

# Session

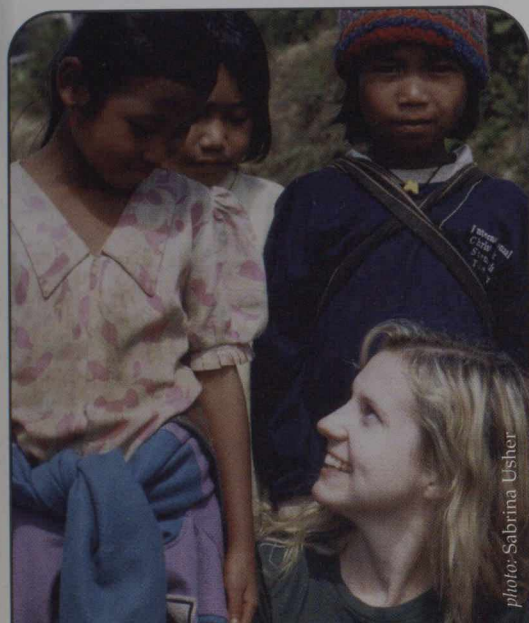


photo: Sabrina Usher

**Dr. Samantha Nutt, founder and executive director of the NGO War Child Canada, with children in the Upiem Mai refugee camp in Mae Sot, northern Thailand**

"The commitments have not yet been translated into reality, nor have they been able to create within governments and populations a culture of respect for the child. While there has been real progress in health and some in education, there remains much to be done." In future, she notes, "The central feature of actions for children will be to break the vicious cycle of poverty." But in every case, she insists, "Children must be seen as the subjects of rights rather than the objects of charity."

To promote that view, she says, "the Special Session must galvanize all parts of the UN system, as well as national and regional forums and organizations, into taking children's rights seriously and incorporating children's perspectives into their day-to-day work. The fulfilment of children's rights is the cornerstone for sustainable human development. With the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other human rights instruments, we have a strong base to build upon. Let's act accordingly." ●—

## What Canada is doing at home

In preparation for the Special Session, most countries submitted reports on their efforts to meet the 1990 World Summit commitments. Canada's report cites national progress in several areas, including "a reduction in child and maternal mortality rates and certain childhood illnesses; increased immunization coverage; a decrease in child poverty; and enhanced access to information for children."

Notably, the federal government initiated a national action plan entitled *Brighter Futures*, to remedy conditions that put children at risk. In 1993 Parliament adopted November 20 as National Child Day, recognizing the importance of children for Canada's present and future. In 1996, the federal and provincial governments started developing a National Child Benefit initiative, which came into effect in July 1998. Its purpose is to reduce child poverty.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child stresses the need for access to information. In 1993 the federal government responded by establishing its SchoolNet initiative; the goal was to connect all Canadian public schools to the Internet. This goal has now been achieved; Canada is the world's first nation to have all its schools "wired."

Among other federal and provincial initiatives: increased maternity and parental leave benefits; tax reductions for families; and the ongoing development of the National Children's Agenda.

On the other side of the ledger, Canada's report notes the need to improve the lot of children living in low-income families and particularly Aboriginal children.

Most important, the government now reviews all new federal legislation for compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

## What Canada is doing internationally

Throughout the 1990s, Canada's foreign policy and official development assistance gave priority to children's rights. Canada has been a leader in promoting the rights of children worldwide and in ensuring their survival, development, and protection from exploitation and abuse. In partnership with other countries, UNICEF and NGOs, Canada has supported international initiatives including actions for war-affected children and for reducing poverty and debt among developing nations.

CIDA is the lead agency responsible for ensuring that Canada carries out its commitments to promote the rights and improve the lives of children in developing countries and countries in transition. CIDA's social development resources are concentrated in four priority areas: health and nutrition; basic education; the fight against HIV/AIDS; and child protection. Over the next five years, almost \$3 billion will be budgeted for these four priorities.

Canadian assistance is channelled through bilateral programs; organizations such as UNICEF and the Red Cross; UN agencies; regional forums such as the Commonwealth, La Francophonie and the Organization of American States; NGOs; and various government programs.

For more information on the Special Session and Canadian action, visit:

<http://www.sen.parl.gc.ca/lpearson>

<http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca>

[http://www.unicef.org/specialsession/how\\_country/index.html](http://www.unicef.org/specialsession/how_country/index.html)

<http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca>