



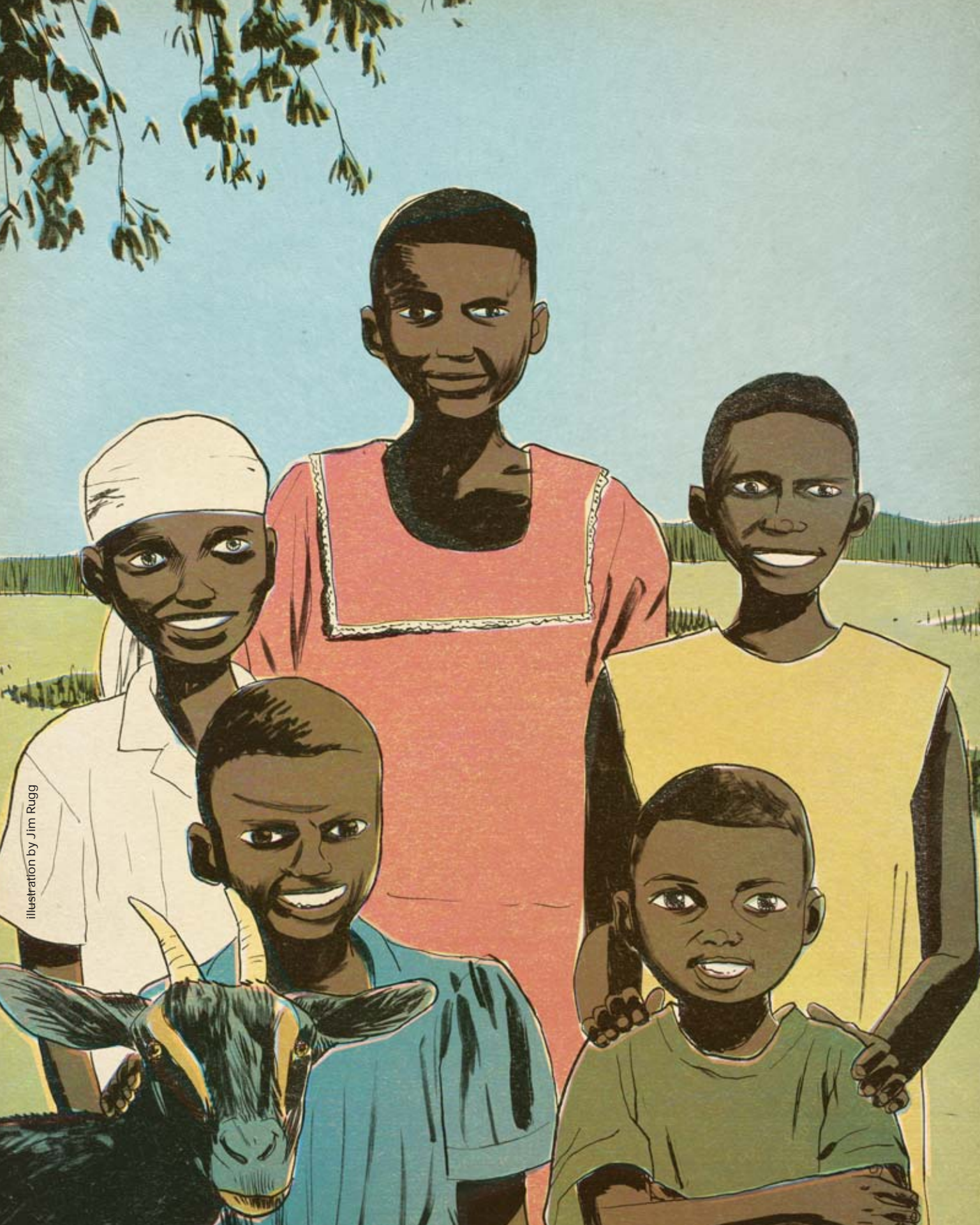
A WORLD FIT FOR US

The Children's Statement
from the UN Special Session
on Children: **Five years on**



unite for
children

unicef 



A WORLD FIT FOR US

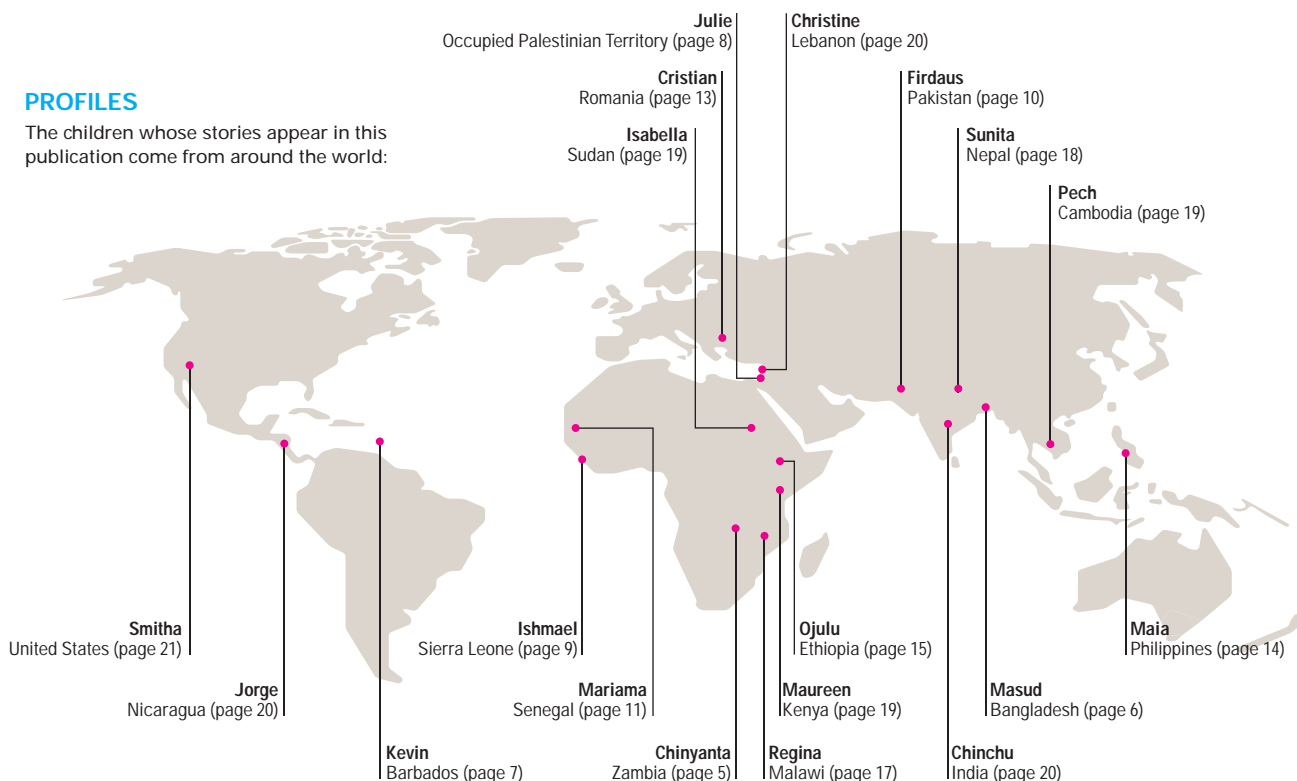
The Children's Statement from the UN Special Session on Children: Five years on

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PROFILES

The children whose stories appear in this publication come from around the world:



We are the victims of exploitation and abuse.

We are street children.

We are the world's children.

We are the children of war.

We are the victims and orphans of HIV/AIDS.

We are denied good-quality education and health care.

We want a world fit for children, because a world fit for us is a world fit for everyone.

We are victims of political, economic, cultural, religious and environmental discrimination.

We are children whose voices are not being heard: it is time we are taken into account.

A WORLD FIT FOR CHILDREN IS A WORLD FIT FOR ALL

The words that appear in the bubbles on the facing page and throughout this publication are the words of the 400 children from all around the world who gathered in New York in May 2002 to take part in the United Nations Special Session on Children. They came from over 150 countries. Most were in their teens, though some were as young as 10.

At the Children's Forum, a 'children only' event that lasted for three days before the Special Session started, young people divided into groups to discuss the things that mattered to them most: child rights, exploitation, war, health care, HIV and AIDS, the environment, poverty, education and child participation. They then joined together to agree on a statement called 'A World Fit for Us'. Two of them – Gabriela Azurduy Arrieta from Bolivia, who was then 13, and Audrey Cheynut from Monaco, 17 at the time – later read the statement to the UN General Assembly.

The presence of children at the Special Session completely changed the atmosphere in the United Nations building. It focused the minds of the adult delegates on the needs and rights of children and introduced a freshness, directness and honesty not often seen in international meetings. As Manuel de Jesús Acosta Delgado from Peru, then 15 years old, put it: "Children have vision that goes deeper than a president's, who looks at everything on a very global

level. They are more capable of seeing what needs to be done. They say how it is – and how they feel."

It was clear to all who attended the Special Session in 2002 that 'a world fit for children' could not be built without the participation of children themselves. This booklet is a report to children on the progress the world has made in their name in the five years since.

"Children can change the world if they are given a chance. We have to fight for that chance."

Jehanzeb Khan, a child delegate at the Special Session from Pakistan

"Your presence here marks a new chapter in the history of the UN.... So far, adults have called the shots, but now it's time to build the world with children. Your voices will be heard, I promise."

Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, at the opening of the Children's Forum, 2002



We see respect for the **RIGHTS** of the child

governments and adults having a real and effective commitment to the principle of children's rights and applying the Convention on the Rights of the Child to all children

safe, secure and healthy environments for children in families, communities, and nations

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was adopted by world leaders on 20 November 1989. It spells out the fundamental human rights of all children. All but two of the world's countries have agreed to be bound by what it says. Two additions to the CRC, adopted in 2000, aim to protect children from exploitation and during armed conflict.

ARE GOVERNMENTS KEEPING THEIR COMMITMENTS TO CHILDREN?

- Every few years, governments have to report on how they are implementing the CRC to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, an independent body of experts.
- In 2002, at the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children, 190 governments reaffirmed their commitment and put together a global action plan called 'A World Fit for Children'. This set goals to be achieved by 2010.
- By the end of 2006, nearly 50 countries had established specific national plans of action for making children's rights a reality. About 100 more had included goals for children in their national development plans.
- Some countries have specifically included children's rights in their constitutions. Others have incorporated them into laws. In 2004, for example, Mozambique adopted a new constitution that explicitly protects the rights of children laid out in the CRC.

More and more, when governments enact new plans and legislation affecting children, they are involving children in the process, making sure they are able to participate. Many countries have also set up children's parliaments to give children official representation and a forum for making their views known.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history and the quickest to gain international acceptance.

Children campaign for child rights in Turkey

The national Child Forum in Turkey, set up in 2000, brings together child delegates from each of the country's 81 provinces. In November 2006 these delegates launched their own campaign to promote the CRC. They plan to spread the word about children's rights through competitions, exhibitions, theatre shows, films and sponsored picnics. The campaigners will also work with children in detention, disabled children and children out of school.

YOUR RIGHTS UNDER THE CRC

You have the right:

- To be free from discrimination
- To be subject to laws and treatment that put your best interests first
- To be protected and able to develop to your full potential
- To have your say in decisions that affect you
- To survive and thrive in conditions that enable you to grow into the healthiest and happiest person you can be
- To have your birth registered, with a legal name and nationality
- To protection from physical and mental injury or abuse, and from neglect, whether you live with your parents or with others
- To an education – and to primary schooling that is free of charge
- To freedom of expression, thought, conscience and religion
- To information that is important to your well-being
- To play



Chinyanta's story



Chinyanta Chimba is 18 and lives in Zambia. She is president of the Student Alliance for Female Education (SAFE), a club that seeks to empower girls. "It's also," she says, "a vehicle for addressing negative social and cultural issues that limit girls' participation in education." She believes strongly that school should be a safe and healthy place for both girls and boys.

In the 'digital diary' Chinyanta is keeping for UNICEF, she asked girls at school how they felt about belonging to the first generation whose whole childhood has been protected by the CRC. "I feel privileged," said one of her classmates, a girl named Memory. "There were others before me who didn't even realize what their rights were, and anyone could just do anything to them."



Masud's story

Masud, who is 9 years old and lives in Dhaka, Bangladesh, is in some ways a success story. He attends classes at the Urban Slum Children's Education Project and enjoys every minute of it. But still, every day after school he spends four or five hours breaking bricks to help the family income. "I do not like breaking bricks. The place is very far from my house and it hurts my hands," says Masud. "But I want to do it to help my family." Masud's story shows how complex the issue of child labour is because it is often intertwined with poverty – for many poor families, having their children work is the only way they can survive.

We see an end to EXPLOITATION, ABUSE AND VIOLENCE

laws that protect children from exploitation and abuse being implemented and respected by all

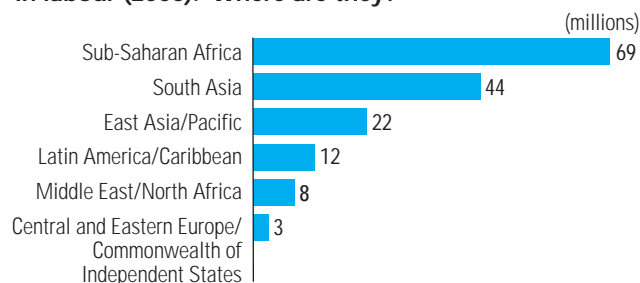
centres and programmes that help to rebuild the lives of victimized children

All children should grow up in a peaceful and secure environment, confident that they will be protected by adults. But from their earliest years millions of children are subject to violence, abuse and exploitation. Child labourers, child soldiers or children trafficked for prostitution are among the most extreme examples, but millions of others are exposed to physical, psychosocial or sexual abuse.

In 1999 and 2000, three new pieces of international law were adopted that sought to protect children from violence and exploitation. Two of these were additions to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. They are called 'Optional Protocols' because countries need to choose to ratify them separately. As of July 2007, 121 countries had ratified the Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and 117 countries had ratified the Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. The third new child protection law was a convention aimed at prohibiting and eliminating the worst forms of child labour; 165 countries have ratified this so far.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007) promotes legislation and policies to ensure that children with disabilities are protected against discrimination, exploitation, violence and abuse.

Worldwide, 158 million children aged 5-14 are engaged in labour (2006).¹ Where are they?



Not all work carried out by children is harmful and exploitative. 'Child labour' is work that is harmful to children's healthy development because it is either dangerous or consumes too many hours of their lives. The UNICEF definition of child labour: Children aged 5-11 performed 1 hour of economic labour or 28 hours of domestic labour in the week preceding the survey; children aged 12-14 performed 14 hours of economic labour or 28 hours of domestic labour.

Kevin's story

Kevin Alleyne is a member of Xchange, a movement that uses sport, drama and music to promote a positive, peaceful lifestyle to young people. Kevin is an avid footballer who has started a soccer programme for young people in the Pine Wildey area of Barbados. The area is known for its violence, especially among young males. "Knowing the environment from which these youngsters come, I just wanted them to know that there was someone out there who was looking out for them.... I want them to see that there is an alternative."

Violence against children

In 2001, the United Nations General Assembly asked the Secretary-General for an official study on violence against children. Children and young people from all over the world were involved in the preparation of the report, which was presented in October 2006.

The report says that violence against children happens in every country and society. Extreme violence against children makes the headlines, but children say that daily, small acts of violence and abuse also hurt them. While some violence is unexpected and isolated, most violent acts against children are carried out by people they know and trust – parents, partners, school-mates, teachers or employers.

The study recommends that governments (and everyone else) try to prevent violence against children. They can ban it, make it clear that it is never allowed, make it easy for everyone to report it, and help and support children who have been victims of violence.

We see an end to WAR

world leaders resolving conflict through peaceful dialogue instead of by using force

child refugees and child victims of war protected in every way and having the same opportunities as all other children

disarmament, elimination of the arms trade and an end to the use of child soldiers

Children have always been hurt by wars – but modern conflicts can be particularly harmful for them, especially when little distinction is made between civilians and those who are fighting. In 2006, 17 major armed conflicts were fought around the world.² Most were internal conflicts within nations, which can have devastating and long-lasting consequences on communities. More than 2 million children died as a direct result of armed conflict in the 1990s, and three times that number were permanently disabled or seriously injured. Around 20 million children worldwide have been forced to flee their homes because of conflict and human rights violations.

Governments talk about peace – but often at the same time they are spending money on armies and weapons. World military spending in 2006 reached \$1,204 billion; 64 per cent of this was spent by just five countries. More weapons are bought and sold now than in 2003-2004.

Julie's story

Julie is 17 and lives in Gaza in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Violence has been part of her world for almost all her life. For her, the worst part about the violence is living in a perpetual state of fear.

"We're not like other youth, around the world. All we see is war. Everywhere is war." But she believes young people must look towards a more peaceful future. "We can't lose hope, because if we do, there's nothing to live for."

Military spending

In 2006, worldwide military spending reached US\$1,204 billion.³



In comparison, governments spent an estimated US\$104 billion⁴ on official development assistance (ODA).

ODA consists of financial aid and technical cooperation provided by donor countries to developing countries.

Government promises

Almost all nations have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which says that governments must do everything they can to protect and care for children affected by war. In 2000, a new part of the Convention affirmed that no one under 18 should fight as a soldier. And in 2007, at a 'Free Children from War' conference in Paris, nearly 60 countries promised to protect children from being recruited by armed groups. But will they all keep their promises?

