

CONCEPT NOTE

High-level meeting of the General Assembly on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption
of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

“25 years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child:

Is the world a better place for children?”

20 November 2014

United Nations, NY

Overview

Twenty-five years ago, on 20 November 1989, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the most comprehensive human rights treaty and legal instrument for the promotion and protection of children’s rights: the Convention on the Rights of the Child. With the adoption of this convention, the international community made a commitment to all children: that it would do everything in its power to protect and promote their rights – to survive and thrive, to learn and grow, to make their voices heard and to reach their full potential without discrimination.

In every region of the world, the CRC has inspired changes in laws to better protect children, altered the way international organizations see their work for children, and transformed the way children are able to take an active role and participate in their communities and societies. The CRC has also contributed to changing attitudes towards childhood and the universal understanding that fulfilling the rights of children depends on recognizing childhood as a period that is distinct from adulthood - defining it as a time in which children can grow, learn, play and develop. Equally important is the optimism, clarity and steadfastness that the Convention captures for the future—that one day all children will enjoy a childhood in which their rights are respected; their basic needs are met; they are protected from violence, abuse, exploitation, neglect and discrimination; and empowered to participate meaningfully in all decisions that affect their lives.

These changes have led to concrete results for children: Global mortality rates for children under five have dropped by almost 50 per cent since 1990. Fewer child deaths are, in part, a reflection of the success of national governments and the international health community in fighting multiple childhood diseases through efforts such as immunization programmes. Between 2000 and 2011, the number of children out of school also declined by almost 50 per cent from 102 million to 57 million. The number of people living in extreme poverty has decreased by 700 million people since 1990. Nearly 1.9 billion people have gained access to improved sanitation, and 2.1 billion people have gained access to improved drinking water sources. Progress has also been made in collecting data on female genital mutilation/cutting which has increased awareness of the health risks faced by young girls.

While this progress is remarkable, reflection on the last 25 years also reveals gaps and inequalities that are a stark reminder of the work that still must be done in order to ensure that gains are evenly distributed. The quality of children’s lives continues to vary by where they are born; their ethnicity; whether they are a boy or girl; whether they have a disability; the income of their family and whether they live in rural or urban areas, along with multiple other variables.

Children from poorer families are more likely to die than those from affluent ones. Although child mortality has declined globally, 24 countries—all of them, except Afghanistan, in sub-Saharan Africa

—still have under-five mortality rates that are above 100 deaths per 1,000 live births. Nearly two-thirds of all child deaths are caused by infectious diseases that could be prevented through cost-effective and available interventions. Estimates show that by 2050, one-third of the world's children will be born in sub-Saharan Africa ; work within the region must continue and be intensified. According to the International Labour Organisation, 168 million children worldwide aged 5 to 17 years are in child labour , compromising their right to protection from economic exploitation and infringing on their right to learn and play. Eleven per cent of girls are married before they turn 15, jeopardizing their rights to health, education and protection. Every year between 500 million and 1.5 billion children worldwide endure some form of violence.

Further, the most marginalized and excluded children are not always being counted; this only perpetuates their invisibility. Orphaned children, children with disabilities, children living in slums or from ethnic minorities, indigenous children and children subjected to forced labour, trafficking and other forms of exploitation may well be the most excluded and most at risk of their rights to survival, protection, freedom and identity being violated.

There is growing recognition that pressing global challenges driven by climate change, food and water insecurity, changing population dynamics, youth unemployment, and social conflict, may have a disproportionately negative effect on the poorest and most disadvantaged children and their families. The excluded and most marginalized face numerous financial, institutional, cultural and political barriers which impede the realization of their rights and prevent them from pursuing opportunities.

Youth populations have risen dramatically in many developing countries partly as the result of improved maternal and child health. These “youth bulges” pose immediate and future challenges to countries’ social and economic development but, with targeted investments in education and employment, can produce economic growth. The global economic crises and climate change both drag households further into poverty and threaten to reverse development gains. Yet, extensive evidence now shows how social protection programmes, and cash transfers in particular can protect families and have significant impacts on multiple dimensions of child poverty, including increases in school enrolment, access to health care and reduced rates of malnutrition.

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have advanced in unprecedented ways over the past decade. They are increasingly driving and supporting community level changes as well as local, national and global economies and international development efforts. While they offer an array of economic, educational and other opportunities to young people who have access, the ICTs have also served to widen social and economic disparities for those who do not.

