



General Assembly

Twenty-seventh special session

1st meeting

Wednesday, 8 May 2002, 9 a.m.

New York

Official Records

Temporary President: Madam Lee Hee-ho (Republic of Korea)

The meeting was called to order at 9:15 a.m.

Item 1 of the provisional agenda

Opening of the session by the Chairperson of the delegation of the Republic of Korea

The Temporary President: I declare open the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly.

Item 2 of the provisional agenda

Minute of silent prayer or meditation

The Temporary President: I invite representatives to stand and observe one minute of silent prayer or meditation.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silent prayer or meditation.

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/S-27/14)

The Temporary President: I should like, in keeping with the established practice, to invite the attention of the General Assembly to document A/S-27/14, containing a letter addressed to the President of the General Assembly by the Secretary-General, in which he informs the Assembly that 21 Member States are in arrears in the payment of their financial contributions to the United Nations within the terms of Article 19 of the Charter.

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of the information contained in this document?

It was so decided.

Item 3 of the provisional agenda

Credentials of representatives to the special session of the General Assembly

(a) Appointment of the members of the Credentials Committee

The Temporary President: Further to rule 28 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, in accordance with precedents and as recommended by the Preparatory Committee for the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly, the Credentials Committee of the twenty-seventh special session should have the same membership as that of the fifty-sixth regular session of the Assembly, namely, China, Denmark, Jamaica, Lesotho, the Russian Federation, Senegal, Singapore, the United States of America and Uruguay.

If there is no objection, I take it that the Assembly decides to appoint those States members of the Credentials Committee.

It was so decided.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

Item 4 of the provisional agenda

Election of the President

The Temporary President: I invite the Assembly to proceed to the election of the President of the General Assembly at its twenty-seventh special session.

In this connection, the Preparatory Committee for the special session recommends that the special session should take place under the presidency of the President of the fifty-sixth regular session, His Excellency, Mr. Han Seung-soo of the Republic of Korea.

I take it that the Assembly wishes to elect His Excellency Mr. Han President of the General Assembly at its twenty-seventh special session by acclamation.

It was so decided.

The Temporary President: I extend my sincere congratulations to His Excellency Mr. Han Seung-soo and invite him to assume the presidency.

I request the Chief of Protocol to escort the President to the podium.

Mr. Han Seung-soo took the Chair.

Statement by Mr. Han Seung-soo, President of the General Assembly at its twenty-seventh special session

The President: I am very pleased to welcome all of you to the special session of the General Assembly on children. I would first like to thank Madam Lee Hee-ho, First Lady and head of the delegation of the Republic of Korea, for presiding over the opening of this special session. This is a crucial moment. It is the first time that the General Assembly has debated the issue of children at a special session, and this is one of the largest gatherings of world leaders ever to take place at the United Nations. The fact that more than 60 world leaders are here with us is a reflection of the gravity of the subject: the well-being of our children.

This special session on children was one of the first major casualties of the tragic events of 11 September last year. These events compelled us to postpone the session, which had been scheduled for September. Those very events make it all the more pertinent that the issues involved in giving children not just their right to survival, protection and development, but also a stake in the world's future are at the core of

this special session. Taking this opportunity, I would like to express my appreciation to all Member States for their spirit of flexibility and cooperation in rescheduling this special session.

This special session will review the progress made since the World Summit for Children held in 1990. The Summit opened a decade of debate and action on children's issues, setting concrete goals to improve child well-being by the year 2000. More than 70 world leaders gathered in 1990, and I am delighted that the leaders of the world have once again responded wholeheartedly in the name of children.

Member States have come to renew their commitments to children, and this time they are doing so in the presence of more than 1,000 non-governmental organizations and, very importantly, hundreds of children and young people. This is a sign of one of the most important lessons of the last decade: progress for children depends on partnership among many players and on the participation of children and young people themselves.

As we have read in the comprehensive report prepared by the Secretary-General, there has been real progress in many areas and there is much to celebrate. More than 60 countries have cut child mortality by at least one third, and there has been a 50 per cent reduction in death from diarrhoeal diseases. Determined efforts have brought polio to the brink of extinction, and great strides have been made against iodine deficiency.

These successes are due to the work of many people and organizations. I would like to recognize in particular the great achievements of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) under the able and inspired leadership of its Executive Director, Ms. Carol Bellamy. I also wish to congratulate Ms. Bellamy and her staff, Ambassador Patricia Durrant of Jamaica, Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee, and the members of its Bureau on their excellent preparations for this special session.

