

Make the world a better place for children

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Agnes Chan

From May 8 to 10, the streets of New York City were adorned by the presence of 60 heads of state and their bodyguards, 3,000 government officials, 3,000 non-governmental organisations and children from 180 countries. They were delegates of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children, the first General Assembly meeting to be devoted to children. Royalty from Sweden to Bhutan attended. Former South African President Nelson Mandela and many celebrities also turned up to show their support. This special assembly was a follow up session to the 1990 World Summit for Children. The meeting was originally slated to be held last September but because of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, it was postponed to May. The delay proved to be a good thing because only the faithful gathered. This made the sessions more concrete and less frivolous. The results of the meeting showed that many of the delegates had given much thought to and taken action on issues affecting children.

The main themes addressed in the 1990 meeting were the education and health of children. In this year's meeting, however, the exploitation of children and HIV/AIDS were the subjects of much attention. And while the previous meeting focused on young children, this time adolescents received considerable attention in an effort to make target groups more inclusive. This year's meeting emphasised the participation by children. A total of 364 children served as official delegates, and 520 children participated in the UNICEF concert. The presence of children had a tremendous impact on the proceedings. Child speakers were present in most sessions and children on the floor were given preference to allow them to voice their opinions.

The involvement of NGOs was also impressive. NGOs were able to hold direct dialogues with governments and in the drafting of the final resolution. The atmosphere was one of cooperation rather than rivalry. During the three days, old pledges were reviewed and new ones were made. A total of 20 goals were agreed upon: seven in the area of promoting healthy lives; six in the area of providing quality education; four in the area of protecting children against abuse, exploitation and violence; and three in the area of combating HIV/AIDS. Some of the goals agreed upon were very ambitious and drew much applause and support. To improve the health of children, it was agreed that 2015 would be the target year by which countries would try to reduce their infant mortality rate by two-thirds, their maternal mortality rate by three-quarters and their child malnutrition rate by one-third. Since the present mortality rate for children under age 5 is 11 million per year, we are aiming to save many young lives.

The education goal was expressed by the slogan: "Education for All." The emphasis was not only on equal educational opportunities for both boys and girls, but keeping them there and giving them a quality education. Two-thirds of elementary-school-age children who are not in school are girls, and of the children who attend school, four out of five drop out before fifth grade. The goal is to ensure that by 2015 all children are receiving a proper education. The issue of children suffering exploitation, abuse and violence was a hushed-up matter, but after much open discussion, governments and NGOs alike have pledged to combat these deplorable situations. New laws against child trafficking, the buying and selling of children for services and sexual favors, have been implemented in many countries in recent years. However, the number of children being sold as commodities continues to rise.

Millions of children are living under especially difficult situations due to war and conflict. The goals for this category did not carry a target year and can be said to be the most vague and difficult to define among the four topics addressed. HIV/AIDS is not only killing young people, but also turning children into orphans. Because this issue is so pressing, 2003 and 2005 have been targeted for concrete policy plans and results. Unfortunately, this year's meeting also revealed discrepancies among delegates. While the European Union reconfirmed that it would draw on "The Convention of the Rights of the Child" as the guiding principle for their policies, the United States was opposed to it.

As for reproductive health, the US, the Vatican and Muslim countries were against abortion, while European countries and ed the need to provide care for young people have be essential. The death sentence for children really been abolished