



# General Assembly

Sixty-second session

**71**st plenary meeting

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Official Records

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

*In the absence of the President, Mr. Al Bayati (Iraq), (Vice-President), took the Chair.*

*The meeting was called to order at 6.20 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 Acting President:** I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Christian Wenaweser, chairman of the delegation of Liechtenstein.

**Mr. Wenaweser** (Liechtenstein): The special session on children in May 2002 was a historic occasion. The Assembly gathered at the highest level to reappraise the situation of children and speed up progress towards a world truly fit for children. Today, it is fair to say that some progress has been achieved to reach the goals and targets set five years ago. That progress, however, is mixed, with many challenges remaining.

We are concerned by the stark discrepancy that continues to exist between the wide range of international norms and standards in respect of

children's rights and their weak implementation. The Convention on the Rights of the Child has the highest number of State parties of any international treaty at any time in history. Yet, the world remains largely unsafe for children.

States fail to protect the most basic rights of children. The right to life and the right to education continue to be widely violated because of some form of neglect. States and the international community are remiss in their fight against hunger and poverty, of which children are the most helpless victims. More can and more must be done for the education of children in order to give them a better chance for the future.

Going beyond neglect or lack of resolve, children's rights continue to be actively violated as children suffer physical and psychological cruelty at home, are dragged into armed conflicts, trafficked, sexually abused or economically exploited. There is no such thing as partial human rights for growing human beings. The full respect for the physical and psychological integrity of children must be a universally applied rule of civilization.

That is also one of the main messages contained in the United Nations study on violence against children. The preparatory process to that study has shown that regional organizations, such as the Council of Europe, can play an essential role in creating a favourable environment for political momentum and action by States, building on the active involvement of civil society. We welcome such regional activities,

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which are aimed at the promotion of universal standards.

We believe that situations in which children are particularly vulnerable should be given continued special attention by the international community. That is especially true for armed conflicts. We would like to stress that, despite the promising progress recently made under the leadership of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, much more needs to be done in order to bridge the particularly large implementation gap in that field.

Liechtenstein attaches great importance to the well-being of children and young people locally, nationally and internationally. Its policy concerning young people follows the long-term guidelines of family policy, equal rights policy and child and youth policy. Those three areas are mutually interdependent. The Government therefore sees the welfare of children and young people as an interdisciplinary task. In addition, it can be said that Liechtenstein's child and youth policy observes as fundamental guiding principles the relevant provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and of other international human rights treaties.

A number of areas are regarded as key for the long-term welfare of children and young people, and are treated as a priority. They include support for families, including through financial measures; work, especially with respect to the compatibility of career and family life; recreation; maintaining quality of life; taking into account aspects of the environment and mobility; and multiculturalism in society. Those long-term pillars of child and youth policy are complemented by short-term and medium-term goals, which are formulated when specific new problems arise. The small size of our country makes it possible to react quickly and flexibly to new challenges.

Various efforts have been made to increase the involvement of children and young people in topics that affect them directly, including the search for adequate opportunities for direct participation. The right to appropriate information is now better secured, thanks to our Youth Information Centre, which is eagerly used. A new youth act is being developed, with which the essential basic ideas and rights concerning children will be implemented at the local and national levels. The drafting of the act has been strongly influenced by the Convention on the Rights of the

Child, directly and indirectly, and developed in a broad participatory process with a low threshold, with the input of children, young people and adults.

In order to achieve the full and timely implementation of the Declaration and Plan of Action contained in "A world fit for children", the international community needs to scale up its response to the remaining challenges. Liechtenstein is committed to further stepping up its support for international cooperation and partnerships in that respect. The financial means for Liechtenstein's international humanitarian cooperation and development has increased considerably during recent years, and will amount to 25.5 million Swiss francs in 2008. With that amount, the Government intends to reach a level of 0.6 per cent in official development assistance next year.

Some 60 per cent of our overall resources are spent on education and health programmes, including programmes against HIV/AIDS. Liechtenstein will continue to contribute to the combined efforts of Governments, international organizations, civil society, local communities and the private sector in order to help deliver concrete results and a better life for the children of the world.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Khaled Budhair, chairman of the delegation of Kuwait.

**Mr. Budhair** (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to convey my gratitude to the President for convening this important meeting, which concerns issues related to children and their rights, aspirations and hopes.

Allow me also to convey my heartfelt condolences to the brotherly people and the Government of Algeria, to the families and to the staff of the United Nations for all the innocent victims who fell yesterday as a result of a cowardly terrorist act. We stress that the State of Kuwait stands with sisterly Algeria during this difficult time.

We meet today to discuss the outcome of the General Assembly's special session on children. We are very pleased to reaffirm our full support for the draft declaration on the child (see A/62/L.31) to be adopted at the conclusion of this Meeting. The draft declaration refers to the progress made since 2000 in protecting children and ensuring their rights and thus reflects the

international community's desire to fulfil the commitments set out in the outcome document of the Assembly's twenty-seventh special session, entitled "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex).

The family is the nucleus of society and the most important pillar upon which the achievement of social welfare rests. The family is also where the human personality is initially formed. The State of Kuwait attaches a great deal of attention to the family and has directed many of its resources and capacities to providing the best possible environment for children and women. The State of Kuwait was among the first to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in September 1991. It also acceded to the Optional Protocol of the Convention on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, as well as the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children In Armed Conflict. Those instruments have already been enacted as national law, with which all State institutions, including the courts, must comply.

In that regard, I wish also to refer to Kuwait's signing of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women And Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Kuwait is also committed to various other international human rights agreements.

All of that clearly attests to the importance that the State of Kuwait attaches to the care of children and to preventing anything that could have a negative impact on their future, so that they may be brought up in a healthy, safe and clean environment.

On the basis of the rights guaranteed by Islamic sharia law, the Kuwaiti constitution and universal human values, and in line with international laws guaranteeing full rights for families and individuals, chapter 2, article 9, of the Kuwaiti constitution sets out that the family is the core of a society based upon religion, morality and love of country. The structure of the family is therefore protected and strengthened by the law.

Accordingly, the State of Kuwait has made substantial progress in providing social services for children over the past four decades. This has been confirmed by numerous international organizations, foremost among which are UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO). As a result of the legislation we have enacted and the programmes and

plans being carried out by the Government and other institutions at the national and international levels, the State of Kuwait has become a model for the States of our region.

Health care for children in Kuwait is considered among the best in the world. Kuwait's under-five mortality rate is the lowest in the region, with only 12 death per 1,000 live births. That figure indicates the very advanced state of our health care.

It is my pleasure to refer here to the healthy child clinic that has been established by the Government, to which parents can regularly take even healthy children to see a paediatrician in order to detect any ailments at an early stage and to prevent future illness. The clinic provides a full medical examination at every visit. It also offers vaccinations and provides parents with information about child rearing and behaviour and answers different questions pertaining to children.

The State of Kuwait has also been very vigilant in combating HIV/AIDS and has a very low incidence of HIV cases, which is limited to drug users.

With regard to development, the State of Kuwait has made education free of charge. Primary school matriculation rates for 2005 and 2006 were 99 per cent for males and females alike. At the secondary school level for the same period, the rates were 83 per cent for males and 98 per cent for females.

The State of Kuwait has also paid close attention to children with special needs, providing them with the best services. The Government has instructed the relevant authorities to put in place a preventive health system to prevent disability, develop an educational system for the disabled, design programmes for their gradual rehabilitation and ensure that all disabled persons have ramp access by reviewing the design of public buildings and facilities.

The State of Kuwait is committed to providing comprehensive social, health and psychological care for women, children and those with special needs. Kuwait is now a pioneer in this area and has considerable experience in promoting social development, enhancing the role of women, protecting the young and preventing violence. It has also played an active role in contributing its experience and active participation to international, regional and local conferences and meetings. Kuwait will continue to strive to provide an appropriate environment for a

world fit for children in every social and educational field, from health and educational services to physical and psychological care, as well as providing adequate information in the service of the family and society.

The State of Kuwait aspires to provide assistance in the areas of social care to sisterly and friendly countries. His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, has donated \$1 million to the WHO initiative to eliminate polio. Under the special care of His Highness the Amir, Kuwait had provided special aid, in the form of clothing, footwear and other essentials, to needy children and sons of martyrs and to more than 16,000 Palestinian children in the West Bank, in an effort to put a smile on their faces. On the occasion of the upcoming holiday of Eid al-Adha, in the coming weeks Kuwait will provide thousands of food items to poor and needy Palestinians living in difficult circumstances.

If a woman is well prepared, then an entire people will be well prepared. Children are the future leaders of our States. Let us therefore all continue to work together to create a world fit for humans and children, for the benefit, safety, welfare and peace of mind of everyone.

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to Ms. Rosemary Banks, chairperson of the delegation of New Zealand.

**Ms. Banks** (New Zealand): Five years ago, the hopes and aspirations that child representatives of many nations brought to the special session on children challenged us all to make a better world for children and young people. I am proud to say that in our delegation, we have with us two young New Zealanders who were present at the inception of "A world fit for children": Jessica Dewan and Te Kerei Moka.

This occasion is one for the voices of young people to be heard. While we have a national statement that we will circulate, I would like to introduce Te Kerei Moka, who will bring his own personal message to the Members of the General Assembly.

**Mr. Moka** (New Zealand): First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge each and every Member of the Assembly for participating and helping in the endeavour to make this world a beautiful and better place.

*Kia ora.* My name is Te Kerei Moka, and I am from New Zealand. I am one of seven children. My mother is blind; my father is in prison. Since I was a child, I have had no time to kick a ball around or play on a swing, let alone live a normal life. However, I am proud of my accomplishments. I have done the best I could to make my family happy and safe. As the only male in my family, I had to grow up at an early age in order to understand the rules of life and the obligations I faced at that time.

