



# General Assembly

Sixty-second session

**70<sup>th</sup>** plenary meeting

Wednesday, 12 December 2007, 3 p.m.  
New York

*Official Records*

*President:* Mr. Kerim ..... (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

*The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.*

## **Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting Devoted to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children**

### **Agenda item 66 (continued)**

#### **Promotion and protection of the rights of children**

#### **(b) Follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children**

#### **Report of the Secretary-General (A/62/259)**

#### **Draft resolution (A/62/L.31)**

**The President:** Members will recall that in resolution 61/272 of 29 June 2007 it was decided that the Chairpersons of the interactive round tables would present summaries of their discussions at the closing plenary meeting. It is my understanding that some of the Chairpersons will have to depart from New York early this afternoon. May I therefore take it that the General Assembly agrees to hear the summaries of the round tables before the list of speakers for the Commemorative Meeting is exhausted? As I hear no objection, we shall proceed accordingly.

I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Esperanza Cabral, Minister of Social Welfare and Development of the Philippines and Co-Chairperson of round table 1, to present the summary of the round table entitled "Promoting healthy lives and combating HIV/AIDS".

**Ms. Cabral (Philippines):** On behalf of my Co-Chair, Minister Sina Damba of Mali, it is my pleasure to present the conclusion of the round table discussion on promoting healthy lives and combating HIV/AIDS.

In the five years since the 2002 special session on children, good progress has been made in reducing child mortality, and for the first time the number of children dying before their fifth birthday — an important milestone in child survival — fell below 10 million. The progress on HIV/AIDS has been variable, despite the availability of scientific evidence on which interventions work. More than 10 million young people between the ages of 15 and 24 are currently living with HIV, and it is estimated that 15 million children world-wide have lost one or both parents to AIDS-related causes.

Discussions in the roundtable, with specific questions from the child delegates and interventions from NGOs, centred on highlighting lessons learned, remaining challenges and strategies required to fulfill the commitments that have been made.

Child delegates requested more coordinated efforts to accelerate the reduction of high under-five mortality rates in some regions of the world. They also requested that delegates indicate how countries will ensure that drug companies provide sufficient vaccines and medicines in all countries of the world, including drugs against HIV. Child delegates also asked about efforts to prevent HIV-related discrimination, especially as they affect children. They requested specific information on progress by countries in

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improving treatment for HIV-infected children as well in care and support for orphans. They expressed concern about the resurgence of polio. Furthermore, child delegates called the attention of delegates to climate change and its long-term implications for the well-being of children.

On promoting healthy lives, many delegates cited the great progress that has been made in increasing coverage with high-impact, cost-effective health and nutrition interventions that have led to decreasing child mortality rates. Such interventions include vitamin A supplementation, immunization, exclusive breast feeding, insecticide-treated bednets and deworming.

Delegates cited the lack of financial resources, skilled human capacity and functional public systems, as well as gender inequality, stigma and discrimination as barriers to an effective health and HIV response. In addition, medicines, diagnostics and other HIV-related commodities are still not accessible for many children and young people in need, particularly the very poor, children with disabilities, those who live in rural areas, children and families of minority populations and those in conflict situations. The lack of trained professionals who can provide services also presents a major constraint on health and other social sector systems, particularly in low income countries. It was pointed out that the most effective way to improve health outcomes for children and women is by strengthening health systems.

As the HIV epidemic varies in intensity and impact in each country, participants emphasized the need for holistic, multidisciplinary, locally coordinated responses that involve international and national partners, including young people, civil society and others. Country experience indicates that central to the response should be a plan that articulates national priorities on accelerating high-impact interventions, HIV prevention, pediatric treatment, prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV and interventions addressing children affected by AIDS that go beyond the health sector to address the environmental, social, gender, legal and economic aspects.

Many participants stressed that preventive interventions with and for young people are a key priority for the future, as anti-retroviral treatment cannot be sustained in the long term. The youth delegates stressed that they have the capacity to participate and to fulfill their responsibilities in the

HIV/AIDS response. Peer education and school-based prevention interventions, implemented by young people themselves, are good examples of effective strategies in raising awareness about HIV/AIDS among young people.

Several delegates from developed countries highlighted the particular health needs of children in their countries and the challenges they face in addressing issues such as childhood obesity, drug use and children with special needs.

Finally, delegates expressed support for the Unite for Children, Unite against AIDS campaign that was launched by UNICEF, UNAIDS and partners in 2005, and they welcomed the financial and technical support from UNICEF, UNAIDS, WHO and other partners in the fight against AIDS. In the long term, predictable financing through the Global Fund for AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, from bilaterals and through national development instruments such as Poverty Reduction Strategies, will be important to sustain the response.

**The President:** I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Cecilia Landerreche Gómez Morín, Minister, Head of the National System for Integral Family Development of Mexico and Co-Chair of round table 2, to present the summary of the round table entitled “Providing universal quality education as key to achieving the Millennium Development Goals and as the first line of protection against abuse, exploitation and violence against children”.

**Ms. Gómez Morín (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*):** I would like to make clear that this round table ended just two hours ago, so these conclusions are not exhaustive, nor do they necessarily reflect unanimity on all viewpoints. It was a very good round table, in which all child delegates on the list were given a chance to speak. We also had a representation of NGOs and participating Member States, and a good balance between the two.

Since the conclusions come from two Co-Chairs, in the name of His Excellency Minister Göran Hägglund of Sweden, I will present the conclusions in English.

(*spoke in English*)

Round table 2 dealt with providing basic education and protection against abuse, exploitation and violence. Several issues were raised.

Child delegates requested concrete answers to several questions, including what Governments are doing to eliminate discrimination and promote quality education for those in poor and marginalized families; what is being done to make quality education a reality for children; why Governments are not investing more in early childhood education; how can Governments contribute to educating and empowering out-of-school youth; how to ensure good quality education for children, including issues of overcrowding, insufficient materials and teacher training; how to ensure that schools are safe and proactive places for children, where their rights are respected, and that provide a place of inclusion and a source of cultural and social interaction.

Ensuring that all children have access to a quality education remains urgent. Many speakers referred to the need to address disparities and ensure that excluded groups of children are included in education plans, policies, budgets, programmes and specific interventions designed to include them in education. This includes a focus on gender, child labour, ethnic and minority groups, indigenous children, children with disabilities, children in rural areas, children affected by armed conflict and children affected by HIV/AIDS. Birth registration is also important to ensure that children have access to schools. Several speakers provided examples of strategies and programmes to address challenges in education for all and called for an accelerated scaling up of those programmes. Quality education should also address the empowerment of children and young people; responsible citizenship, for example, might mean participation in school government and active learning.

Regarding the quality of education and new technologies, several delegates mentioned the use of new technologies and media in education to ensure access to information, learning and increased levels of interaction between young people.

Several delegates mentioned the need to better prepare teachers to do their jobs. More teachers are needed to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and examples were provided of efforts to recruit and train more teachers in order to reduce student-teacher ratios.

Regarding child labour, there is an important relationship between efforts to combat child labour and to ensure education for all children.

On partnerships, all stakeholders need to be engaged in issues connected with children and education. Several delegates mentioned opportunities to forge public-private partnerships to enhance education. The Education for All Fast Track Initiative was highlighted as an important partnership between Governments, donors and others to ensure strong sector plans and international resources for countries committed to achieving universal primary education.

Regarding investments, attention was brought to the need to ensure that education is free, which is very important to ensure equality of access and opportunities for all. Direct as well as hidden costs need to be addressed.

With regard to the response to violence against children, child delegates, Member States and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) pointed out the need for zero tolerance for violence in school and at home. It was noted that dialogue is a better way to educate. Concern was expressed that violence against children is socially condoned. Legislation is needed, but is not sufficient on its own — unless it is enforced. Children are not mini human beings with mini human rights. Emerging types of violence need to be addressed, for example, exploitation via the Internet.

On the specific responses to the study on violence against children (A/61/299), several child delegates specifically asked what Member States are doing to follow up the study's recommendations. Member States mentioned the incorporation of follow-up into national development plans; passing laws to deter violence against children, including around sexual exploitation and sexual tourism; and setting up child protection networks. The 4 Ps — prevention, protection, participation and prosecution — should guide violence study follow-up. A call was made for more support for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and for a special representative of the Secretary-General on violence against children.

Regarding the strengthening of child protection systems, child and Government delegates noted the need to coordinate all efforts from various agencies and actors in protecting children from harm. Member States noted that they are working to improve detection of violence against children, including sexual violence. They stressed the need to revise and strengthen mechanisms to address juvenile justice, sexual

exploitation and trafficking and to stop recruitment of children in the armed forces and criminal activities. Member States need to work together to address cross-border child protection issues. Child and NGO delegates raised the need to address children without parental care and those at risk of abandonment.

On child protection and education, child delegates noted that education is an important strategy for addressing violence, abuse and exploitation, including child labour. Delegates further observed that educating children about their rights helps protect them from exploitation and is a part of quality education. Children need to be fully equipped to defend their rights. Inadequate birth registration, early marriage and exclusion of children with disabilities and minorities reduce children's participation in education. Strategies must go beyond the ministries of education and include ministries of social protection and finance to address these issues.

Regarding the strategies for prevention and reaching the most vulnerable children, child delegates asked what Governments are doing to educate and protect child workers, poor families, including those affected by AIDS, orphans and minority groups. Strategies include supporting families and developing alternative care options — foster families, for example — as a way to address violence and other concerns of children, and providing out-of-school youth with the tools needed for adulthood: shelter, vocational training and other reintegration services.

The round table underlined the importance of quality education for all children and the importance of achieving the education goals for reaching the other MDGs in order to break the cycle of poverty and reduce exploitation. Education was conceived as a contribution to preventing poverty, conflict and child labour. Inclusive education and educating children about their rights are important strategies for protecting children and having children protect themselves.

Preventive strategies to protect children from harm need further investment. Those include developing and enforcing legislation, early childhood education and support for families through social protection, including services to prevent separation of children from families. Lack of child protection reduces children's access to education. Investment in child protection contributes to protecting children's

human rights and to achieving the goals regarding poverty, education and other areas.

Finally, violence against children is unacceptable and preventable. Legislating to address violence against children is possible and has been undertaken, and important lessons can be learned. Follow-up to the violence study should be a priority for Member States.

**The President:** We will now hear the remaining speakers on the list of speakers. I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Sira Astour, Chairperson of the Family Commission of the Syrian Arab Republic.

**Mrs. Astour** (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to express my deep condolences to the Government and people of Algeria, to the United Nations and to the families of the victims of the terrorist bombings that occurred in brotherly Algeria yesterday morning.

It is my pleasure as Chair of the Family Commission to represent the Syrian Arab Republic at this significant meeting, in which we hope to achieve an effective declaration that will promote the welfare of children. It is also my pleasure to make this brief statement summarizing the contents of the national report of the Syrian Arab Republic on "A world fit for children" and reflecting the progress Syria has made on children's issues, especially in the areas of health, education and protection, with the assistance of international organizations, including the Syrian office of UNICEF.

In the field of health, the under-five mortality rate was reduced from 41.7 per 1,000 in 1993 to 19.3 in 2004. With such a high rate, Syria has exceeded the interim goal established in its own development plans. Moreover, the newborn mortality rate was reduced from 34.6 per 1,000 in 1993 to 17.1 in 2004, reflecting great progress towards achieving the identified goal. Maternal mortality was reduced from 107 per 100,000 births in 1993 to 57 in 2004, according to the report on the Millennium Development Goals and a study conducted by the United Nations Population Fund. All those figures indicate the effectiveness of the primary health care policies adopted by the Ministry of Health. Furthermore, the immunization rate increased to over 95 per cent.

The quality of programmes, infrastructure and health services provided to citizens have all been improved. Growth has also been registered in health

education programmes, especially in the least developed areas, and health education syllabi have been introduced in all primary schools.

In the area of education, 96.7 per cent of Syrian children of primary-school age are enrolled in primary schools, demonstrating that Syria is close to achieving the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education. We would also note that there is no gap in the enrolment figures for boys and girls at that stage, according to the most recent multi-indicator cluster survey. Moreover, the Syrian Government has raised the age for compulsory education and the minimum age for employment to 15 years. None of that progress should distract us in the future from focusing on improving the quality of education, developing syllabi, reducing the drop-out rate or addressing the requirements of children with special needs.

With respect to protecting children from abuse, violence and marginalization, in 2005, under the direct supervision of the President, Syria adopted its first national policy for the protection of children. The policy aims at developing infrastructure and services for the most vulnerable children — those who have no parental care, street children, working children and juvenile delinquents. Syria is currently preparing a national law on children.

I would also refer to the category of Syrian children living under Israeli occupation in the occupied Syrian Golan. Those children live in difficult circumstances and continuous suffering, deprived of stability and physical and psychological security. Landmines continue to kill our innocent citizens in the Golan. Over 589 citizens, including 17 children, have been affected. Furthermore, Syrian educational syllabi and curriculums have been cancelled in all village schools in the occupied Golan, where there is absolutely no relevant international presence and difficult access to organizations in the field, which cannot obtain information about the circumstances of our children under occupation, despite the fact that the United Nations has adopted hundreds of relevant resolutions denouncing Israel and its practices in that sphere.

We would also note the massive influx of Iraqi refugees, including tens of thousands of children, into Syria. In that respect, the Syrian Government has made tremendous efforts to integrate those children into

Syrian schools and to provide them with necessary health and educational services on an equal footing with Syrian children. In addition to the numerous Iraqi child refugees, we host many Palestinian child refugees who were already living in Syrian territory. Combined, the number of child refugees in Syria is close to 1 million. That matter calls for the attention of the international community and organizations, which should work in coordination with the Syrian Government to provide significant and urgently needed assistance.

In conclusion, on behalf of the Syrian Arab Republic, I offer my sincere gratitude to the Secretary-General for his humane message and focused attention on the plight of children. I reiterate my Government's commitment to the principles enunciated in the report before us regarding the need to make every necessary effort to create the best possible environment for children, the mainstay of the future, throughout the world, and especially in Syria.

**The President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Punya Prasad Neupane, Secretary, Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare of Nepal.

**Mr. Neupane (Nepal):** On behalf of the delegation of Nepal, I appreciate the opportunity to discuss the follow-up to the special session on children, held in 2002, at this Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly.

Today, millions of children in the world continue to face difficult situations, including malnutrition, poverty, illiteracy and disease. Many children, especially girls, continue to be victims of trafficking, discrimination, exploitation and violence in many parts of the world.

In the Millennium Declaration, we adopted goals and targets, including for the development of children. In 2002, a special session of this Assembly adopted a Declaration and Plan of Action in which we committed to a time-bound set of goals for children. As we reach the half-way mark in implementing those commitments, we need to make a sincere evaluation with a view to incorporating necessary changes and accelerating implementation at the national, regional and international levels.

Nepal attaches strong importance to the work of the United Nations system, particularly UNICEF,

regarding the protection and development of children. Nepal appreciates the role of the country and regional offices of UNICEF, including the Regional Office for South Asia based in Kathmandu, in implementing and coordinating programmes related to children.

In Nepal, there is significant momentum in the protection of the rights of children, especially after the signing of a comprehensive peace agreement between the Government and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) in November 2006. That has created a good atmosphere for realizing the rights of children from traditionally marginalized communities, such as dalits, indigenous communities and poor families living in the rural areas. The protection of the rights of children is reflected in several recently introduced legislative and administrative measures and development programmes.

Nepal's Interim Constitution includes children's rights as one of the major State responsibilities. The Children's Act of 1992 provides for measures and safeguards to children's rights. Provisions against child labour and child trafficking have been included in national policies and laws. In order to stop the trafficking of women and children, a human trafficking control act has been enacted.

The Government of Nepal is committed to protecting the rights of children, including children affected by armed conflict. It is implementing the recommendations of the Security Council Working Group on the subject. In accordance with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, children found to be recruited as combatants will be released, returned to their families and communities and rehabilitated. Nepal is working with the United Nations system presence in the field to develop programmes for the rehabilitation and reintegration of these children.

*Mr. İlkin (Turkey), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

Nepal attaches high priority to the implementation of the "A world fit for children" Plan of Action. Accordingly, a comprehensive National Plan of Action has been adopted for the period from 2004 to 2014. It seeks to improve the quality of life of children by promoting child-friendly environments, providing qualitative and free education and eliminating all forms of exploitation, abuse and discrimination against children. Nepal has recently submitted its national progress report on the "Plus 5" review of the "A world fit for children" Plan of Action.

A National Action Plan on Education for All is being implemented, focusing on vulnerable and disadvantaged children. It aims at ensuring free and compulsory primary education to all children, particularly girls, by 2015. The Government has also formulated programmes for the construction of children's homes and the rehabilitation of dependent children living in prisons. It has launched a children's help line and programmes for street children and for the protection of children at risk.

Nepal is a party to most international human rights instruments related to children, including the Convention on the Rights of Child and its two Optional Protocols. Nepal has signed the International Labour Organization conventions on the abolition of forced labour, the minimum age for admission to employment and the worst forms of child labour. Nepal has also ratified the Convention of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation on preventing and combating trafficking in women and children for prostitution. On behalf of the Government of Nepal, I wish to reiterate Nepal's commitment to fulfilling the obligations arising out of these instruments.

It is obvious that the international community should invest more in the form of additional financial and technical assistance to developing countries, especially least developed countries and countries emerging from conflict, in order to complement the national endeavours of those countries to protect and develop children. This meeting is an opportunity to show our collective political will to work towards these objectives, and I pledge Nepal's commitment to work with others in order to achieve them.

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Khalid Abdulrahman Mohamed Ishaq, Directorate of Childhood and Family Development of Bahrain.

**Mr. Ishaq (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*):** Allow me at the outset, on behalf of the Kingdom of Bahrain, to present our deepest condolences and sympathies to the people and the Government of Algeria on the tragic bombing attacks that occurred there.

There is no doubt that a healthy childhood is the key to human development and the foundation of a sound and coherent society. Such a society will be the main pillar for development, growth and the creation of a better future, a future in which we can overcome the obstacles in our path. Those obstacles already look

smaller thanks to the efforts to create a new generation that is aware of its rights and duties in society.

In our kingdom, we continue to strive to achieve these goals with total determination, because we believe that, everywhere in the world, the rights of children are among the most important human rights. Therefore, the Kingdom of Bahrain has adopted international conventions and instruments and has sought to guarantee for children healthy and ideal social growth in all areas, including the physical, mental, spiritual, cultural and moral.

In the Kingdom of Bahrain, we have always tried to support and promote all efforts to protect the rights of children and the family. There have been many achievements in recent years. The reform project carried out by His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa has helped to improve the conditions of the children of Bahrain in all spheres: legal, social, educational and cultural. Our reform and human development processes have been acknowledged by many observers and international organizations. For example, His Excellency Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, Prime Minister of Bahrain, was awarded the 2006 Scroll of Honour Award in urban development and housing, a very important award established by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme to recognize the efforts and achievements of leaders in the areas of urban development and housing, construction of human settlements for the broad population, fighting poverty and improving living conditions.

Allow me to offer a comprehensive view of our kingdom's achievements in the promotion of children's rights, because the best interests of the child are always a main consideration in the kingdom's efforts. The Kingdom of Bahrain has joined international agreements and conventions in the area of protecting and promoting children's rights, first and foremost the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. We have taken special steps to protect children and the family, including programmes for foster families and for protecting children from maltreatment, violence and sexual abuse. The Bahrain Centre for the Protection of the Child was created in May 2007 for this purpose and operates on the principle that the protection of the child is a guarantee for the future. The Centre seeks to meet the needs of children who have been victims of abuse by creating a child-friendly environment, protecting them from further abuse and providing services and support to protect them and

their families from any further harm while their cases are being investigated.

In this vein, we have also sought further protection for children through the transfer of children's issues to the Ministry of Social Development, in order to provide a better framework for focusing on the development of the capabilities and talents of children.

In the area of education, the Kingdom of Bahrain has achieved great qualitative and quantitative progress due to the steady and significant support of the wise leadership of our country for education. This has made it possible to achieve the enrolment of 100 per cent of children in primary education and the reduction of the illiteracy rate among target groups to approximately 2.7 per cent, as well as the provision of educational services to citizens at all stages of learning and in all areas of the country. In addition, Bahrain is now ranked first among all Arab countries in achieving the basic objectives of the special United Nations Education for All programme, according to an international report issued in early December 2006 by UNESCO. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education has initiated a number of future projects that will undoubtedly contribute to a quantum leap in the quality of education, including the Schools of the Future project, sponsored by His Majesty the King.

In the field of health and the prevention of HIV/AIDS, the Bahrain Ministry of Health, in cooperation with international partners and organizations, seeks to promote awareness-raising programmes to protect the country's citizens and residents. It is currently undertaking a comprehensive initial study on pregnant women, drug users and young people in order to identify needed changes in that sphere.

Moreover, out of our concern to protect children from hereditary diseases, a law was issued in 2004 making premarital health examinations mandatory so as to reduce the transmission of hereditary diseases. Given the close connection between women, family well-being and the raising of children, who are the foundation of future society, Bahrain has sought to promote and activate a Supreme Council for Women through the 2004 royal decree establishing that Council.

In order to ensure a better life for orphans, the Royal Welfare Society was established by royal decree

in order to nurture and care for Bahraini orphans. The Government also seeks to provide a stable society and environment for children by improving the health, social and economic circumstances of needy families and creating development projects to increase their income or ensure them a stable and independent livelihood. Foremost among such projects is the "Productive Families" programme of the Ministry of Social Development, which promotes training, financing, marketing and specialized services for those families, and an initiative to provide needy families with vocational and health rehabilitation.

In conclusion, our protection for children is based on the sincere desire of the Kingdom of Bahrain to safeguard the future.

**The Acting President:** I have received a request from the observer of the Council of Europe to be given the floor in the debate early this afternoon, following the statements of the ministers of Government. It is my understanding that the observer would have to depart New York this evening. May I therefore take it that the General Assembly agrees, without setting a precedent, to hear the observer of the Council of Europe in the debate early this afternoon and following the statements of the ministers of Government?

*It was so decided.*

**The Acting President:** In accordance with General Assembly resolution 44/6 of 17 October 1989, I now call on Ms. Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, chairperson of the observer delegation of the Council of Europe.