In light of the 25th anniversary of the CRC and the discussions on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, this is a critical moment to bridge implementation gaps and make the vision of the Convention a reality for all children, as well as to highlight innovative approaches that can transform the lives and realize the rights of all children, everywhere. As the international community enters the next 25 years of the CRC with growing and widening disparities within societies, and pressing global challenges driven by climate change, food and water insecurity, changing population dynamics, and social conflict, business as usual is not enough to make the vision of the Convention a reality for all children.

Objective

The overall theme for the high-level meeting will be: "25 years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: is the world a better place for children?" Participants will have the opportunity to:

1. Take stock of the progress that has been achieved for children since 1989;
2. Identify the main challenges in realizing the rights of the child, including discrimination and inequalities in the progress made to date; and
3. Look to the future from different perspectives and disciplines to consider the best ways to address these challenges as the international community moves into the next 25 years of the CRC.

Format

In accordance with General Assembly resolution 68/273, the high-level meeting will take place on 20 November 2014 and will comprise an opening meeting and an interactive panel discussion with the meaningful participation of children.

The opening meeting will feature statements by the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General, the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, the Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and Member States speaking on behalf of regional groups.

The opening meeting will be followed by the interactive panel discussion which will be chaired by two Member States, selected by the President of the General Assembly after consultations with regional groups. Following the presentations by the selected panellists, representatives will be invited to make brief remarks from the floor not exceeding two minutes. These remarks may include questions, responses or comments to the information presented by the panellists.

Delegations are informed that there will be no pre-established list of speakers and written statements are strongly discouraged.

To help guide the panel discussion, participants are asked to consider the following questions:

1. What can be done at the global, regional and national levels to build on the progress made since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in order to advance the universal realization of children's rights? How can the international community leverage current gains and resources to further advance the rights of children?
2. What are the key obstacles and challenges encountered by Member States in the realization of the rights of the child? What types of innovations can be implemented to overcome those challenges?
3. What measures can be taken to protect children from discrimination and overcome inequalities? How can the international community address the barriers faced by the most marginalized and excluded children?

4. How can the human rights principles of accountability and participation play a key role in driving change on the most pressing challenges confronting children, and help close the gaps in the implementation of the CRC?
5. How can the Post-2015 discussions advance the realization of children's rights and the unfinished agenda of the MDGs? What types of investments and resources would be needed to accelerate progress on the current achievements and address remaining challenges?

The detailed Programme for the high-level meeting will be made available at a later stage on the website of the President of the General Assembly at: <http://www.un.org/pga/calendar/>. Additional information related to the CRC@25 is available on the UNICEF website at: <http://www.unicef.org/crc/>.

Participation

Member States and Observers are encouraged to be represented at the highest level possible and to include children and young persons in their delegations. United Nations entities, relevant intergovernmental, regional and subregional organizations and other relevant stakeholders are invited to participate at the highest possible level.

Media

The high-level meeting, including the panel discussion, will be broadcast via a live webcast that is publicly accessible at: <http://webtv.un.org>.

Outcome

The outcome of the high-level meeting will be a President's summary that subsequently will be made available to Member States.

Provisional Programme

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<p>Morning</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Opening Session</u> Venue: General Assembly Hall</p> <p><i>Chaired by: H.E. Sam K. Kutesa, President of the 69th Session of the United Nations General Assembly</i></p>
<p>11:00 a.m.</p>	<p><u>Opening remarks</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• H.E. Sam K. Kutesa, President of the 69th Session of the United Nations General Assembly• Mr. Anthony Lake, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (<i>on behalf of the Secretary-General of the United Nations</i>) <p>Statements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mr. Ivan Šimonovic, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights• Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Under Secretary-General and Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict• Ms. Marta Santos Pais, Assistant Secretary-General and Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children• Ms. Kirsten Sandberg, Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child• Ms. Maud De Boer-Buquicchio, Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regional groups (November 2014)<ul style="list-style-type: none">- African States- Asia-Pacific States- Eastern European States- Latin American and Caribbean States- Western European and other States <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Miss Teyise Dlamini, Child representative (Swaziland)

