

photo: UNICEF / Jeremy Horner

The UN Special Tackling

Children are the bearers of our common future.

—Carol Bellamy

At the 1990 World Summit for Children, 71 heads of state and government and other senior officials signed the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children. They also adopted an action plan with a set of precise, time-bound goals that included improving children's living conditions, reducing the spread of preventable diseases and protecting children in danger.

This September, world leaders are gathering at the United Nations to assess the situation anew. Says UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, "The Special Session will indeed be a special session in several ways. It will have the potential to shape the lives of children and adolescents throughout the world. It will assemble leaders from governments and non-governmental organizations, as well as children and adolescents, in a model of wide participation and partnership that must be the way of the future in the work of the UN."

The Special Session will review the progress achieved since 1990, and will identify shortcomings. It will also set specific targets and deadlines for achieving what Kofi Annan describes as "our main objective over the next decade: protecting and fulfilling the rights of all children and women."

Millions of children lead safer, healthier, fuller lives than a decade ago, but the rights of too many children and women are abused or threatened. The challenge is to find practical solutions to these problems and to commit the necessary human and economic resources. The Special Session is expected to produce a Global Agenda with a set of goals, and a Plan of Action for ensuring that children have the best possible start in life.

UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy reflects on the Special Session

Canada World View

Ms. Bellamy, you have publicly expressed disappointment at the results of the 1990 Summit commitments. Were the goals too ambitious?

Ms. Bellamy

They were ambitious, yet they were realistic and they reflected what was sorely needed. Sadly, the world, as demonstrated in the UN Secretary-General's report *We the Children*, has not met its own standards for children. It has fallen short on many goals, with terrible consequences. More than 10 million children still die each year from preventable causes, and not enough progress has been made in immunization, education and general protection of children.

We are also confronted with three acute challenges: poverty, civil conflict and HIV/AIDS, all of which are compounded by continuing discrimination against women and girls. Hundreds of millions of children are born in entrenched poverty; there have been more conflicts over the last decade than at any time since the Second World War; and in some countries AIDS is reversing gains made for children over the last decade. When I see this, I certainly cannot be pleased. None of us can.

Canada World View

What is needed to redress the situation?

Ms. Bellamy

It is vitally important that the Special Session galvanize the leadership, political will, commitment and resources to address these challenges. Experience shows that the difficulties are not insurmountable. If intention and determination are in place, we have



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UN headquarters in New York City, site of the Special Session on Children

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan