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Official Records

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

In the absence of the President, Mr. Hannesson (Iceland), Vice-President, took the Chair.

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

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

Agenda item 66 (continued)

Promotion and protection of the rights of children

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

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

Draft resolution (A/62/L.31)

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Hugo Siles Alvarado, chairman of the delegation of Bolivia.

Mr. Siles Alvarado (Bolivia) (spoke in Spanish): Permit me to begin this statement by expressing, on behalf of the Government and the people of Bolivia, our condolences and full support to the Government and the people of Algeria following the acts carried out in that country, which claimed precious human lives. We energetically condemn those acts, because they were committed against innocent human beings.

The Government of President Evo Morales Ayma has approved a national development plan entitled "A worthy, sovereign, productive and democratic Bolivia", adopted by his Government. Based on the concept of

quality living, the plan sets out guidelines and strategies that promote structural change according to a community-oriented concept centred on uniting peoples and communities, which respects diversity and cultural identity and takes an intersectoral approach to caring for children and adolescents.

The structure of Bolivia's population pyramid is characterized by the fact that, in 2005, 57 per cent of the nation's people were under the age of 18. Of that group, 19.2 per cent were 6 or younger, 16.3 per cent were between 7 and 12 and 13.7 per cent were adolescents aged 13 to 18. In addition, 61 per cent of the population is concentrated in urban areas, with 39 per cent in rural areas.

Those statistics represent a challenge for our country, because they indicate a large population of children and adolescents. It is estimated that, by 2015, 40 per cent of the total national population will consist of those age groups. Given that reality, the issue of children is becoming a priority of particular interest when it comes to the activities of the Bolivian State.

The economic and social crisis that has produced high poverty levels in Bolivia over the past 10 years has caused an increasing number of children under 14 years old to enter the labour market, as a result of the abject poverty in marginalized sectors such as the indigenous community. In order to ensure a minimal level of household income, often in situations of exploitation and abuse, these children are compelled to engage in labour — frequently forced labour. The

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situation of these children, who are forced to work at a very young age, has been called “stolen childhood”.

The Government of President Morales is seeking to reverse that cruel reality through structural changes, by adopting policies that will improve the situation of children and adolescents. In that context, we have developed activities that will enable us to assess the impact of public spending on children’s living conditions and to allocate resources in a strategic and focused manner in order to ensure sustainable results.

We are promoting intercultural and multilingual education that gives priority to equal opportunities in order to promote, adapt and apply science and technology through productive and wholesome schools. We are also engaged in educational research to reassess Bolivia’s various cultures. At the same time, these basic policies are enabling us to eliminate the problem of the exclusion of segments of the population, particularly the indigenous community, and to reassess the traditional knowledge and technologies of Amazonian and Andean civilizations.

In addition to those provisions, we have adopted legal rules for the awarding of Juancito Pinto grants, economic grants aimed at preventing members of the poorest sectors from leaving the educational system.

We have launched national programmes to address and prevent vaccine-preventable diseases, which has made it possible to register progress in controlling child and maternal mortality. Moreover, the new constitutional text, recently adopted by the Constitutional Assembly and shortly to be submitted to a national referendum, prohibits forced labour and child exploitation in the context of child labour. The activities of children and adolescents must be limited to the family sphere and geared towards their comprehensive development.

The Executive Board of UNICEF, which Bolivia has had the honour to chair in 2007, adopted a country programme this year that represents the outcome of efforts and commitments made between Bolivia and the United Nations system. In that regard and as previously noted, given the priority that our Government attaches to the issue of childhood, national contributions have been made to ensure the full implementation of the aforementioned programme, which reflects the policies to be implemented from 2008 to 2012. In that context, we prioritize the implementation of the “Zero malnutrition” programme,

to be implemented by 2010, as a significant reduction in child mortality.

At this Commemorative Meeting, Bolivia wishes to underscore the effective actions of UNICEF, in which we are all involved with the aim that our children and adolescents will be the direct beneficiaries of those shared efforts.

Finally, allow me, on behalf of our Government, to convey the message that the United Nations must pay closer attention to ensuring that future generations of children and adolescents live in a world that is free from the threat of war, terrorist acts and the effects of climate change. If the United Nations does not take decisive steps to that end, we will be unable to guarantee a future for the generations to come.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mr. Reta Aleme Nega, chairman of the delegation of Ethiopia.

Mr. Nega (Ethiopia): I wish at the outset to join other delegations in expressing our deepest condolences to the victims, their families and the Government of Algeria for the terrorist attacks in that country the day before yesterday. Such inhuman and senseless acts of terrorism deserve the strongest condemnation of the international community.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Ghana on behalf of the African Group. We welcome and express our thanks to the Secretary-General for his report to this Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly Devoted to the Follow-up of the Outcome of the Special Session on Children in 2002. The report clearly indicates the progress made so far and what remains to be done in the implementation of the Declaration and Plan of Action adopted at that session to usher in a better and brighter future for our children under the motto “A world fit for children”.

There is no doubt that, as the report of the Secretary-General and other studies conducted by relevant United Nations agencies indicate, despite the encouraging progress witnessed in certain areas, there is an urgent need for concerted action by the international community to put an end to situations that continue to make children vulnerable to violence, sexual abuse, labour exploitation and armed conflicts and to undermine children’s welfare and their basic human rights and dignity.

Ethiopia strongly believes that ensuring children's well-being and promoting, protecting and respecting their rights and legitimate interests should be central to social and economic policies at the national, regional and international levels. A home, a village, a community and a society fit for children will ultimately lead to a world fit for children. That, of course, requires devising appropriate policies and strategies focusing on children's rights from the basic unit of society — the family — to the world community at large. That is why Ethiopia has adopted at the national level policies and strategies which have meaningful impact on children's well-being, and has become a party to a number of agreements relating to children, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Let me take this opportunity to highlight some of the principal measures taken by the Government of Ethiopia with regard to promoting the rights of children and to share our experiences in the implementation of those measures and the encouraging results registered so far.

Following the adoption of the Declaration and Plan of Action in 2002 at the special session on children, my Government immediately launched the task of preparing a national plan aimed at translating into action those important documents. The plan was developed in the course of extensive discussions with stakeholders. The Government offered the opportunity for children from around the country to comment on the national plan of action for children. Children also marched to Parliament and shared their concerns about their needs. The Ministry of Women's Affairs was entrusted with the task of implementing the action plan and has mainstreamed children's rights into all its programmes and projects, which are being carried out in partnership with national and international non-governmental organizations.