**Ms. De Boer-Buquicchio (Council of Europe):** The Council of Europe is an intergovernmental human rights organization that includes 47 States on the European continent. Our job is to promote, monitor and take very seriously the commitments of our member States towards the rights of the child. I am the one who said long ago that children are not mini persons with mini human rights, and I am happy that that message has received an echo worldwide.

In 2006, we launched a pan-European programme, "Building a Europe for and with children", following the political instructions given by the then 46 European heads of State and Government in 2005. The programme is a solid platform for the implementation of the recommendations of the United Nations study on violence against children on the European continent,

and we are making good progress in that respect. Through our programme, we are taking concrete measures to promote children's rights and to eradicate all kinds of violence against children.

Since 2002, we have set new and far-reaching standards, such as a convention on contact concerning children in 2003, which gives children a voice in family matters concerning them; a convention on action against trafficking in human beings in 2005, which provides an independent monitoring mechanism; a convention on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and abuse in 2007, which criminalizes offences, such as grooming, and addresses the problem of sexual tourism. All those treaties are open to non-member States as well, and I encourage all States represented here today to consider accession to them.

We are developing new policy areas, particularly to address violence in the media, in the schools, in institutions, in the family and in the justice system, and to protect particularly vulnerable children, such as children with disabilities, Roma children, migrant children, street children and children living in poverty. Our last conference of ministers of justice intensively discussed children's access to justice, and the Council of Europe is now expected to start drafting guidelines for child-friendly justice.

We have reinforced the monitoring of children's rights, in particular through our treaty-based human rights monitoring mechanisms, which have increased their attention to children's rights issues. Our Human Rights Commissioner is also focusing very closely on children's issues, and we are supporting the essential role of children's rights independent institutions.

At this Commemorative Meeting, I wish to call on Governments to act upon all the recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's study on violence against children, including the establishment of the post of special representative of the Secretary-General on violence against children; to develop and assess their national strategies for the promotion of children's rights, incorporating children's rights standards in their legislations, policies and practices; to share their experiences and cooperate with all stakeholders at the national and international levels; and finally, never ever to forget the promises made to children and to continue seeking to build a world for and with them.



**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Hjalmar Hannesson, chairman of the delegation of Iceland.

**Mr. Hannesson** (Iceland): Let me first join others in expressing our deepest condolences to the people and Government of Algeria and to all families that have lost loved ones in the tragic bombings there.

Five years have passed since the special session of the General Assembly on children, at which we committed to creating a world fit for children. This Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly gives us an important opportunity to reflect on the progress made and to measure the degree of implementation of the Declaration and the Plan of Action.

In that context, we warmly welcome the comprehensive report of the Secretary-General on children and the Millennium Development Goals, and the UNICEF report entitled "Progress for children", which provide an excellent basis for our discussion. Both reports note that significant progress has been made during the five-year reporting period in many countries, but also make it clear that much more remains to be done in protecting and promoting the rights of children.

Iceland would like to reaffirm its strong commitment to the full implementation of the Declaration and Plan of Action contained in the document "A world fit for children". Iceland remains fully committed to the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two Optional Protocols, which we have already ratified. In that context, we wish to emphasize the importance of full and effective implementation of those legal instruments by all Member States.

My country has underlined the importance of close cooperation between the United Nations, Governments and civil society in order to promote and protect the human rights of children. In that context, I would like to emphasize the important role of UNICEF in safeguarding the rights and interests of children.

Violence against children continues to persist in all parts of the world. The study submitted last year by the independent expert on violence against children (A/61/299) documented the nature, extent and causes of violence against children and the destructive impact that violence has on children and society. We highly

appreciate the attention the study has brought to this serious issue at a global level.

The report also identifies areas where concrete action is needed by Member States. No form of violence can be justified; we must prevent, eliminate and respond to all violence against children. We place great emphasis on the prohibition of all forms of violence against children, including all corporal punishment. We also acknowledge that violence against children has a gender dimension. Girls are by far the most vulnerable, particularly as victims of sexual violence.

We warmly welcome the decision to appoint a special representative on violence against children. The special representative should act as a high-profile and independent global advocate to promote the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against children.

Iceland is concerned about the serious problem of children in armed conflict. We urge all states to strengthen their efforts to ensure the safety and security of children living in conflict areas. We fully support the notion that the most effective way of protecting children's rights is to prevent conflict and promote peace and security.

Iceland is committed to progress in all of the major areas of "A world fit for children". My country completely revised its legislation regarding children and child protection in 2002 and 2003 with the aims of ensuring the rights of children, of protecting them from violence and abuse and of strengthening the participation of children in matters that concern them.

Our most concentrated effort is the Icelandic national plan of action to improve the situation of children, young persons and their families, approved by the Icelandic parliament in 2007. The Government has appointed an inter-ministerial coordinating body responsible for its implementation. The priorities include an examination and implementation of our duties with regard to international conventions and recommendations, first and foremost the Convention of the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, secondly, the Council of Europe's recommendation Rec(2006)19 on positive parenting and, thirdly, the important new Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse of 2007.

The national plan of action includes measures to improve the financial position of families with children and to provide support for those involved with raising children. It includes general preventive measures to improve the health and well-being of children and measures to benefit children in need of special protection, such as children with special health problems or drug abuse problems, children of immigrants and victims of sexual offences.

Also, in December 2007, the Government introduced a comprehensive new school policy and bills for legislation for preschools and for primary and secondary education to ensure the right of all children in my country to education directed at the development of their full potential and at preparing every child for a responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of tolerance, peace and equality.

The best interests of children should be our priority. Children are still being denied human rights, and their rights are being violated all over the world. We must renew our political will to intensify our common efforts towards building a world fit for children and to achieve the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, by 2015.

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Saleh Alharbi, Saudi Childhood Commission of Saudi Arabia.

**Mr. Alharbi** (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish at the outset to convey the sympathy and condolences of the Saudi delegation to the families of the victims of yesterday's tragic explosion in brotherly Algeria.

I thank you, Mr. President, for your laudable conduct of this Commemorative High-level Meeting. My thanks go also to previous speakers for their excellent statements, which have enriched our consideration of this item. On behalf of my delegation, I express the Kingdom's appreciation for the endeavours of the United Nations and its organs and agencies to address the numerous challenges facing people — and children in particular — in the task of creating a world fit for children.

We join the rest of the international community in focusing on children and on protecting them. Children are a pillar of society and the makers of the future. That is why in 1996 the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and why it has contributed to intensified efforts by the United Nations and its specialized agencies to enhance the rights and the protection of the child. The Kingdom has contributed generously to regional and international mechanisms and activities and has continued to support all international resolutions intended to enhance the rights of children and to protect them worldwide. It was an active participant in the preparation of many regional instruments and conventions in this sphere and in the drafting of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, within the framework of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States, and joined other Arab countries in preparing guidelines for including human rights concepts in school curricula at all levels.

Saudi Arabia is guided by the lofty principles of Islam. That is why the child enjoys innumerable rights from the moment of birth — and even before, through the parents' legal bond of marriage. In Saudi Arabia, the child is the trust and responsibility of the parents. The parent-child relationship is based on faith and creed, and on respect for the law and familial bonds. The Basic Law of Government, a component of the Saudi constitution, stipulates that the family is the nucleus of Saudi society. In Saudi Arabia, children are raised on the basis of observance of Islam and love for the homeland and its glorious history. Article 10 stipulates that the family is of paramount importance, on the basis of Arab values and the Islamic faith. In that framework, in the event that the parents or guardians are absent, there are shelters and homes where children are raised respectfully in accordance with the principles of Islamic law.

The population of Saudi Arabia is more than 24 million, 38 per cent of whom are 14 years of age or less. We have therefore put in place the necessary conditions for the upbringing and development of children, including those who are disabled. There are many activities enabling them, inter alia, to engage in hobbies, along with educational books, films and programmes. Health care and special projects for children are also available. The Ministry of Health has initiated a campaign to ensure that every family has a physician for primary and family care.

The Government also cares for AIDS patients, and statistics on that disease are kept in a transparent manner. The most recent figures, for 2006, show that

the total number of people with AIDS between 1984 and 2006 was 11,510; 2,658, or 23 per cent, of them were Saudis. In 2006, 1,390 new cases, 24.6 per cent of them among Saudis, were identified in the 15-to-49 age group, which constituted 77 per cent of all cases, with those below the age of 15 accounting for 3 per cent of cases. In addition to general medical services, three specialized centres provide comprehensive psychological, social and medical care for AIDS patients, under the direction of Government officials.

In 1979, the Government established the National Committee for Children to coordinate governmental and non-governmental organization activities to benefit children. The Committee issues progress reports and works with UNICEF through a three-year programme financed by the Saudi Government.

Consonant with Saudi principles and values, we are developing a law that will protect children from all physical, sexual or psychological abuse and that will prevent neglect for any aspect of a child's development, whether emotional, health-related or educational. It will also disseminate information throughout society and will provide a framework for implementation through regional and national committees. We have 24-hour hotlines in this sphere, and the Saudi National Society for Human Rights follows cases and receives complaints with a view to providing solutions that fully preserve the rights of the child.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia works with many domestic and international organizations to attain the lofty goal of creating a world fit for children. We hope that the present High-level Meeting will be crowned with every success.

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Gerhard Pfanzelter, chairman of the delegation of Austria.

**Mr. Pfanzelter (Austria):** Austria considers the outcome document of the special session in 2002 to have been very significant indeed. In "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex), we subscribed to firm and clear undertakings in a detailed Plan of Action. The Plan provides practical guidelines for action in support of child-oriented national policies, giving particular attention to health, quality education and protection against abuse, exploitation and violence.

By involving approximately 20,000 children, experts, non-governmental organizations and public authorities, my country assembled all relevant stakeholders to develop a national action plan for a child-friendly Austria, which was issued in November 2004. Our action plan has been monitored over the past three years by a working group, which has: issued reports on the realization of more than 200 child-relevant projects; discussed new approaches in the field of the rights of the child; fostered a coordinated Austrian policy integrating the rights of the child; focused on the areas of education, health and sustainable development; and gave particular attention to awareness-raising. As a consequence, 80 per cent of children at the age of 14 now know about children's rights. They consider the right to be protected against violence and the right to quality education as the most important of these. A few weeks ago, the working group issued a mid-term-review of the implementation of the national action plan. Austria has thus made the promotion and the protection of the rights of the child a top priority and plans to integrate the rights of the child into our federal constitution.

Austria is committed to a child-friendly policy at the international level as well. This is reflected in our development cooperation, where full emphasis is given to children's needs and participation, as well as to children affected by armed conflict. Bilateral projects aim at rehabilitating and reintegrating former child soldiers.

In this context, I would like to emphasize that every peacekeeper has to be competent in addressing the rights and needs of children in conflict and post-conflict situations. We want to make sure that every Austrian peacekeeper is trained in child rights and child protection and is fully aware of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security. Member States may be interested to know that the European Peace University in Schlaining offers special courses on child protection, monitoring and rehabilitation for United Nations personnel.

We commend the independent expert, Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, for his ground-breaking study on violence against children (A/61/299). We fully agree with his recommendations aimed at enabling all children to enjoy a childhood free of violence. Austria therefore welcomes the recent decision to establish the post of special representative of the Secretary-General on violence against children. The mandate will be to

serve as a global focal point and act as a catalyst in combating this worldwide phenomenon.

Virtually all forms of violence are linked to entrenched gender roles and inequalities; the violation of the rights of children is often closely linked to the status of women. The protection of the girl child remains a big challenge for all of us. The situation of girls in all regions has similar underpinnings, varying in intensity but always similar in nature, including discriminatory and patriarchal practices, inequality, exclusion, inadequate legal protection, lack of educational opportunities, the impact of HIV and AIDS and the persistence of poverty. In the framework of its multilateral development cooperation, Austria pays particular attention to the specific needs of women and girls. We support projects of the United Nations Development Fund for Women and UNICEF to end female genital mutilation and to combat trafficking of women and girls.

The present meeting is of great importance in strengthening our commitment to the effective protection of children and thus in building a truly global coalition for their protection from abuse, exploitation and violence. We have a comprehensive set of legal instruments. Now we have to show the political will and commitment to implement and enforce them.

We in the Assembly must send a strong message to make a world fit for children a reality. Our common efforts to end the suffering of children and to improve their situation in all parts of the world must be crowned with success.

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Muhammad Ali Sorcar, chairman of the delegation of Bangladesh.

**Mr. Sorcar** (Bangladesh): It is an honour for me to present to the Assembly a review of the activities of Bangladesh with regard to children's issues. We have a longstanding natural commitment to children, at both the national and international levels. We recall today with pride our extensive involvement in the elaboration of the outcome document of the special session entitled "A world fit for children". We were involved both as a member of the Bureau of the special session and as a delegation that gave extensive input to the document.

In the implementation of the document, we have been able to increase our collaboration with

development partners and with United Nations agencies that work for children, in particular UNICEF. The Government's relationship with non-governmental organizations and civil society is stronger than ever before. These wide-ranging partnerships, along with the commitment of the Government, have led to significant improvements in a number of social and health indicators for children, including reduction in the under-five mortality rate, the infant mortality rate, the maternal mortality ratio, and the school dropout rate. Moreover, there has been notable improvement in immunization, sanitation and access to safe drinking water.

One particularly notable achievement was the elimination of the disparity between boys and girls. Due to our intense focus on girls' education at all levels, the gender gap in primary and secondary school enrolment has been eliminated — indeed, reversed. Girls now constitute 51 per cent of enrolment at the primary level. Our focus is now on improving the quality of education.

As children have no political voice, they need our watchful legal protection. We have conducted a comprehensive review of our domestic legislation to harmonize it with the outcome document of the special session. Stringent measures have been enacted to protect children, particularly the girl child, from all forms of abuse, exploitation, violence, trafficking and discrimination.

A recently enacted labour law, issued in 2006, has provided for the elimination of hazardous and exploitative forms of child labour. A law on the appointment of a children's commissioner, or ombudsperson, is awaiting final approval of the Cabinet. The Government has just approved the establishment of the National Human Rights Commission.

In spite of significant resource constraints, the Government has made increased budgetary allocation for children. We have submitted the five-year report on "A world fit for children" in December 2006. The third and fourth periodic reviews of the Convention on the Rights of the Child have also been delivered.

Although there have been notable successes since 2002, major challenges persist. Poverty and recurrent natural disasters represent huge stumbling blocks. The recent cyclone Sidr, which swept over the southern part of Bangladesh on 15 November, devastated the

livelihoods of millions of people, disproportionately affecting children. We made considerable improvement to poverty eradication in our country, but progress made through intense efforts has been wiped out in many areas.

The flow of international assistance is much less than the assurances received. By all means, such assistance is much less than the commitments made by Governments and the progress achieved thus far is accordingly far less than what is hoped for or needed. Unless a significant new inflow of resources is injected into the system, it will be hard to sustain the progress we have made and achieve the Millennium Development Goals and other goals.

*Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

Unfortunately, this case reflects a scenario which is by no means unique to Bangladesh. It is indeed a symbol of a global culture where commitments and pledges by the international community are often not fully honoured. The report of the Secretary-General tells us that "today's flows of aid still fall far short of what will be needed to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and in particular to finance essential investment in children as anticipated by the outcome of the special session" (A/62/259, para. 13). It rightly points out that the least developed countries should be able to rely on support from the international community. As an individual delegation as well as the current Chair of the Group of the Least Developed Countries, we call on all development partners to honour their pledges.

We should seize this occasion to renew our political commitment, both at the national and international levels, to invest more in the present of our children so that our posterity will have a better future.

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jorge Voto-Bernales, chairman of the delegation of Peru.

**Mr. Voto-Bernales (Peru)** (*spoke in Spanish*): There is no doubt that the issue on the international agenda that generates the highest degree of agreement is the protection of boys and girls. This fact is reflected in the degree of acceptance of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, as well as of other international instruments, such as the Millennium Declaration, and of conferences such as

the 2002 special session on children and this commemorative plenary session. As a result, it is possible for the international community to permanently renew its political commitment towards children and adolescents by establishing a series of priorities, including that of guaranteeing them the highest possible level of health and adequate education, protection against violence, exploitation and abuse, and the opportunity of participating in the decisions that affect them.

Peru believes that the well-being of children and adolescents is a prime goal of development and is committed to promoting the full exercise of their rights. Towards this objective, we have directed our efforts to consolidate a strategic agenda for action that will give priority to the eradication of poverty and the reduction of social inequality, and to ensure equality of opportunity.

In line with these policies, we have elaborated our National Plan on Childhood and Adolescence 2002-2010, which has been enacted into law and which has as its main goal to guarantee the rights of children and adolescents in Peru, as well as to bring about structural changes in a society that is still marked by inequality and broad social gaps. Within this framework, I would like to highlight some of the areas in which the Government of Peru has been working in a priority manner, together with civil society, to comply with the commitments it made under the Millennium Development Goals.

In the field of education, Peru has made a central commitment to guaranteeing the right to a quality education for all children and adolescents. Through our National Educational Project for the year 2021, we plan to eradicate illiteracy and to provide universal and unrestricted access to education, from basic educational levels to training levels, in order to actively incorporate children into social life. In the light of the several languages used in the country, we have also incorporated bilingual intercultural education in the rural and indigenous areas, thus ensuring equality of opportunities for them in relation to the rest of the population.

Peru promotes universal access to health, free of charge, in an ongoing and quality manner, giving priority to the poorest sectors and the most vulnerable groups such as children. In this context, we are committed to ending one of the greatest scourges

affecting the children of Peru, namely, infantile malnutrition. To do so, action has been strengthened to devote effective attention and care to breastfeeding women and to children through the promotion of and protection and support for maternal breastfeeding, as well as through national strategies on nutrition, care and information about food. Peru has also been confronting HIV/AIDS and sexually transmittable diseases, attaching particular importance to children and adolescents.

Peru promotes the participation of children and adolescents, making them strategic actors in the development of the country. In this regard, on the national and decentralized level, youth groups have been developed to allow young people to participate actively in different sectors that affect them, such as education, culture, health, nutrition, the environment, human rights and the prevention of family and sexual violence.

In the latter sphere, Peru applies a zero-tolerance policy towards family violence and child sexual abuse. Through its various State agencies, it has been increasing the attention given to children and adolescents and their families affected by family violence and child abuse, in addition to increasing human resource capacities to provide that attention.

Peru has undoubtedly made some headway on implementing its commitments to protect the rights of children and adolescents. However, a great deal remains to be done to implement them completely and to realize the Millennium Development Goals. We are firmly committed to that achievement.

These national efforts are sharply different from our global goals. The very difficult situation of the thousands of children in the world who are subjected to the worst forms of child labour, mistreatment, discrimination, violence, sexual exploitation and recruitment as soldiers is particularly painful. It has been 10 years since the report of Ms. Graça Machel on the impact of armed conflict on children (see A/51/306), and, unfortunately, violations against the most essential rights of children continue because of such armed conflicts.

We highlight the work carried out by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to support international initiatives to end serious violations of the rights of children affected by conflict. Peru likewise appreciates the work

of UNICEF and its ongoing support for countries in implementing policies and programmes that benefit children. One example of that was a meeting held in Lima on 21 and 22 November 2007 of the Congress of the Ibero-American Ombudsman Federation, under the auspices of UNICEF, which adopted the Lima Declaration and established the Ibero-American Network for the Defence of Children's and Adolescents' rights.

In conclusion, it is of fundamental importance that this Meeting send a clear message about our commitment towards children. Because of this, I would like to add Peru's support to the draft declaration (A/62/L.31) that we hope to adopt by consensus, in which we shall all reaffirm our commitment to the implementation of the Declaration and Plan of Action set out in "A world fit for children". International support and greater cooperation are essential to meet the challenges and achieve the goals that would guarantee the well-being of all children and adolescents everywhere in the world.

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Rodrigo Malmierca Díaz, chairman of the delegation of Cuba.

**Mr. Malmierca Díaz (Cuba)** (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to express our condolences to the Government and the people of Algeria, and in particular to the families of the victims of the terrible terrorist attack that took place recently.

Five years ago the General Assembly called upon the international community to unite in a world movement contributing to the creation of a world fit for children. However, the situation of children worldwide is not very encouraging, and unprecedented challenges persist.

The eradication of poverty remains the main challenge facing the world due to the current unjust international economic order, in which children are threatened by wars, preventable diseases, hunger, inequality, climate change and lack of resources and underdevelopment in most of the world.

Lack of political will for cooperation, coercive unilateral measures imposed by some Powers and the excessive influence exerted by rich countries in international relations, including economic and trade relations, hamper the achievement of a safe and appropriate environment for children where their social

well-being is fulfilled and all their human rights are realized. Underdevelopment, poverty, hunger and marginalization have escalated as a consequence of the globalization process, which in its current form perpetuates and increases the marginalization of developing countries, worsening the structural imbalance and inequality, that characterize the current unjust international economic order.

As a result, every year some 10 million children die, most of them of preventable diseases. There continues to be a lack of immunization services for 27 million children under 1 year of age and 40 million pregnant women; 500,000 women die every year from complications during pregnancy, mainly in developing countries. Moreover, more than 125 million children under 5 years of age still live in households using non-potable sources of water and confront serious challenges related to education and quality of learning.

Worldwide, it is estimated that nearly 218 million children over 5 years of age are forced to work; 126 million of them work for low wages and without protection, in sectors such as mining and agriculture, enduring physical abuse, sexual harassment, intimidation and even murder. At the same time, some 300,000 minors are involved in armed conflicts, and an equal number suffer as a consequence of foreign occupation and displacement and are victims of bombings and insecurity.

In this regard, Cuba considers that if these ills persist, the objectives set at the General Assembly's 2002 special session on children will not be fulfilled and that, in consequence, efforts to achieve the aspirations set out in the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals for 2015 and beyond will be seriously compromised.

Therefore, it is paramount to continue to work towards the commitments made in the framework of the United Nations. Cuba stresses that the States must meet their commitments on development matters, underscoring the need for the developed countries that have not done so to set deadlines for allocating 0.7 per cent of donor countries' gross domestic income to official development assistance, as agreed at the international level, and reiterates the need to find an effective, comprehensive, equitable and lasting solution to the external debt problems of developing countries.

