

How the world views and treats children: **Time for change**

On September 19 and 20, heads of state and government (including Prime Minister Jean Chrétien), non-governmental organizations, children's advocates and young people will gather at the United Nations in New York to discuss how to build a world fit for children. The UN General Assembly Special Session on Children will review progress since the landmark 1990 World Summit for Children, and will decide on what needs to be done over the next decade.

The 1990 Summit came a year after the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. At the Summit, world leaders promised to protect children, lessen their suffering and promote their full development. "We do this," they declared, "not only for the present generation, but for all generations to come." They also promised that they would always put the best interests of children first in all circumstances.

**We cannot waste our precious children.
Not another one, not another day.**

—Nelson Mandela and Graça Machel

Eleven years later, the record is mixed. On the plus side, infant mortality has fallen; expanded immunization programs save 3 million lives a year; severe malnutrition is becoming rarer; iodized salt is being used by 1.5 billion more people now than in 1990, reducing brain damage, retardation and other physical impairments; millions more children are in school; and the number of people without access to safe drinking water has dropped from 1.5 billion to 700 million.

photo: UNICEF / Giacomo Pirozzi



Graça Machel, Nelson Mandela and 12-year-old Kamo Masilo of South Africa use a laptop computer to register their support on-line for the "Say Yes for Children" campaign.

photo: CANAPRESS



Agricultural worker Lenise Aparecida Mota and her children sit in their cardboard shack near a tomato field in the town of Riberão Branco, near São Paulo, Brazil. According to a recent estimate of the UN World Food Programme, over 800 million people go hungry in developing countries alone, not because of sudden crisis or drought but as a matter of everyday life.

On the minus side, more than 10 million children still die each year from preventable causes; 150 million still suffer from malnutrition; 100 million (most of them girls) still are not in school; promised resources have yet to materialize; social services are underfunded; and the lives of millions continue to be devastated by hazardous labour, HIV/AIDS, the sale and trafficking of women and children, the recruitment of child soldiers, the commercial sexual exploitation of children, and general abuse and violence.

Carol Bellamy heads UNICEF (the United Nations Children's Fund). She sees the Special Session as an opportunity to make world leaders aware of the distance still to be travelled. One way of putting across the message, she says, is by marshalling the support of the world's citizens. That is the rationale behind a worldwide campaign called "Say Yes for Children," launched by UNICEF and the Global Movement for Children (http://www.gmfc.org/en/index_html)—a group of partners led by former South African President Nelson Mandela and his wife Graça Machel, former Education Minister of Mozambique. The results of the campaign will be presented to world leaders at the Special Session.

This issue of **Canada World View** examines the situation of children around the world, and looks at what to expect from the Special Session. We hear from Carol Bellamy and also learn what Canada is doing from Senator Landon Pearson, Prime Minister Chrétien's Personal Representative to the Special Session. ●—

say

YES

for children