My Government also took initiatives to improve the situation of children in various ways and, in an effort to fulfil its obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, reviewed national laws and introduced amendments when needed. The first act in the introduction and revision of laws includes the insertion of provisions on the rights of children into our federal and regional laws and the revision of the national family code and labour, penal and civil laws. For instance, provisions against harmful traditional practices were included in our revised penal code, while provisions allowing corporal punishments

were removed. Other proclamations were also amended to allow the prosecution of illegal actions against children. There is also parliamentary oversight of children's rights. The Ministry of Women's Affairs submits reports to Parliament on its activities regarding children on a regular basis.

In our national endeavour to disseminate and implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child, we have put mechanisms in place to ensure that the rights of children are promoted through all Government mass media. Furthermore, propitious conditions have been created for initiatives to be led and run by children in order to ensure that they are able to express their opinions and ideas on matters that affect them directly. The Ministry of Education has helped schools to establish child rights clubs, which are managed by children themselves.

I would also like to point out here that a significant part of the national budget has been allocated to implementing educational and health policies that directly affect children's rights. As a result, enrolment rates of children in primary education have been on the increase and notable achievements are evident. The national action plan also included programmes to control child poverty and mother-to-child HIV/AIDS transmission and to make provision for AIDS orphans. In addition, national health and education policies include the creation of a special task force for children living in difficult circumstances.

The federal and regional police commissions have established child protection units in police stations in different parts of the country. There are efforts to establish child-friendly courts, where children's cases will be tried by specially trained judges and in an environment appropriate for children.

With respect to measures taken to eliminate discrimination against certain groups of children, namely against girls, HIV-infected children, AIDS orphans and disabled children, the national action plan on gender equality, which has been incorporated into the Government's development strategy, focuses on children's education and reproductive rights. All governmental organizations have been made responsible for mainstreaming gender issues and children's issues in their main work. The national action plan is also focused on prevention and on the rehabilitation of victims, through awareness-raising programmes and campaigns.

Today, the world of our children is characterized by both opportunities and challenges. The experiences derived from the implementation of the Declaration and Plan of Action demonstrate that if there are concerted efforts by the world community, we can use the opportunities — that is, the existing strong commitment and determination of the international community — to make a real difference in improving the welfare of children and ensuring their rights and legitimate interests, thereby making the world much brighter and better. The challenges currently facing children are multifaceted and enormous. They need practical and concrete measures beyond mere statements of commitment and promises to effectively address them, with a view to achieving our lofty goals of making our world fit for children. In that regard, Ethiopia wishes to reiterate its commitment to the full realization of this noble goal by working together with all those involved in the implementation of the Declaration and Plan of Action.

The Acting President: I call on His Excellency Archbishop Celestino Migliore, observer of the Observer State of the Holy See.

Archbishop Migliore (Holy See): At the outset, I would like to join the previous speakers who have expressed their condolences and support to the people of Algeria and to the United Nations family.

This Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting gives us the opportunity to pause and assess where we stand today with respect to the commitment to create a world fit for children made during the 2002 special session on children. The Convention on the Rights of the Child remains the standard in the promotion and protection of the rights of the child. It contains such fundamental principles as the rights of the child before as well as after birth, the family as the natural environment for the growth and education of children and the right of the child to the best health care and education possible.

Echoing the principles enshrined in the Convention, the 2002 special session reaffirmed the family as the basic unit of society, providing the best environment for children to acquire knowledge, cultivate good qualities and develop positive attitudes in order to become responsible citizens. It is therefore in everyone's interest to motivate parents to take personal responsibility in the education of their children and to strengthen the family.

Acting on its perennial conviction that education lies at the heart of the development of every child, the Catholic Church today runs more than 250,000 schools on all continents, with 3.5 million teachers educating 42 million students. To help every child exercise the right to education, many of these schools are in some of the most challenging locations where otherwise children would be completely left behind, such as remote villages, deprived inner cities, conflict zones, refugee camps and waste-dumping grounds.

Recognizing that chronic poverty remains the single biggest obstacle to meeting the needs of children, helping working children through education is the key to empowering them to break the cycle of extreme poverty and raising their awareness of their self-worth and dignity. Ways must be found to offer them free basic education and training and to integrate them into the formal educational system in every way possible.

The commitment of the Holy See in the area of protecting children and their families from the impact of HIV/AIDS is illustrated by the thousands of institutions engaged in the care and education of orphans, prevention and awareness campaigns, the distribution of antiretroviral drugs, basic health care and nutrition, the prevention of mother-to-child viral transmission, the fight against stigma and the empowerment of people living with HIV/AIDS to be protagonists in the fight against the epidemic. However, while continuing to focus on HIV/AIDS, we must enhance our health-care policies on even more common killer diseases, such as malaria and tuberculosis.

An even more fundamental challenge is the lack of access of children and mothers to basic health care and sanitation. As the Secretary-General recently stated, sanitation is one of the most overlooked and underserved basic human needs, and international efforts to deliver in this area have been lacklustre. Children are the first victims of this unacceptable situation. This neglect or lack of focus on basic health care is very costly, given that basic medical prevention is often one of the most cost-effective and successful ways of improving the health and stability of society.

My delegation earnestly hopes that the commitments renewed or made in the course of this meeting are not mere declarations of good intentions or objectives to which to aspire, but steadfast commitments to be upheld, so that a world truly fit for children can at last become a reality.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Riyad Mansour, chairman of the observer delegation of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): As we gather on the fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration and Plan of Action, “A world fit for children” (resolution S-27/2, annex), a review of the situation of children around the world reveals that, while progress has been made in improving the lives of millions of children, unfortunately millions more continue to face serious challenges and hardships as they continue to suffer from poverty, hunger, disease and war. We are thus compelled to recall the appeal made five years ago to put children first; eradicate poverty; leave no child behind; educate every child; care for every child; protect children from harm and exploitation; protect children from war and conflict; combat HIV/AIDS; protect the Earth for children; and listen to children and ensure their participation.

All over the world, children await the fulfilment of the pledges we have made to protect, care and promote a brighter future for them. We must therefore use this occasion to reaffirm our commitment and to redouble our efforts for their realization so that all children may enjoy the inalienable rights to which they are entitled, as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and all other relevant instruments of international law.

In light of time limits, we wish to focus on the grave situations of children in armed conflict, including foreign occupation, which affect all aspects of the lives of children who tragically find themselves in such situations. As stated in “A world fit for children”,

“Children must be protected from the horrors of armed conflict. Children under foreign occupation must also be protected, in accordance with the provisions of international humanitarian law” (resolution 27/2, annex, para. 7.7).

In that regard, we recall also the important study of Ms. Graça Machel on the impact of armed conflict on children, which this year underwent a 10-year strategic review and in which it was stated that

“war violates every right of a child — the right to life, the right to be with family and community, the right to health, the right to development ...

and the right to be nurtured and protected” (A/51/306, para. 30).