In my country, a small Caribbean island blockaded and besieged by the United States Government for nearly 50 years, we can show substantive achievements benefiting children on the basis of a just social project in which all children, boys and girls alike, have a predominant place in society. Cuba has one of the lowest child mortality rates in the world — 5.3 per 1,000 live births — thanks to the massive efforts of the Government and its institutions through a health system that guarantees quality of life, beginning from pregnancy. All children are guaranteed free universal education at all levels, which is compulsory until the ninth grade. Cuba has a 99.6 per cent literacy rate and the revolution's educational programmes are guaranteed in the most far-off places of the country; there are even schools in rural and mountain areas for a single student with the most modern communications and information technologies.

Those achievements stem from the political will of the Cuban Government, from the extraordinary effort of our people and from the social organizations which have endeavoured to guarantee a happy childhood despite the serious consequences for Cuban children of the economic, commercial and financial blockade that the United States has imposed against Cuba unilaterally, illegally and in a manner contrary to international law.

José Martí, the apostle of Cuba's independence, said that "children are the world's hope", thus summarizing the best aspirations of the human race. But he called on us to fight for that reality. Hence, as long as the international community does not put an end to the ills affecting children, and as long as policies where international cooperation and human solidarity prevail are not implemented, as long as a few get rich and so many millions suffer poverty, our children and our very species are endangered. Humankind must advance towards more just societies. A better world is possible.

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Habib Mansour, chairman of the delegation of Tunisia.

**Mr. Mansour (Tunisia) (spoke in French):** First of all, I wish to express to my Algerian colleague and to his entire delegation my feelings of sympathy and compassion following the vile terrorist act which has plunged Algiers into mourning, an attack that has cost the lives of so many innocent victims.

At the outset, I wish to emphasize my country's pleasure at the convening of this Commemorative Meeting Devoted to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children, as well as our hope that this event will contribute to strengthening the commitment and determination of the international community to better assume its responsibilities towards children and future generations.

Since the special session in 2002 and the adoption of the outcome document entitled "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex), special attention has been given to policies, programmes and other strategies directly affecting the lives of children. It is reassuring that this issue is mentioned regularly and with increasing insistence; this augurs well for the future.

However, this persistence in reminding the international community of the situation of children also reflects a situation that is not progressing quickly enough; this can give rise not only to a delay in the implementation of commitments made by Member States but, even more worrying, to a possible deterioration of the situation at the world level. Indeed, it is essential that action be continuously strengthened, because the dangers besetting children are still there: improvements do not mean that these have totally disappeared. Vigilance is therefore vital.

In this respect, Tunisia invites Member States to focus all their attention on the recommendations contained in that important document, the implementation of which will be possible only through concerted efforts by all, on the national, regional and international levels.

As a country whose human resources are its main wealth and principal resource, Tunisia, since its independence in 1956, has opted to ensure schooling for all; this policy has enabled us to have a 100 per cent enrolment level for children between the ages of 6 and 11. This child-centred approach has been consistently buttressed over the years through numerous decisions, such as the signing in 1991 of the Convention on the Rights of the Children and the promulgation in 1995 of our Child Protection Code.

However, State efforts did not stop here: since the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly, in 2002, Tunisia has undertaken to enhance these achievements by diversifying initiatives and programmes on behalf of children, including by

ensuring that several recommendations contained in the document "A world fit for children" are concretely implemented.

In this respect, protecting children against violence, making them aware of the dangers of HIV/AIDS and the continuously improving school programmes have become constants of our State policy, which spares no effort to provide children with a healthy environment, in which they can fully flourish. Several laws have been promulgated and, on the institutional level, the authorities, on 14 February 2002, created the Observatory for Information, Training, Documentation and Study for the Protection of the Rights of the Child, a scientific body whose activities have proved to be necessary and essential. Indeed, one of its principal achievements has been the establishment, in collaboration with UNICEF, of the Child Info database indexing all sectors and bringing out all relevant indicators relating to the situation of children in Tunisia.

This programme falls within Tunisia's concern to strengthen its ties of cooperation with the United Nations, transmitting regular reports on the situation of children whenever asked, because we are convinced that an exchange of views and of our respective experiences is an effective means for all Member States to take action together in order speed up the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.

Through the preparation of the second national plan of action for children for the period 2002 to 2011, Tunisia is strengthening its child protection strategy and is striving to find sustainable solutions, taking into account the evolution of society in general. These solutions affect a whole gamut of sectors, such as schooling, maternal health, children's health according to specific age, and including disciplines with a direct connection to the new trends, such as ecology and information and communications technology. They also involve the continuous strengthening of the initiation of children and adolescents to the values of tolerance, national and civic identity, awareness of the external world, respect for others, human rights and peace.

Moreover, the national report on the situation of children for 2006 emphasizes the right of children to express their points of view and to take decisions on all subjects affecting them, including in the education or administrative and legal areas, and to participate in all aspects of family and social life. It is in this framework



that the children's parliament was established in 2002 and municipal children's councils were set up; both of these are forums for dialogue and the exchange of views that are useful and necessary for public authorities to better understand the new generations and adapt their strategies, policies, legal structures and other initiatives according to the specific needs of children.

All these decisions and initiatives stem from our conviction that this policy is well founded and our determination to surround children with all the care that they need. For this reason, the State has allocated 16 per cent of the national budget to basic education, and the education sector represents approximately 5 per cent of our gross national income.

The future of our children is a matter for all of us, and civil society is a major partner in implementing our national children's policy. It plays an increasing consultative role in the selection of programmes and the definition of plans of action, and it contributes in several areas, such as preschool education, culture and leisure, protection, disability and the environment.

Furthermore, the effort to develop digital know-how in the educational system is seen in the connection of 100 per cent of schools to the Internet. Indeed, aware of the fact that information and communications technology is a vital tool in today's world, Tunisia, which hosted the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, in November 2005, has increased its efforts to facilitate children's access to new technologies, in particular through integrating them into school programmes and creating computer centres for children and through the spread of computer and Internet clubs in cultural centres.

Moreover, the Government has also created a National Children's Computer Centre, whose regional branches made it possible to train more than 88,000 children between 2002 and 2004. This institution allows children to gain knowledge of the digital world through programmes adapted to each age group above age 5. The programmes include both creative multimedia work and basic maintenance of computer equipment. In order to guarantee equal opportunity for all children, the Computer Centre for Disabled Children, inaugurated on 13 January 2003, as well as specialized centres for introducing disabled children to information technology, work actively for children

with various disabilities by using appropriate pedagogical approaches.

Those are among Tunisia's initiatives on behalf of children, whose well-being is the best guarantee for the building of a tolerant, open and responsible society. The achievement of a world fit for children is by no means out of reach. However, this perspective requires us to make the appropriate, necessary efforts, without any hesitation or delay, so that this can become a tangible reality.

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Prasad Kariyawasam, chairman of the delegation of Sri Lanka.

**Mr. Kariyawasam (Sri Lanka):** Let me first of all join others in expressing our outrage at the terrorist bombings in Algeria. Sri Lanka unequivocally condemns this barbaric act, and we offer our condolences to the victims.

At the historic special session of the General Assembly in 2002, our leaders adopted an outcome document, "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex), setting specific goals and targets for the next decade. Five years on, we meet here to ensure that we do not lose focus in creating that world truly fit for children.

Since our independence, successive Governments of Sri Lanka have consistently accorded priority to investing in a better future for our children. Sound policies and legal measures have been introduced for the promotion and protection of the rights of our children. Our aim has been, and continues to be, to give children the best start in life and to ensure that all children have access to the full range of opportunities needed to maximize their potential from early childhood through their learning years and adolescence.

The system of free education and an effective free public health system were introduced during the early post-independence era with the primary aim of benefiting our children. As a result, Sri Lanka continues to record considerable progress in social development despite being a lower middle-income country, but one that ranks far above most countries with similar levels of income.

Investment in free access to education from primary school through university has resulted in high rates of enrolment and literacy in Sri Lanka. We are

already on par with the Millennium Development Goals for primary education, school gender parity and reproductive health services. The net primary school enrolment ratio for boys and girls is over 95 per cent; the proportion reaching grade 5 has exceeded 95 per cent; the literacy rate for 15- to 24-year-olds is over 95 per cent for both males and females. Sri Lanka is on track to reach the target of universal primary education well before 2015.

Sri Lanka has already eliminated gender disparity in both primary and junior secondary education, the parity index being nearly 100 per cent. In senior and tertiary levels, the share of girls is even higher than that of boys. There is no disparity in literacy between men and women, the figure being 100.9 per cent.

Child mortality and maternal mortality in Sri Lanka have recorded reductions to levels that are notably low and comparable with those in some developed countries. Immunization coverage has been sustained at over 80 per cent. About 96 per cent of births occur in health institutions and are attended by skilled personnel.

Despite our best efforts — in cooperation with the international community, including UNICEF — to ensure our children a safe and secure childhood, we are faced with formidable challenges arising out of an unbridled violent campaign by a terrorist group. Forced recruitment of children by this group is a major cause of concern. Moreover, larger disruption of the social fabric of Sri Lanka as a result of terrorism has led to the displacement of children and their families, giving rise to problems such as increased malnutrition, low birth weight and anaemia, as well as widening regional disparities in access to education and health care.

The Government of Sri Lanka takes these problems very seriously and is taking all possible measures to address them. With resolute commitment to a zero-tolerance policy towards child recruitment, steps are being taken to help former child combatants who have escaped or have been released or rescued. Rehabilitation and reintegration of children whose innocent minds have been abused and brainwashed for years by ruthless terrorists is indeed a challenge for us. The task becomes even more challenging as it also entails ensuring a protective environment for the reintegration of children through successful family reunification, access to health, education, vocational training, income generating activities and psychosocial

care. This also involves livelihood support and the elevation of the standard of living of people who live in areas afflicted by conflict. Towards this end, the Government has launched several projects, in particular in Eastern Province, and we need continuous support of the international donor community for this objective.

Children are our future. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that we create a safe and secure environment for them to enjoy their childhood. We must therefore recommit to create a world fit for children that is based on sustainable commitments to provide an environment with security, social justice and economic well-being. Such a world can only be created through the partnership of all stakeholders throughout the world.

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. William Brisben, chairman of the delegation of the United States of America.

**Mr. Brisben** (United States of America): The United States Government and the people of the United States offer our condolences and prayers to the victims and their families in Algeria.

I represented the United States at the 2002 special session and note the remarkable achievements we, the international community, in collaboration with UNICEF, have accomplished together over the past five years to improve the lives of children everywhere.

Demographic and health surveys supported by the United States Agency for International Development have found that at least nine countries have reduced infant and child mortality by 20 to 40 per cent in just five years. This has been accomplished even in the face of continued or worsening poverty. While levels of mortality in these and many other countries are still too high, these successes do show that with leadership, determination and the sustained support of partners, countries can make a difference for their children.

In terms of the four focus areas of “A world fit for children”, we can be proud of our accomplishments, but we should also be sobered by the work still ahead of us. On promoting healthy lives, the United States Government continues to be the leading financial donor to the global polio eradication. Since 1988, we have provided over \$1.3 billion. The United States financial commitment remains constant at \$132 million for the 2007 fiscal year and we are determined

to maintain our strong support of efforts to contributing to eradication. Experience elsewhere has shown that the key to eradication is strong political will and effective national strategies and campaigns.