Looking into the future, we still have a long journey ahead of us. We must be serious and open about the challenges that remain in the unfinished business of the last decade. And we must ask some searching questions. Why are so many children still out of school? Why have we made so little progress in reducing maternal mortality? In a world of unprecedented wealth, why are so many children still

born into abject poverty and deprivation? And why are many children still exposed to the horrors of conflict?

Unless we understand and acknowledge our failures, we are in danger of repeating them. Unless we recognize and address the barriers to progress for children, we cannot overcome them. Unless we are inventive, creative and adaptable, we will be unable to respond to the issues that have emerged since 1990 or to the challenges and opportunities that may face us in the future.

Globalization, for example, presents us with both profound challenges and great potential. The revolution in information and communication technologies holds enormous potential for accelerating the pace of economic and social progress. Yet at the same time it has also engendered the digital divide, which threatens to widen the already huge disparities of income and opportunity both within and among countries.

May I suggest that, for the next three days, we set aside any adult prejudices and listen to and learn from the children and young people who are with us. Let us take on their excitement, dynamism, optimism and energy. Let us be as open as they are to new ideas, differing opinions and alternative viewpoints.

We are immensely privileged to be part of this historic event. At the same time, we have a great responsibility to meet the high expectations of children. The children of the world are watching us. They expect us to deliver on the promises we make here in New York. Let us not fail them. Let us therefore work together during these three days to build a world fit for children.

I call on the Secretary-General of the United Nations, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan.

The Secretary-General: This is not just a special session on children. It is a gathering about the future of humanity. We are meeting here because there is no issue more unifying, urgent or universal than the welfare of our children. There is no issue that important.

None of us — not in the United Nations, not in Government, not in civil society and certainly not the children in this room today — needs convincing that this session must be truly special. And it will be special in at least one way: it will be the first time that children themselves will speak at such an event. I urge all the adults here to listen to them attentively. To work for a

world fit for children, we must work with children. I would therefore like to address my words to them — the children of the world.

I would like to tell you that, wherever you may live, you have the right to grow up free of poverty and hunger. You have the right to a quality education, whether you a girl or a boy. You have a right to be protected from infectious diseases, including HIV/AIDS. You have a right to grow up on a clean and healthy planet, with access to safe drinking water. You have a right to live safe from the threat of war, abuse and exploitation.

These rights are obvious. Yet we, the grown-ups, have failed you deplorably in upholding many of them. One in three of you has suffered from malnutrition before turning five years old. One in four of you has not been immunized against any disease. Almost one in five of you is not attending school. Of those of you who do go to school, four out of five will never reach the fifth year of classes. So far many of you have seen violence that no child should ever see. All of you live under the threat of environmental degradation.

We, the grown-ups, must reverse this list of failures, and we are pledged to do so. The very rights I described for you are part of the promises made in the Millennium Declaration — a list of pledges agreed by all the leaders of the world. They promised that by the year 2015, we will have cut by half the number of people living on less than a dollar day. They promised that by the same year, all boys and girls of primary school age will be in school. They promised that the spread of AIDS will have been halted. They promised to work to prevent war and to protect the resources of our planet.

This gathering of the General Assembly is a reminder that these were promises made to you, the next generation.

That means that a child born in the year 2000 has a right to expect to see a very different world by the time he or she is 15 years old. It means that all of you have a right to see a better world in your lifetime. That better world can be built only by investing in you, the children of the world.

People may say this cannot be done. But look at what has been achieved before in the space of just 15 years. A child born in 1954 came into a world that had

never even sent a satellite into space. In the year that child turned 15, a man landed on the moon.

A child born in 1964 came into a world where tens of millions of people were infected with smallpox. In the year that that child turned 15, smallpox had been officially eradicated.

A child born in 1976 came into the world in one of the darkest and most brutal years of South Africa's apartheid rule. By the time that child was 15, Nelson Mandela, who is here with us this morning, had been released and the end of apartheid was in sight. We are delighted that today, 10 years later, Madiba is with us at this special session and is still working harder than anyone to give children a better future.

Finally, a child born in 1982 came into a world where there were no attempts to restrict the landmines that were being laid, from Angola to Afghanistan, which would kill and maim thousands of children. In the year that that child turned 15, a treaty was signed that would ban the use of these abominable weapons.

