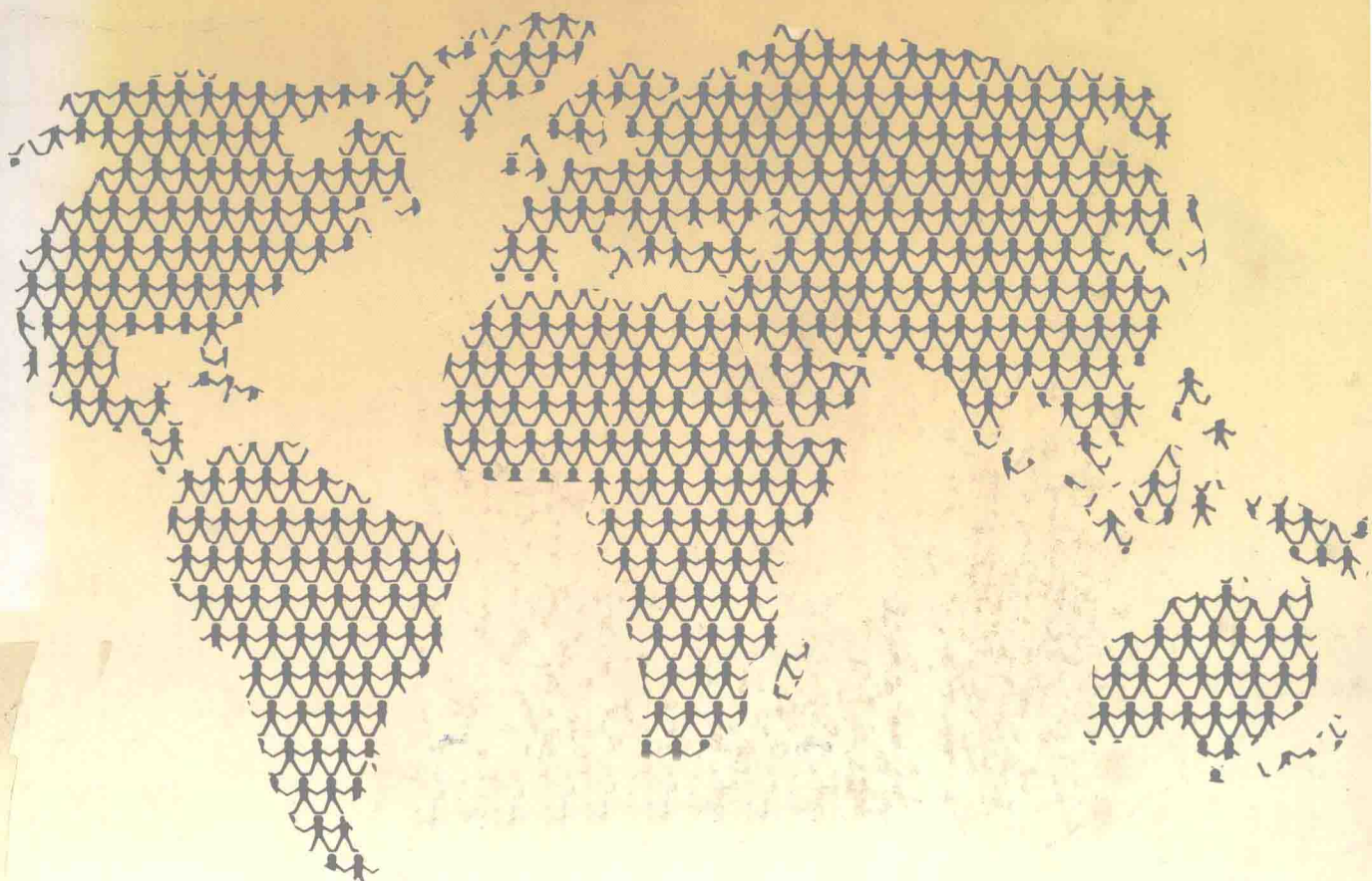


THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN 1990



United Nations Children's Fund
(UNICEF)

THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN 1990



James P. Grant
Executive Director of the
United Nations Children's Fund
(UNICEF)



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THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN
1990

I

THE STATE
OF THE WORLD'S
CHILDREN
1990

James P. Grant

The principle of first call

The specific opportunities

Priority to the poor

The role of the industrialized world

The under-five mortality rate (U5MR) is the number of children who die before the age of five for every 1,000 live births. It is the principal indicator used by UNICEF to measure levels of, and changes in, the well-being of children. The U5MR also governs the order in which countries are listed in the statistical tables annexed to the State of the World's Children report.