We also very much appreciate UNICEF's excellent collaboration on President Bush's Malaria Initiative, where it has been a major partner in the effort to provide long-lasting insecticide-treated bed nets to the most vulnerable populations — UNICEF's targeted group — especially in Africa. Both polio eradication and malaria prevention and control are key foreign policy objectives of the United States Government.

UNICEF's leadership in promoting access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene in communities and in schools is a critical element in the effort to improve the health of the world's children. In 2005, President Bush signed the Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act, which makes addressing the water needs of the world's most vulnerable populations an important aspect of United States foreign policy.

On education, the United States increased commitment can be seen in the numbers. In fiscal year 2002, we provided \$125 million for basic education support — a figure which skyrocketed to \$590 million in USAID funding alone in fiscal year 2007. In that same time period, we doubled the number of countries receiving USAID basic education support to more than 50.

Protecting children against abuse, exploitation and violence — the third focus area of “A world fit for children” — remains a critical priority. It is estimated that over 1 million children are currently being exploited in the global commercial sex trade. In addition to sex trafficking of children, the issue of children trafficked into debt bondage, forced labour and conflicts is of grave concern. The international community should ensure that domestic laws prohibit and punish trafficking in children, especially sexual exploitation of children, be it in their own country or another. Predators must not exploit legal loopholes or lax law enforcement. Governments and communities must band together and support the victims with essential services.

As stated in “A world fit for children”, the family is the basic unit of society and as such should be strengthened. Families are the first line of defence against many systemic ills that eventually spill into the

national, regional and international arenas. We believe that Government ought to create the conditions to allow strong and healthy families to thrive. We encourage Governments to recognize the unique and irreplaceable contributions of mothers and fathers to the lives of their children and to develop public policies that strengthen healthy marriages and, wherever possible, two-parent families. We believe that Government policy should recognize that every child has dignity and worth, and therefore ought to support all children while intensifying efforts to strengthen the family.

Turning to the last focus area of “A world fit for children”, combating HIV/AIDS, the United States is proud of its partnership with UNICEF in the fight against HIV/AIDS through President Bush's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). Through fiscal year 2008, the United States Government will have spent \$18.3 billion to fight HIV/AIDS.

We are optimistic about the future. The latest PEPFAR results illustrate why that is so. In fiscal year 2006, PEPFAR supported care for over 2 million orphans and vulnerable children and provided over \$213 million in funding for activities related to them. Furthermore, we estimate that, since its inception, PEPFAR-supported programmes have averted over 100,000 infant infections. There is much more to do, but our experience through PEPFAR convinces us that the ambitious goals UNICEF and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS family have set for themselves are achievable.

Our work over the past five years has yielded both accomplishments and lessons. Let us build on what we have achieved so far and apply what we have learned to craft a future of promise and opportunity for the world's children. I look forward to working with everyone here.

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Yukio Takasu, chairman of the delegation of Japan.

**Mr. Takasu (Japan):** I would like to express deepest condolences and heartfelt sympathy to the victims and their bereaved families, and to many other people who were injured by the suicide bombing attacks in Algeria yesterday. Japan condemns in the strongest terms such heinous acts of terrorism, which victimize many innocent people.

Children are our treasure and our hope for the future. Despite much progress made since the 2002 special session on children, there are still many challenges we must overcome if we are to ensure that the world's children are able to live their lives in peace and a dignified way. There are places in the world where the rights of children are under threat from poverty, disease, forced recruitment, their use as soldiers in armed conflicts, sexual exploitation, child labour, violence, abuse and discrimination. Japan is committed to strengthening international cooperation and ensuring that every child is able to enjoy the right to live in a safe, non-discriminatory and nurturing environment. We bring our knowledge, experience and resources to bear by working to implement obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, its Optional Protocols and other international human rights instruments concerning the rights of the child.

Education is the cornerstone of empowering children and building a foundation of national development. All children, especially girls, must be given a chance to complete at least primary education. Human security focuses on human-centred development not only by protecting children from threats and insecurities, but also by empowering them to fully develop their abilities and potential. A human security perspective is crucial to advancing the cause of ensuring the well-being of children, wherever they are born.

We are pleased with the recent UNICEF report that the number of infant mortalities has fallen below 10 million for the first time since recordkeeping began. That is encouraging progress towards meeting the Millennium Development Goal to cut the rate of infant mortality by two thirds by 2015. However, the unacceptable reality is that 30,000 children lose their lives every day around the world. At the current rate of progress, it would be difficult for sub-Saharan countries to achieve the goals by 2015. The majority of such deaths are preventable if children are provided with the most basic care — enough nutrition to preserve health, or a mosquito net. The development of Africa, particularly children, demands greater commitment and concrete actions on the part of the international community.

Foreign Minister Koumura of Japan, in a recent policy speech, stressed the importance of a comprehensive approach to global health. In post-war Japan, the introduction of maternal and child health

handbooks contributed to improving mothers' basic knowledge about health and community health systems. As a result, maternal and infant mortality rates significantly declined in Japan. We have shared that experience with many countries and partners, including Indonesia and Palestine, through the dissemination of the maternal and child health handbooks. To reduce infant mortality, community health systems must be strengthened to complement actions to combat specific diseases.

Children are exposed to many forms of violence in their daily lives. They are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. In order to protect children, it is the responsibility of adults to listen to their concerns and take action to mitigate the damage that is done. In Japan, the Child Abuse Prevention Law was adopted in 2000 and has been revised and strengthened twice since then. We have to take comprehensive measures in the prevention of child abuse, early response and child protection.

The commercial sexual exploitation of children is another serious issue that the international community needs to tackle in a united manner. We are pleased that, after the Second World Congress held in Japan, Brazil will host the Third World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in November 2008. Japan will extend every possible support to make the Congress a success.

In conclusion, I would like to pledge Japan's determination to do its best to create a better world for children. Next year, Japan will host the Fourth Tokyo International Conference on African Development and the G8 Hokkaido Toyako Summit. In the margins of the G8 Summit, children of G8 countries will meet in Japan to form the so-called Junior 8 summit, which has been extremely successful. Through those excellent opportunities, Japan will work to achieve, together with its partners, our common goals of promoting human security and the rights of all children.

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Baki İlkin, chairman of the delegation of Turkey.

**Mr. İlkin (Turkey):** At the outset, let me underline our shock and deep grief over the terrorist attacks in Algeria, which led to the loss of many innocent lives, including those of some United Nations staff members. We most strongly condemn those terrorist acts, and underline the need for full

international cooperation in order to eradicate the scourge of terrorism throughout the world.

It is my distinct pleasure to address the General Assembly today at this Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting Devoted to the Follow-Up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children. We all know that safeguarding and improving the well-being of children are among the most profound responsibilities of humankind, since investing in children is investing in our common future. With that mindset, and as a country with a vast child and adolescent population of 22 million, we believe that this Meeting is both timely and much-needed.

The Secretary-General's report on progress towards the goals of "A world fit for children", as well as the statistical review issued by UNICEF as part of its Progress for Children series, indicate that we are on the right track. It is especially encouraging that the Convention on the Rights of the Child has become the most universal human rights treaty. At the same time, however, it is also true that we are still far from achieving our end goal. There remains ample room for further progress.

Turkey aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union. At the same time, allow me at this point to briefly update participants on what Turkey has achieved regarding children's issues since the special session.

As a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Turkey signed the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. Both Optional Protocols are in force in Turkey now.

Very recently, on 25 October, Turkey signed the Council of Europe Convention on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse at the beginning of the twenty-eighth Conference of European Ministers of Justice. Turkey has also undertaken a comprehensive review of its domestic legal framework. In that respect, relevant parts of the Turkish civil code, labour code, criminal code, criminal procedure code, code on enforcement of penalties and security measures, child protection code and the code on persons with disabilities were amended in line with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Moreover, our cooperation with UNICEF continues successfully. I should also add that we are steadily increasing our voluntary financial contribution to the UNICEF budget and projects in line with our emergence as a donor country in recent years.

As members will see from that brief summary, Turkey is exerting great efforts in fulfilling the Millennium Development Goals and the objectives put forward in the "A world fit for children" resolution of the General Assembly. At this point, I would like to make a few additional remarks with a view to highlighting the progress made specifically on the main topics of this meeting.

First, regarding the promotion of healthy lives, we have achieved significant reductions in infant and under-five mortality, as well as in the maternal mortality rate. In addition, progress has been made in the betterment of access to affordable health services before and after birth, and the eradication of child malnutrition and such diseases as polio, tuberculosis and diphtheria. For instance, since 1998, no case of polio has been observed in Turkey. There has also been no death related to malaria. Hence, we are close to achieving our commitment in that respect. With an amendment to the social security system in 2006, all children have been granted the right to receive treatment, consultation and support services from our relevant agencies.

One of the most damaging challenges of today's world is combating HIV/AIDS, as stipulated by the sixth Millennium Development Goal. The studies pursued by our Ministry of Health indicate that the number of children under 15 years of age carrying HIV/AIDS is 51. The number increases to 59 and 305 for the age groups 15-19 and 20-24, respectively. Obviously, the accurate number of people carrying HIV/AIDS may be greater than what the statistics tell us; however, the rate is still well below the international average. Moreover, increasing public awareness of HIV/AIDS is a promising factor with respect to meeting our commitments.

The second area I would like to touch upon is education. In line with the Millennium Development Goals, we have a commitment to achieving universal primary education and eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2015. In the light of those goals, and within the context of the strategies put forward at the special session on children, Turkey

has intensified its efforts in increasing the literacy rate of children, with a special focus on the girl child.

A campaign known as “Let’s Go to School, Girls!”, led by the Turkish Ministry of Education, is a clear example of those efforts. That intersectoral campaign led to the enrolment of approximately 230,000 girls in primary education in the period 2003-2006. Needless to say, we have much to do to meet the Millennium Development Goals. However, achievements on the ground, public awareness of children’s issues and the determination of our Government to improve the living standards of children are clear indications of our ambition in that field.

In that regard, I would like to conclude my remarks by sharing the timeless words of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Republic of Turkey, which, I believe, summarize the gist of our efforts today:

“We love the children because they are the continuation of our very existence. In each and every child we find the fulfilment of our longing to reach eternity.”

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Gilles Noghès, chairman of the delegation of Monaco.

**Mr. Noghès (Monaco) (*spoke in French*):** Allow me at the outset to associate the Government of the Principality of Monaco with the condolences and expressions of sympathy that have been extended in this Hall following the heinous terrorist acts that took place yesterday, claiming victims among United Nations staff members and the people of Algeria.

In the Millennium Declaration, our leaders placed humankind at the centre of development and recognized the duty of the international community towards all people, especially the most vulnerable, and children in particular. In that spirit, and arising from a moral and logical imperative since it involves humankind’s future, the General Assembly reiterated its resolve to act in the higher interest of children and to make them a top priority so as to secure the resources they need. In those circumstances, such an investment can help us to attain the objectives that inspire the very existence of our Organization.

In the light of the Secretary-General’s report on the follow-up to the outcome of the special session of

the General Assembly on children, the five-year assessment is, as expected, ambiguous.

We are well aware that not all children are assured a satisfactory start in life. In fact, it is deplorable that 143 million children under the age of 5 still suffer from malnutrition and that access to quality basic education is not a given. The Assembly’s consideration of the issue on this fifth anniversary should emphasize the elements necessary to permit us to continue to build “A world fit for children”.