A wide gap remains between the international legal standards relevant to the protection of children and the implementation of those laws for the actual safeguarding of children’s rights. It is precisely that lack of implementation that perpetuates the impunity of violators of children’s rights and thus perpetuates children’s suffering. Clearly, if international law, including humanitarian law and human rights law, were respected, children around the world would not be the victims of such crimes, but would instead be enjoying the peace, freedom, stability and prosperity necessary for promoting their healthy and happy well-being and growth.

Yet, serious human rights violations and war crimes continue to be committed against children. That must be an issue of priority concern for all, as the damage caused to children today — some of it irreparable — has detrimental short- and long-term consequences for children, women, families and societies as a whole, inevitably impacting future prospects for peace and development. Ending impunity for violations against children is paramount and all efforts must be exerted to ensure their protection, the promotion of their rights, the provision of needed assistance, redress of the injustices done to them and their rehabilitation so as to allow them to become productive members of their societies, contributing to the advancement of their nations.

Sadly, as noted in the strategic review, “many conflicts last longer than the duration of childhood” (A/62/228, para. 5). In the case of the Palestinian people, three generations of Palestinian children have lived as refugees, and two generations of Palestinian children in the occupied Palestinian territory have already lived knowing only a harsh, abnormal existence marked by the constant oppression, discrimination, humiliation and crimes of the 40-year Israeli military occupation. The decades of hardship, pressure and fear have left an indelible mark on Palestine’s children, who, in the occupied Palestinian territory alone, constitute over half of the population. As stated by the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Coomaraswamy, in a report following her visit to the occupied Palestinian territory in April of this year, there is a palpable sense of loss and a feeling of hopelessness that places the children of the West Bank and Gaza apart from all other

situations the Special Representative of the Secretary-General has visited to date.

Palestinian children continue to be the targets of excessive, indiscriminate and lethal force by the Israeli occupying forces. The killing, wounding and maiming of children in Israeli military assaults has brought grief to thousands of families and terrorized and traumatized Palestinian children. Since September 2000, nearly 1,000 Palestinian children have been killed by the occupying forces and over 3,500 have been injured, many permanently disabled. Palestinian children are also among the thousands of civilians being illegally held in Israeli jails or detention centres under inhumane conditions and subject to physical and mental ill-treatment. Palestinian children also continue to suffer from displacement resulting from the occupying forces' wanton destruction of homes, refugee shelters and infrastructure during assaults on civilian areas; from the hundreds of home demolition orders it has handed down against Palestinian families, particularly in the occupied East Jerusalem area; and from its ongoing unlawful construction of the wall and settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory. All such violations have far-ranging, negative and traumatic consequences for children, requiring serious attention and redress.

In addition, Palestinian children suffer from the denial of humanitarian access, which, as rightly emphasized in the strategic review,

“whether deliberate or the result of a deteriorating security situation, deprives children of assistance and violates their basic rights, including the right to life” (*ibid.*, para. 23).

Israel's collective punishment of the Palestinian people, particularly in the besieged Gaza Strip, has had a disastrous impact on the humanitarian situation of children. The imposition of prolonged closures of the Gaza Strip and of severe restrictions on the movement of persons and goods in the West Bank has severely obstructed access and the delivery of humanitarian supplies, violating children's rights to food, education, health care and, ultimately in some cases, to life. That has caused, *inter alia*, rising food insecurity and a dramatic decline in child health, with malnutrition, anaemia, stunted growth and other diseases widespread among children and increasing school failure rates. At the same time, their well-being and rights also continue to be seriously affected by the destruction of infrastructure, including water, sanitation and electricity

networks, while the threat of further obstruction and deterioration continues to loom over Gaza.

Palestinian children yearn to play, learn and live with their families in a safe, nurturing and positive environment. They yearn also for peace and freedom so that they, too, can enjoy their inalienable human rights and grow to constructively contribute to the future of their nation.

It is our deepest hope that current peace efforts will gain momentum towards the achievement of a just, lasting and peaceful settlement that will bring Palestinian children the joys of a long-awaited peace, living side by side with Israeli children in peace and security. However, the rights and needs of children living in situations of armed conflict, including foreign occupation, cannot be withheld and considered a privilege only for those who live in freedom.

On our part, we enacted in January 2005 the Palestinian Child Rights Law to give priority to children's rights, and we continue to work cooperatively via official Palestinian institutions with United Nations agencies on the ground and other organizations providing vital assistance to Palestinian children and their families for the betterment of their lives. Yet the international community also has a responsibility to act, in accordance with international law and the declarations it has adopted, to guarantee child rights and needs in all circumstances in tandem with the ongoing struggle to bring an end to the conflict and occupation that has ravaged our region.

I wish to conclude by expressing our gratitude to all members of the international community exerting efforts to support the needs and rights of Palestinian children. We reaffirm our appreciation to the United Nations agencies providing assistance and helping to promote the rights and well-being of Palestinian children, including, among others, UNICEF, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the United Nations Population Fund and the World Food Programme, to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for her important advocacy efforts and to the many international humanitarian organizations and non-governmental organizations also providing assistance.

In that regard, we also welcome the request by the General Assembly's Third Committee for the appointment of a special representative on violence against children. Moreover, we urge the international

community to continue to support efforts to alleviate the plight of Palestinian children and help them realize their inalienable human rights, so that one day they too can join hands with all children around the globe in celebrating a world truly fit for children.

The Acting President: In accordance with resolution 57/32, of 19 November 2002, I call on Mrs. Anda Filip, chairperson of the observer delegation of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Mrs. Filip (Inter-Parliamentary Union): Allow me to begin by joining previous speakers in extending our profound condolences to the Government and people of Algeria, to the broader United Nations community and to the families of the victims of the recent terrorist attacks in Algeria, which the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) firmly condemns.

Providing education for all children, protecting them against abuse, exploitation and violence, promoting health and combating HIV/AIDS are principles on which there is international consensus. Those are also important areas of activity for IPU. We believe that by working collectively through and with parliaments and their members, child protection can be improved and the rights of children better promoted.

IPU has strongly supported the ratification and implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We have also consistently encouraged parliamentary action in implementing the Declaration and Plan of Action, entitled "A world fit for children".

Indeed, parliaments and their members have a particular responsibility towards the fulfilment of the rights of children. Parliaments are called upon to ratify international conventions and agreements, and they legislate, adopt budgets, oversee the action of government and help build popular support for further action. All of those components are essential for tackling the many problems currently faced by children around the world.