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Afternoon	<p><u>Interactive Panel Discussion</u></p> <p>Theme: "25 years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: is the world a better place for children?"</p> <p>Venue: Trusteeship Council Chamber</p> <p><i>Co-Chairs:</i> Her Majesty Queen Silvia (Sweden) Ms. Laura Vargas Carrillo (National System for Integral Family Development of Mexico)</p>
3:00 p.m.	<p><u>Introduction of Queen of Sweden</u> Mr. Anthony Lake, UNICEF Executive Director</p> <p><u>Opening remarks and introduction of Co-Chair</u> <i>Chair:</i> Her Majesty Queen Silvia</p> <p><u>Opening remarks and introduction of Moderator</u> <i>Chair:</i> Ms. Laura Vargas Carrillo</p>
3:10 p.m.	<p><u>Introduction of Panellists</u> <i>Moderator:</i> Ms. Maysa Jalbout, non-resident fellow, Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution</p> <p><i>Panellists:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Bertha Condori Siñani, Movimiento ATD Cuarto Mundo (Youth representative - Bolivia) • Mr. Ehab Monzer, Lebanese Children's Council (Child representative - Lebanon) • Mr. Thomas Chandy, Executive Officer, Save the Children (Civil society - India) • Mr. Gideon Badagawa, Executive Director, Private Sector Foundation (Private sector - Uganda)
3:15 p.m.	Video presentation
3:20 – 3:45 p.m.	<u>Panel discussion</u>
3:45 – 5:30 p.m.	Interactive discussion
5:30 p.m.	Final remarks by the panelists
5:45 p.m.	<u>Closing remarks and reading of the meeting summary</u> <i>Moderator:</i> Ms. Maysa Jalbout
6:00 p.m.	Interactive panel ends

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Summary of key messages that emerged from the opening session and interactive panel discussion:

- Statements were delivered by strong advocates for children's rights, including Member States, civil society, the United Nations, private sector representatives and children themselves.
- The event was a celebration of the remarkable progress achieved in children's rights over the past 25 years. More children than ever have had the chance to survive, thrive and reach their full potential. However, looking back, on 25 years of progress reminds us there is much left to do. Too many of the commitments made to children – the builders of our future – have yet to be fulfilled.
- Participants agreed that the 25th anniversary of the CRC constitutes an opportunity to renew commitments to children and ensure the best future for them. Participants strongly urged the need to fully reflect children's rights in the Post-2015 Development Agenda and beyond.
- There were reminders to all stakeholders to spare no effort to honour the articles of the Convention and turn aspirations into concrete results for children. There were also calls for the universal ratification and effective implementation of the Convention and its Optional Protocols.
- There must be continued investment in the rights of all children across the world. They are the fundamental building block for achieving the future we want. Explicit targets on reducing inequality, ending all forms of violence against children and combating child poverty are major steps forward in the new agenda. Poverty, violence, conflict, weak governance and the absence of rule of law severely undermine development gains, and any new development agenda must explicitly take up these issues.
- Multi-stakeholder partnerships will be required to deliver on the success of the future sustainable development goals of the Post-2015 Development Agenda, and have a special accountability to achieve the rights of children. Every sector of society needs to be mobilized. In particular, the financial sector, private business, foundations and non-profits will represent central players to bring forward new opportunities.
- Civil society called for rethinking the way we work and emphasized that the rights of every child demands innovative solutions. Innovative services, products and processes and systems are critical to closing the gaps that prevent so many children from realizing their rights.

- Children and youth are essential stakeholders in this multi-stakeholder partnership. They have a unique perspective that must be sought and cannot be ignored. Children have the right to be heard, and to be active agents of change in their communities. Today, children specifically called upon adults to ensure that decisions that affect them must start with discussions with children and young people themselves.
- All actors were urged to consider the most marginalized and excluded children. Numerous participants – including children – emphasized that inequality and discrimination remain among the biggest challenges to the realization of children’s rights. The quality of children’s lives continues to vary by where they are born; their ethnicity; whether they are a boy or a girl; whether they have a disability; the income of their family; and whether they live in rural or urban areas. In all cases, the best interests of the child must be taken into account.
- Member States and young representatives highlighted the importance of focusing on children’s access to health, adequate nutrition, quality education, water and sanitation and strengthened child protection systems and mechanisms. Several participants underscored that paramount responsibility rests with Member States to implement children’s rights and to monitor implementation of the CRC, in partnership with key stakeholders.
- Several participants also highlighted that current conditions make for a challenging environment in which to realize children’s rights. Threats to children are ever increasing in the form of alarming numbers of humanitarian crises, changing population dynamics, natural disasters, violent conflicts and climate change.
- The importance of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development in Addis Ababa in July 2015 was emphasized, particularly in the context of investing in children and youth to ensure that their needs are central to the discussions on financing of the Post-2015 Development Agenda.
- Information and Communication Technology and the Internet present an important opportunity for empowerment and engagement of children. Today’s children have far more possibility to participate through online means than 25 years ago. Children are not simply passive recipients of information; they are also engaged participants and innovative drivers. Yet, this exciting online world brings with it heightened risks against children, including all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation.
- Every child has a right to a future full of promise – a right for each child to claim and for each of us to provide. A lot remains to be done to ensure the vision of a better world for children, which lies at the heart of the CRC. The 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child is an opportunity for us all to recommit to enhancing, improving and intensifying our efforts to realize the rights of our children, everywhere, and at all times.