In addition to various publications and the series of UNICEF reports entitled “Progress for Children”, the most recent report of the Secretary-General (A/62/259) emphasizes the importance of progress indicators achieved in various areas in which we have committed ourselves to taking action. Measuring progress is a means of highlighting certain societal phenomena and, undoubtedly, allowing mindsets to evolve.

The question of violence against children testifies to that process, since the 2001 request that the Secretary-General carry out an in-depth study on that question resulted in the nomination of a Special Representative on violence against children. By revealing certain practices that had up until now remained taboo, the in-depth study allows us to face reality.

The concrete measures adopted in social, legal, political and even environmental areas, while taking into account the additional threat of climate change, should result both quantitatively and qualitatively in a healthier existence for children.

The 20/20 Compact on Human Development agreed upon at the World Summit for Social Development must be honoured. In that respect, official development assistance is vital for the financing of basic social services. Those commitments correspond more than ever to moral obligations and go hand-in-hand with the generosity of the international community.

The principle of universal solidarity therefore guides my Government’s policy of international cooperation, both on the multilateral and bilateral levels. The Principality of Monaco is already party to several international conventions relating to children and is currently taking concrete measures to allow progress to be made in its legislation in order to align

itself with the major guidelines of the international community on this matter. A draft law to strengthen the fight against crimes and misdemeanors against children will soon be submitted to our Parliament.

Through vaccination and medication distribution programmes, the monitoring of epidemics, activities related to water treatment and hygiene and the distribution of grains in countries affected by famine and crisis, Monaco brings its support to the poorest populations. The Government fully participates in the fight against HIV/AIDS by developing preventive and detection measures and access to care, especially in cooperation with UNICEF and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS.

Moreover, non-governmental organizations from Monaco are committed to actively fighting against and protecting children from paedophilia, violence, abuse and prostitution, both in Monaco, through the work carried out by Action Innocence, and internationally, under the aegis of the World Association of Children's Friends.

As you have already pointed out, Mr. President, without political will and determination, we will not be able to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Throughout the world, millions of children are expecting those promises to be kept. To disappoint them would be to cheat our future.

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Zoran Loncar, Minister of Education of Serbia.

**Mr. Loncar** (Serbia) (*spoke in Serbian; interpretation provided by the delegation*): I am shocked and devastated by yesterday's bombing attack in Algeria and I express the deepest condolences of the Government of Serbia to the families who lost loved ones.

I am honoured, privileged and very thankful to have the opportunity to address the General Assembly on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Serbia on this important occasion. Serbia aligns itself with the statement made by Portugal on behalf of the European Union. Nevertheless, I will make a few observations regarding my country's activities to promote the cause of children.

Serbia made an active contribution to the elaboration of the document entitled "A world fit for children" from the time of its readmission to the United

Nations in 2000. Although it has had to deal with the consequences of the political, economic and social crisis of the 1990s, my country has taken numerous legal, political and economic measures to improve the situation of its children ever since. In that regard, "A world fit for children" provided a useful framework for the adoption of various strategies in that field, in particular Serbia's National Action Plan for Children. Preparation for the Plan began in 2002 and was coordinated by the Council for the Rights of the Child, which consists of high-ranking officials appointed by the Government.

The National Action Plan for Children, adopted in 2004, defines the country's policy towards children in the short, medium and long term. It contains priority measures, activities and programmes to be taken to create increasingly favourable living conditions for children and for their growth and social inclusion. Based on the four basic principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child — the right to life, survival and development; the best interests of the child; non-discrimination and protection from discrimination; and participation, or respect for children's opinions — the Plan provided a framework for and encouraged the formation of a number of projects over the past several years which have been of exceptional importance for the well-being of children and the exercise of their rights. Although we may have not achieved all the results we had hoped for, the principles outlined in the Plan are being included in an increasing number of the country's laws relating to children.

Serbia has adopted a number of other strategic documents, laws and by-laws against child abuse, child exploitation, human trafficking and discrimination, and on the rights of children and adults with disabilities. The Special Protocol on the Procedure of Police Officers in the Protection of Minors from Abuse and Neglect and the Special Protocol for the Protection of Children in Institutions of Social Protection from Abuse and Neglect have also been adopted. I take special pride in the adoption this year of the Special Protocol for the Protection of Children and Students from Violence, Abuse and Neglect in Educational/Correctional Institutions.

In 2006, a Parliamentary Subcommittee on the Protection of Children helped stage a presentation of the United Nations study on violence against children for stakeholders nationwide. The School without Violence project is implemented in 101 Serbian

schools. Also, local communities devise their own plans of actions and allocate funds for their realization.

Serbia has adopted a number of documents defining the strategic direction of its development in various social areas which affect the status and rights of children. They include the Strategy for the Reduction of Poverty, adopted in 2002; the Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking, adopted in 2006; the Strategy for Social Protection Development, adopted in 2005; the Strategy on Family Accommodation Development and the National Strategy to Deal with Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons, adopted in 2002; the National Strategy to Combat HIV/AIDS, adopted in 2005; and the Strategy for the Health Development of Young People in the Republic of Serbia, adopted in 2006. A draft Strategy for Roma Integration and Roma Empowerment has also been prepared and is currently under public discussion.

A number of systemic laws have been adopted that improve in the most immediate way the status and rights of children, including the Family Law; the Law on Underage Perpetrators of Criminal Offences and Legal Protection of Minors in Criminal Matters; and the Law on the Basic System of Upbringing and Education.

The adoption of the law on the basic system of child-rearing and education marked a change in our way of thinking with respect to the educational status of the child. The principles and goals of education have been defined in an altogether new way, while many other solutions have brought about greater access to, and better quality of, education.

Notwithstanding considerable achievements, many problems remain, and efforts continue to be made to address them. Those problems include the need to increase preschool attendance — now at about 40 per cent — by children between the ages of 3 and 5. Children in rural areas are particularly disadvantaged in that regard, as are children of parents with only an elementary education and children of poor parents.

There is also a need to increase inclusion in preparatory preschool programmes. That is of great importance, as we have noticed a significant improvement in the elementary school enrolment of children from the most vulnerable social categories since their introduction in the 2005/2006 school year. The programmes extend over a period of at least six

months and include 88.6 per cent of the overall child population.

The dropout rate must also be reduced. Currently, 95 per cent of children complete elementary school and 76.42 per cent complete secondary school.

In addition to the previously mentioned laws, much is expected also from the law on the children's ombudsman. This has already been drafted and is expected to be submitted to the Government and parliament soon.

Serbia remains committed to attain its goals by pursuing these and other activities.

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, chairman of the delegation of Qatar.

**Mr. Al-Nasser (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*):** It gives me great pleasure, on behalf of the delegation of the State of Qatar, to extend to Mr. Srgjan Kerim my sincere congratulations on the manner in which he is chairing the Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting Devoted to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children. This Meeting is being held five years after the special session on children, which was convened with the participation of 190 States and a high-level delegation from the State of Qatar, headed by Her Highness Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al-Misnad, consort of His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar.

The speech of Her Highness before the Assembly (see A/S-27/PV.1) highlighted the rapid improvement in Qatar in the promotion and protection of the rights of the child and the real progress achieved in the enforcement of the rights of the child at the national level. That progress is evident at the national level in the scope of the development of public freedoms, participation in decision-making processes and the expanded functions and roles of civil society organizations. At the international level it is reflected in the elimination of the blatant contradiction between international ideals and standards and the daily reality experienced by millions of children in many parts of the world, where innocent children live in abject poverty, afflicted by the spread of diseases and the scourge of war, conflict and foreign occupation.

During the special session, States and Governments stressed their commitment to work for a



world fit for children. In the State of Qatar, under the wise leadership of His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the relevance and vital importance of State institutions are highlighted, since they enhance the lives of the Qatari population and create an environment conducive to the enjoyment of all their rights and freedoms guaranteed by the permanent constitution of the country. A number of institutions have therefore been created, most notable among which is the Supreme Council for Family Affairs, headed by Her Highness Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al-Misnad. The Council was established in 1998, and the Government was able, through it, to achieve significant and rapid development in the preservation, protection and development of all family groups.

Regarding the attention paid to children and the enforcement of their rights, the State of Qatar has almost completed the formulation of its national strategy for children. The strategy's development has been the result of an extensive participatory process aimed at identifying a set of goals based on our religious and cultural values and international terms of reference. We have gone even further and begun to implement our international obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two Optional Protocols. The most important of those steps is the current preparation by the State of a special children's law.

The periodic reviews of national legislation have also taken into account State obligations under the relevant international conventions on children. Those reviews have been reflected in various laws issued in the past two years, including Decision No. 15 of 2005, on the types of jobs in which no child may be allowed to work, and the act on the prohibition of recruiting, training and participation of children in camel races, Act No. 22 of 2005.

Regarding the participation of children and young people, the State of Qatar has been eager to introduce many improvements in the educational systems designed to provide children and young people of both sexes with the capacity they need to ensure their full participation in all spheres of life.

Qatar has made steady progress towards reaffirming its international obligations on the promotion and protection of the rights of the child. Its commitment is reflected by the Cabinet decision to approve the withdrawal of the general reservation to

the Convention on the Rights of the Child that was submitted by the State when it signed the Convention in 1992. That decision reflects the wise approach of the leadership of the State of Qatar on the significance and vital importance of the full and comprehensive enforcement of the rights of the child.

Despite our achievements, much remains to be done to reach the goals to which we committed ourselves at the 2002 special session. In that regard, I would like to recall the statement by Her Highness Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al-Misnad to the Assembly in 2002. Her position, which was shared by many heads of State or Government, was based on full recognition of the importance of genuine political will and the mobilization of the necessary resources, without which the situation will remain unchanged. Indeed, developing countries are still very far from honouring our obligations, due to the lack of resources necessary for an environment that is conducive to the full and comprehensive enforcement of the rights of the child.

In the field of education, despite international appeals for an increase in the rates of enrolment in primary and secondary education, those rates remain low in certain regions of the world. People deprived of education are still a reality in various areas. The situation has even worsened as a result of the repeated attacks on schools, students and teachers in the many areas affected by armed conflict and under foreign occupation.

The State of Qatar has therefore focused primarily on the areas of education and the elimination of illiteracy. Her Highness Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al-Misnad, UNESCO Special Envoy for Basic and Higher Education, has played a pivotal regional and international role in drawing attention to the importance of supporting education efforts in poor countries and countries affected by conflict, in particular the education of girls and young people, providing them with life-skills, based on the premise that education is the best means to contain violence and spread tranquillity and peace.

We must not overlook the importance of children with disabilities fully and equitably enjoying all rights and freedoms, in order to ensure their dignity and encourage them to be more self-reliant and to participate actively in their communities. In that regard, Her Highness Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser

Al-Misnad has played a leading role in raising community awareness of children with disabilities. Her initiatives have gone further, to create the institutional framework required to provide them with care.

The State of Qatar's accession to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was an expression of the Government's attention to that issue at the national level. From this rostrum, as a State party to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, we call on the States that have not taken this step to do so.

It is not possible to talk about children without talking about their families. The State of Qatar believes that the promotion of children's rights depends on the realization of the rights and duties of the family, which is the basic nuclear unit of society and which should therefore be strengthened. In that regard, as confirmed by Her Highness in her speech before the Assembly, we would like to reiterate that children cannot grow up and prosper without family ties. The family was the origin of human nature well before that fact was enshrined in international instruments.