Recovering from war in Sierra Leone

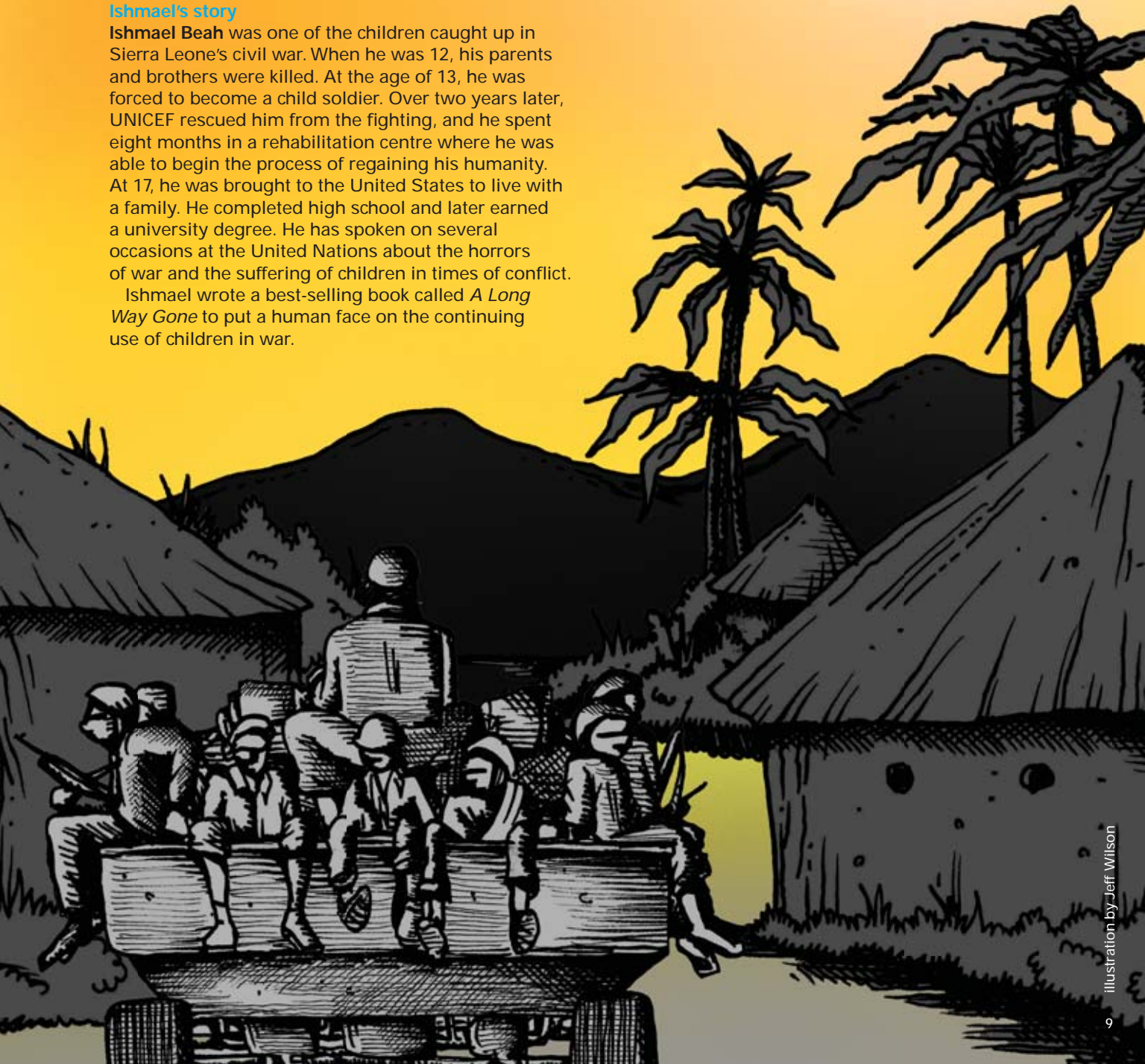
When Sierra Leone's civil war finally ended in January 2002, the country decided that it needed two things: a Special Court and a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The Special Court was set up by the United Nations to punish the people who committed the worst war crimes. In June 2007, the Court set a historic precedent when it convicted and sentenced three former military leaders for the recruitment and use of child soldiers. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's approach was different. The members listened to and wrote down people's stories about their lives during the war, however terrible they were, so that everyone would know the truth and could start afresh and build a peaceful future. Children's stories were just as important as adults' because everybody had suffered so much.



Ishmael's story

Ishmael Beah was one of the children caught up in Sierra Leone's civil war. When he was 12, his parents and brothers were killed. At the age of 13, he was forced to become a child soldier. Over two years later, UNICEF rescued him from the fighting, and he spent eight months in a rehabilitation centre where he was able to begin the process of regaining his humanity. At 17, he was brought to the United States to live with a family. He completed high school and later earned a university degree. He has spoken on several occasions at the United Nations about the horrors of war and the suffering of children in times of conflict.

Ishmael wrote a best-selling book called *A Long Way Gone* to put a human face on the continuing use of children in war.



Firdaus's story

Firdaus is a student trained as a community health worker. In 2005, she worked with people affected by the earthquake in Pakistan, near the ruined village of Chela Bandi. In addition to providing essential health services, she taught people about hygiene.

"Each day I usually see two families. On busy days I see four or five," said Firdaus shortly after the earthquake. "Before the earthquake the people here weren't in the habit of washing their hands with soap before preparing meals." According to Firdaus, the new practices quickly had an impact, and she saw the level of illness drop.

We see the provision of HEALTH CARE

strong and accountable partnerships established among all to promote better health for children

affordable and accessible life-saving drugs and treatment for all children

In 2005, almost 1 child in every 14 died before the age of five – and in sub-Saharan Africa, about 1 in every 6 children suffered that fate. World leaders promised to cut the under-five mortality rate by two thirds between 1990 and 2015. There has been some progress – in 2006, the number of children who died before their fifth birthday was reduced to 9.7 million, compared to almost 13 million in 1990.

All over the world, the poorest children have the worst chances of life. The main causes of under-five deaths are pneumonia, diarrhoea, malaria, preterm birth, and infections and other disorders in the first few weeks of life. More than half the children who die are also undernourished.

Malaria

Every year, malaria – a disease spread by mosquito bites – results in the death of more than a million people. Most of these are African children under five, who are dying at the rate of nearly 3,000 every day. One in five of these children could be saved if they were protected by insecticide-treated mosquito nets, which not only prevent bites but also kill mosquitoes. More and more of these are being distributed, but only a few African countries came close to the target of getting nets to 60 per cent of people by 2005.

Funding for measures to control malaria has, however, increased tenfold since 1994. The Roll Back Malaria partnership was launched in 1998 and has grown rapidly to include all kinds of partners committed to devoting expertise and money to fighting the disease.

It is often best to distribute mosquito nets as part of other health campaigns. In Rwanda, for example, over 1 million long-lasting nets were distributed as part of a 2006 measles campaign that also provided vitamin A and deworming medicine. During Senegal's Child



Survival Day in May 2007, 11-year-old **Mariama** said: "We all sleep under bednets at home. I have asked my parents whether I could bring our nets to school today so that ours would be treated as well."

Measles

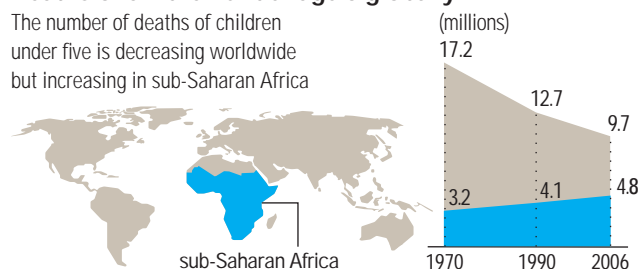
Measles is a deadly disease – and even when it doesn't kill, it can cause permanent disabilities, including blindness, deafness and brain damage. But it can easily be prevented if children are immunized, and better immunization coverage has resulted in spectacular progress – measles deaths worldwide fell by over 60 per cent between 1999 and 2005. In sub-Saharan Africa, immunization coverage improved from 49 per cent to 64 per cent. The higher immunization rates are partly due to the work of the International Measles Initiative – which targets 47 priority countries – together with the African governments involved. The GAVI Alliance (formerly the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization) is providing vaccines and single-use syringes to make immunization safe.