Over the past five years, in recognition of the role played by parliaments and their members, IPU has developed numerous activities in the field of child protection, and much of this has been conducted in close cooperation with UNICEF. Common efforts have followed a two-tiered strategy aimed at, first, raising awareness among parliaments of child protection issues in general and, secondly, addressing specific child protection and child rights themes warranting

parliamentary action, such as female genital mutilation, child labour and trafficking of children. Activities carried out have included the production of several handbooks for parliamentarians on child protection, violence against children and trafficking of children and the provision of technical support to parliaments and their members to bring about change for children back at home, at the national and local levels.

The strategic partnership developed with UNICEF has indeed been very effective. One of the most striking results is that child protection issues have gained ground at IPU and have become a recurrent and systematic theme at our annual assemblies. It is also mainstreamed in much of the work of IPU.

The most recent example relates to a conference held two weeks ago in Manila on HIV/AIDS. Working in close collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme and the secretariat of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, IPU held the First Global Parliamentary Meeting on HIV/AIDS. It was the first time that parliaments from around the world convened to jointly discuss the role that they have to play in responding to HIV/AIDS. It was agreed that parliamentarians need to be more assertive as leaders in grappling with the pandemic and initiate and promote a rights-based response to HIV/AIDS. It was also agreed that special attention should be given to vulnerable populations such as children.

During the meeting, IPU took the opportunity to launch a new handbook for parliamentarians entitled "Taking action against HIV". The handbook will serve as a tool for parliamentary leadership on this issue and a reference text to assist legislators and their staff in undertaking relevant action.

At the meeting, the need to tailor national budgets to effectively tackle the problem of HIV/AIDS was high on the agenda. The past few years have witnessed a significant growth in financial resources available to address the HIV/AIDS pandemic in low- and middle-income countries. Nevertheless, IPU is concerned that those resources remain considerably below the amount those countries need to allocate to comprehensive programmes. In that regard, IPU calls on the international community to step up its efforts to increase funding.

The commitment of IPU to the welfare of children and the protection of their rights is long-

standing. In the first half of next year, IPU will be contributing to a global forum entitled "Countdown to 2015: Tracking progress in maternal, newborn and child health". The forum, scheduled to take place in Cape Town, South Africa, in April 2008, will bring together a large coalition of actors, including the World Health Organization, UNICEF, academics, international non-governmental organizations such as Save the Children and representatives of the multilateral donor community.

The forum will aim at promoting the achievement of the two Millennium Development Goals that relate to maternal and child health. In turn, the event will add political content to the 118th IPU Assembly, which will be taking place at the same time, and mobilize parliaments in support of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.

IPU will continue to build the capacities of parliaments to advocate for and critically examine national budget allocations in relation to the welfare of children and will assist with new legislation focusing on children. We will also continue to provide support to parliaments for the monitoring of respect for children's rights and for raising awareness among members of parliament on broader child welfare issues such as child education and health. We look forward to continuing to pursue the goals of a rejuvenated agenda and to ensuring that our world is indeed fit for children.

The Acting President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 49/2 of 19 October 1994, I now call upon Ms. Susan Johnson, chairperson of the observer delegation of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Ms. Johnson (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies): The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies at the international level and the world's National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies at the national level are profoundly concerned about the situation confronting children.

Despite some progress made over these past years and the commitments set out in the 2002 Declaration "A world fit for children", there are still too many instances in which children face discrimination. The harsh reality is that children's rights are being consistently violated in every country. Those violations are compounded by ignorance, discrimination and the

abuse of power. The report of the Secretary-General (A/62/259) and the statements made by Governments here in this debate remind us that children all over the world are being bought and sold, exploited and abused, harmed and orphaned. The Secretary-General's report also points to the progress made through partnerships, and the draft declaration of this High-level meeting calls for broader and more focused partnerships.

Two weeks ago, at the thirtieth International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, Governments and the Red Cross Movement took up this same issue. In the final declaration adopted by the Conference, we committed to intensifying operational interaction and partnerships wherever there is a clear benefit for the victims and for the most vulnerable.

At our Conference, we recalled that national societies are created by acts of Government legislation to be auxiliary in the humanitarian field on the basis of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and as such are the natural preferred partners of national Governments. It is clear that the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies is well placed to work in close cooperation with Governments to meet the many humanitarian challenges before us.

It is time that the strength of the national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies and our international network was drawn more effectively into action-focused local, national and global partnerships to ensure for children their legitimate rights, especially as it concerns their health and safety.

Violence against children is an issue of high priority for the Red Cross and Red Crescent national societies. Our children are now living in a world where violence is commonplace. It confronts them in their homes, schools, institutions, workplaces and communities. I will offer two examples of actions of Red Cross societies in this field. First, I will speak about the Canadian Red Cross Society and its programme RespectED: Violence and Abuse Prevention, through which it aims to reduce and prevent violence against children through education and by developing with organizations and communities comprehensive risk management plans. Over 3.5 million children and adults in Canada have participated in this programme. Secondly, let me mention the situation in West Africa where the Sierra Leonean and Liberian Red Cross national societies are two national societies with important programmes for assisting young people who

are survivors of the recent wars in that region. Through these programmes, those Red Cross societies assist young people to set aside their animosities and reintegrate into their communities.

While these are encouraging examples, they are not enough. Action in many more countries is essential. Working in partnership is key.

Let me now turn to the situation of HIV. According to recent reports by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the number of children living with HIV has increased from 1.5 million in 2001 to 2.5 million in 2007, and nearly 90 per cent of all HIV-positive children are living in sub-Saharan Africa.

In recognition of the worldwide impact of HIV, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies is scaling up its efforts in support of national HIV and AIDS programmes. We are determined to reduce vulnerability to HIV. On World AIDS Day in 2006, we committed to doubling by 2010 the number of people in Red Cross and Red Crescent HIV/AIDS programming in targeted communities. So far, I can report that more than 60 national societies are scaling up their action to prevent further HIV infection, to expand treatment, care and support, and to reduce stigma and discrimination.

The growing capacity of Red Cross and Red Crescent societies is encouraging. But it is not enough. It is clear that the size of the threats posed by violence against children and by HIV is such that no one Government nor any one organization can meet them alone. Partnerships are essential.

In closing, we would urge all Governments here to recall the commitment made only two weeks ago at the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Conference in Geneva. Partnering with Red Cross and Red Crescent national societies is an important action which must be taken to tackle the enormous challenges facing children at local levels. Our joined up actions at the local community level can really make a difference in the lives of many thousands of children today, tomorrow and in the many more tomorrows to come.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mrs. Mary Reiner Barnes, chairperson of the observer delegation of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta.

Mrs. Barnes (Sovereign Military Order of Malta): Allow me first to say that the Sovereign Military Order

of Malta joins the rest of the international community in condemning the barbaric act of terror committed against United Nations personnel and civilians in Algiers on Tuesday. The Order offers its sincere condolences to the people and the Government of Algeria, the United Nations and the families of the victims.

The Order of Malta is grateful for the opportunity to address this very special High-Level Commemorative Meeting Devoted to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children. Children are at the heart of the Millennium Development Goals. They are the most vulnerable members of society, and their needs are often the greatest. For these reasons, the Sovereign Military Order of Malta considers the promotion of a world fit for children to be a point of pre-eminent importance.

Children are often unaware that they have rights and duties owed to them. Therefore, the Order of Malta makes it a priority to increase awareness of these rights and to see that they are respected and implemented.

The Secretary-General reiterates in his report (A/62/259) that the first duty towards children is to ensure that they survive. Immunization is one of the "high-impact" solutions to accelerate the reduction of under-5 mortality that has received considerable attention. The Order incorporates immunization campaigns against measles, meningitis, polio and tetanus, among other diseases, into many of its projects in Africa and Asia.

Maternal mortality levels remain unacceptably high across the developing world, with more than half a million women dying every year from complications of pregnancy and childbirth. This number can be drastically reduced with the utilization of midwives and qualified health-care professionals. The Order's midwife programmes in Cambodia and elsewhere have been very successful and ensure an overall improvement of life for mothers and children through education on hygiene and nutrition.

The prevention of HIV/AIDS is one of the four major areas of focus in "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex). Sadly, progress towards those goals is mixed. The health of newborns must be protected from the preventable transmission of HIV/AIDS. The Order is seeing great success and is increasing the reach of its programmes for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission in Argentina, Mexico, South Africa and Cambodia, to name only a

few countries. The Order of Malta encourages Member States and organizations to act swiftly on the recommendations of the Secretary-General.

The Order is strongly committed to enhancing children's lives through education and encouraging life-skills training. Whether it is providing daily transport to schools for children with handicaps in the Czech Republic, reconstructing village schools destroyed by the 2004 tsunami in Asia or providing educational support to the children of Haiti, the Order recognizes the potential that education has to help children secure a better future for themselves and their families.

The President took the Chair.

Unfortunately, the report also finds persisting gender disparities in education. It is essential to provide girls with the tools of a good education. For example, the Order of Malta's Italian Association is opening a secondary school for girls in Rumbek, Sudan. Its focus is to educate females so that they can support themselves in the future.

Finally, in the area of abuse, exploitation and violence against children, the sale of children, child prostitution, child pornography and the involvement of children in armed conflicts must be eradicated and replaced with promotion of life, quality education and child protection. It remains vital for countries to continue working towards incorporating those objectives into their national development plans.

Through the dedication of the Order's more than 80,000 trained volunteers and 13,000 employees, we are helping to assure children the right to be born safely, protected, educated and nurtured. The Order of Malta reaffirms its commitment to the rights of the child and guarantees its active participation in the creation of a world fit for children.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Fernando Valenzuela, chairman of the observer delegation of the European Community.

Mr. Valenzuela (European Community): I would like first to extend, on behalf of the European Community, our heartfelt condolences to all those affected by the recent acts of terrorism in Algeria.

In addition to the statement made by Portugal on behalf of the EU, it is a great honour for me to address the High-level Plenary Meeting on behalf of the

European Community. The participation of child delegates at this event reflects the same enthusiastic contribution of children and adolescents to the 2002 special session. Indeed, this is a strong reminder of the necessity to involve children and adolescents in all discussions, both global and national, that relate to their empowerment, the protection of their rights and the satisfaction of their specific needs.

Today's debate takes place a couple of weeks after the celebration of the eighteenth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child — a date that has renewed reflection on the status of the implementation of the Convention and on the authoritative role played by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in developing international standards of promotion and protection of children's rights. Recently, we also welcomed the presentation of the United Nations report on the progress achieved since the 1996 study on children in armed conflict by Graça Machel. Finally, one of the key achievements of this year's session of the General Assembly's Third Committee has been the adoption of a draft resolution requesting the establishment, for a period of three years, of a mandate for a new special representative of the Secretary-General on violence against children to continue the groundbreaking work undertaken by the independent expert, Mr. Pinheiro, in his 2006 global study on violence against children. Those initiatives are instrumental to the empowerment of the United Nations machinery to promote and protect the rights of the child, which the European Commission is fully committed to supporting.

However, despite those positive developments, it is clear that much remains to be done and that the international community must redouble its efforts to advance the situation of children worldwide. Boys and girls continue to be among the most affected in situations of crisis and emergencies. The injustices that they suffer — such as those related to the worst forms of child labour or unequal access to basic services and opportunities — affect our societies as a whole. It is clear that gross and persistent violations of children's rights are not only an affront to human dignity, but also a threat to human security and seriously undermine the economic and social development of the globalized world.

With that in mind, the European Commission works towards mainstreaming children's rights in all its key policies and programmes, both within the EU and

in its external relations. A specific policy initiative, entitled “Towards an EU strategy on the rights of the child”, was adopted by the Commission in July 2006 to enhance internal coordination, consultation and communication and allow for thorough analysis leading to the development of a long-term strategy for the promotion and protection of children’s rights. One of the clear objectives of the initiative is the establishment of the EU Forum on the Rights of the Child, bringing together actors involved in children’s rights both in the EU and globally, including children, ombudspersons for children, United Nations agencies, civil society, the Council of Europe, the European Parliament and, of course, the European Commission.

Besides strengthening the Commission’s capacities to increase our impact on the promotion of children’s rights, the EU policy identifies key areas that require urgent action. Child poverty is an area of concern within the EU, and a number of activities are currently being developed with the aim of preventing poverty and the social exclusion of children. The EU asylum policy contains specific provisions protecting the rights of children, and in particular unaccompanied minors. Concerning young people’s active participation in society, the Commission has established a genuine dialogue between policymakers and young people through regular meetings and events, from the local to the European level.

Children’s rights form part of the human rights issues which must be respected by candidate countries as an integral element of the common European values referred to in the Treaty on European Union. Moreover, the Commission is actively exploring global and regional opportunities to support partner countries in the fight against the trafficking of children, another key area of concern in the EU.

Furthermore, the Commission contributes to the overall EU policy on children’s rights in multilateral forums and vis-à-vis third countries through numerous specific initiatives. For instance, the Commission is involved in the implementation of the EU Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict, inter alia, through reporting and monitoring initiatives undertaken by its delegations in third countries, which is also a way of implementing Security Council resolution 1612 (2005). The European Commission is also determined to ensure the effective implementation of the new EU Guidelines for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Child and their implementation strategy,

defining the elimination of all forms of violence against children as a priority issue.