That being so, I have had the chance to observe and take in life skills from another angle. As time went on, I was in a position to make a difference within my realm. Now, standing here before the Assembly, I have grown up and have learned a lot in order to participate in an event such as this, as well as to bring what I can to share with you.

I feel that we, as a people of the world, are in a situation where we are slowly making progress in changing the way we see things. Education is a primary example. I feel that we need to keep our thinking caps on in creating strategies to make sure that children can succeed in education, by providing the right tools, the right funding and professional support to enable more students to attend school. Now, I know that there are a lot of other obligations facing us that affect the possibilities of making that happen. But I also feel that, if we take it step by step, day by day, one way or another we will prevail. As I say, good things take time, but hopefully not that long.

So, to all my younger brothers and sisters, it is time to stand staunchly, proud of who you are and whom you represent. Educate yourselves in ways that you thought you could never think of. Make contacts, establish goals within yourselves and endeavour to make the world around you a happier one. Reach for the highest peak, and you will seek. If you want it, take it. And do not dare to let anyone else tell you otherwise, because, at the end of the day, nothing is impossible. *Ma te atua e tiakina I a koutou katoa mo ake tonu atu.*

**The Acting President** (*spoken in Arabic*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Yasir A. Abdelsalam, chairman of the delegation of the Sudan.

**Mr. Abdelsalam** (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we would like to express our deep condolences to the Government and the brotherly people of Algeria, as well as to the families of the

victims of the criminal acts that were committed yesterday in that country.

My delegation associates itself with the statement made by the Minister of Women's and Children's Affairs of Ghana on behalf of the Group of African States.

This Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting Devoted to the Follow-up of the Special Session on Children is a good opportunity to make the necessary assessment of progress made in implementing recommendations aimed at promoting and protecting children's rights. It is also an opportunity to redouble our efforts at the national and international levels to attain the objectives set out in the document "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2).

In 2002, the twenty-seventh special session on children was held, *inter alia*, to shed light on children's concerns and issues. The session saw the adoption of the Declaration and Plan of Action contained in "A world fit for children", in which States and Governments undertook to promote health services and good education, to protect children against exploitation and violence and to combat HIV/AIDS. Those four areas are addressed in the Millennium Declaration and have a direct impact on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, which cover seven areas, including the rights of children and young people.

The Sudan has prepared a national document entitled "A Sudan fit for children", dealing with the protection of children, that sets out strategies, objectives and necessary measures adopted during the special session on children. The national document is based on the prospects, visions and the guidelines for the State's strategic objectives, which also served as the basis for the preparation of our five-year plan for 2007-2011 for the care and protection of children.

In that connection, we wish to refer to the following efforts that we have made. The Sudan has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two Optional Protocols, as well as Convention No. 138 of the International Labour Organization (ILO), concerning the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment; ILO Convention No. 182, concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour; the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child; and

Additional Protocol I to the Fourth Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949, relates to the protection of victims of international armed conflicts.

In the area of national legislation, our 2005 transitional constitution contains provisions protecting children's rights, in keeping with international instruments and conventions ratified by the Sudan that were incorporated into the constitution, including that of South Sudan. In 2004, we drafted a law intended to fill gaps in governmental policy in that area. Our law on nationality, amended in accordance with the 2005 constitution, provides that a child whose mother is Sudanese, but not his father, has the right to acquire Sudanese nationality. The law on armed forces, adopted recently by parliament, contains provisions on the protection of children and civilians during armed conflict, in accordance with the norms set forth in international instruments ratified by the Sudan.

With regard to measures undertaken in our country, we should like to mention the following. Our sectoral plans contain the targets and procedures set out in "A world fit for children" and the Millennium Declaration. We have created a commission comprising Government representatives and civil society, UNICEF and the secretariat for the care of children, to help harmonize national legislation with international agreements on the rights of the child. We have prepared a national plan against violence against children, drafted a national plan on street children that seeks to reintegrate them into society, implemented a programme of caring for such children by assisting in their adoption and created a Commission on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, in accordance with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which covers children affected by armed conflict. The Commission has started work, in cooperation with the Government and UNICEF, and with other programmes and projects.

In addition, many programmes and projects in the areas of health and education have been successfully implemented. In the field of health, we have seen considerable advances between 2002 and 2006. In the field of education, the enrolment rate of boys and girls has increased at all levels of education, from preschool through secondary education.

In the area of protecting children, especially those who work in camel racings and those who live in the street, we have created high-level commissions to

counter the problem and, in cooperation with the Arab Council on Children and Development, have undertaken a project to combat the phenomenon altogether.

I have described the progress that has been achieved by Sudan as part of the Declaration and Plan of Action entitled "A world fit for children". Here, we would like to thank all organizations and United Nations funds that have contributed to the implementation of these projects. It is our hope that our partnership, and that of other States, with United Nations agencies will be strengthened in order that we may redouble our efforts to achieve objectives that will guarantee a bright future for children.

Finally, the attempt by Zoe's Ark to kidnap children in Darfur was a clear violation of international humanitarian law as well as of the principles underlying the actions of humanitarian organizations active on behalf of children. Such organizations must not depart from their noble objectives, which are to provide assistance to people, rather than kidnap them for the purposes of trafficking. Such behaviour should be clearly condemned, and a decision that will guarantee the rights of the children concerned as well as their return to their families should be taken. Indeed, necessary steps should be taken against that organization.

**The Acting President:** I give the floor now to Her Excellency Ms. Ndeye Lissa Diop Ndiaye, Director of the Protection of the Rights of the Child of Senegal.

**Ms. Ndiaye (Senegal) (spoke in French):** I should like first to join previous speakers in condemning the bombing that occurred yesterday in Algiers. On this occasion, on behalf of the Government and the people of Senegal, I would like to convey to the Algerian people and to the United Nations system as a whole our most heartfelt condolences.

The delegation of Senegal would like to thank the presidency for holding this High-level Commemorative Plenary Meeting within the context of the sixty-second session of the General Assembly to follow up on the text that emerged from the special session on children (see resolution S/27-2, annex). This initiative is particularly felicitous because the many challenges facing our ever-changing world have an impact on all levels of society, particularly on the most vulnerable, namely children. For that reason, five years after the

convening in 2002 of the special session of the General Assembly on children, it is appropriate to draw up an interim balance sheet to assess the progress made and to measure the depth of our commitments by the yardstick of the actions we have taken.

On this occasion, Senegal, through its President, His Excellency Abdoulaye Wade, together with other Nations, agreed to implement the Plan of Action contained in the document entitled "A world fit for children". I should also like to share with participants some of the points of progress that my country has made in this context, despite the many constraints stemming from its insufficient economic resources.

In each of the priority areas in the Declaration and Plan of Action of "A world fit for children", my country has endeavoured, pursuant to its commitments, to bring fitting solutions to problems in order to provide all children with a high quality education, protect them from mistreatment and to combat HIV/AIDS, with a view to providing them with a healthy life.

In this regard, in addition to the legal reforms that have been initiated to combat all forms of violence against children, particularly early marriage and female genital mutilation, Senegal has undertaken activities with a view to significantly improving the well-being of that particularly vulnerable part of society, in order to guarantee better protection of its rights.

In this respect, the bold policies of my country, based upon the raising of awareness and information, have made it possible to achieve a meaningful improvement in the issuance of birth certificates for children, which increased from 60.9 per cent in 2000 to 78.5 per cent in 2004, thereby making it possible to maintain more accurate statistics and to develop better-targeted actions. This approach by the Senegalese Government has also made it possible to raise the marriageable age of girls and to dramatically reduce the practice of female circumcision, which has been punishable under Senegalese law since 27 February 1999.

In other areas, such as combating child labour or the trafficking of children, Senegal has made considerable progress and is trying to consolidate that progress with the assistance of various partners in a number of projects and programmes, such as the project to combat trafficking and the worst forms of child labour, and the national framework plan that is

currently being adopted, which constitutes a framework for our policies.

Concerning education, Senegal has performed remarkably well between the years 2000 and 2005, as the proportion of children 3 to 5 years of age in child care centres has increased from 8.1 per cent to 20.4 per cent. In elementary school, the gross rate of school enrolment, which measures the capability of the educational system to serve school-age children, has risen considerably between 2000 and 2005. At the same time, in 2005, Senegal adopted a law that has made school attendance compulsory up to the age of 16, and that has reduced the school dropout rate. This progress, thanks to the strengthening and improvement of school infrastructure, and to the creation of the National Agency of Homes for Infants, which is responsible for creating a network of all types of structures for caring for infants and toddlers, has made it possible for Senegal to take a firm step towards the goal of education for all.

Additionally, the Government has worked together with partners such as World Food Programme and UNICEF on key projects, including the improvement of water supply and sanitation; this has improved the quality of education and reduced the school dropout rate.

With regard to health, we should like to point out that there has been a net improvement in under-five survival, the result of a considerable reduction in infant mortality, which fell from 145.3 per 1,000 live births in 2000 to 121 per 1,000 live births in 2005, and of a reduction in neonatal infant mortality. This downward trend in mortality is, without a doubt, a result of the improvement of vaccination coverage for children. In 2005, nearly 59 per cent of children aged from 12 to 23 months received all of their vaccines, whereas the figure for 2000 was only 42 per cent.

With regard to combating HIV/AIDS, the fourth priority area in the Plan of Action, one can note the success that has been recorded in Senegal over more than a decade, marked by the low prevalence of HIV in the general population, estimated at 0.7 per cent in 2005. That tally aligns well with the primary objective of the National Multi-Sector AIDS Programme, which is to keep the general prevalence levels below 3 per cent through the end of the implementation of the national strategic action plan for 2002-2006.

