

ture. It is in the context of these three objectives that the protection and promotion of children's rights can be seen as fundamental to our foreign policy.

The promotion of global prosperity and employment is a trade and human resources issue. But, at the end of the 20th century, who are the workers and who are the potential consumers on whom global trade depends? Much of the world's population is currently under the age of 18. In fact, this is the largest and youngest generation the world has ever known. Most of these children live in Asia, Africa and Latin America in countries whose populations continue to grow. In Europe and North America, in contrast, populations are either stabilizing or declining and are aging as a result. These demographics are profoundly significant for the global economy. So how are these now and future workers and eventual consumers faring? Not as well as they should be. Far too many of them live in abject poverty, deprived of basic services such as health and education, battered by ethnic conflict, exploited for their labour, beaten and abused, their fundamental rights as human beings violated every day. As a result a generational time bomb is being primed to go off. These are children who, if they survive at all, may grow up with as little respect for us as we adults are showing for them.

But a human disaster is far from inevitable. No investment in global prosperity is as vital as investment in the human and social capital that, properly looked after, these children will create. Let me give just one example of what happens when we do the right thing. Through the Canadian International Development Agency, Canada is helping girls, notably in Africa, to improve their access to education and the World Bank estimates that for each additional year girls are educated, child mortality is cut by up to 10 per cent, female fertility is reduced by 10 percent and wages are boosted by 10 to 20 per cent. As a further example, in Kerala, an Indian state that is no richer than its neighbours but where girls are valued for more than their reproductive capacity, the incidence of child labour is considerably lower than it is in the rest of the country.

Child labour, when it deprives a child of formal education and other opportunities to develop in a normal and healthy manner, is a major problem for global prosperity, a fact that even the countries where it is most prevalent have begun to recognize. Government leaders have become aware that large