Figures given for the U5MR of particular countries, in both the text and statistical tables, are estimates prepared by the United Nations Population Division on an internationally comparable basis, using various sources. In some cases, these may differ from national estimates.

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The principle of first call

On present trends, over 100 million under-fives will die in the 1990s and many times that number will grow up malnourished. But as the world struggles to free itself from the burdens of debt servicing and military spending, there are signs of a new concern for children. The prospect of a *World Summit for Children*, the new *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, and practical advances such as the near achievement of *Universal Child Immunization*, all represent progress towards the principle that children should be protected not only from specific abuse but from the sharpest edges of the political and economic processes which are always at work in adult society. If that principle were widely accepted, then it would now be possible to protect the health and the development of the great majority of the world's children – at an affordable cost.

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The specific opportunities

There are six major low-cost opportunities for protecting the lives and health of children in the developing world in the 1990s. More than half of all child deaths and malnutrition can be attributed to vaccine-preventable disease, dehydration, and pneumonia – all of which can be prevented or treated at very low cost *if* today's new communications capacity is mobilized to inform and support the majority of families in using today's knowledge. Combined with advances in knowledge about nutrition, and about the importance of breast-feeding and birth spacing, these breakthroughs could save the lives of at least 50 million children and protect the normal growth of many millions more.

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Priority to the poor

In addition to these specific opportunities, progress must be resumed towards the great goals of adequate food, water, health care and education for all. Even in difficult economic times, a new commitment to primary health care and primary education could make more efficient use of resources and re-accelerate progress.

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The resumption of progress towards a world in which every family can meet basic needs will also require action from the industrialized nations. A resolution of the debt crisis and a resumption of investment is now in the interest of all parties. But increases in aid should be offered in support of the developing nation's own plans for specific reductions in absolute poverty and measurable improvements in the survival, health, and nutrition of children.

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The principle of first call

Great change is in the air as the 1990s begin. And great change is needed if a century of unprecedented progress is not to end in a decade of decline and despair for half the nations of the world. In many countries poverty, child malnutrition, and ill health are advancing again after decades of steady retreat. And although the reasons are many and complex, overshadowing all is the fact that the governments of the developing world as a whole have now reached the point of devoting *half of their total annual expenditures* to the maintenance of the military and the servicing of debt^{1*}. These two essentially unproductive activities are now costing the nations of Africa, Asia, and Latin America almost \$1 billion every day, or more than \$400 a year for each family in the developing world. Half-way through this century, President Eisenhower described the vast scale of military expenditure as 'humanity hanging from a cross of iron': if he were alive to observe the impact of the debt crisis as the century comes to an end, then he would have to add that humanity is also hanging from a cross of gold.

* This aggregate figure includes significant differences between regions and between the balance of military spending and debt servicing within regions. The Middle East, for example, has been accounting for a disproportionately high percentage of the developing world's military spending, while its debt service obligations are relatively light.

The sums involved are so large that it is difficult to see them in any steady perspective. *Debt and interest payments* in 1988, the latest year for which figures are available, totalled \$178 billion – three times as much as all the aid received from the industrialized countries. *Military spending* in the developing nations amounted to \$145 billion – an annual expenditure which would be enough to end absolute poverty on this planet within the next 10 years, enabling people everywhere to meet their own and their children's needs for food, water, health care and education.

It is therefore obvious that for much of the world, some significant reduction in debt servicing and defence spending has become the *sine qua non* of a resumption in human progress.

The winds of change

But as we enter the 1990s, the winds of political change are again beginning to stir the human condition. And the most important of the changes they are bringing is the thaw in the cold war. As World Bank President Barber Conable has said, "*The political and ideological forces which have polarized the world for half a century are diminishing*".

More rapidly than could have been imagined, the result has been a relaxing of ideological tensions, a stumbling forward of democracy, a

Immunization: a league table

The following 'league tables' list the nations of the developing world in order of the percentage of their one-year-old children who were immunized with DPT vaccine in 1988. The figures in parentheses indicate the equivalent figure for 1987 and the percentage point rise or fall between the 1987 and 1988 levels. Because DPT requires three separate vaccinations, it is a good indicator of how well the immunization system as a whole is working. The figures given below are one month more recent than the figures given in Table 3 of the main statistical annex to this report.