Child health in emergencies

Children affected by disasters or conflict need urgent protection if they are to stay healthy. When a massive earthquake hit Pakistan in October 2005, it killed an estimated 73,000 people and left 3.3 million others without shelter. Time was short before winter cut off the remote, mountainous region affected by the disaster, but over 1 million children were successfully vaccinated against measles.

Deaths of children under age 5 globally⁵

The number of deaths of children under five is decreasing worldwide but increasing in sub-Saharan Africa



We see the eradication of HIV/AIDS

orphans of AIDS and children living with HIV/AIDS cared for and enjoying the same opportunities as all other children

educational systems that include HIV prevention programmes

free testing and counselling centres

information about HIV/AIDS freely available to the public

The world has been trying to fight the HIV epidemic, but it is still spreading fast – there are many more people living with HIV now than there were at the time of the Children's Forum in 2002. In 2006, some 39.5 million people were living with HIV – 8.6 million more than in 2000.

About 2.3 million of these were children under the age of 15, most of whom contracted HIV from their mothers – and in 2006 alone, around 380,000 of these children died of AIDS-related causes. But the main way HIV is transmitted is through unprotected sex, and young people are especially vulnerable – it is estimated that more than 10 million of those infected are between the ages of 15 and 24.

One promising development over the past five years has been the *Unite for Children, Unite against AIDS* campaign, which was launched in 2005 to put the missing faces of children at the centre of global efforts to combat AIDS.

THIS CAMPAIGN PROMOTES THE 'FOUR Ps':

Prevent mother-to-child HIV transmission

Most of the 530,000 children newly infected in 2006 were born to HIV-positive mothers. Mother-to-child transmission can be prevented by using antiretroviral (ARV) drugs, yet in 2006, only 11 per cent of HIV-positive pregnant women received this treatment – an improvement over the 3 per cent of 2003.

Protect and support children affected by HIV and AIDS

The need to support children affected by AIDS is now much more widely recognized. Some 20 African countries have drawn up national plans of action. In Botswana 95 per cent of households now receive some kind of external support for the care of orphans and vulnerable children.

As of 2005, an estimated 15.2 million children have lost one or both parents to AIDS. Some 80 per cent of these children – about 12 million – live in sub-Saharan Africa.⁶

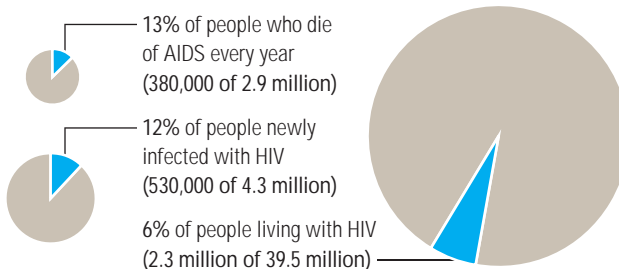
Provide paediatric treatment

In 2006, there were 780,000 children under 15 in need of ARV therapy but only about 15 per cent of them received it. This was still an improvement on the previous year, when only 10 per cent received the drugs they needed. Drugs for children have to be specially made. In November 2006 the Clinton Foundation announced that a children's pill was now available for under 16 cents a day, or \$60 a year.

Prevent infection among adolescents and young people

It is vital to teach young people how to protect themselves. This includes, in addition to abstinence, knowing two key ways to prevent HIV transmission – using condoms and only having sex with one faithful, uninfected partner. It also involves understanding how HIV is transmitted – and how it isn't – as well as knowing that someone who looks healthy can still have the virus. Only around 25 per cent of young women and 31 per cent of young men surveyed in sub-Saharan Africa knew this much. This information can be spread through schools. But it can also reach people in more unusual ways, as with the colourful 'Bashy Bus' (party bus) in Jamaica. The bus stops at places in rural areas where young people meet, and uses music and drama to communicate its message about HIV prevention, as well as offering testing and counselling.

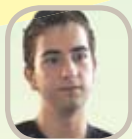
Children and AIDS⁷ In 2006, children under 15 made up:





Romania

Cristian's story



Cristian Traicu from Romania tested positive for HIV 18 years ago. Today he is happy to be alive. "I take 11 pills

daily. I exercise and try to think positively." Cristian formed 'The Fighters', a network of young people who teach others about HIV and AIDS, how it is transmitted and how HIV infection can be prevented. "I discovered I have this skill. I can speak in the name of others who are also HIV-positive.... We go out to the streets and inform other young people like us about HIV and AIDS."

Access to information and services is essential for HIV prevention





FSLF
Youth



Maia's story



Maia Therese Eugenie L. Azores is 15. She is president of Friends of the Seven Lakes Foundation (FSLF),

an environment-focused children's organization that promotes conservation, protection and rehabilitation of the seven interconnected crater lakes of San Pablo City. It also conducts eco-camps and tree planting activities, cleans up polluted lakes and

organizes recycling campaigns. In March 2007, Maia travelled from the Philippines to France for the Biovision Forum, a meeting on the role of life sciences in our evolving world. Maia believes that the world's natural resources need better protection and that humans need to live more sustainably. "I still have hope that if we all work together and do our part we will be able to solve our problems and accomplish our goals," she says.

We see the protection of the ENVIRONMENT

conservation and rescue of natural resources

accessible surroundings for children with special needs

awareness of the need to live in environments that are healthy and favourable to our development

Humanity is putting too great a strain on the planet – and children are likely to pay the price. Experts suggest that people's resource consumption and waste production exceeded what the Earth could cope with by about 25 per cent in 2003. Of the 24 ecosystems that support humanity – through provision of fresh water, replenishment of fertile soil, or regulation of the climate, for example – 15 are being pushed beyond their sustainable limits or are already operating in a degraded state.

The World Health Organization attributes many premature deaths of children to the various impacts of climate change. Some of the direct effects of climate change on the health and development of children include respiratory problems; death, injury and disease caused by weather disasters; and dehydration and diarrhoeal diseases. Higher temperatures will cause more vector-borne disease, which will hit children harder because they are more prone to infection and death from parasites.