This progress has been possible because of a holistic policy centred on productive partnerships with a variety of actors and a decentralized approach to protecting the rights of the child. The development of partnerships has been one of the guiding strategies of the implementation of the Plan of Action in “A world fit for children” and has made it possible to attain significant results, although much still remains to be done.

Our success in launching the national activities of the world movement “Say Yes for Children” and the encouraging results relating of the strategy for reducing infant and child mortality would not have been possible without dynamic partnerships, which have mobilized and sensitized all sectors of Senegalese society, including parliamentarians, the private sector, children, the religious sector, women’s associations, human rights organizations, artists, non-governmental organizations and the media. Those actors have all worked to improve the situation of children.

Pooling the strengths and the comparative advantages of many actors and institutions, through careful distribution of tasks and costs, permits better planning, coordination and follow-up on the optimal implementation of activities promoting the survival, protection and development of children. The other significant aspect of Senegal’s strategy, a decentralized approach to ensure the survival of children, has enabled us to better identify barriers to accessing services and to target disadvantaged populations. Local actors have participated in improving the results and in making them permanent. This has made it possible to decentralize education and health services, as envisaged by the Government in 2007.

Hence, despite the existence of some difficulties in gathering of data for better follow-up, in strengthening institutional and community capacity and in pursuing legal reform, Senegal has resolutely begun to implement the Plan of Action of “A world fit for children” by the end of the decade.

I wish to conclude by reaffirming Senegal’s full support for the call issued at the second Pan-African Forum on Children, held in Cairo in November, that activities be undertaken more rapidly to ensure survival, development, participation and protection of children.

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Houngbedji Adjai, Director for

Children and Adolescents of the Ministry of Family and Children of Benin.

**Mr. Adjai** (Benin) (*spoke in French*): Allow me, on behalf of my Government and the people of Benin, to express my profound condolences to the Algerian people and to the United Nations regarding the attack which occurred in Algeria on Tuesday, 11 December.

The delegation of Benin associates itself fully with the statement made by Ms. Alima Mahama, Minister of Women's and Children's Affairs of Ghana, on behalf of the African Union.

The midterm review of the Programme of Action entitled "A world fit for children" (see resolution S-27/2, annex) provides an opportunity for my Government and the rest of the international community to realize that we have a considerable way to go to achieve the objectives of the Programme of Action, despite the efforts that have already been made.

My delegation would like to congratulate the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, on his excellent report (A/62/259), in which he acknowledges that even if progress maintains its current pace, no country, particularly any developing country, is likely to achieve any of the objectives according to the established timetable. This finding is particularly true of the situation of Benin.

Numerous studies, actions and programmes have been initiated in recent years by the State of Benin in order to bring national legislation into line with ratified international instruments. The ensuing effects were not long in coming. For example, the codes on individuals and on the family were adopted, and laws on trafficking in children, female genital mutilation, care for persons affected by or infected with HIV/AIDS and social violence against children have all been promulgated. A number of studies have been carried out to benefit the children of Benin.

For the Government of Benin, what has to be done, first and foremost, is to ensure life for children as the primary catalyst for further action. In this connection, notable efforts have been made to ensure that all children start life properly and grow up and develop in an environment which enables them to develop their potential for acceptance, peace, security and dignity.

In connection with priority diseases — namely HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis — Benin in August of 2005 organized a telethon to gather funds to acquire medicated mosquito nets to be distributed to pregnant women and mothers of children aged 5 years or younger. These funds have also helped to acquire antiretroviral treatment, which has been made available free to persons living with HIV/AIDS.

Regarding the right to education, Benin has drawn up a 10-year development plan. The education budget has risen to 35 per cent of the national budget in 2007 with the introduction of free primary education, and we have continued the "girl for girl" initiative in rural areas with the support of our strategic partners: the World Food Programme and UNICEF. Regarding the right to protection, particular emphasis has been placed on combating trafficking in children and violence against them. Finally, regarding the participation of children in decision-making processes, Benin, since 2005, has had a children's parliament, which is regularly involved in all decisions that affect children.

But despite these efforts, the national context is marked by violations of children's rights through economic exploitation, trafficking and violence in all its forms, including ritual infanticide. A number of challenges obviously still need to be met. Poverty continues to be an obstacle to protecting the rights and promoting the well-being of children. The infant mortality rate remains high.

*Mr. Hannesson (Iceland), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

In the light of that state of affairs, the challenge is first to establish a strategic and political framework to strengthen the Government's current capacity, make it more effective and influential with respect to the implementation of the conventions promoting the rights of children, create synergy between the various cells and coordinating committees, allocate resources and target them more strategically, and streamline interaction between the partners and stakeholders involved.

Benin's policy and national strategy document for the protection of children and its five-year programme, which were adopted on 6 and 7 November 2007, reflect the political resolve of the Government of Mr. Boni Yayi to commit itself further to defending the rights of children by respecting the provisions of conventions

ratified by Benin. That dual validation will undoubtedly help to establish a genuine policy for the protection of children that is integrated, coordinated and based on an intersectoral approach, including the dimensions of prevention, rehabilitation and reintegration of Benin's vulnerable children.

Similarly, the growth strategy document for the reduction of poverty drawn up by Benin in the framework of the Millennium Development Goals devotes particular attention to the protection of children by identifying very precise targets to be attained in the next four years. It is therefore absolutely essential to accelerate the process so that we can achieve those various targets on schedule. The acceleration of the process will require above all that greater resources be made available to the programmes and policies relating to children. In that regard, the budget of Benin's Ministry of Health, which has stood at 8 per cent of the national budget, will be revised upwards to 15 per cent by 2010.

We should not lose sight of the fact that investing in children so as to protect, educate and care for them cannot remain an isolated activity among Benin's many needs in its fight against poverty. In other words, we must pursue the goals set in "A world fit for children" in harmony with the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals that seek to eradicate poverty by 2015. We must therefore undertake a set of high-priority, multidisciplinary and multisectoral actions, with the participation of all our technical, financial and social partners in order to ensure that the world of 2010, or at the very least of 2015, will be truly fit for children.

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to Mr. Majdi Ramadan, chairman of the delegation of Lebanon.

**Mr. Ramadan (Lebanon)** (*spoke in Arabic*): We wish to express our deep sorrow over the tragic event that struck our brethren in Algeria. We share in their grief over the terrorist acts that took place there and that also took the life of one Lebanese citizen.

(*spoke in English*)

Lebanon's commitment to promoting and protecting the rights of each child is unwavering. We are determined to respect the dignity and to secure the well-being of all children. Both our Government and our civil society acknowledge that the Convention on

the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocols thereto contain a comprehensive set of important international legal standards for the protection and well-being of children. Our commitment to creating a world fit for children rests on the principles of democracy, equality, peace and respect for human life that define our values as Lebanese society.

Children and the best interests of the child always come first. Lebanon this year identified as a priority national planning for preventing and responding to violence against children. In some cases, stand-alone plans specifically dealing with violence against children are being developed. In 2006, a mechanism was put in place for the formulation of an action plan on the situation of children, with the participation of representatives of the Government and civil society.

In Lebanon, approximately 95 per cent of the population, including children, has access to basic health services. However, findings reveal that neither the infant mortality rate nor the under-five mortality rate has shown any significant improvement since 1996. The national health system, which is driven primarily by the private sector, tends to promote curative rather than preventive care. My Government has been focusing on developing more effective reproductive health information systems as a means of improving coordination and strengthening decentralization. The national reproductive health programme emphasizes the provision of quality reproductive health services, including emergency obstetric care, within primary health-care systems. In view of regional disparities within the country in key reproductive health indicators, the programme also supports 10 Centres of Excellence for referral services, while focusing on underserved areas.

Girls and boys are born free and equal in dignity and rights in Lebanon. No form of discrimination affecting children exists in legal processes. Lebanon has improved the gathering and analysis of data on children, as well as access to the existing legal framework vis-à-vis international human rights norms and standards relating to children. Lebanon has provided information on studies undertaken on the situation of children in institutions and in alternative care.

Lebanon's educated children are one of its best-known attributes. All girls and boys have access to complete primary and secondary education that is free

and of comparatively very good quality. No gender disparities exist in primary and secondary education.

Lebanon strives to protect its children against acts of violence, abuse, exploitation and discrimination. Some legal reform efforts in Lebanon have been comprehensive in their coverage of violence against children, while others have focused on specific forms of violence, settings or sectors, such as juvenile justice. Lebanon has established a special committee to consider amending the juvenile justice laws, including raising the age of criminal responsibility.

In Lebanon, efforts to promote non-violent and human rights values include large-scale Government and non-governmental-led public awareness-raising campaigns. A national campaign for the protection of children from violence, entitled "Their rights are our duties", was launched last year. Those efforts have also covered such issues as replacing corporal punishment with positive non-violent forms of discipline. Many television programmes on violence against children have been broadcast.

Lebanon, at the current session of the General Assembly, has played a leading role in the efforts to create an office of special representative of the Secretary-General on violence against children, based on the in-depth study of Mr. Paulo Sergio Pinheiro. Lebanon highly appreciates the remarkable work of Mr. Pinheiro. We are glad to note the comprehensiveness of the mandate of the new office. We are now certain that the vulnerable group of children under occupation is included in the mandate of the new office and that of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children in Armed Conflict, leaving no child behind. Children must be protected from the horrors of armed conflict, including foreign occupation, in accordance with the provisions of international humanitarian law.

Lebanon understands that its children are resourceful citizens capable of helping build a better future for all. Despite some social and traditional limitations, the Lebanese Government respects the right of children to express themselves and to participate, where appropriate, in matters affecting them, in accordance with their age and maturity. Several initiatives have been undertaken in Lebanon aiming at offering forums for children to freely express their views. In 1996, Lebanon saw the establishment of the first children's parliament, whereby children

representing various regions discussed their priorities with the Speaker of the House.