Americas	% children immunized (DPT)		Africa South of the Sahara	% children immunized (DPT)		Asia	% children immunized (DPT)				
	1988	1987		1988	1987		1988	1987			
Antigua	98	()	()	Seychelles	-	(94)	()	Singapore	-	(98)	()
Saint Vincent	98	()	()	Cape Verde	90	()	()	China	96	(75)	(+21)
Chile	96	(93)	(+3)	Botswana	89	(86)	(+3)	Samoa	91	()	()
Dominica	96	()	()	Mauritius	87	(85)	(+2)	Brunei Darussalam	91	()	()
Cuba	94	(87)	(+7)	Tanzania, U. Rep. of	85	(81) ^d	(+4)	Fiji	-	(90)	()
St. Christopher Nevis	94	()	()	Gambia	83	()	()	Korea, Rep. of	86	(76) ^d	(+10)
Costa Rica	87	(91)	(-4)	Zambia	83	(66) ^d	(+17)	Maldives	86	()	()
Jamaica	82	(81)	(+1)	Malawi	82	(55)	(+27)	Hong Kong	83	()	()
Uruguay	82	(70)	(+12)	Rwanda	80	(67) ^d	(+13)	Sri Lanka	83	(61)	(+22)
Trinidad & Tobago	80	(79)	(+1)	Zimbabwe	79	(77)	(+2)	Thailand	80 ^e	(48)	(+32)
Saint Lucia	78	()	()	Lesotho	77	()	()	Philippines	79	(73)	(+6)
Barbados	76	()	()	Kenya	77	(75)	(+2)	Indonesia	75	(48)	(+27)
Panama	75	(73)	(+2)	Sao Tome & Principe	77	()	()	Nepal	74	(46)	(+28)
Colombia	74	(58)	(+16)	Comoros	-	(71)	()	India	73	(58)	(+15)
Honduras	74	(58)	(+16)	Congo	71	(71)	(0)	Malaysia	72	(59) ^d	(+13)
Belize	73	()	()	Gabon	68	(48)	(+20)	Bhutan	70	(27)	(+43)
Peru	66	(42)	(+24)	Guinea-Bissau	67	(47)	(+20)	Mongolia	69	(79)	(-10)
Grenada	65	()	()	Togo	62	(41)	(+21)	Solomon Is.	68	()	()
Guyana	64	(67)	(-3)	Nigeria	58	(20) ^d	(+38)	Pakistan	64	(62)	(+2)
Suriname	64	()	()	Senegal	55	(69) ^b	()	Viet Nam	62 ^e	(51)	(+11)
Argentina	61	(93)	(-32)	Burundi	54	(73)	(-19)	Vanuatu	58	()	()
El Salvador	61	(53)	(+8)	Sudan	53 ^a	(29)	(+24)	Korea, Dem. Rep. of	57	(62)	(-5)
Mexico	60	(62)	(-2)	Cameroon	53	(45)	(+8)	Papua New Guinea	48	(44) ^d	(+4)
Paraguay	57	(58)	(-1)	Central African Rep.	42	(24) ^c	(+18)	Kampuchea, Dem.	45	(37) ^d	(+8)
Brazil	54	(57)	(-3)	Zaire	41	(36)	(+5)	Afghanistan	31	(25)	(+6)
Ecuador	54	(51)	(+3)	Madagascar	40	(30) ^d	(+10)	Myanmar	18	(23)	(-5)
Nicaragua	51	(43)	(+8)	Uganda	40	(39)	(+1)	Lao People's Dem. Rep.	17	(28) ^c	(-11)
Venezuela	51	(54)	(-3)	Mozambique	38	(51)	(-13)	Bangladesh	16	(9)	(+7)
Haiti	49	(20)	(+29)	Swaziland	37	()	()				
Guatemala	47	(16)	(+31)	Ghana	33	(37)	(-4)				
Dominican Rep.	39	(80)	(-41)	Côte d'Ivoire	32	(71)	(-39)				
Bolivia	39	(24)	(+15)	Benin	30	(52)	(-22)				
				Burkina Faso	30	(34)	(-4)				
				Liberia	28	(28)	(0)				
				Mauritania	28	(32) ^d	(-4)				
				Somalia	26	(25)	(+1)				
				Sierra Leone	25	(30) ^d	(-5)				
				Equatorial Guinea	19	()	()				
				Mali	18	(12)	(+6)				
				Ethiopia	16	(16)	(0)				
				Guinea	16	(15) ^d	(+1)				
				Niger	16	(5) ^d	(+11)				
				Chad	14	(12)	(+2)				
				Angola	12	(10)	(+2)				