What did these events signify? Why did these events come into being, and what do they have in common? They were achieved because people had the commitment to use their minds and their hearts to work together and reach the goals they had set themselves. If they could accomplish all these things within the span of one childhood, how can we fail to do the same with the pledges that have been agreed by all the countries of the world, especially as we know from experience that for every dollar invested in the development of a child, there is a seven dollar return for all society?

To the adults in this room, I will say: let us not make children pay for our failures any more. Who among us has not looked into the eyes of a disappointed child and been humbled? The children in this room are witnesses to our words. They and their peers in every land have a right to expect us to turn our words into action; I repeat, to expect us to turn our words into action, and to build a world fit for children.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

In connection with the next item, I should like to inform Members that the report of the Preparatory Committee for the special session is contained in document A/S-27/2 and Addendum 1 (Parts I and II).

I call on the Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee for the special session, Ambassador Patricia Durrant of Jamaica.

Miss Durrant (Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee): It gives me great pleasure to extend a warm welcome to all who are attending this special session of the General Assembly on children. We are particularly pleased that so many delegations have included children.

I now have the honour to present the report of the Preparatory Committee for the special session, as contained in document A/S-27/2 and Addendum 1 (Parts I and II).

We are here to witness the culmination of more than two years of dedication and intense work on behalf of the children of the world. At this special session of the General Assembly representatives of Member States will have the opportunity to commit themselves to addressing the unfinished business of the 1990 World Summit for Children, as well as new and emerging issues that affect the lives of children, and to take concerted action to place the interests of children at the forefront of development policies.

To oversee the arrangements for the special session, the Preparatory Committee was established in accordance with resolution 54/93 of 7 December 1999. The Committee began its work with the election of a five-member Bureau made up of Ambassadors from Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, Mali and Jamaica.

In addition to its organizational session, the Committee has held three substantive sessions, several extended Bureau meetings and numerous informal consultations.

Decisions on organizational matters for the special session, including the three interactive round tables and participation of speakers other than Member States, including children, non-governmental organizations and other civil society representatives, are contained in the main body of the report.

A series of seven panel discussions was held during the preparatory process. These panels elaborated several key themes that run throughout the outcome document; namely, review and assessment, including constraints encountered in implementing the goals of the World Summit emerging issues future actions for children adolescent development and participation the

girl child and the subject of the two Optional Protocols of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

Another significant feature of the preparatory process was the holding of five main regional meetings. These meetings were organized jointly with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and took place in Beijing, Berlin, Cairo, Kathmandu and Kingston. They produced their own declarations, which have been extremely important in assessing progress and highlighting regional concerns and priorities.

The declarations of these regional meetings have been put together in one convenient document for participants at this special session.

The report of the Secretary-General entitled "We the Children: End-decade review of the follow-up to the World Summit for Children" is contained in document A/S-27/3. The report was introduced to delegations at the third substantive session of the Committee. At that time, delegations engaged in substantive discussion of this very comprehensive report, which serves as a companion to the draft outcome document and is based on over 130 national reports, reports from United Nations entities and on the follow-up and assessment procedures established by UNICEF after the 1990 World Summit.

At its meeting on 6 May, the Preparatory Committee decided to transmit to this special session for further consideration the draft outcome document entitled "A world fit for children". The document is divided into three main sections.

First, the declaration is a political reaffirmation to complete the unfinished agenda of the World Summit for Children and to address emerging issues. It contains 10 imperatives that have been used to mobilize a groundswell of support that will help to build a world fit for children.

The second section comprises a review of progress and lessons learned, which provides a summary of accomplishments and notes the shortfalls since the 1990 World Summit for Children.

Section three, the Plan of Action, sets out our vision of a world fit for children, in which all children get the best possible start in life; have access to quality basic education, including primary education that is

compulsory and available free to all; and have ample opportunity to develop their individual capacities in a safe and supportive environment.

This section also identifies the broad range of partners who are called to action in the best interests of children. The Plan of Action further sets out goals, strategies and actions in four areas: promoting healthy lives, providing quality education, protecting against abuse, exploitation and violence, and combating HIV/AIDS.

Within each of these areas, specific goals have been outlined, including, inter alia, developing and implementing policies and programmes in early childhood development and adolescent health; affirming education as a key factor in eradicating poverty and reducing child labour; protecting children from all forms of sexual exploitation, including paedophilia, trafficking and abduction; and reducing the prevalence of HIV/AIDS within the age group 15 to 24. Several intermediate goals and targets have also been identified, which will strengthen our progress towards achieving the goals of the Millennium Declaration for 2015.