In addition to those policy initiatives, the European Commission supports projects undertaken by United Nations agencies, international and regional organizations, as well as civil society organizations, through its financial programmes in the field of the promotion of children’s rights. For example, the Commission has provided support to UNICEF to develop a toolkit on mainstreaming children’s rights in development cooperation and policy programming, and to the International Labour Organization’s International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour.

The promotion of a coherent approach in our work to protect children’s rights and to improve the situation of children worldwide is a major challenge for the European Commission. In that regard, an upcoming action plan on children’s rights in external relations identifies the policy framework, the priority areas at the country, regional and global levels, the programming tools and the guiding principles for the European Commission’s actions during the period 2007-2013.

In line with the commitments made in “A world fit for children” and with reference to the subjects discussed during the round tables of this Meeting, the European Commission intends to increase its activities in relation to global health issues announced in the new EU health strategy adopted in October. The areas of child health, HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment, and diseases of poverty will continue to be central areas of importance for our work in the future.

In the field of child health, the Commission will work on strengthening health systems through more aligned and predictable financial support, linked with a closer dialogue on health strategies and delivery of basic health services. The Commission will also continue to provide additional resources to key areas, such as malaria and immunization.

In relation to HIV/AIDS, the Commission is concerned that the prevention of HIV transmission from mother to child remains inadequate in different regions. We need to strengthen our efforts in the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS in Africa and other parts of the world, as well as to redouble our efforts to improve access to treatment for HIV/AIDS to affected children and to take care of the growing number of HIV/AIDS orphans.

In the area of education, the European Commission will maintain its commitment to support partner countries in their efforts to ensure that all girls and boys reap the benefits of quality primary education, including in situations of crisis and emergencies, as key to achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

We welcome the declaration of the Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting Devoted to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children and we reaffirm the principles, goals, strategies and actions of the Declaration and Plan of Action contained in “A world fit for children” and our commitment to their full implementation.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate for the Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting Devoted to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children.

The Assembly will now take action on draft resolution A/62/L.31, entitled “Declaration of the commemorative high-level plenary meeting devoted to the follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children”. May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to adopt draft resolution A/62/L.31?

Draft resolution A/62/L.31 was adopted (resolution 62/88).

The President: I now call on the representative of the United States of America.

Mr. Rees (United States of America): The United States has joined the consensus on the Declaration and congratulates the President, the facilitators and Member States on an outcome document that addresses the real needs and interests of children, including education, life-saving medical interventions and protection from human trafficking and other forms of abuse. The document also reflects the recognition by Member States that children need the love and care of their families. This reaffirms the recognition in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society.

We would note that, at the end of paragraph 2 of the Declaration, the term “all the rights of the child” is synonymous with “all the rights of children” and “all children’s rights”. The United States understands that, in the first sentence of paragraph 3, the phrase “the fulfilment of obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child” refers only to the fulfilment by

States parties of their obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, since non-parties have no obligations under the Convention.

The President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 61/272 of 29 June 2007, I now give the floor to Mrs. Deepali Khanna, Regional Director of PLAN International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council.

Mrs. Khanna (PLAN International): I and my organization, PLAN International, are highly honoured to have been chosen to address this body on behalf of non-governmental organizations around the world. I wish, therefore, to start by thanking all those who have made it possible for me to be here.

So, here we are, five years after the adoption of the “A world fit for children” Declaration (resolution S-27/2, annex), gathered together to celebrate an anniversary and to ask ourselves how far we have come in attaining those noble goals.

If we are to reach the objectives that we have set for ourselves, then it is vital that we recognize both the successes and the failures of our past efforts. Only by being honest with ourselves can we hope to overcome the remaining obstacles that stand in the way of a better life for all the world’s children.

As we know, the Declaration contained in “A world fit for children” rightly puts tackling poverty and improving access to services at the heart of our efforts. The strong, future-focused agenda highlighted four key priorities: promoting healthy lives; providing quality education for all; protecting children against abuse, exploitation and violence; and combating HIV/AIDS. And it called on a wide range of actors, especially children themselves, to play active roles in reaching those targets. But how far have we really come in realizing those goals since we first promised to say yes to children, five years ago?

There are, of course, some shining examples of progress. For the first time in the modern era, the number of children who die before their fifth birthday has fallen below 10 million per year. In East Asia, the proportion of children under 5 who go hungry has been cut by almost two thirds. More children than ever before are completing primary education. Nineteen out of every 20 primary-school-age children in North Africa and Latin America are enrolled in school, and

millions more in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia now receive education — children who previously would never have seen the inside of a classroom.

However, for every significant step forward, there are similar and significant steps backward. In countries where there is progress in a particular area, there is dismal failure in another. And inequality and inconsistency continue to hinder progress in every country.

The hard fact is that progress in many areas is not accelerating, but slowing. The most striking declines in child mortality took place in the years between 1960 and 1990, before our current targets were even on the agenda. Over those three decades, the number of child deaths fell by 2.5 per cent per year. Since 1990, the average annual decline has been just 1.1 per cent.

Even where we are doing better, progress is often insufficient to reach our targets. Since 1999, the proportion of sub-Saharan African children in primary schools has risen from just over 50 per cent to 70 per cent — impressive, but not nearly enough if we are to reach our goal of universal primary education by 2015. Despite that promise of universal access, there are still 72 million children for whom primary education remains a distant dream. And as for early childhood care and development, it is too often an afterthought, despite the fact that it is critical to children's chances of success at school. We all know that the evidence shows that investment during a child's early years delivers a much greater return than money spent later.

Globally, 4,000 children die every day as a result of dirty water and poor sanitation. Only 1, I repeat 1, in 20 children in sub-Saharan Africa sleeps under an insecticide-treated bed net. And every minute a child dies from an AIDS-related illness.

These statistics show the scale of the challenge still facing us. But they do not tell the whole story. I was recently in Cairo, where the African Union was reviewing its progress towards an Africa fit for children. During this meeting, PLAN International presented the views of 1,000 children from 30 countries across the continent. Their verdict was stark and straight to the point: we adults have not kept our promises; nor have we sought their expertise and opinion on what we have been doing for them. In short, we are failing them.

Above all, they said, we are failing those children who most need our help. While appreciating that some progress has been made, they deplored the increasing divide between children in urban and rural areas. While urban children were on the whole relatively positive that there had been some improvement in their lives, rural children talked of being left behind, of suffering poorer health and education services as well as of having lower incomes. They spoke of poor access to immunization programmes, the high cost of food due to inflation and the mismanagement and poor distribution of preventive and curative resources like impregnated nets and drugs.