Middle East and North Africa	% children immunized (DPT)		
	1988	1987	
Jordan	98	(89)	(+9)
Bahrain	97	()	()
Morocco	92	(78)	(+14)
Tunisia	91	(89)	(+2)
Saudi Arabia	89	(89)	(0)
Cyprus	88	()	()
Oman	88	(77)	(+11)
Egypt	87	(81)	(+6)
Iraq	86	(76)	(+10)
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	84	(62) ^c	(+22)
Iran, Islamic Rep. of	80	(74)	(+6)
Turkey	77	(71)	(+6)
United Arab Emirates	71	(75)	(-4)
Kuwait	69	(94)	(-25)
Qatar	69	()	()
Algeria	-	(66)	()
Djibouti	65	()	()
Syrian Arab Rep.*	58	(70)	(-12)
Yemen, Dem.	35	(25)	(+10)
Yemen	29	(14)	(+15)

a Government controlled areas only
b 2 shots only
c 1985
d 1986
e Provisional

* Coverage in Syria has since risen again to 70% as of March 1989.

No reliable estimates are available for Lebanon.

defusing of regional conflicts, and a re-examination of the commitment to present levels of military spending. The INF treaty and the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks are the first results: a reduction in the numbers of tactical nuclear weapons deployed in Europe may well follow.

In other regions of the world, a diminishing military involvement by the superpowers is already becoming evident. And in some of the largest countries, including China, India, and Pakistan, which together account for half the population of the developing world, levels of military spending have begun to fall for the first time in 50 years.

Armed conflicts still scar the surface of the planet. But it is nonetheless the case that fewer wars are being fought in the world at this moment than at any time in the last half-century. It is therefore not impossible to think in terms of an outbreak of peace, nor is it any longer idle to think that a more advanced diplomacy, including the increasing use of international organizations, might one day replace the primacy of force in human affairs.

However long the journey, every step in this direction brings closer the possibility of a more fundamental re-examination of the world's commitment to present levels of military spending. And the resources involved in such a re-examination are so vast that any significant change could not help but have a profound effect on almost every other aspect of the human endeavour. Total military expenditures, in both industrialized and developing worlds, easily exceed *the combined annual incomes of the poorest half of humanity*. The diversion of even 5% or 10% of this vast sum would be enough to reaccelerate progress towards a world in which the basic human needs of all were met.

If the world were to begin moving in this direction in the 1990s, then finance would not be the only resource to be released. For the 50 years since 1939 our world has been preoccupied by war, by the fighting of war, by the threat of war, by the deterring of war, by the preparing for war, by the paying for war. In one or all of these forms, war has distorted our economies, deflected our

industries, dominated our research and development, and diverted the finest scientific minds of two generations. Even more important than the claims it has made on our resources, war has claimed too large a share of our human capacity and concern: it has suborned our science and technology; it has usurped our energies and ingenuities; it has distracted the human imagination.

If these human capacities as well as society's financial and physical resources were to be released, even partially, from this preoccupation with war, then it follows that new vistas of human achievement would draw nearer and that progress towards a more genuinely civilized world would become more possible. Peace is not only one of the most longed-for of human goals; it is also an end which would become a means.

The environmental challenge

There would of course be no shortage of challenges to human ingenuity and imagination in a world struggling free of its preoccupation with war. The profound social and psychological problems arising in the turbulent wake of increasing prosperity will undoubtedly preoccupy much of the energies of the industrialized world in the years ahead, and the overarching problem of the environment, including the avoidance of a major ecological catastrophe, will provide a challenge sufficient to absorb far more physical and intellectual resources than are at present assigned to the task.

But alongside these great social and environmental issues, and inseparably linked to them, there remains the quieter but even more fundamental claim of those inhabitants of the planet who have not yet had the luxury of worrying about the problems of prosperity or the consequences of consumerism. Over 1 billion people, a fifth of mankind, still lack adequate food, clean water, elementary education, and basic health care. And for both moral and practical reasons, there can be no real advance towards a more genuinely civilized and environmentally sustainable world society without addressing the residual problem of gross inequity and absolute poverty.