Treaties and conferences

Among the treaties and international agreements addressing the world's environmental problems are the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which tried to set targets for reducing carbon emissions, and the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, which sought to phase out toxic chemicals and restore the world's depleted fisheries. But in general there has been far more talk than action.

At the Second Children's World Water Forum in Mexico in 2006, 110 children from 29 countries shared their experiences of unsafe water, poor sanitation and what they have done to improve the situation in their communities. They called for more action from world leaders.

Jay-Z's visit to Angola



Worldwide, around 400 million children under 18 do not have access to safe water. US hip-hop star **Shawn 'Jay-Z' Carter** discovered what this was like when he visited Angola in October 2006.

Jay-Z visited a primary school in Luanda and saw for himself the lack of running water as well as the streets strewn with garbage. He was clearly shocked by the conditions.

"It's unbelievable," he said. "It's 2006 and this is still happening. We are not talking about a luxury. We are talking about water, the most basic of needs." The rapper's 'Water for Life' video diary is meant to educate young people who may not be aware of the water crisis and inspire them to take action.

Ojulu's story



Ojulu Okello is 16. He is from Ethiopia, and his school is in Gambella Town, two kilometres away from his home. Ojulu says that, although the school has latrines, the students don't know how to use them properly, and that there aren't enough for 1,600 students. "Students go to the nearby bushes to relieve themselves because [the latrines] cannot accommodate a large number of students during break," he says.

"To help our families, we students have formed a school sanitation club. We learn basic hygiene skills, and pass them on to our friends and relations. So I would like to request international organizations, including UNICEF, to teach people how to use latrines and [about] environmental hygiene, to find the way for rural people of Ethiopia to get clean water and rescue them from waterborne diseases. I am asking this in the name of the Gambella children, women and the whole community."

Humanity's resource consumption and waste production exceeded what the Earth could cope with by about 25 per cent in 2003.⁸

We see an end to POVERTY

cancellation of the debt that impedes progress for children

anti-poverty committees that bring about transparency in expenditure and give attention to the needs of all children

Halving global poverty by 2015 is the first Millennium Development Goal – and all regions except sub-Saharan Africa may achieve that. The standard indicator for defining poverty is living on less than a dollar a day. But child poverty cannot be measured just by this indicator.

Children's development is damaged in all kinds of ways by poverty – lack of adequate health care in early childhood due to poverty, for example, can result in a lifelong handicap. A recent UNICEF study concluded that over one billion children – more than half the children in developing countries – suffer from at least one form of severe deprivation.

THREE WAYS TO ALLEVIATE POVERTY

Debt relief

The poorest countries are often in debt to rich countries and banks because of money borrowed by past generations. Paying off these debts usually means that the poor countries are unable to spend money on helping their own poor people. At the 2005 G8 Summit in Gleneagles, United Kingdom, leaders of the richest nations pledged to cancel the debt of some of the world's most indebted poor countries – most of them in Africa. In countries receiving debt relief, debt payments have been cut by two thirds, and spending on anti-poverty programmes has increased from \$4 billion to \$11 billion since 1999.

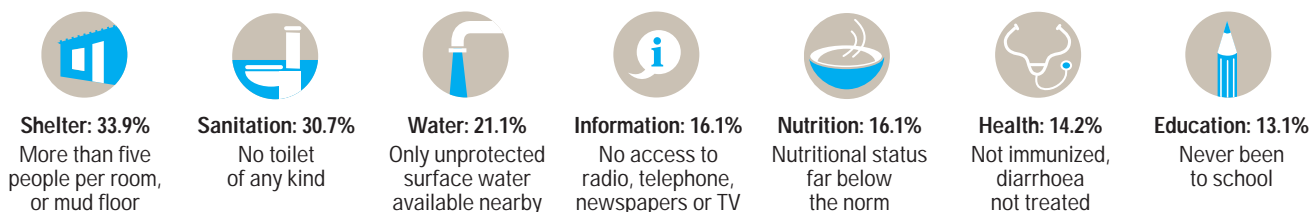
Child-friendly budgets

Even the poorest countries can make a real difference if they spend government money on child welfare. Governments need to make sure that the ways they raise taxes and spend money are fair and understood by everyone. Working out how to do this has been a priority recently in Ecuador. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where a new government is trying to recover from a long and terrible civil war, the budget is currently tiny. But it will grow quite fast if peace holds, and now is the time to make sure that money will be spent on the things that matter – especially on health clinics and schools.

Payments to the poorest

Another way out of poverty is to make regular payments to extremely poor and vulnerable families – especially if, in return, the families have to ensure that their children attend school and that pregnant women visit health clinics. Such payments have been made since 2006 in Malawi, where over 4 million children across the country live in poverty and nearly 13 per cent of children have lost their parents or caregivers, mostly to AIDS.

Over 1 billion children in developing countries experience at least one of these deprivations. Per cent of children deprived:⁹



Age ranges: Education: 7-18 years old; Information: over 3 years old; Nutrition: under 5 years old



Regina's story



At 16, **Regina Kondwerani** from Malawi has responsibilities that many people of 30 do not. She is in charge

of four sisters, their ages ranging from 5 to 14. Regina's father died in 1996, and in 2004 her mother found a new husband and moved to a nearby village. Regina then started taking care of the younger children.

With no source of income, life was not easy. There were many days when the girls went to sleep on an empty stomach. In the past year, though, things have been different. Regina has not missed a single day of school at Mbwinga

primary school. "Regina is now able to mix freely with others and is openly a happier child," explained her teacher, Juvencio Iwalani.

Regina's life is now happier because she has become a beneficiary of the Social Cash Transfer Pilot Scheme, which helps the ultra-poor by providing cash each month. She receives about \$19 a month, and that has enabled her to provide for the family, which now has several chickens and two goats. "It is not so much the money that is important to me," says Regina, smiling, "but the fact that I can now plan my future and that of my sisters."

Malawi



Sunita's story



Sunita Tamang is 16 and lives in Nepal. When she was very young, her father left the family. So that they could survive, her mother took a job in a jute mill and Sunita worked in a matchstick factory. But when she was 8, she heard about special catch-up classes for children who were out of school. She signed up for two hours of classes a day besides her factory work. She studied so hard that by

the time she was 10 she had caught up to grade 5 and she has now completed high school. Sunita still works five or six hours a day after school putting matchsticks into boxes but she hopes to go to university one day. She cares so much about working children having the opportunity to go to school that she set up a club so they could learn about their rights – and she wrote a letter to world leaders asking them to keep their promises.