The children we talked to complained of growing inequality. While private schools improve, the quality of State education is failing, which is a result of the poverty in their communities, insufficient school infrastructure and the poor quality of education staff. The point here is that the quality of education matters, not just the quantity as measured by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and many of our other indicators. "Education for all" will prove a hollow victory if pupil numbers rise and standards fall.

Children complained that marginalized groups are being left even further behind. Those living with disabilities often miss out completely on access to education and life-saving services.

These children's views are supported by the statistics. While more than four out of five urban children receive a primary education, almost one in three rural children miss out on school altogether. Poorer children in developing countries are more than twice as likely to die before they reach the age of 5 than those from wealthier families.

The uncomfortable truth is that the hardest part is yet to come. All of us, children in particular, face a new threat. Unchecked climate change has the potential to turn the development clock back 30 years by increasing children's vulnerability to natural disasters, disease and famine. And as the planet warms, conflicts will arise over increasingly scarce resources, posing even more threats to children. And, as always, it is the poorest and the most vulnerable that will suffer most.

To achieve a world fit for all children, we need to improve the lives of those who are hardest to reach: girls, children in rural areas, young people in war zones and those with disabilities. This will require all of us to leave our comfort zones. We need to recognize

that helping the hardest to reach is expensive, but sustainable development requires a sustained and consistent commitment to making those resources available. Governments owe it to themselves and their children to rise to this challenge.

In today's globalized world, no country can afford to waste the talent and resources that its young population possesses. Those that do will be left behind as the rest of the world streaks ahead. Economic gains alone will not deliver a world truly fit for children. It requires more than that. It demands that children's rights are not only respected but promoted by us all: Governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and communities.

Eighteen years have elapsed since the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The early years and adolescence of the Convention have seen Governments create systems that promote children's best interests. Legislation has been passed to protect children from sexual exploitation, trafficking and abuse. But, again, legislation alone is not enough. In some countries, what is missing is not the systems or laws, but the implementation and the will to implement. We need sustained and consistent political will, resulting in real action and practical steps.

Throughout the world, millions of children are being physically and emotionally abused by those who are charged with their care and who are duty-bound to protect them. Fewer than 10 per cent of 193 countries worldwide have declared a total ban on corporal punishment, and 117 countries and dependent territories still allow children to be beaten at school.

We know that in spite of our promise to protect, each year 223 million children suffer forced sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual violence, up to 140 million girls and women undergo some form of female genital mutilation, 126 million children are involved in the most hazardous forms of child labour and 1.2 million children are victims of trafficking. Each year, 53,000 children are murdered.

Too many countries have failed to introduce even the most basic laws to protect children from violence in school and at home. And even in countries that have introduced legislation, those laws are too often not enforced. There are no more excuses for failing to protect children from violence. Enough is enough — children have the right to learn without fear.

I know that many development organizations already have violence against children as their top priority. PLAN International is no exception. Next year, following on from the success of our campaign to promote universal birth registration, we will launch our second global campaign — Learn without Fear — which will target all forms of violence in school.

But we, the NGO community, cannot act alone. We need nations to come with us. Governments must outlaw all forms of violence against children and make schools safe places to learn, free from physical and sexual violence, bullying and harassment. They must safeguard children at home by putting in place comprehensive protection systems that prevent abuse and support children and families. And most of all, they must rigorously and consistently enforce these systems. And we will support them every step of the way.

At 18, it is time for the Convention of the Rights of the Child to come of age, and it is time for us, the world's adults, to live up to our responsibilities to children. That means attaching as much importance to children's rights as we currently do to the MDGs. The whole world agreed to do just that. But it still has not delivered.

That is why we welcome the recent recommendation on appointing a Special Representative of the Secretary-General to hold to account countries that fail to meet their legal and moral obligations to promote the rights of children. He or she must be a well-respected, senior international figure, independent of existing agencies, ready to provide real leadership and to stand up to all those failing to protect children. And he or she must be given the authority, resources, backing and teeth to fulfil the role.

It is time we listened to the people we claim to represent. As Linda Yohannes, an eloquent young activist, said in Cairo, "No more resolutions. We want action. And we children are part of the solution".

We have come a long way in our quest to make the world a truly better place for our children, but we still have a very long way to go. To achieve our goals and ensure that no child is left behind, we need to put in place mechanisms, strategies and the political will to accelerate action that will ensure in an integrated way the survival, development, protection and participation of all children. This approach requires strategic partnerships and alliances between Governments, civil

society, the private sector, the media and the parents and children themselves.

I call on all the Governments represented here to live up to the promise they made five years ago and lead a global movement for children that creates an unstoppable momentum for change. They can rely on the support of NGOs and wider civil society in helping to overcome the barriers that stand in our way. It is critical that in doing so we reflect seriously about what it is we have accomplished so far, but, more important, about what we can achieve if we listen to children and work with them instead of for them.

Our appeal is that, for a world truly fit for children, we need to listen to what children have told us and to work with them in ensuring that their recommendations are followed. If we are to jump-start the next generation, we need sustained and consistent commitment. The challenge before us is too great for any one Government, organization or agency; it will take real participation, real political will and real strategic alliances at every level. We cannot solve the entire problem without including everybody. We must act now, before our legacy to the next generation becomes a series of broken promises.

The President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 61/272 of 29 June 2007, I now give the floor to the child delegate Ms. Millicent Orondo Atieno of Kenya.

Ms. Orondo Atieno (Kenya): I am Millicent Orondo Atieno. I come from Kenya. I am 15 years old. I am here to present the statement produced by all the participants, from different parts of the world, who have attended the Children's Forum on a world fit for children.

The path to a world fit for children has been, and still is, long and difficult. We still have so much more to achieve. Since 2002, we have started following this path. We, the children, have always been ready and willing to keep on moving forward. We are the hope and the light that cannot be turned off. We have three more years to go. We have passed the halfway mark. This is our final chance to urge you to keep your promises, and it is your final warning that action needs to be taken.

It is no longer a question of what to do or how to do it, but of what is given priority. We call on all of you, adult decision makers, to renew your commitments

towards us and to make us the number-one priority. There should be no argument about the best interests of the child being the number-one priority. You often consider the best interests of the child, but just talking about it is not enough; it should be the guiding principle for all your decisions and all your actions. We recommend that, when you are preparing national budgets, for example, every decision should be consistent with the best interests of the child.

It is through the meaningful partnerships between Governments, civil society, the private sector and young people that the cycle of poverty can be broken. Poverty is indeed the main obstacle that prevents us from building a world fit for children, and quality education is a key to breaking the horrible cycle of poverty. Therefore, we children demand access to quality education for each and every child. Teach the child of today so as not to punish the adult of tomorrow. If adults commit to us for a better present, we commit to them a better future.