In particular, it is the concern of UNICEF to argue that the needs of *children*, and particularly of those millions of children who are still living and dying in malnutrition and ill health as the twentieth century draws to a close, should have first claim on our concerns and capacities and on the even greater resources which may gradually be released if the world were indeed to move away from its long and wasteful preoccupation with war.

The largest generation

The moral dimension of this argument is of course familiar. It is the greatest condemnation of our times that more than a quarter of a million small children should still be dying *every week* of easily preventable illness and malnutrition. *Every day* measles, whooping cough and tetanus, all of which can be prevented by an inexpensive course of vaccines, kill almost 8,000 children. *Every day* diarrhoeal dehydration, which can be prevented at almost no cost, still kills almost 7,000 children. *Every day* pneumonia, which can be treated by low-cost antibiotics, kills more than 6,000 children. Death and suffering on this scale is simply no longer necessary, and it is therefore no longer acceptable. Morality must march with capacity.

Every single one of those deaths is the death of a child who had a personality and a potential, a family and a future. And for every child who dies, several more live on with malnutrition and ill health and are thereby unable to fulfil the mental and physical potential with which they were born.

Such facts shame and diminish us all. Civilization and progress are not entities to be measured only by GNP and technological capacity. They are also measured by the development of the human conscience, by the degree to which it is offended and the extent to which it acts when faced by the facts of human suffering, the denial of human needs, the violation of human rights.

But as is often the case, the moral argument is ultimately inseparable from the practical. The long-term consequences of poverty and suffering on this scale are well known. And they will affect

us all, and affect us increasingly, as we move towards a new millennium. Malnutrition means poor physical and mental growth, poor performance at school and at work, and the perpetuation of poverty from one generation to the next; high child death rates mean high birth rates and rapid population growth; lack of education precludes people from contributing fully to, or benefiting fully from, the development of their communities and their nations; hopelessness and the denial of opportunity erodes self-respect and sows the seeds of almost insoluble social problems for future generations; entrenched injustices and the parading of unattainable wealth before the eyes of poverty provoke an instability and violence which often takes on a life of its own; and, finally, it is becoming increasingly obvious that the extremes of deprivation preclude environmental sensitivity, forcing millions to over-exploit their surroundings in the name of survival.

A major renewal of effort to protect the lives and the development of children, and to end the worst aspects of poverty, would therefore be the greatest long-term investment which the human race could make in its future economic prosperity, political stability, and environmental integrity.

The time to make that investment is now. One and a half billion children will be born in the decade of the 1990s and, towards the end of that decade, a historic turning point will be reached as the number of children being born into the world finally reaches its peak and begins to decline. It is UNICEF's most fundamental belief, as the world struggles to free itself from the old preoccupation with war, that there could be no more important *new preoccupation* than protecting the lives and the development of the largest generation of children ever to be entrusted to mankind.