20 November 2014

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Sam Kahamba Kutesa,
President of the 69th Session of the General Assembly,
at the High-level meeting on the occasion of the twenty-fifth
anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the
Child**

Excellencies,

Mr. Tony Lake, Executive Director of UNICEF,

Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Under Secretary-General and Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

Mr. Ivan Šimonovic, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights

Ms. Marta Santos Pais, Assistant Secretary-General and Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children,

Ms. Kirsten Sandberg, Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child,

Ms. Maud De Boer-Buquicchio, Special Rapporteur on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography

And a special greeting to our young guest, Miss Teyise Dlamini from Swaziland,

Ladies and gentlemen,

We meet today to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This landmark document is the cornerstone of the promotion and protection of children's rights worldwide. It reflects our collective commitment to ensure that every child, in every society, has the right to a fair start in life.

Over the last 25 years, the Convention has created new perspectives on the place and role of children in society, while serving as the basis for important new legislation. Indeed, its provisions not only ensure special care and assistance for children, they also encourage their full participation in their communities and in all decisions affecting them.

In 2002, the General Assembly held a Special Session on children to review progress since the World Summit for Children and give a new impetus to global commitments on children's rights. This was the very first time children participated in a United Nations conference as delegates.

Addressing the Assembly, children described their vision of a world fit for them: a world where their fundamental rights are respected, without exploitation, abuse, violence, war and poverty. They spoke of a world with access to healthcare and education and a thriving environment.

As we look back today, we must ponder: how far have we come in making this vision a reality?

We should feel encouraged by the significant improvement in the living conditions of children around the world. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have focused national and international efforts, while also generating resources to support of a number of key initiatives related to children.

For example, child mortality rates for those under five have been cut in half, in part thanks to immunization campaigns and improved access to clean water and sanitation. More children than ever are attending school, with 9 in 10 children in developing countries now enrolled in primary education. Extreme poverty and hunger have also decreased.

Yet, important disparities remain. Children born into poor families, those living in conflict or post-conflict countries or those growing up in marginalized communities do not have the same opportunities to realize their full potential.

In many countries worldwide, girls still have limited access to education and are at risk for early and forced marriage. Child malnutrition remains a serious issue, as are the phenomena of child labour, child trafficking and child prostitution.

We must continue investing in the rights of all children across the world — no matter their gender, ethnicity, race, disability or economic status. Children are the fundamental building block for achieving the future we want. Indeed, by strengthening their capacity to mature into engaged, responsible and productive adults, society as a whole stands to benefit.

Excellencies,

The deadline to achieve the MDGs is quickly approaching. We must now build on their success and ensure that children's rights and well-being are fully reflected in the post-2015 development agenda.

With targets on reducing inequality, ending violence against children and combating child poverty, the proposals of the Open Working Group provide a solid basis to move forward. It will also be critical to maintain a holistic approach and address other factors that can undermine development gains, such as poverty, violence, conflict, weak governance and the absence of rule of law.

Equally important is the need to ensure mobilisation of the resources that will be required to implement a truly transformative development agenda that puts the welfare of all people, especially the children, at the forefront.

In this regard, investing in children and youth should be central to discussions on financing the post-2015 development agenda. At the global level, this should translate into new and innovative partnerships between governments, the private sector, civil society and financial institutions.

Firm domestic resource commitments for children will also be critical as economies grow and demands for social interventions become more diversified. Governments need to ensure that the benefits of growth are shared equitably across groups and generations, focusing in particular on the needs of the most vulnerable.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Twenty-five years after the adoption of the CRC, we must ask ourselves, “Is the world a better place for children?” This afternoon’s interactive panel discussion will provide an opportunity to further explore this question.

As we reflect on how the next twenty-five years can result in the further promotion of the universal realization of children’s rights, let me conclude with these inspirational words from the children who addressed the Assembly in 2002:

“We want a world fit for children, because a world fit for us is a world fit for everyone.”

I thank you for your attention.