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and finally, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (November 1989). One by one these conventions entered into force as international treaties after being ratified by the requisite number of states; adherence to them is monitored regularly by six treaty bodies functioning under the UN Commission for Human Rights.

Most of the UN's major human rights instruments were drafted during the period of the Cold War and the political polarities of the time affected the process of ratification, slowing and restricting it. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, however, was unanimously adopted by the UN General Assembly *after* the fall of the Berlin wall and rapidly became the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history. As of today, March 17, 1997, less than seven years after coming into force, this convention has been ratified by 191 countries. Only Somalia and the United States (which, at least, has signed) have so far failed to do so.

The end of the Cold War was also marked by a flurry of UN-sponsored or UN-related conferences whose declarations and programmes of action refined and elaborated the propositions and understandings imbedded in the covenants and conventions. For the evolving understanding of the human rights of children, the most important declarations and programs of action are those adopted at the World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, 1990), the Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, 1992), the Conference on Human Rights (Vienna 1993), the Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994), the World Summit on Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995), the Fourth World Conference on Women, which had a special focus on the girl child, (Beijing, 1995), and the First World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Stockholm, 1996). Each of these conferences built on the preceding ones, crafting and clarifying language and concepts to describe more and more accurately the real situation of children from a human rights perspective. As a result each new programme of action was better designed than its predecessors to enhance the inherent dignity of the child as a member of the human family. During the same period UNICEF (UN Children's Fund), with its annual reports on *The State of the World's Children* and *The Progress of Nations* (with respect to the goals agreed upon at the World Summit for Children),