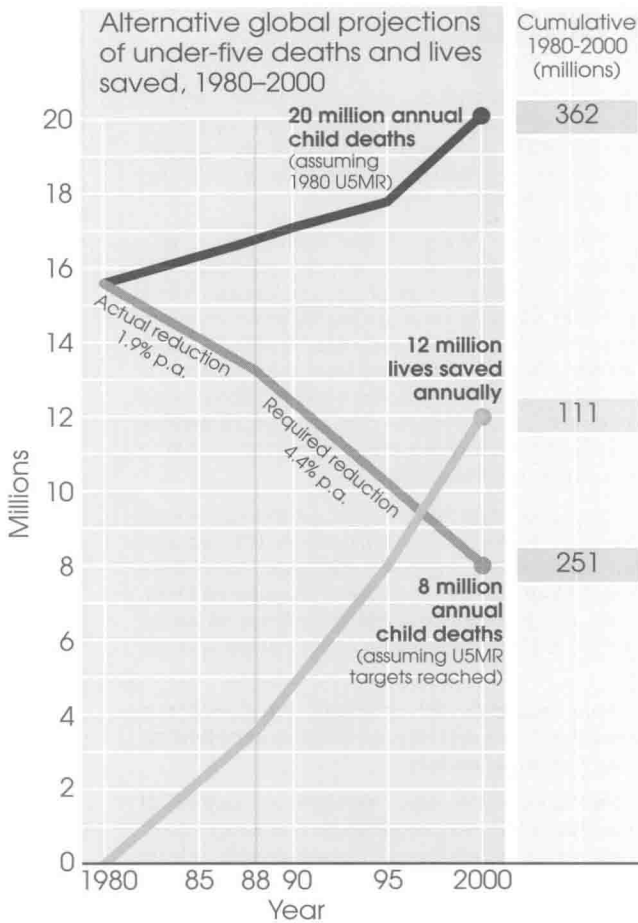
The rights of the child

In the closing years of the 1980s, several new developments and some practical achievements have suggested that this new priority for children may be beginning to emerge.

In both industrialized and developing worlds there is clearly a growing recognition that the

Fig. 1 Saving children's lives 1980-2000

The top two lines on the chart show two possible trends in the annual number of child deaths from 1980 to 2000. The lower line translates the difference between these two trends into the actual number of children's lives which could be saved.



- Assuming the 1980 under-five mortality rate (U5MR) remains the same
- U5MR as estimated by the UN Population Division up to 1988. Thereafter the assumption is that all countries make sufficient progress to reach the U5MR target by the year 2000 (i.e. a U5MR of 70 or half the 1980 U5MR, whichever is the lower.)
- Number of children's lives saved each year if U5MR reduction targets are met.

Source: UNICEF, based on revised United Nations Population Division estimates.
Note: Changes from the equivalent chart presented in last year's report are largely the result of revised estimates of actual and projected births.

physical, mental, and emotional needs of the young are a legitimate matter of concern for a nation's political leaders. The President of the United States, for example, has expressed the belief that "our national character can be measured by how we care for our children". And in making the same point about the world's responsibility for its children, President Gorbachev has stated simply that "mankind can no longer put up with the fact that millions of children die every year at the close of the twentieth century".

The growing importance of this issue may soon find expression in the first ever *World Summit for Children* which was suggested in this report last year and which has since been endorsed by over 100 governments. Projected for the second half of 1990, the Summit would bring together Presidents and Prime Ministers from all regions of the world to discuss and draw world attention to the need for a new preoccupation with children. On the agenda would be the glaring opportunities now available for saving the lives of up to 50 million young children and protecting the normal growth of many millions more in the decade ahead (fig. 1). Chapter II of this year's *State of the World's Children* report is devoted to a discussion of the six most obvious and universal of those opportunities and is intended as a specific input to the preparations for the Summit.

A *Summit for Children* would also consider another major development in the emergence of this priority.

After 10 years of detailed negotiations, the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* has finally been brought before the General Assembly of the United Nations. Setting minimum standards of protection for children's survival, health and education, as well as providing explicit protection against exploitation at work, against physical or sexual abuse, and against the degradations of war, the Convention is the first agreement among the nations of the world on the legally defined rights of the child (panel 2). Like many such documents in history, it is the statement of an ideal which few if any nations have so far achieved. But as more and more nations ratify its text and begin to enact its provisions into national law, and as the press and public become more concerned to ensure its

The Convention: on the rights of the child

2

At the end of 1989 the Convention on the Rights of the Child was brought for adoption to the General Assembly of the United Nations. The fruit of ten years of exhaustive consultations involving many governments, UN agencies and some 50 NGOs, the Convention aims to set universal standards for the defence of children against neglect, exploitation and abuse.

The document is unique in its breadth, bringing together in one comprehensive code the legal benefits and stipulations concerning children, which were previously scattered through scores of other international agreements of varying scope and status. It applies to all persons below the age of 18, except where children attain their majority at an earlier age according to national law.

The rights enshrined in the Convention apply equally to all children, without regard to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status. Another fundamental principle is that the 'best interests' of the child, should be used as the touchstone for all decisions affecting children's health, wellbeing and dignity.

The provisions of the Convention apply to three main areas of children's rights: survival, development, and protection.

○ **Survival:** The first specific right mentioned is the inherent right to life. States must ensure, "to the maximum possible, the survival and development of the child". The Convention recognizes the right of access to health care services (such as immunization and oral rehydration therapy), and to an adequate standard of living (including food, clean water, and a place to live). In addition, the child has the right to a name and a nationality.

○ **Development:** To allow every individual the chance to develop to his or her potential, the Convention contains provisions relating to the child's right to education, to rest and leisure, to

freedom of expression and information, and to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. It also stipulates that parents shall give 'due weight' to the views of children, in accordance with their age and maturity.

○ **Protection:** Many of the Convention's provisions are designed to provide protection for children in a wide range of circumstances. Some deal with mentally or physically disabled children, others with refugees or parentless children, or with children who are separated from their parents. It also recognizes that, in some cases, children need to be protected from their own parents, or may be in a situation where the parents may be unable to take proper care of them.

The Convention also covers economic, sexual and other forms of child exploitation, and requires that appropriate measures be taken to protect children from the use and sale of drugs. In addition, it sets out the rights of children in times of armed conflict, and of children who are in trouble with the law.

Once ratified by 20 countries, the Convention enters into force and its provisions become binding in each ratifying country.

The Convention also includes a number of follow-up measures designed to encourage compliance with its provisions by governments, private organizations and individuals. A Committee on the Rights of the Child will be established with ten experts serving in their personal capacities, and States which ratify the Convention will report to the Committee on the steps they have taken to comply with its provisions.

It is expected that the standards set by the Convention will become the point of reference for everyone concerned with the health, development and protection of children. The Convention will thus provide a universally valid basis for advocacy on behalf of children everywhere.

observance, it may gradually become the standard below which any civilized nation, rich or poor, will be ashamed to fall.

The principle of first call

Transcending its detailed provisions, the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* embodies a fundamental principle which UNICEF believes should affect the course of political, social and economic progress in all nations over the next decade and beyond. That principle is that the lives and the normal development of children should have *first call* on society's concerns and capacities and that children should be able to depend upon that commitment in good times and in bad, in normal times and in times of emergency, in times of peace and in times of war, in times of prosperity and in times of recession.

If the trench of such a principle could be dug across the battlegrounds of political and economic change in the decade ahead, then civilization itself would have made a significant advance. The essence of civilization is the protection of the vulnerable and of the future: children, like the environment, are both the vulnerable and the future. Failure to protect the physical, mental and emotional development of children is the principal means by which humanity's difficulties are compounded and its problems perpetuated. And *special measures* to protect children from the inadequacies and mistakes of the adult world is a principal means by which many of mankind's most fundamental problems might ultimately be allayed. The principle of first call therefore underlies all of the issues discussed in this year's report, just as UNICEF believes it should underlie the many decisions and actions which will shape the decade ahead.

The early examples

The 1980s have already seen the first examples of this principle of first call being put into practice, albeit partially. In 1985, El Salvador became the first country ever to suspend a civil war for the purpose of respecting the right of its

children to be immunized. It was an historic decision, and marks one of the first steps on the road to accepting that protection for the lives and the growth of children should not have to depend on the vagaries of adult society, on whether a country is at war or at peace, on whether a particular party is in power, on whether the economy has been well managed or bungled, on whether debts have been paid or rescheduled, on whether commodity prices have fallen or risen, or on any other trough or crest in the endless and inevitable undulations of political and economic life in the modern nation state.

Through the good offices of the Catholic Church and the Red Cross, both sides in El Salvador's war have since agreed to a further 14 separate 'days of tranquillity' over the last 5 years, during which time over 3 million doses of vaccine have been administered. And as a further development of that concept, both sides in Sudan's civil war agreed, in 1989, to create 'corridors of tranquillity' through which 120,000 metric tonnes of food and other supplies, including immunization supplies, have since reached the two and a quarter million civilian victims of that war. So far, this unprecedented compact has avoided a repetition of the events of 1988 which claimed the lives of an estimated 250,000 civilians – the majority of them women and children. Recently, both the new military government in Khartoum and the leaders of the Sudan People's Liberation Army have agreed to keep open the 'corridors of tranquillity' and requested that the relief effort be continued into 1990. It is not inconceivable that the channels of communication established by this process might quicken the pulse of peace in the region or that the example being set in the Sudan might one day become the accepted norm in the conduct of civil or international war. It is significant, for example, that co-operation from all sides is now allowing the child immunization programme to proceed in Afghanistan and that the nation of Sri Lanka, racked by worsening violence and disruption, is able to announce this month (December 1989) that, with the co-operation of all parties, the goal of universal child immunization has now been reached.

But if the principle of first call and the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* are widely