the slave trade or trafficking. In Lesotho, 73,000 orphans and child-headed households were registered. In Viet Nam, birth registration increased from 72 per cent to 87 per cent following a successful communication campaign coupled with legal reform.

The **Measles Initiative** partnership, led by UNICEF, WHO, the American Red Cross and the Centers for Disease Control in the United States, along with other partners including the governments of Canada and Japan, has vaccinated more than 85 million children since 2001. The Initiative has prevented an estimated 120,000 child deaths in two years.

In 2002, Europe was certified free of **polio**. Following massive immunisation efforts, only seven countries continued to have indigenous cases of polio in 2002. However, India and Nigeria registered more cases in 2002 than in 2001, causing global case numbers to again rise above 1000. Concerted efforts are still required to achieve the goal of total eradication of polio.

## 5. The way forward

The real work of implementing the World Fit for Children Plan of Action has just started. The progress made in the past 12 months is a good start, but tremendous challenges lie ahead. All stakeholders – governments, civil society and NGOs, families and children, and the international community – need to move further ahead from words to deeds, from plans and policies to actions and results.

The countries that have been developing or will develop NPAs should aim to complete them by the end of 2003. Those countries that choose to use other mechanisms, such as poverty reduction strategies, national development plans, and sector-wide approaches, should ensure that their documentation specifically and clearly reflects the key goals and targets of the WFFC, to enable periodic monitoring and review. We strongly encourage those countries that have not yet taken action to do so, in the interests of their children.

In all these follow-up processes, it is important to ensure that civil society organizations, including NGOs, and children are actively involved.

All countries should establish or strengthen appropriate national bodies for the protection of children. National budgets should be reviewed to allocate at least 20 per cent to basic social services which benefit children and to reorient resources in favour of the implementation of the NPAs and other child development plans. Industrialized



countries are encouraged to raise their official development assistance (ODA) levels to reach the target of 0.7 per cent of their GNP for overall ODA and to allocate at least 20 per cent of ODA to basic social services.

All countries should establish or strengthen monitoring systems at national and subnational levels to assess progress towards the international goals. Countries should also build up their national statistical capacity to collect, analyze and disaggregate data, by sex, age, and other relevant factors.

All countries should conduct periodic reviews of progress at national and subnational levels to address obstacles and to accelerate progress. Regional follow-up consultations can be very useful in providing peer review and in sharing experiences.

UNICEF and its partners will continue to collect, prepare and disseminate information on progress and on good experiences.

And most importantly, all stakeholders should take concrete action to improve the well-being of children, to protect, promote and fulfil their rights, and to build a world fit for children.