The Plan of Action affirms that in order to achieve the goals and targets within the four key areas, additional human, financial and material resources will be required nationally and internationally, and it calls for enhanced international cooperation to achieve global funding targets.

Finally, the draft outcome document addresses follow-up actions and monitoring to be taken at the national, regional and international levels. It also requests the Secretary-General to report regularly to the General Assembly on the implementation of the Plan of Action.

On behalf of the members of the Bureau and on behalf of the members of the Preparatory Committee, I would like to pay tribute to UNICEF and to the leadership of its Executive Director, Ms. Carol Bellamy. In its role as substantive secretariat, UNICEF's contribution to the work of the Preparatory Committee has been immeasurable. I would also like to thank members of the United Nations Secretariat, who continually performed miracles to accommodate the changing needs of the Committee. I am deeply grateful to the Vice-Chairmen, Ambassadors Chowdhury and Schumacher, in particular, for their support and

guidance in facilitating the work of the Preparatory Committee's outcome document.

Finally, to all members of the Committee, I am truly grateful to you for the hard work and the commitment displayed throughout the process.

We now have the opportunity to participate in creating a world fit for children.

Item 6 of the provisional agenda

Organization of the session

Draft decision II (A/S-27/2, para. 25)

Draft decision III (A/S-27/2/Add.1 Part 1, para. 18)

The President: In addition to General Assembly resolution 55/276 of 22 June 2001 and 56/259 of 31 January 2002, as well as Assembly decision 56/467 of 1 May 2002, the Assembly has before it draft decision II, recommended by the Preparatory Committee in paragraph 25 of its report (document A/S-27/2), and draft decision III, recommended by the Preparatory Committee in paragraph 18 of Part 1 of the addendum to its report (A/S-27/2/Add.1 (Part 1)).

Draft decision II is entitled "Organizational arrangements for the special session".

May I take it that the General Assembly wishes to adopt draft decision II?

It was so decided.

The President: Draft decision III is entitled "Presentation of the outcome of the children's forum to the General Assembly at its special session on children".

May I take it that the General Assembly wishes to adopt draft decision III?

It was so decided.

The President: On the basis of the decisions taken by the General Assembly, the Vice-Presidents of the twenty-seventh special session shall be the same as those of the fifty-sixth regular session of the General Assembly.

The Vice-Presidents of the fifty-sixth session are: Cambodia, China, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, France, Greece, Guatemala,

Kyrgyzstan, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Malta, Mauritania, Nepal, Nicaragua, Paraguay, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone, South Africa, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America.

If there is no objection, I take it that the Assembly decides to elect by acclamation those States Vice-Presidents of the General Assembly at its twenty-seventh special session.

It was so decided.

The President: The Chairmen of the Main Committees of the fifty-sixth regular session shall serve in the same capacity at the twenty-seventh special session. The Chairmen of the six Main Committees at the fifty-sixth regular session are the following: First Committee, Mr. André Erdős of Hungary; Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), Mr. Hasmy Agam of Malaysia; Second Committee, Mr. Francisco Seixas da Costa of Portugal; Third Committee, Mr. Fuad Mubarak Al-Hinai of Oman; Fifth Committee, Mr. Nana Effah-Apenteng of Ghana; Sixth Committee, Mr. Pierre Lelong of Haiti.

If there is no objection, I take it that the Assembly decides to elect by acclamation those representatives Chairmen of the Main Committees at the twenty-seventh special session.

It was so decided.

The President: As concerns the First Committee, in the absence of its Chairman, Mr. Stéphane De Loecker of Belgium, Vice-Chairman of the First Committee, has been designated to act as Chairman of that Committee for the duration of the special session.

As concerns the Sixth Committee, in the absence of its Chairman, Mr. Siddig Abdalla of the Sudan, Vice-Chairman of the Sixth Committee, has been designated to act as Chairman of that Committee for the duration of the special session.

In adopting the recommendations of the Preparatory Committee, the Assembly has established an Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole, which will be designated as "Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the twenty-seventh special session".

In accordance with the decisions taken by the General Assembly, the Chairman of the Ad Hoc

Committee of the Whole will be a full member of the General Committee of the twenty-seventh special session.

The Chairman of the Preparatory Committee will serve in the same capacity in the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole.

I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly at its twenty-seventh special session to elect Her Excellency Ambassador Patricia Durrant by acclamation Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole.

It was so decided.