Initiatives to integrate children's rights and participation in school curriculums have been established, but their impact has not been assessed yet. Workshops aimed at schoolteachers and child caregivers within various settings have been organized. Two training manuals on children's rights and children's participation have been developed at the national level and used on various occasions. Those initiatives, in addition to the national plan of action that was formulated this year by the Higher Council of Motherhood and Childhood to promote children's participation, have contributed to advocacy efforts by making children's participation a main issue on the public agenda. In its concluding observations on the third national report on the status of children in Lebanon, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child welcomed Lebanese efforts to promote the rights of children to freely express their views.

Above and beyond all the dangers affecting Lebanese children, the biggest risk to the lives of children in South Lebanon is from unexploded ordnance, which will take months if not years to clear. That directly harms our children. Since the cessation of hostilities, hundreds have been killed or wounded by unexploded bombs, mostly submunitions that landed indiscriminately in civilian areas. One of the latest victims was a six-year-old boy, Ali Dakdouk, from the South of Lebanon. Former Secretary-General Kofi Annan said that "even if there is only one mine in the field, it is the kind of weapon that, long after the conflict, lies there silently waiting to maim and kill". Unfortunately, we have over a million cluster bombs in the field.

Lebanon condemns the killing of children of all races, denominations and nationalities, be they Arab or Israeli, and in that respect the killing of all civilians. We look forward to the day when children in our rejoin, be they in Lebanon, Palestine or Israel, can live together in peace and security, in which they can grow, learn and, most importantly, play.

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Paul Kavanagh, chairman of the delegation of Ireland.

**Mr. Kavanagh (Ireland):** At the outset, let me restate from this rostrum Ireland's strong condemnation of the terrorist attacks that have taken

place in Algiers — a condemnation which was issued yesterday on behalf of the Irish Government and people by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Dermot Ahern. This is a time to stand in solidarity with the Government and people of Algeria and, of course, with the offices and staff members of the United Nations system who were deliberately targeted by the perpetrators with the objective of inflicting as many casualties as possible. Our heartfelt sympathy and support go to the survivors of the attacks and to the families, colleagues and friends of all of the victims.

Ireland endorses the remarks made earlier today on behalf of the European Union by the representative of Portugal. Ireland also joins with others in acknowledging and commending the role of UNICEF in organizing this Commemorative Meeting, which recalls the 2002 special session of the General Assembly on children. We salute the work of the Executive Director Anne Veneman and her colleagues. UNICEF remains the principal vehicle by which the United Nations addresses the rights and interests of children, and we wish to see that role continue into the future.

This Commemorative Meeting is an opportunity to reaffirm our commitments to the full implementation of the 2002 Declaration and Plan of Action contained in “A world fit for children”, as well as to the fulfilment of obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We have come a long way since the year 1990, when the then Executive Director of UNICEF, the inspirational Jim Grant, persuaded — and he had to persuade — Member States to hold the first World Summit on Children. The vital role of civil society, including non-governmental organizations, also needs to be fully recognized.

Since 2002, we have seen progress made in the realization of children’s rights and in the fulfilment of many of the promises that States made here in 2002. The Secretary-General’s report on the goals of “A world fit for children” illustrates progress in reducing child and maternal mortality and malnutrition, ensuring universal primary education, protecting children against abuse, exploitation and violence, and combating HIV/AIDS. The Convention on the Rights of the Child has also been an inspiring framework within which States Members of the United Nations

have undertaken institutional and legislative initiatives to further secure children’s rights.

In Ireland, a national children’s strategy entitled “Our Children — Their Lives” was published in 2000. The strategy, rooted in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, is a cross-sectoral response to improving children’s lives. It was developed with the assistance of non-governmental organizations. Our national strategy centres on young people and is family- and community-oriented. It is also designed to be equitable in terms of access, inclusive in terms of recognizing diversity in young people’s experiences, and action-oriented by focusing on achieving specified results in publicly funded programmes. Under the national strategy, the Irish National Children’s Office was established to drive implementation forward and better to ensure coordination of services for children.

In 2002, an Office of the Ombudsman for Children was established under an act of Parliament, the Ombudsman for Children Act. The Office works on behalf of all children under 18 years of age in Ireland. Its principal functions are independently to handle complaints, to carry out policy research, and to foster communication and participation among children. It provides invaluable advice to the Irish Government on policies towards children and young people. The Office of the Ombudsman for Children is an independent and valuable institution which monitors and promotes the rights and welfare of children. I acknowledge the presence here this evening of the Irish Ombudsman for Children, Ms. Emily Logan.

Ireland supports the establishment of such institutions worldwide. In that context, we also particularly welcome the call in the draft resolution on the promotion and protection of the rights of children, recently adopted by the Third Committee, for States to establish and strengthen national bodies for the promotion and protection of those rights, such as an independent ombudsman for children.

In addition, under the national children’s strategy, the Irish Government established the Office of the Minister for Children in December 2005. It brings greater coherence to policymaking in relation to services for children and young people. The Minister for Children attends all meetings of the Government or cabinet.

It is anticipated that Ireland will hold a popular referendum in 2008 that will seek to enshrine

principles relating to the rights of the child in the Irish Constitution. In that regard, the Minister for Children has initiated a process of consultation and discussion with all relevant interest groups in the country.

In acknowledging the progress that we have all made since 2002, we must also accept that significant challenges remain. Many children remain affected by HIV/AIDS and are victims of discrimination, poverty, exclusion, exploitation, violence and abuse. Millions of children continue to die from preventable causes, including child labour and involvement in hazardous work in armed conflicts.

In that context, we welcome the progress achieved by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, and look forward to the continuation of her mandate in the future. We also welcome the decision taken recently in the Third Committee to request the Secretary-General to appoint a special representative on violence against children, who could be an effective global advocate for the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against children.

In relation to HIV/AIDS, Ireland has accepted an invitation from UNICEF to co-host, in Dublin next year, the Global Partners Forum on Children Affected by HIV/AIDS. The draft resolution on the promotion and protection of the rights of children identifies a number of areas where children's needs remain unfulfilled and greater protection is required.

Ireland shares the view that the protection of children in relation to the use of the Internet and other information and communications technologies is of growing importance and urgency. Those new technological advances can be enormously beneficial in providing new opportunities, particularly educational opportunities, for children. It is vital to ensure, however, that, in the use of those new technologies, the rights of children, including the right to be protected from sexual abuse and exploitation, are fully respected and guaranteed.

Ireland, by way of its own domestic initiatives, by supporting multilateral action and through its overseas aid programme, will remain actively committed to advancing the rights of the child and to addressing the vulnerabilities that children face on a global scale. We agree fully with the General Assembly President's call for the nations represented here to

deliver on the promises that we have all made to the children of our own countries and of the world.

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to the chairman of the delegation of Yemen, Mr. Abdullah M. Alsaidi, and Ms. Nada Al Shaka, youth delegate of Yemen.

**Mr. Alsaidi (Yemen) (spoke in Arabic):** I would like at the outset to thank the presidency most sincerely for holding this Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting Devoted to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children. I would also like to thank all those who participated in the preparations for this Meeting.

Our delegation would also like to express its sincere condolences to the Government and the people of Algeria after the terrorist attack yesterday. I proclaim our solidarity with our brotherly country Algeria in its struggle against the forces of terrorism.

The special session on children, which took place from 8 to 10 May 2002, together with its final document, entitled "A world fit for children" (resolution S/27-2, annex), constitute an important event in which Member States committed themselves to working to promote the rights of children and to secure their well-being. But results since that meeting have not been commensurate with the hopes and expectations that were raised there.

That is why this Meeting is very important, providing as it does an opportunity for us to draw up a balance sheet of the progress made, define challenges and work to find appropriate solutions. My country would like to reaffirm its commitment to attaining positive results at this meeting. Yemen is convinced that the rights of the child are an integral part of the teachings of Islam, and we believe that children are the future generation and the builders of a bright tomorrow.

Yemen has done pioneering work in this connection, as it was one of the first countries to accede to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in May 1991, as well as its two Optional Protocols. Yemen has also ratified a series of international conventions, including the International Labour Organization Conventions No. 138 concerning the minimum age for admission to employment and No. 182 on the worst forms of child labour.

We have also worked to ensure that our international commitments are reflected in national legislation. Our constitution contains principles and provisions guaranteeing the rights of the child. Relevant laws have been promulgated in this connection, including Law No. 45, on the rights of the child, of 2002, and Law No. 24, of 1991, on delinquency. We have also revised other laws to ensure that they include provisions to promote and protect the rights of children. In the same vein, the Parliament of Yemen is currently studying a series of amendments of certain laws to ensure greater cohesiveness and complementarity and to reflect Yemen's international commitments on the rights of children.

Above and beyond legislative activity, institutional machinery has been devised to transform legislation into concrete action. A Supreme Council on the Mother and the Child has been established, as has a Ministry of Human Rights, both of which devote particular attention to the rights of the child. Several departments have also been established in our institutions and ministries for that purpose.

The issue of children has had pride of place in all strategies and national development plans adopted during the last decade, and a law was adopted to include children's issues within the context of other questions. We are preparing special strategies to address the problems of the mother, the child and youth that emphasize the quality of life of children. Last June, Yemen launched a national plan of action for children and youth and started work on a Superior Council for Children and Youth. This approach reflects our determination to pursue our efforts to secure and guarantee the rights of the child.

I now give the floor to Ms. Nada Al Shaka, President of the Parliament of Children of Yemen.

**Ms. Al Shaka** (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): We are convinced of the importance of our work, so my country, together with civil society organizations, is working to ensure the optimal protection of the interests of children. We are doing pioneering work to ensure that the next generation is educated in the principles of democracy and freedom of expression and that children's issues are discussed openly and freely. Some ministers of Yemen have already become involved and asked questions relating to children in Yemen.

Our delegation highly appreciates the efforts of our international partners, UNICEF being in the forefront. Its work improves the situation of children and guarantees a happy youth. We emphasize the fact that national and international efforts need to be redoubled with a view to improving the living conditions of children throughout the world.

Arab children under Israeli occupation are suffering from poverty, displacement, killing, blockades and deprivation of their rights. My country condemns all Israeli practices that violate those rights and calls upon the international community to shoulder its responsibilities with a view to putting an end to that occupation, thereby enabling the Palestinian child to put down the stone and live in peace.

**The Acting President:** I now call upon Mr. Adel Alakhder, chairman of the delegation of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

**Mr. Alakhder** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya): First of all, before I deliver my country's statement, allow me to say at the outset that Libya firmly condemns the horrible terrorist attack that took place yesterday in Algeria. Libya's leadership and peoples express and convey their sentiments and deep condolences to the victims of that horrible attack.

Allow me now to deliver my country's statement, by the help of God, in my mother tongue, the Arabic language.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

My country attaches primary importance to children and their just cause. We in Libya have put in place policies to provide childcare and protect the rights of children. In that connection, we have set up kindergartens and child and mother centres, in order to provide timely health care and immunizations. We have also established a High Committee on Children, which is entrusted with elaborating programmes and plans to promote child health and welfare.

My country is party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two Optional Protocols dealing with the involvement of children in armed conflicts and with the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. Although the Convention has the most ratifications of any international human rights instrument, the world continues to witness flagrant violations of children's rights and children continue to be subjected to

degrading practices. More than a million children were killed over the past decade. Six million children have been permanently disabled because of their involvement in armed conflict. Tens of thousands of girls are subject to rape, violence, sexual exploitation and harassment.

More than 250,000 children are forcibly conscripted and become child soldiers in armed conflicts. As mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General presented to the Security Council on 20 November (S/2007/643), since 2003, over 14 million children have been coerced into fleeing their countries and have become subject to conscription as child soldiers. We therefore call upon the international community to work for the return of those displaced children to their countries and families, lest they be exploited in such a heinous fashion.

In that connection, we wish to highlight the serious practices that were recently disclosed in Chad. We condemn those practices and call on the United Nations to express its solidarity with the authorities in Chad in their efforts to punish the criminals who exploit the misery of children and traffic in them under the cover of charitable acts.

My delegation condemns the inhuman and degrading treatment of children by policemen. Studies and reports on children show that there has been an increase in those heinous acts. We also condemn child labour, through which children are deprived of education and forced into dangerous jobs and activities that are harmful to their health and sometimes claim their lives. In that respect, States should be accountable to the international community and should impose most severe punishment on criminals in order to save the lives of the many children who fall victim to them.

Libya also condemns the phenomenon of street children, which is prevalent in many countries. That phenomenon creates a fertile environment for juvenile delinquency, where children are exploited by criminal gangs and forced to commit crimes such as robbery, prostitution and panhandling. We therefore call on the international community to intensify its efforts, within the framework of the United Nations and organizations that care for children, as well as civil society institutions, to combat and eliminate that phenomenon and to provide suitable shelter, education and rehabilitation to street children.

My delegation expresses its grave concern with regard to the suffering of children whose countries are under the yoke of foreign occupation. In that connection, we mention in particular the suffering of the children in the occupied Palestinian territories, who are subject to oppression, intimidation, displacement and degrading treatment by the occupation army. We also wish to highlight the suffering, and harsh and inhumane treatment of Palestinian child prisoners in Israeli jails and the violence they are subjected to.

Further, we stress the suffering of African children who are forcibly involved in armed conflicts. African children are all too vulnerable to deadly diseases such as AIDS and malaria, in addition to being vulnerable to rape, violence, sexual exploitation and harassment. We therefore call upon the United Nations and its specialized agencies to promote and support programmes for children in Africa and to address all the issues related to children, such as discrimination and misguided and harmful traditions and practices, and to face up to the challenges of armed conflict. That subject should be followed up seriously and in coordination with African Union institutions and UNICEF.

We are imbued with the hope that States will cooperate to improve children's conditions and to promote their happiness and welfare in order to achieve, finally, a world that is truly fit for children, a world where peace is prevalent, a world that preserves the innocence of children and furthers the advancement of men and women and future generations.

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mohammad Khazaee, chairman of the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

**Mr. Khazaee** (Islamic Republic of Iran): Allow me at the outset to express our profound condolences to the Government and the people of Algeria on the tragic loss of the lives of many innocent people as a result of the act of terrorism committed in Algiers on 11 December 2007. We strongly condemn that vicious act of terrorism, which caused numerous deaths and injuries among the people of Algeria and also among United Nations staff, and we call for the apprehension and punishment of the perpetrators. We share this moment of grief and sorrow with the families of the victims.

At the historic twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly, held in May 2002, Member

States reiterated their commitment to act in the best interests of the child, through the adoption of a document entitled "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex). The four major goal areas of the special session on children, as outlined in the outcome document, paid particular attention to health, education, protection against abuse and exploitation and combating HIV/AIDS, and strongly reinforced the Millennium Development Goals. Since then, there has been notable progress in realizing the aforementioned goals. Yet challenges persist and much more needs to be done, particularly in areas where more assistance is needed from the international community.

At the special session, the promotion of healthy lives for children ranked first among the four goal areas. However, child deaths are still at an alarming level. The link between child deaths and poverty is indisputable, and under-five mortality rates are typically much higher among poorer households. Hence, securing healthy lives for children depends on more effective implementation of poverty eradication programmes and on the provision of additional international aid and investment.

Despite the fact that, at the special session, Governments reaffirmed their vow to break the cycle of poverty within a single generation, extreme poverty continues unabated in practice. We share the concern of the Secretary-General, as expressed in his report to the General Assembly at its current session:

"Though a significant advance, 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)

To protect the rights of children and to give them the best possible start in life, many Governments, as well as international institutions, need to step up the level of their investment in various aspects of children's rights.

The situation of unprotected children in war and under foreign occupation has worsened since 2002. More than 1.5 billion children, living in 42 countries, have been affected by violence and conflict. It is estimated that there are 14.2 million refugees worldwide, of whom 41 per cent are believed to be children. Children are the initial victims of war, occupation and armed conflict. Thus, a world fit for

children must be a world free from aggression, occupation and armed conflict. We wish to emphasize the call to adopt effective measures for the protection of children under foreign occupation, as echoed in the outcome document.

The human rights of children are not fully protected unless the family foundation to which they belong is protected and supported. The role of the family in protecting children's human rights is of great importance. The family is the basic unit of society and, as such, should be strengthened. Therefore, it is entitled to receive proper protection and support. The primary responsibility for the protection, upbringing and development of children rests with the family.

Since the special session on children, the Islamic Republic of Iran has taken a number of steps in line with the outcome document. In 2005, Iran's second periodic report was considered by the Committee on the Rights of the Child. The Committee, inter alia, welcomed article 30 of the Iranian constitution, which provides for free education for all citizens up to secondary school, and expressed appreciation for the fact that more than 90 per cent of Iranian children aged 6 to 10 have access to primary education. In addition, the Committee welcomed Iran's ratification in 2002 of International Labour Organization Convention No. 182, concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour. Furthermore, in 2007 the Islamic Republic of Iran acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

In the area of promoting healthy lives for children, Iran has been able to extend preventive public health services by establishing an extensive primary health-care network. As a result, child and maternal mortality rates have fallen significantly, and life expectancy at birth has risen remarkably. The infant mortality and under-five mortality rates have approached the level of total elimination.

Immunization coverage is more than 90 per cent, and polio has been almost eliminated. More than 85 per cent of the population has access to health services, and 90 per cent of births are attended by trained health personnel. In recent years, the Bureau of Children, in the Ministry of Health and Medical Education, has initiated programmes aimed at planning and conducting activities on child care, vaccination and

combating specific childhood diseases and diseases prevalent in childhood. Other bureaus, such as the Bureau of Nutrition and School Health, are also involved in developing policies and taking the steps necessary to combat child malnutrition.

In the field of quality education, one of the areas specified at the special session, Iran has embarked on pre-elementary school training involving the training of children 3 to 6 years old. These programmes are being implemented at pre-elementary school centres in both urban and rural areas. Moreover, the establishment of private pre-elementary school centres in cities and villages has been encouraged by the Government in recent years. To that end, the Government has provided interest-free loans to the private sector, using public resources.

I should like to conclude my statement by expressing our earnest hope that, five years after the adoption of "A world fit for children", this Commemorative Meeting of the General Assembly will boost the efforts of all members of this body to achieve the goals identified in that outcome document.

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Alexei Tulbure, chairman of the delegation of Moldova.

**Mr. Tulbure (Moldova):** In 2002, the General Assembly's special session on children culminated in the adoption of the outcome document entitled "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex). More than two years of consensus-building resulted in a strong future-oriented agenda focused on four key priorities, namely, promoting healthy lives, providing quality education for all, protecting children against abuse, exploitation and violence, and combating HIV/AIDS.

The document's Declaration committed leaders to completing the unfinished agenda of the 1990 World Summit for Children and to achieving other goals and objectives, in particular those of the Millennium Declaration. It reaffirmed leaders' obligation to promote and protect the rights of each child, acknowledging the legal standards set by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols.

The Plan of Action set out three essential outcomes, namely, the best possible start in life for children; access to a quality basic education, including

free and compulsory primary education; and ample opportunity for children and adolescents to develop their individual capacities. There were strong calls to support families, to eliminate discrimination and to tackle poverty. A wide range of actors and partners were called upon to play active roles, including children themselves, parents, families and other caregivers, local governments, parliamentarians, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, religious, spiritual, cultural and indigenous leaders, the mass media, regional and international organizations and people who work with children.

The Plan of Action also reaffirmed previous goals and targets relevant to children endorsed by world summits and conferences, including the Millennium Summit. It listed 21 goals for children in the four priority areas of action, goals considered a vital step towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals adopted in 2000 by world leaders at the Millennium Summit. To achieve those goals and targets, "A world fit for children" called for the mobilization and allocation of new and additional resources at both the national and international levels.

Let me briefly inform the Assembly about some measures Moldova has undertaken nationally to make the world indeed fit for children.

With regard to promoting healthy lives, a number of programmes and strategies have been implemented to improve basic health care. The national programme to promote quality perinatal services for 2003-2007 aims at reducing the rate of maternal, perinatal and early neonatal mortality by 30 per cent, while also reducing the rate of stillbirth from 7.2 to 5.0 per 1,000. The programme establishes various activities to increase access to quality perinatal services.

In 2006, a national health policy was developed which establishes priorities for 15 years to improve health and to reduce the inequalities between social groups and regions. Special emphasis is placed on ensuring a healthy start in life and on maintaining and strengthening the health of the younger generation.

A national reproductive health strategy, approved in 2005, makes the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents and young people a priority. A national concept on youth-friendly health services was approved in 2005 to offer better health and protection for adolescents and the development of youth-friendly health services was initiated nationally by UNICEF in

2001. By the end of 2006, 12 youth-friendly health centres were functioning in Moldova.

With regard to providing quality education, one major step taken by the Government during the past five years was the development of a national strategy for education for all to provide all children access to quality education. It includes special provisions for children with learning difficulties. Based on that strategy, the action plan on education for all was developed for the period 2004 to 2008. It includes four basic components, namely, early education and development, access to basic quality education, education and development for children with difficulties, and non-formal education. The actions planned in each component comply with legal and institutional frameworks and are appropriate for the human and teaching resources and community-based services available.

In addition, Moldova pays special attention to computerization of the educational system, vocational, secondary and post-secondary education, and higher and post-graduate education. Other projects include the gifted children programme, which provides financial support to general secondary students from poor families and rural areas; the presidential programme entitled SALT, which provided information and communication technologies during the period 2004 to 2006, including computers and Internet connections; and the national Moldovan village programme, which also covers a range of actions to improve rural school environments.

Following the 2002 special session on children, the Government set out explicit priorities for reforming the system for protecting children. A child protection policy was developed through the national strategy on child and family protection approved in 2003. The strategy addresses the decreasing role of the family in children's development and education. It includes a list of categories of children who are traditionally disadvantaged and in difficulty and need special protection. The strategy establishes a number of objectives that cover all aspects of child protection, starting with developing a policy and ending with bringing the legal framework into compliance with international standards, developing resources and institutional and human capacities, establishing a monitoring mechanism and developing family and community capacities to help children and to prevent

institutionalization and the risk of becoming a child in difficulty.

The national reproductive health strategy approved in 2005 aims at preventing and managing family violence and sexual abuse. It provides an adequate legislative framework for preventing family violence and sexual abuse, specific services for victims of violence, information and education on violence, social assistance for families that do not adequately fulfil their responsibilities towards children, programmes to psychologically rehabilitate child victims of, and witnesses to, violence and, lastly, counselling services for abusers.

Other major initiatives undertaken in Moldova recently include a national strategy and plan of action to reform the residential care system and a range of activities in selected districts to reduce the number of children living in institutions.

I should now like to provide some statistics. The total number of children in Moldova's boarding schools dropped 22 per cent during the period 2006-2007. I would also like to underline that only children who cannot remain in families or cannot be placed in family care will be placed in boarding schools in the future. Some boarding institutions are to be closed down — six of them very soon — with the others being converted into alternative child-care institutions.

A national plan of action to combat violence against children has been developed, and activities have recently started. Provisions for children were included in the law and national plan of action to combat trafficking. In addition, the law on preventing and combating violence in the family has been adopted by the Parliament.

A nationwide network of 1,135 professional community social workers — which is quite a large number for Moldova — was established by the Government in 2006. That will provide Moldova with a much-needed mechanism to ensure that children have access to cash benefits and that all excluded or vulnerable children are identified and have access to all basic services.

That comprehensive framework has contributed to the implementation of a series of activities by local stakeholders.

With regard to combating HIV/AIDS, in 2003 a study of young people's knowledge, attitudes and practices vis-à-vis health was carried out to assess factors that influence their health and development. It included access to services, evaluating young people's health behaviours, especially with regard to HIV, and developing recommendations to improve young people's health and development.

The national programme on the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections for the period 2006 to 2010 includes priority activities and strategies for protecting and ensuring children's best interests. They include developing infrastructure and building the capacities of health-care providers; social and palliative assistance for HIV/AIDS-infected children and their family members; voluntary confidential counselling and testing services for 100 per cent of the population requesting them, especially for persons aged 15 to 24; building capacities and extending information, education and communication activities for young people infected with HIV/AIDS; and cultivating a sense of responsibility for one's own health.

The activities included in the programme provide life skills for young people, both in and out of school. They are based on extracurricular programmes, including peer-to-peer education and outreach activities; a strategic communication framework for preventing HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections; information, education and communication campaigns for young people and for the population in general; strengthening information, education and communication and creating and supporting a national hotline available to all, including HIV-positive persons.

The role of UNICEF in developing and promoting those programmes in Moldova is very important. I would like to take this opportunity to commend the activities of that United Nations agency.

In conclusion, I would like to inform the Assembly that Moldova is active not only domestically but also internationally; we are active not only at the United Nations but also at the regional level. This is best illustrated by the fact that Moldova is participating in and supports the Council of Europe's programme on the theme "Building a Europe for and with children". That programme is effectively addressing issues such as sexual violence against children, trafficking, Internet violence, and violence in schools and in the family

home. The promotion of child-friendly justice, education about children's rights and positive parenting are among the objectives for 2008.

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to the Ambassador Daw Penjo, chairman of the delegation of Bhutan.

**Mr. Penjo (Bhutan):** At the outset, I would like to join previous speakers in strongly condemning the terrorist attacks in Algeria. We denounce terrorism in all its manifestations and offer our deepest condolences to the families of the victims of those heinous acts.

It is an honour for me to participate in the Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting Devoted to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session of the General Assembly on Children. My delegation is confident that under the President's wise and able leadership the deliberations of this Meeting will be productive and lead us to act to bring about a real difference in the lives of children throughout the world. I would like to assure the President of my delegation's full support in that regard.

Five years ago, the General Assembly committed itself to goals to improve the situation of children and young people. We are grateful to the Secretary-General for his report (A/62/259), which is highly instructive. The report observes that notable achievements have been made since 2002, but a lot more needs to be done to achieve the indicators set out in "A world fit for children" and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This Meeting is therefore a good opportunity to strengthen our collective efforts to deliver on the goals agreed upon in 2002.

"A world fit for children" identified four major goals, namely, promoting healthy lives, providing quality education, protection against abuse, exploitation and violence, and combating HIV/AIDS. For developing countries, and especially least developed countries, achieving those goals continues to be demanding. The Secretary-General has emphasized the need to address the severe financing gap that exists in achieving the targets of "A world fit for children" and the MDGs. While it is essential that developing countries retain responsibility for their own development, national action must continue to receive the strong support of the international community to address the issues that perpetuate child vulnerability.

Our leaders have reiterated time and again that the future of Bhutan lies in the hands of its children. It is with that in mind that Bhutan has consistently accorded priority to investing in a better future and creating a protective environment for our children. The health and education sectors continue to receive the highest share of our national budget every year. In the 2005 to 2006 period that accounted for 30 per cent of the total Government plan outlay.

Although our difficult mountainous terrain hinders the expansion of an effective primary health-care system, well-integrated primary health-care services have been established through basic health units. As a result, 90 per cent of Bhutan's population has access to basic health services. Infant mortality rates have declined substantially. Bhutan is on track in meeting Goal 4 of the MDGs, namely, to reduce the rate of child mortality before 2015.

All Bhutanese children enjoy free basic education from pre-primary to the tenth grade, which is regarded as an inalienable right by the Government. Bhutan is expected to achieve universal primary education well before 2015. In its drive to achieve universal primary education, the Royal Government has not lost sight of the equal importance of providing quality education. Towards that end, the Government is addressing quality issues such as those pertaining to classroom size, the repetition rate, curriculums and teacher quality.

Bhutan was among the first countries to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in 1990, without reservation. We have also signed the two Optional Protocols to the Convention. Bhutan is signatory to the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation Convention on Regional Arrangements for the Promotion of Child Welfare in South Asia. It has also ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

While a body of legislation already exists to protect the rights of Bhutanese children, those rights are further guaranteed under the draft constitution that is to be enacted in 2008. Article 7 of the draft constitution guarantees all children their fundamental rights. Article 9 provides for principles of State policy on good governance, the provision of free education, quality health care and the protection of children against all forms of discrimination and exploitation.

A national commission for women and children was established in 2004 to coordinate and monitor activities related to women and child rights and to provide a forum for receiving and investigating reports on violations of those rights. The commission is currently finalizing the national plan of action for gender, which will form the basis for ensuring a safer and more protective environment for women and children in the country.

In December 2006, the labour and employment act was enacted by the National Assembly, which provides for the protection of children against the worst form of child labour.

The number of detected cases of HIV/AIDS in Bhutan remains small, but that is no reason to be complacent. The Government is concerned by the exponential rate of increase in the number of cases identified. The increasing risks of HIV/AIDS and substance abuse among young people are taken seriously, and committees comprising multisectoral representatives have been established to draw up policies on HIV/AIDS and substance abuse, with particular focus on adolescents and children.

Globalization and modernization are presenting serious challenges to Bhutan's traditional assets, such as the natural environment, the cultural heritage, the social fabric and value systems. The Royal Government believes that these challenges can best be addressed by pursuing a development course that strives to balance material growth and spiritual nourishment. Based on this conviction, Bhutan has defined the goal and purpose of its development policy as achieving Gross National Happiness. We are convinced that nurturing children along this path of development will enhance their well-being and that of humanity.

Bhutan will continue with its efforts to achieve the goals of "A world fit for children" and the MDGs. However, as a least developed and landlocked country, it faces serious challenges in sustaining its children-oriented services and programmes. Our efforts have been greatly facilitated by our development partners, and we are hopeful that this support will continue.

In concluding, allow me to thank all the children who have actively participated throughout this event. They all have challenged us and informed us. I know that everyone here echoes the same sentiment in saying that we as a global family assure them all of our

collective efforts in making this world a better place for children.

**The Acting President:** I next give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Atoki Ileka, chairman of the delegation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

**Mr. Ileka** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): Allow me at the outset to join those delegations that have spoken before me to firmly condemn, on behalf of my Government, the terrorist attacks yesterday in Algiers. My delegation expresses its profound sympathy and deep condolences to the victims of those hateful attacks and their families, and to the Algerian Government and to the Secretary-General.

I wish to present, on behalf of the Congolese delegation, our warmest congratulations to the President for having successfully organized this world gathering for children. My delegation is very pleased to take part in this important Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting Devoted to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children, which undoubtedly is an additional milestone in the framework of actions undertaken by the international community to improve the status of children. May I express our full appreciation for what UNICEF has done to serve the children of the world.

My delegation wishes to endorse the statement made yesterday by the representative of Ghana (see A/62/PV.66), who clearly and eloquently expressed the position of the African Union on the item before us.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo believes that this meeting is an excellent opportunity to reaffirm international commitments to help promote and protect the rights of children. My country shares the view that the implementation of the declaration and action plan, as contained in the Outcome Document of the Assembly's special session on children, entitled "A world fit for children" (*resolution S-27/2*), is a major contribution in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and in protecting the rights of children and improving their status.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, an instrument almost universally accepted, and its Optional Protocols are the legal reference framework for strategies and action programmes for children. More than a decade after the adoption of the Convention and the world summit for children, we are

gratified to see that significant progress has been made with regard to promoting and protecting the rights of children. Nevertheless, it is true that considerable challenges still have to be met. They include the HIV/AIDS pandemic, armed conflicts, the phenomenon of child soldiers, child labour, trafficking in children, and above all, poverty, which all the leaders of the world, at the Millennium Summit, pledged to reduce by half by 2015.

Although the results with regard to commitments made in 1990 at the world summit are qualified because of the difficulties connected with the breach of the peace that has been going on for more than a decade, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has nevertheless invested in setting up mechanisms to serve children. My country has taken steps involving disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of vulnerable groups, including children in the fighting forces. I refer, *inter alia*, to the directive on the demobilization of child soldiers. There has been considerable success with that to date; more than 30,000 children have been disarmed, demobilized and reintegrated into their family environment. Beyond that progress, a number of other efforts have been undertaken in the field of health, particularly the vaccination of children up to age five against polio and measles, and also the education and awareness-raising of all school girls and free primary education, which is now a constitutional commitment in my country.

Nevertheless, in view of the tremendous tasks remaining, my country wishes to seek, from this very rostrum, increased and consistent assistance from its traditional partners so that all Congolese children can live in a world that is fit for them.

My delegation wishes to draw the attention of all members of the General Assembly to the indescribable suffering of children in the province of North Kivu — victims of the remnants of a pointless and senseless armed aggression. They too are entitled to a better life. In their name I am emboldened to ask for assistance, as part of members' international obligations.

Apart from the urgent need to end the current conflict, such assistance could specifically be directed to, first, developing a pilot programme for women and girls recruited by the armed forces and armed groups; secondly, making local communities aware of the way in which they regard women and young girls as victims and helping them in reintegration and in respecting

their rights; thirdly, providing them with access to health services; fourthly, taking into account the psycho-sexual aspects of sexual abuse and unwanted pregnancies; fifthly, taking into account the problem of orphans, unwanted children and children abandoned by their parents; and sixthly, providing education for young unmarried mothers and socio-economic activities especially for them, to ensure that they have a social life and the minimum income they need.

The growing number of children who are victims of all kinds of abuse reflects the breakdown of human values and the deterioration of cultural norms that have always preserved the family unit and the equilibrium of society. Therefore it is up to us to continue the efforts undertaken to protect all components of the family — especially children, who will be the women and men of tomorrow — by guaranteeing their full rights and dignity. Therefore it is important to develop a robust partnership at the national, regional and international levels to achieve objectives favouring the survival, protection and development of the child, including by emphasizing mobilization, research and action designed to create a protective and nurturing environment so that each child can have a good start in life, guaranteed quality primary education, protection against illnesses — particularly malaria and tuberculosis, polio and HIV/AIDS — and, finally, protection against violence, mistreatment, exploitation and discrimination.

In conclusion, my Government would like to appeal to all of our international, regional and subregional partners to help us implement our programme to promote and protect the rights of the child. There is a pressing need to renew international commitments to put children at the forefront of our efforts, in order not to waste the most precious human resource in the world and to build a stable and productive society. The future of the Democratic Republic of the Congo depends on the well-being of its children. To invest today in children is to ensure peace, stability, security, democracy and sustainable development for present and future generations.

**The Acting President:** I now call on to Ms. Olive Chikankheni, Principal Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child Development of Malawi.

**Ms. Chikankheni (Malawi):** I will never be more satisfied than I have been over the past two days, for here in this Assembly, I have listened to and shared

matters that are very dear to my heart: matters of child development.

Allow me to begin by conveying, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Malawi, my condolences to the people of the Republic of Algeria and to the United Nations on the tragic and untimely loss of life following the devastating bomb attacks that took place yesterday.

I would also like to thank the President of the Assembly for convening this important Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting Devoted to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children, held in May 2002. My delegation would also like to thank the Secretary-General, the President of the Economic and Social Council and the Executive Director of UNICEF for their informative introductory statements and their continued commitment to the betterment of the lives of children the world over.

The Malawi delegation would like to align itself with the African Union statement delivered yesterday by the Minister of Ghana.

The Malawi Government is committed to the full realization of the commitments set out in the final document of the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly, entitled “A World Fit for Children” (resolution S-27/2, annex). I would like to share information with Members on the progress that Malawi has made with respect to the particular commitment of “A world fit for children”.

Malawi is making progress in improving child health. Under-five mortality rates have been reduced from 189 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2000, to 133 children per 1,000 live births. Over 90 per cent of children under age 5 were immunized against diseases such as tuberculosis, polio and measles. Over 65 per cent of children under 5 and pregnant women, as at 2006, were able to access treated bed nets to prevent malaria. Exclusive breast-feeding has also increased from 27 per cent to 52 per cent of our infants. Over 350,000 orphans are receiving nutrition support. Food supplies have increased to the extent that there has been over 1.4 million tons of surplus, enabling the Government to export some of our harvest.

Recognizing the impact of HIV/AIDS on children, Malawi has stepped up its efforts to prevent the mother-to-child transmission of HIV through voluntary testing and counselling and through the

supply of antiretroviral drugs. Well over 60 per cent of pregnant women voluntarily undergo counselling and testing for HIV. The Government is implementing a National Plan of Action for Orphans and other Vulnerable Children, which promotes the survival, growth and well-being of children who have been affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic as well as dire poverty.

The Malawi Government is making progress in addressing shortages of adequate fresh water and lack of sanitation. Sixty-six per cent of the population now has access to clean water.

Gender equality is central to realizing a world fit for children. The Malawi Government is implementing a gender equality programme to maximize the double dividends that gender equality produces. We do indeed reap double dividends when we achieve gender equality, because not only are we directly addressing the needs of women as mothers, but women also tend to care for their siblings. Empowering women therefore empowers children and all those cared for by women.

Malawi has enacted legislation against domestic violence in 2006. For those who might want to look it up, perhaps electronically, this law is called the Domestic Violence Act. The ratio of women in the Malawi parliament also increased from 5.7 per cent to 14.4 per cent over a period of three parliamentary elections, from 1994 to 2004.

In the area of child protection, the Malawi Government has drafted a child care, protection and justice bill, which broadly covers the right of a child to participate in matters that affect his or her well-being. The bill also seeks to introduce into domestic law the concept of child justice, in order to protect children from undesirable practices such as child labour, child abduction, child sexual abuse and harmful cultural practices. In addition, efforts are under way to draft an anti-human-trafficking bill to address, among other things, child trafficking.

The Malawi Government encourages the participation of children in national development issues, particularly through the Children's Parliament. Through that forum, children articulate their aspirations and needs and the problems facing them in their daily lives, as we have seen them do today in the Assembly. In that way, the National Assembly and the District Assembly are able to respond to the needs of children.

Malawi is implementing the second phase of free primary education under the revised policy investment framework, which covers the period 2000-2012. In addition to focusing on the provision of quality basic education through effective partnerships with stakeholders, the programme includes interventions that seek to eliminate inequalities and discrimination in schools by mainstreaming a gender perspective into the curriculum. Government schools have also changed the design of their buildings to enhance the comfort and convenience of children with special needs.

More than 60 per cent of our children are receiving free primary education. To increase literacy rates, the Government and civil society, with the support of the donor community and our cooperating partners, provide functional adult literacy classes to others who have not acquired literacy. Literacy among women has increased by 48 per cent over the past four years, while literacy among men has increased by 24 per cent. To promote early childhood development, the Government has launched an early childhood policy.