Five years ago, we were, and we are still today, unanimous in our belief that we should protect children from the horrors of armed conflict and the yoke of foreign occupation. However, we have not honoured our commitment. We still operate in blatant contradiction with that commitment, and as a result, the tragedies experienced by children in various regions are marginalized and children live under the yoke of foreign occupation. Their tragedies are even being used by some for political and not humanitarian purposes. We therefore reiterate that, for every child without exception and without distinction, we must create the best possible start in life and contribute to building a world fit for children.

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Robert Hill, chairman of the delegation of Australia, and to Mr. Mikael Dunlop and Ms. Catherine Maher, the youth delegates of Australia.

**Mr. Hill (Australia):** As you indicated, Sir, I am joined today by young Australians Mikael and Catherine, who will help me in the delivery of this statement.

Like others before me, I would like to commence by expressing our condolences to the families of those who lost their lives and our sympathy to those who

were injured in the appalling terrorist bombings in Algeria.

In relation to the subject matter of this special meeting, there have been considerable successes achieved by the international community since we met in 2002 to address child rights and adopt "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex). Collective global action has been taken to reduce the under-five mortality rate and increase school attendance and educational opportunities equally for boys and girls. Systems are in place to protect children from violence, including the recent agreement to establish the post of Special Representative of the Secretary-General on this issue, and those affected by armed conflict.

While considerable progress has been made over the past five years, we must all recognize that the challenge to create a world fit for children still remains. Over half the children in the developing world continue to live without access to basic services, commodities and the protection necessary to survive and develop.

Australia has invested significant resources to help strengthen and support Australian families and children. Like other countries, Australia has worked hard to implement the goals of "A world fit for children", domestically and within our region. Our response to "A world fit for children" outlines actions being taken by all levels of government in Australia to improve outcomes for children and young people, with input from non-governmental organizations and from children and young people themselves.

Australia's children and young people have good health by world standards, with low morbidity and mortality rates, free education and strong educational attainment. However, we recognize that our indigenous children in particular are not achieving as well as the rest of the population on some key measures of health, education and well-being. The Australian Government puts special emphasis on improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The aim is to ensure accessibility and responsiveness of the education and health systems for indigenous Australians.

But beyond Australia, we are committed to working together with our partners, including the United Nations system, to ensure that the generally high standards our children experience become a reality for children and young people throughout the

world. We do this particularly through our aid programmes. In a spirit of partnership, we work closely with other Governments and with international organizations to advance the health and education of children and young people in developing countries around the world, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. We also have a proud history of promoting and safeguarding the rights of children internationally.

UNICEF is a particularly important partner for Australia in our efforts to achieve a world fit for children. Australia recognizes UNICEF's key role in saving and improving the lives of children and advocating for their rights. UNICEF's strategic priorities align with many of the objectives of the Australian aid programme, including maternal and child health and basic education, HIV/AIDS, child protection and humanitarian assistance. In 2006, Australia contributed over \$60 million in funding to UNICEF.

A significant part of our work through our aid programme is devoted to investing in people by supporting the provision of basic health and education services, which are vital for ensuring that children grow healthily and learn and develop to their full potential. Australia also works to mitigate the effects of HIV/AIDS on young people and children in developing countries, through awareness-raising activities and the provision of treatment, care and support for children living with or affected by HIV/AIDS. Through measures to combat child trafficking, and by taking action to mitigate the impact of conflict on children in our region, Australia works to achieve a world where children are safe and protected.

Advancing gender equity is also a core principle underpinning our efforts. The views, needs, interests and rights of women and girls must shape the development agenda as much as those of men and boys do. By integrating that concept into all of our development projects, Australia assists children in ways that promote such equality, for example through support for gender-equitable access by children to basic social services, and programmes to address the specific protection needs of girls and boys.

Australia considers that measures to improve the lives of children should be central to all international development efforts. The interests of the world's children are central to the Millennium Development Goals, and the achievement of the Goals is critical to

the well-being and future of all children. Over the coming five years, we must also continue to work collaboratively to achieve the important goals set out in "A world fit for children".

I now ask Mikael Dunlop to take the floor.

**Mr. Dunlop** (Australia): Since 2002, we have all learned a great deal. If we are going to create an environment in which children not only survive, but also thrive, we must combat poverty and guarantee that all children are provided with adequate food and shelter, quality education and access to basic health services.

If we are to meet our responsibilities to protect all children from harm and exploitation, we must uphold their rights and bring those who would infringe upon them to account.

I shall now allow our child delegate Ms. Maher to conclude.

**Ms. Maher** (Australia): If we are going to make our vision for a world fit for children a reality, we as the international community — Governments, international organizations, civil society and the private sector — must reaffirm our commitment, mobilize our resources and work together in a global partnership to that end. This High-level Meeting — which brings together Member States, the United Nations system and civil society — is our signal to children and to young people that our commitment to that effort will not waiver.

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ilya Rogachev, chairman of the delegation of the Russian Federation.

**Mr. Rogachev** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Strengthening international cooperation with regard to issues pertaining to the protection of children's rights has become an ongoing trend in recent decades. The twentieth century was pivotal as regards children. For the first time, children were treated as individuals endowed with specific rights. Precisely that approach is the basis of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, whose principles are shared among the vast majority of States. The road map for fulfilling the requirements of the Convention became the outcome document of the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly, entitled "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex).

At the same time, it is still too soon to say that Member States have successfully and fully achieved the main goals and purposes of that document. Unfortunately, despite the efforts of the international community, children are still vulnerable. It is they who are first and foremost the victims of hunger, disease, poverty, violence, exploitation, armed conflict and terrorist acts. There is no more noble a cause than to free the world's children from suffering and fear.

The well-being of children should be the main criterion for measuring social progress, given that today's children will shape the world in the future. The problems of children therefore constitute a key area of Russia's social policy. Issues that concern ensuring the rights of children are always of interest to the Russian Government. In accordance with the obligations contained in the Convention on the Rights of Child, Russia has adopted an additional federal programme on Russia's children, for the period 2007 to 2010. That initiative includes subprogrammes on "A healthy generation", "Gifted children" and "Children and families". When a child is born, the mother receives a "mother's allowance", which she can spend on education and medical treatment for the child or for obtaining accommodation.

The Russian Government's commission on the affairs of minors and protecting their rights is working successfully. The commission is holding seminars throughout Russia for first-hand familiarization with the situation of children. In September, the first children's television channel began to broadcast, targeting an audience of children between the ages of 4 and 17. In order to strengthen the social functions of the family, President Putin declared 2008 the year of the family in Russia.

Observing the rights of children and ensuring and improving their well-being is an absolute universal value. We are convinced that this idea is shared by all States without exception. It can also serve as a unifying basis for international efforts in this field. We would like in particular to commend the work of UNICEF, under the leadership of Ms. Ann Veneman. The Russian Federation is cooperating actively with UNICEF and supports its work.

We would like to note the establishment of new international institutions and mechanisms to protect the rights of children. At the same time, it is important to avoid any overlap or competition in their work. The

purpose should not be to create additional bureaucratic structures, but rather to strengthen the regime for the protection of children at all levels. In that connection in particular, it is necessary that, from the very outset of his work, the new special representative of the Secretary-General on violence against children should be guided by a non-selective approach, in the interests of children in all parts of the world.

Today, it is of vital importance to strengthen the effectiveness of international cooperation to improve the status of children throughout the world and to establish conditions for their full and harmonious development so that they may not know want, war or violence.

In the time that I have spoken here today, hundreds of children have been born on our planet. Let us wish them a peaceful and happy childhood and work together towards that end.

**The Acting President:** I have received a request from the observer for the League of Arab States to be given the floor at the end of the debate this afternoon. It is my understanding that the observer will have to depart New York this evening. May I therefore take it that the Assembly agrees, without setting a precedent, to hear from the observer for the League of Arab States in the debate this afternoon?

*It was so decided.*

**The Acting President:** In accordance with resolution 477 (V), of 1 November 1950, I now call on Ms. Mona Samir Kamal, chairperson of the observer delegation of the League of Arab States, to make a statement.

**Ms. Kamal** (League of Arab States) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of Mr. Amr Moussa, Secretary General of the League of Arab States, I would like to express our hope for the full success of this meeting. This comes in reaffirmation of the attention that the League of Arab States gives to the issues of children and to the advancement of their conditions in the Arab world.

Attention to children in the Arab world witnessed a great improvement since the 1980s and further increased with the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 by all Arab countries, except Somalia, due to its special circumstances. That was reaffirmed in the periodic review report, prepared

by the United Nations on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Since the beginning of the third millennium, those Arab efforts have continued at the highest levels of political decision-making in the Arab world. For the first time since the establishment of the League of Arab States, the holding of Arab summits has led to the adoption of resolutions to emphasize the rights of Arab children. Arab young people have participated in several activities in the context of the General Assembly's 2002 special session on the theme "A world fit for children".

Discussions have also been held on this subject throughout the world. A second high-level meeting on the rights of children in the Arab world was also held in 2001. In accordance with the principles of the document "A world fit for children", an additional high-level meeting on children was held in 2004 to emphasize the activities and resolutions adopted in the context of international conferences. Various steps have been taken to consider the particular characteristics of the Arab world and its culture.

All of this has been implemented at the national and regional levels through the convening of meetings, the establishment of specialized bodies and regular reviews of reports provided by States in connection with the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The League of Arab States would like to emphasize that most of its members have responded favourably with regard to implementing "A world fit for children" programmes. Considerable achievements have been made in that regard. A meeting will be held in 2008 to review the progress made in the achievement of the goals set out in that document. Bodies have been set up to address problems related to children and their rights. New laws have been promulgated, and administrative, health, educational, economic, social and other measures have been adopted to guarantee the rights of children at the national and regional levels. Our member States have also established children's advisory councils or parliaments to ensure that children are involved in

discussions on issues of direct interest to them. Arab League States have also established the Arab Children's Parliament, which convened in 2007. A series of conferences, symposiums, workshops and round tables have also been held to consider children's issues and problems. The problems of street children, child labour and child abuse have also been discussed.

States have also made efforts to put an end to violence against children. Three regional conferences have been held, with the involvement of national children's councils and other Arab and regional institutions, including representatives of children and other regional organizations. We welcome their efforts to ensure wide-scale participation in this effort. I should also say that a follow-up committee has been established to assist Arab children.

We welcome the decision adopted by the Third Committee on the subject of violence against children.

The Arab League believes that children are the harvest of the future. What we do today will have an impact on the future of our children. We must ensure tolerance, so as to establish a better world for our children.

We are aware of the dangers of war and armed conflict in the Arab world and of their potential impact on children. I appeal for the immediate release of men, women and children from Israeli prisons. I also call for an end to war in Iraq, Palestine and the Sudan. Innocent children pay a high price for those conflicts. Dialogue is essential to ensuring the restoration of peace. Attempts have been made to take children out of Darfur and Chad in order to turn them into soldiers. That constitutes a flagrant violation of the basic human rights and the rights of the child. These unfortunate attempts should be condemned throughout the world. They must not be repeated anywhere.

Peace and international cooperation are a prerequisite for preventing catastrophes and war. We must meet the challenges confronting our societies in order that we can establish a world fit for children.

*The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.*