The President: I congratulate Her Excellency Ambassador Patricia Durrant on behalf of the General Assembly and on my own behalf and wish her well in the important and onerous responsibilities that she has just assumed for the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole.

The General Committee of the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly is thus fully constituted.

I should now like to inform members of the co-chairpersons of the three round tables: round table 1, His Excellency Mr. Nambar Enkhbayar, Prime Minister of Mongolia, and His Excellency Mr. Ion Iliescu, President of Romania; round table 2, Her Excellency Ms. Tarja Halonen, President of the Republic of Finland, and His Excellency Mr. Vicente Fox, President of the United Mexican States; and round table 3, His Excellency Mr. Levy Mwanawasa, President of the Republic of Zambia, and His Excellency The Right Honourable Sher Bahadur Deuba, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Nepal.

Members will recall that the President of the General Assembly was requested to present the list of selected accredited non-governmental organizations to Member States in a timely manner for approval. I should now like to propose to the Assembly the following eight non-governmental organizations: Centre for the Culture of Peace and Non-Violence ("Mali Korak"); Christian Children's Fund; Forum for African Women Educationalists; Hague Appeal for Peace; Arigatou Foundation; NGO Committee on the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); Save the Children Alliance; and South Asian Coalition on Child Servitude.

May I take it that the Assembly agrees that representatives from these eight non-governmental

organizations may make statements in the debate in plenary of the special session?

It was so decided.

The President: In accordance with the decisions taken by the General Assembly, two child delegates to the children's forum will present the outcome of the forum in the plenary.

After consultations, the following two child representatives have been identified: Ms. Gabriela Azurduy Arrieta and Ms. Audrey Chenynut.

I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to hear those two child representatives.

It was so decided.

The President: I should like to remind representatives that statements in the debate in plenary are limited to five minutes.

For the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly, the Observer of Palestine will participate in the work of the General Assembly, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 3237 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974, resolution 43/177 of 15 December 1988 and resolution 52/250 of 7 July 1998, with no further need for a precursory explanation prior to any intervention by Palestine in this special session.

As was stated in my letter of 6 May 2002 to the Chairpersons of regional groups, the President of the Inter-Parliamentary Council of the Inter-Parliamentary Union requested to make a statement in the debate in plenary at this special session.

In the absence of objection, may I take it that the Assembly, without setting a precedent, agrees to hear a statement by the President of the Inter-Parliamentary Council of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in the debate in plenary meeting?

It was so decided.

Item 7 of the provisional agenda

Adoption of the agenda

The President: The provisional agenda of the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly is contained in document A/S-27/1/Rev.1.

In order to expedite its work, the Assembly may wish to consider the provisional agenda directly in

plenary meeting without referring it to the General Committee. May I take it that the General Assembly agrees to this procedure?

It was so decided.

The President: May I take it then that the Assembly wishes to adopt the provisional agenda as it appears in document A/S-27/1/Rev.1?

It was so decided.

The President: On the basis of the decisions taken by the General Assembly, all of the items on the agenda are to be considered directly in plenary meetings. In addition, substantive items — that is, items 8 and 9 — have also been allocated to the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the Twenty-Seventh Special Session for consideration, on the understanding that the debate on those two items shall take place in the plenary.

In accordance with the decisions taken earlier, I give the floor to Ms. Gabriela Azurduy Arrieta and Ms. Audrey Chenyut.

Ms. Azurduy Arrieta (*spoke in Spanish*): We have a message from the Children's Forum entitled "A World Fit for Us".

We are the world's children. We are the victims of exploitation and abuse. We are street children. We are the children of war. We are the victims and orphans of HIV/AIDS. We are denied good-quality education and health care. We are victims of political, economic, cultural, religious and environmental discrimination. We are children whose voices are not being heard; it is time we are taken into account.

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

In this world, we see respect for the rights of the child: governments and adults having a real and effective commitment to the principle of children's rights and applying the Convention on the Rights of the Child to all children; and safe, secure and healthy environments for children in families, communities, and nations.

We see an end to exploitation, abuse and violence: laws that protect children from exploitation and abuse being implemented and respected by all; centres and programmes that help to rebuild the lives of victimized children.

We see an end to war: world leaders resolving conflict through peaceful dialogue instead of by using force; child refugees and child victims of war protected in every way and having the same opportunities as all other children; disarmament, elimination of the arms trade and an end to the use of child soldiers.

We see the provision of better health care: affordable and accessible life-saving drugs and treatment for all children; strong and accountable partnerships established among all to promote better health for children.