We see the provision of EDUCATION

equal opportunities and access to quality education that is free and compulsory

education for life that goes beyond the academic and includes lessons in understanding, human rights, peace, acceptance and active citizenship

school environments in which children feel happy about learning

The world's leaders promised that by 2015, all children would be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. But there are still about 93 million children out of school, and that is too many. Three quarters of these children live in Africa or South Asia. Children living in the countryside are much less likely to have the chance to go to school. Those from poor families also have less of a chance, and there are more girls than boys out of primary school.

THREE WAYS TO GET CHILDREN INTO SCHOOL

Abolishing school fees



School fees are a major reason many children in developing countries can't go to school. Poor families often have to choose between paying for school or for food. One way to get more children

in school is to abolish fees altogether. Kenya got rid of school fees in 2003. One of the first children to benefit was **Maureen Akinyi**, from the shanty town of Kibera. At 9, she was top of her class but then both her parents died of AIDS. Eventually she had to drop out of school because her aunt could not afford to pay – but her dream of becoming an accountant came alive again when fees were abolished.

Child-friendly schools



A child-friendly school puts children first and tries to make sure that they enjoy learning. Child-friendly schools are safe places to be – not only protecting children from violence but also offering

them decent food, clean water and basic sanitation. Cambodia has promised to make its primary schools child-friendly, and 12-year-old **Pech Phary** benefits in a very practical way every day – her school gives her a good breakfast of rice, lentils and vegetables. Phary also has to work on her family's farm, but the breakfast has given her an incentive to go to school and helps her concentrate. "Before, I was always tired," she says. "But now I have energy and am happy at class."

Girls' education

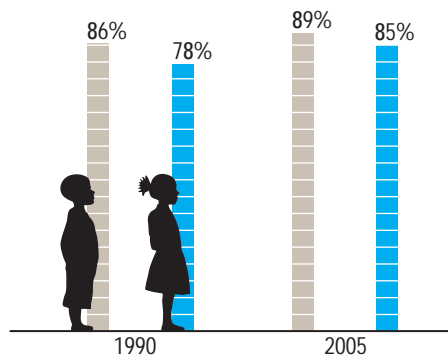


With more girls out of school than boys, special measures are needed to reach out to them. Many African countries have their own chapters of the Girls' Education Movement (GEM), in which children

themselves take the lead. In southern Sudan, where a peace agreement has raised people's hopes after many years of civil war, GEM clubs find creative ways of encouraging girls to come to school – including music, drama, dance and games – and then supporting them so they do not drop out later. One of those active in GEM is **Isabella Kitari Feliciano**, 19, who says: "I am going to school so I can gain the knowledge that will help me rebuild my country."

The gender gap in education is diminishing¹⁰

Primary net enrolment rates for boys and girls



We see the active PARTICIPATION of children

children actively involved in decision-making at all levels and in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating all matters affecting the rights of the child

raised awareness and respect among people of all ages about every child's right to full and meaningful participation, in the spirit of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

There are over 1 billion young people aged 10–19 in the world – the largest generation of adolescents in history. About 85 per cent live in developing countries. The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child says that children should be able to express their views freely on matters affecting them – and that those views should be “given due weight” based on how old and mature the children are.

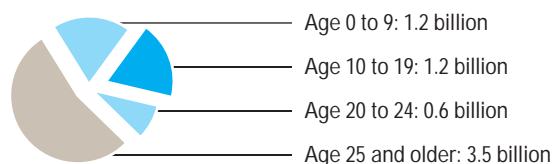
The UN General Assembly Special Session on Children in 2002 was a big step forward – hundreds of child representatives from all over the world attended the Session and related events. For the first time ever, children addressed the General Assembly on their own behalf.

Children have increasingly been making their voices heard. They form clubs or associations, publish newspapers and magazines, or stand for election in their schools and communities. Many of them manage households and care for younger siblings or ailing parents. All over the world, children have become involved in the process of government.

PARTICIPATION AT GLOBAL EVENTS

At the 2005 C8 Children's Forum – held in the United Kingdom just before the G8 summit of industrialized countries – children discussed issues on the G8 agenda and called for an end to child poverty. At G8 summits in the Russian Federation in 2006 and in Germany in 2007, delegates elected at J8 Junior Summits took their seats next to Heads of State and presented their ideas for action. At the 2007 Commission on the Status of Women session held at the United Nations in New York, young women from around the world called for an end to discrimination and violence against girls.

Global population by age group¹¹



YOUNG PEOPLE TAKING ACTION

Chinchu's story



Chinchu George is 16 and from Kerala, India. She belongs to the children's advisory council to the adult district government. At her school she pioneered the introduction of a new rainwater harvesting unit that provides water to the school and community during the dry season. Chinchu has inspired students in 13 nearby districts to follow her example. In 2006 she made a speech to adult professionals from over 50 countries at the International Conference on Rainwater Harvesting in New Delhi.

Jorge's story



Jorge Luis Contreras, 16, lives in Estelí, Nicaragua, and has been involved in children's radio since he was 9. He records stories on children's rights every week for Radio Cumiches, and the programme's success has won Jorge access to the mayor of Estelí and other city officials.

Christine's story



Christine is 13 and lives in southern Lebanon. In 2006, the war in Lebanon killed more than 1,000 people and made 900,000 homeless. About a third of those affected were children. This summer, Christine and other young people from her area participated in a programme at a community centre. In the morning they learned about first aid, caring for the environment and other topics; in the afternoon they used drama and other interactive methods to communicate the same subjects to younger children affected by the war. “They are very happy each time they learn something new,” said Christine.