Malawi has made some tremendous strides towards the achievement of goals set out in "A world fit for children". Malawi has integrated strategies into its growth development strategic document, which is a home-grown overarching national strategic document aimed at creating wealth and achieving sustainable socio-economic growth and development for our country, in line with the Millennium Development Goals. Malawi has integrated child-related strategies into the strategic document to ensure a Malawi fit for children.

Allow me to take this special opportunity to thank our cooperating partners — including the donor community, in particular UNICEF's Malawi Office — which have enabled us to achieve what we have accomplished so far.

Malawi's road towards a nation fit for children can be made shorter and smoother through the continued commitment of Governments and, in particular, continued support from our cooperating partners, which I have highlighted in this statement.

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Camillo Gonsalves, chairman of the delegation of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

**Mr. Gonsalves** (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): At the outset, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines takes this opportunity to express its deepest condolences to the people of Algeria and the staff of the United Nations on the senseless murders in Algiers. We unequivocally condemn that cowardly and barbaric act of terrorism.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines fully aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of the Bahamas on behalf of the Caribbean Community and is honoured to make a brief contribution to this high-level follow-up to the special session on children.

The special session on children cannot be discussed in isolation, divorced from other major challenges confronting the United Nations. Indeed, a world fit for children must begin with a world fit — in all aspects — for people, progress, prosperity and peace. Today, as we focus on this, our most vulnerable and most promising global demographic, we must also consider the critical interrelations between the rights of children and the myriad development obligations of Member States.

If judged by the standardized benchmarks of the Millennium Development Goals and other global minimum standards, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is, in many respects, increasingly becoming a nation fit for children. Infant mortality continues its downward trend, and we are on track to meet our 2015 target. The Government has instituted comprehensive programmes to combat HIV/AIDS and mother-to-child transmission of the disease. Literacy and primary school attendance rates are robust, and, thankfully, no wars threaten our nation or our region. A comprehensive wellness revolution is under way to combat a host of preventable lifestyle diseases and to promote children's health and nutrition.

Since 2001, the Government has made education a central plank of its development programme and has buttressed that philosophy with massive financial and legislative commitments. Last year five new schools were built, and over the past five years eight have been expanded and 25 refurbished, with six more currently under construction. Twelve learning resource centres have been built nationwide, which expand and supplement educational options for children outside the classroom. The Government heavily subsidizes textbooks and primary school meals through its book loan and school feeding programmes, and has radically

expanded students' access to tertiary scholarships, grants and loans.

Between 2001 and 2006, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines went from having only 39 per cent of children attending secondary school to achieving universal access to secondary education. Through all of that rapid expansion, we have maintained a student-teacher ratio under 20. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines' far-reaching revision of its education act has also spurred a transformation in the field of early childhood education. The Government is building 10 preschools and providing specialized training to supplement private sector kindergartens.

But the seven-year-old MDGs, while undeniably important, cannot remain a stagnant holy grail in a fast-changing and globalized world; nor should the achievement of any of the targets merit self-congratulatory inertia. In today's world, for example, literacy and primary education are far less than the bare minimum required for children to succeed. We must accept the fact that a child with only basic literacy skills is a disadvantaged child in the modern global economy. Today, computer literacy is the new literacy, and an essential life skill. In that regard, the children of the developing world remain on the wrong side of a widening digital divide, which threatens to reinforce new forms of inequality and underdevelopment for future generations.

Accordingly, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines echoes the message delivered by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to the Connect Africa Summit this year when he recognized the fundamental developmental dimension inherent in narrowing the digital divide for young and poor people.

As we gather here, united by our sincere desire to deliver on the noble goals of the special session, we cannot forget the international blind spot that exists with respect to the children of Taiwan. There are over 4 million children in Taiwan under the age of 14, but their interests are not represented in this forum, the World Health Organization or any other United Nations body. It seems that the international community is capable of fashioning ways to recognize Taiwan's economic might through the World Trade Organization, but unable to apply similar ingenuity or fortitude to the issue of its children. We must urgently correct that colossal representational oversight and include Taiwan in our world fit for children.

Before a world can be fit for children, it must first be fit. The health of our planet today is threatened by climate change and the short-sighted choices made and defended by developed countries. We recognize that climate change will have a disproportionate negative effect on the world's most vulnerable countries. In those countries, it stands to reason that children — our most vulnerable citizens — will also bear a disproportionate burden, both today and in the future planet they inherit. Accordingly, we must explicitly link this Meeting with the work being carried out simultaneously in Bali, and demand radical changes on our children's behalf.

The children of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines have generally escaped the horrors of war in the 200-plus years since European conquest and settlement. However, the peace-loving citizens of our region are now awash in the swelling tide of illicit small arms that accompanies the narcotics trade. Our youth are increasingly on the giving and receiving ends of gun violence. Unless we act now, our children's safety and innocence may be lost. Just as poverty is not limited to the most heavily indebted countries, the scourge of gun violence is not the exclusive province of war zones. A meaningful and effective supply-side prohibition on the traffic in small arms is critical to our children's collective future.

When the General Assembly adopted the document entitled "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex) in 2002, we acknowledged the gap between promised and delivered resources and recognized the failure of developed countries to honour their pledge to utilize 0.7 per cent of gross national product for development assistance. The recently concluded High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development has further highlighted the continued lack of success in meeting those eminently reasonable assistance targets. The ongoing neglect of middle-income small island developing States vis-à-vis debt relief and the dearth of innovative debt swaps for projects aimed at meeting the needs of children further belie our credibility and noble words today.

The inescapable fact is that our goals and aspirations for children are unattainable without the financial assistance of the developed world. This holiday season, the best gift that we can give to the world's children is simply to deliver on our existing promises. They deserve nothing less.

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to Ambassador Kyaw Tint Swe, chairman of the delegation of Myanmar.

**Mr. Swe (Myanmar):** First of all, I wish to extend the heartfelt condolences of my Government to the Government and people of Algeria and to the families of United Nations staff in connection with the recent tragic loss of life as the result of a dastardly terrorist attack.

The twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly devoted to children, held in May 2002, resulted in the Declaration and the Plan of Action for creating a world fit for children. At the special session, Governments committed themselves to a time-bound set of specific goals and actions in four priority areas. Today, we are gathered here to review and assess the status of the time-bound and quantified commitments set out in the Declaration and the Plan of Action.

We are currently at the mid-decade following the 2002 special session. This year also marks the mid-point to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Secretary-General's report (A/62/259) has rightly pointed out that building a world fit for children will be a major step in fulfilling the commitments of the Millennium Summit. The report also highlighted the important achievements made in the past five years. We note with satisfaction the decline in the number of children dying before reaching their fifth birthday, to a level below 10 million in 2006. Success stories in the fight against measles and malaria and access to drinking water and sanitation are also encouraging.

Notwithstanding those achievements, there still remain many things that require our urgent attention. The issue of poverty, which adversely affects the well-being of children, must be addressed to meet the MDGs by 2015. The flow of official development assistance (ODA) still falls far short of what is needed to achieve the MDGs. In that regard, my delegation cannot stress enough the importance of the need for our developed partners to fulfil their commitment to allocate 0.7 per cent of the gross national product as ODA to developing countries.

Let me take this opportunity to apprise the Assembly about our national efforts. After becoming a State party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in 1991, our child law was enacted in July 1993. Myanmar is currently implementing its national plan of

action for children, with the aim of achieving the goals of “A world fit for children”. To achieve those goals, Myanmar is working together with UNICEF and other United Nations agencies.

During the past five years there has been progress in the maternal and new-born health sectors, with the introduction of safe-mother initiatives. Those initiatives have now been transformed into a national movement. The infant mortality rate fell from 55 per 1,000 live births in 1999 to 49.7 in 2003.

Realizing the importance of working closely with all parties as partners for children, the Government of Myanmar is working together with national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on issues related to children and child-centred activities. The establishment of technical strategic groups on HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, in partnership with United Nations agencies and NGOs, is a good example in that regard.

In the area of providing clean water and sanitation, significant progress has been made in supplying safe drinking water, right down to rural schools and villages. Steps have been taken to provide over a period of five years arsenic-free clean water and sanitation to over 1,200 communities, 1,000 schools, 500 rural health centres and 250 rural markets. The number of people with sustainable access to improved sanitation has increased from 24 per cent in 1990 to 77 per cent in 2004.

In Myanmar, both girls and boys receive an equal opportunity to pursue education. At present, gender disparity in primary and secondary education is close to zero. While promoting access to education, emphasis

is also placed on providing quality education. The Myanmar Education for All National Action Plan, 2003-2015, was formulated in 2002 in that regard. The National Action Plan provides equal access to all children, including those who need special care.

Myanmar has a youth literacy rate of 94.5 per cent. The Government is also implementing early childhood care and development and has established post-primary schools under the Education for All National Action Plan, with the assistance of bilateral and international partners.

With regard to primary education, the net enrolment ratio in primary education and the proportion of pupils completing the primary level have increased sharply between 2000 and 2005. By 2005, the net primary school enrolment rate for male students was 89 per cent and for female students 91 per cent. The percentage of primary school entrants reaching grade five has reached 100 per cent.

Myanmar attaches great importance to the protection of children from abuse, exploitation and violence. The Myanmar National Plan of Action for Children has been elaborated for the protection of children and includes strengthening the organization on child protection at different levels and raising capacity-building for protection programmes. Legislative and administrative measures are also being carried out to protect and prevent trafficking in women and children.

Children are our future; investing in children is investing in our future. Myanmar is resolute in its determination to work with the international community in building a world fit for children.

*The meeting rose at 8.45 p.m.*