In my country, as in many other countries in the world, the lives of children and young people are threatened by HIV and AIDS. For us, access to life skills education is a priority in the fight against such diseases. Life skills education helps us to develop healthy lifestyles. In that way, we can learn how to protect ourselves from the danger of diseases.

We call on your Governments and local authorities to provide supportive environments for those children and young people living with HIV and AIDS. That is another example of what we mean by working in the best interests of the child.

You, the leaders of the world's countries, need to work together across national borders to ensure children's rights. Together, we are strong. In the past few days, we, the children, have seen that friendship does not have barriers. Despite our cultural differences and language barriers, we all have the same goal: to make this world a better place for us, for all children.

As we look to the future, there are some notable achievements worth acknowledging. We have learned from the "Progress for Children" report that, for the first time, the annual global number of deaths of children under 5 years old is below the 10 million mark. For us, that is a very encouraging sign of progress, and we hope that there will be other similar results in the future. Our world has three more years to save the lives of those children who are at risk. Unless

we improve our performance, nearly 30 million more children will die by 2010.

Discussions, especially with children, are essential. We want to be more involved. Let our voices be heard in our local communities, our schools and our parliaments. Wherever people are making decisions that affect children, we want to be involved.

But results are what matter most to us. Children do not want just resolutions; we want solutions. We do not want to hear any more good intentions; we want to see more actions.

We are ready. Let us redouble our efforts. Let us together make a reality of a world fit for children.

The President: We have come to the end of a remarkable commemoration of the special session on children. I would like to thank all Member States for their active participation, the Co-Chairs for their skilful moderation of the round tables, and non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations for sharing their unique perspectives. Most important, I would like to thank all the children who were involved in the preparations and all those children who participated in this Meeting. The quantity and quality of all the speakers — who numbered more than 140 — demonstrates that the Assembly is vital, that we accept our shared responsibility to build a world fit for children.

The best advocates for children are children themselves. The General Assembly called for the participation of 20 children selected from all over the globe. In addition, more than 55 Member States included a child in their official delegations.

The highlight, and the most remarkable feature, of this meeting has been the active contribution these young people have made. It is essential that we listen to them and take action. Children have an amazing appreciation for universal human values. They are not just beneficiaries; we must involve them more as our partners.

During the debate, children articulated a vision of the world they want to live in. Let us pay attention to their concerns. Longeni Masti, the child representative of Namibia, made a statement on behalf of children from 51 countries. He described the direct action that children had taken in their own countries to address child trafficking, HIV/AIDS, malnutrition, exploitation and abuse of children. Longeni's message and that of

Millicent Orondo Atieno, who just spoke, were very simple but very clear. Children want honesty, they want action and they want to know that when Governments make promises they are kept.

The key priorities of this session of the General Assembly — responding to climate change, financing for development and achieving the Millennium Development Goals — are closely tied to delivering on the commitments we have made to make the world fit for children. We will use the many insightful points made by delegations, children and non-governmental organizations at forthcoming General Assembly events where these issues will be debated in more detail.

It is clear that progress has been made since 2002. Fewer children under 5 are dying each year. More children are in school than ever before. More educational opportunities are being extended equally to girls and boys. More medicines are available for children, including those infected by HIV/AIDS. More laws, policies and plans are in place to protect children from violence, abuse and exploitation.

But many challenges still remain. Malnutrition, pandemics including HIV/AIDS, as well as malaria, tuberculosis and other preventable diseases, bring continued suffering to millions of children. Lack of access to education remains a significant obstacle to making faster progress. A large number of children are still subject to violence, exploitation and abuse, and to inequality and discrimination, in particular against young girls.

Child delegates called for a more coordinated international response to these issues, including stronger partnerships with the private sector and the availability of cheaper drugs. They also stressed the empowerment role of education, the importance of involving children in national education programming and meeting the financing gaps that remain to provide education for all.

The positive, action-orientated tone of the debate was a mark of our collective resolve and commitment to making this world truly fit for children.

While we have been debating how to achieve these ends, heads of Government and Ministers have assembled in Bali to discuss one of the defining challenges of our time: climate change. Some in the media have questioned the link between climate change and children. It is really quite simple. There is nothing more important for a parent than securing a better

future for his or her children. As I mentioned at the opening of the Meeting, we have a special responsibility as adults to set an example and to act as responsible custodians of the planet so that we pass on a safer, cleaner and more equal world to our children. Climate change draws those strands together. Without global action that is economically and environmentally sustainable, we will not be able to provide that future.

May I offer my sincere congratulation to all Member States on their contribution to this Commemorative Meeting. I would like to thank the Permanent Representative of Brazil, Her Excellency Ambassador Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti, for facilitating the drafting of the Declaration, which is a significant outcome of this Meeting. The Declaration is a reflection of the priority we give to children. It calls on all of us to, first, renew and reaffirm our political will and our commitments. Secondly, it calls on us to promote the well-being and rights of children, as that is in the best interest of all humanity. Thirdly, it calls upon us to recognize the encouraging developments and progress made since 2002, but also the many challenges ahead. Fourthly, it calls on all of us to commit to increasing our international cooperation and partnerships in order to fully achieve the goals of the 2002 special session.

Let us not just stay the course. Let us accelerate and march ahead. We must assure the children that the future they truly deserve and will inherit can be realized through our actions now.

The General Assembly has concluded the Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting Devoted to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children. The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of sub-item (b) of agenda item 66.

Programme of work

The President: I should like to consult members regarding an extension for the work of the Fifth Committee. Members will recall that, at its 2nd plenary meeting, on 21 September 2007, the General Assembly approved the recommendation of the General Committee that the Fifth Committee complete its work by Friday, 14 December 2007. However, I have been informed by the Chairperson of the Fifth Committee that the Committee will not be able to finish its work by tomorrow, 14 December, and that it will need to hold additional meetings until Wednesday, 19 December 2007.

May I therefore take it that the General Assembly agrees to extend the work of the Fifth Committee until Wednesday, 19 December 2007? I hear no objection.

It was so decided.

The President: I would now like to announce some additions to the programme of work of the General Assembly. The Assembly will resume consideration of agenda item 77 and its sub-items (a) and (b), on oceans and the law of the sea, on Tuesday, 18 December, in the afternoon to hear the remaining speakers on that item and to take action on the draft resolutions.

I have also received a letter from the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Assistance and Support to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse requesting that the report of the Working Group be considered under agenda item 116, "Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit". This letter has been issued as document A/62/581 and will be taken up on Monday, 17 December 2007, in the afternoon under agenda item 34, "Comprehensive review of the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all their aspects", together with the report of the Fourth Committee on that item.

The meeting rose at 4.55 p.m.