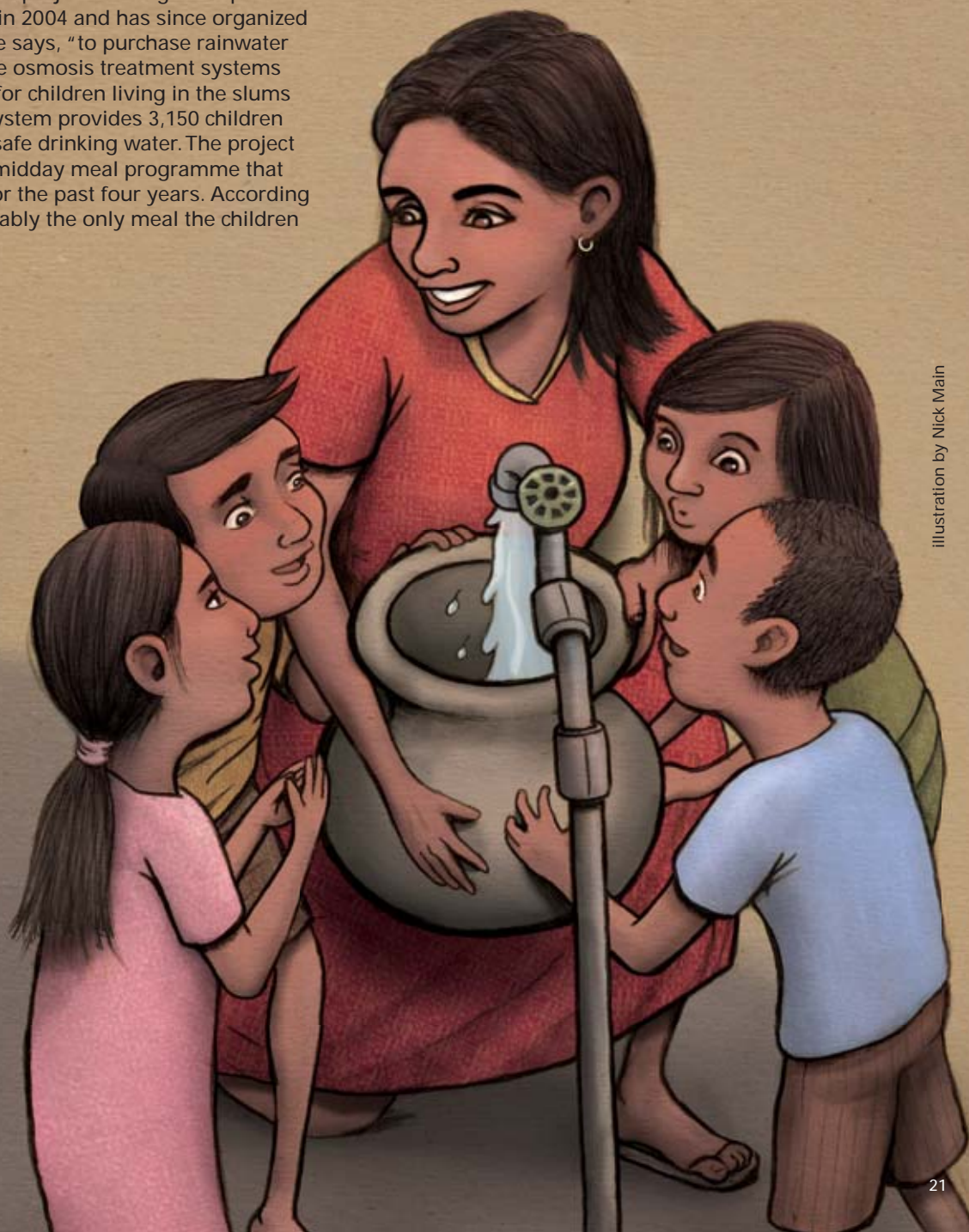
Smitha's story



Smitha Ramakrishna, 16, from Arizona in the United States, was shocked by the living conditions of the poor when she visited her grandparents in India a few years ago. She met children her age

who did not have water or food, and on her return to Arizona started her own project seeking to help them.

"The project began in 2004 and has since organized four walk-a-thons," she says, "to purchase rainwater harvesting and reverse osmosis treatment systems to provide safe water for children living in the slums in India." Today, that system provides 3,150 children from 10 villages with safe drinking water. The project has also supported a midday meal programme that has fed 450 children for the past four years. According to Smitha, this is probably the only meal the children eat every day.



We are not just young people; we are people and citizens of this world.

We are not expenses; we are investments.

Until others accept their responsibility to us, we will fight for our rights.

We are not the sources of problems; we are the resources that are needed to solve them.

We have the will, the knowledge, the sensitivity and the dedication.

We pledge an equal partnership in this fight for children's rights. And while we promise to support the actions you take on behalf of children, we also ask for your commitment and support in the actions we are taking, because the children of the world are misunderstood.

We promise to treat each other with dignity and respect.

We promise that as adults we will defend children's rights with the same passion that we have now as children.

We promise to be open and sensitive to our differences.

You call us the future, but we are also the present.

We are united by our struggle to make the world a better place for all.

We are the children of the world, and despite our different backgrounds, we share a common reality.

AN EQUAL PARTNERSHIP

The young people who made such a difference at the Special Session five years ago elicited a promise from the world leaders present that they would “change the world for and with children.” The need for children and young people to be real participants in the process of change is as paramount now as it was then. If world leaders revert to business as usual and backslide on their commitments to children, young people can play a vital part in holding them to account. Never forget that your ideas matter – and that your actions can make a difference.

“My advice to children and young people is keep fighting for what you want and believe in and be proud of who you are. Follow your dreams – a dream is a goal and goals lead to success.”

Gabriela Azurduy Arrieta, 18, one of the girls who read the children's statement to the UN General Assembly in 2002.

FIVE IDEAS FOR ACTION

- 1 Decide which issues matter most to you**
You will want to take action on an issue because you feel strongly about it. But action needs a sharp focus to be effective, so the first thing you need to do is work out which aspect of the issue is most important to you.
- 2 Inform yourself**
Doing some research is essential – the more you know about your issue, the more effective your action is likely to be.
- 3 Get involved with an organization or a campaign**
There is strength in numbers. If you want to join forces with other like-minded people, one option is to support or join a local chapter of a national or international organization. Such organizations may have specific programmes or campaigns involving young people, like the *Unite for Children*, *Unite against AIDS* campaign <www.uniteforchildren.org/youth/index.html> and the Global Campaign for Education <www.campaignforeducation.org/joinup/index.php>.
- 4 Create your own project**
Start an awareness campaign, teach a class, hold a fund-raiser, write a petition, conduct a survey, perform a play – think of other creative ways to get your message across and to effect change.
- 5 Reflect on your experiences and share with others**
It is important that you thoroughly review any action you take in order to judge its success and learn from your experience. Don't forget to share your experiences and the lessons you've learned with others. UNICEF's Voices of Youth <www.unicef.org/voy/> is a popular online discussion forum for young people.

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