We see the eradication of HIV/AIDS: educational systems that include HIV prevention programmes; free testing and counselling centres; information about HIV/AIDS freely available to the public; orphans of AIDS and children living with HIV/AIDS cared for and enjoying the same opportunities as all other children.

Ms. Chenyut (*spoke in French*): We see the protection of the environment: the conservation and rescue of natural resources; awareness of the need to live in an environment that is healthy and favourable to our development; accessible surroundings for children with special needs.

We see an end to the vicious cycle of poverty: anti-poverty committees that bring about transparency in expenditure and give attention to the needs of all children; the cancellation of the world debt that impedes progress for children.

We see the provision of better education: equal opportunities and access to quality education that is free and compulsory; school environments in which children feel happy about learning; education for life that goes beyond the academic and includes lessons in understanding, human rights, peace, acceptance and active citizenship.

We see the active participation of children: raised awareness and respect among people of all ages about every child's right to full and meaningful participation, in the spirit of the Convention on the Rights of the Child; children actively involved in decision-making at all levels and in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating all matters affecting the rights of the child.

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

taking, because the children of the world are misunderstood.

We are not the sources of problems; we are the resources that are needed to solve them. We are not expenses; we are investments. We are not just young people; we are, above all, human beings and citizens of the world.

Until others accept their responsibility towards us, we will fight for our rights. We have the will, the knowledge, the sensitivity and the dedication. We promise that as adults we will defend children's rights with the same passion that we have now as children. We promise to treat each other with dignity and respect. We promise to be open and sensitive to our differences.

We are the children of the world, and despite our different backgrounds, we share a common reality. We are united by our struggle to make the world a better place for all. You call us the future, but we are also the present.

The President: I thank Ms. Gabriela Azurduy Arieta and Ms. Audrey Chenynut for their statements.

Agenda items 8 and 9

Review of the achievements in the implementation and results of the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and Plan of Action for Implementing the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in the 1990s

Renewal of commitment and future action for children in the next decade

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Excellency The Honourable Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

President Kumaratunga: I must apologize for being the first adult to spoil that beautiful moment dedicated to the children.

Today, as the United Nations General Assembly holds this special session on children, I am honoured to be part of a renewed world leadership movement to make choices for children, with children, and to give fresh vitality to our belief that they alone are the bearers of our future and a nation's most valuable asset.

Let me begin by quoting Lord Buddha, who said, "What is mankind's treasure? Children are mankind's treasure."

The age we live in has been called "the age of extremes". The twentieth century saw the marvels of the rapid development of science and technology, while it also engendered dangers arising from the excessive use of such great innovations. For example, the discovery of nuclear fission, which led to revolutionary scientific inventions, also led to the manufacture of nuclear weaponry. I could also mention drugs, the abuse of which has led to drug addiction, and many other such examples.

Politically, the emergence of independent nation States as a result of decolonization has given rise to the phenomenon of communities within States rising up to demand recognition and their own separate State, resulting in a large number of armed conflicts, mainly in the decolonized regions of the world.

All of that has a direct impact on children in particular. There are millions of children today who are suffering physically, psychologically and emotionally from the effects of war. It is young people who are most affected by alcohol, tobacco and drug abuse, who make up the largest number of HIV/AIDS victims and who suffer the most horrendous consequences of poverty.

Our world and our modes of living have been unjust to our children. They, in turn, have become today's perpetrators of terrorism, crime and violence. We adults have the responsibility of ensuring for our children an environment conducive to growing and blossoming freely. It is therefore apt that we, the leaders of Governments as well as of the private and non-governmental sectors, are meeting here today to discuss and make decisions about the solutions required to ensure this for our children. Each one of us here has a sacred obligation to our children to build together with our children a world fit for children and a better place to live in.

We in Sri Lanka have made many endeavours to keep our promise to children by placing their needs high on the country's political agenda. We believe that children have rights and that they are not mere appendages of adults. Several decades of sustained commitment in Sri Lanka to develop health and education services have led to many success stories. Free schooling as well as university education and

other assistance is provided to all our children, including the poorest. Our high literacy rates — of over 90 per cent for men and for women — bear testimony to Sri Lanka's commitment to education without social or gender disparity. We introduced compulsory-education legislation in 1977. Four years ago, my Government introduced an extensive educational reform programme aimed at qualitative development and modernization of education.

Health also has been accorded high priority. We provide free health-care services for all, with the accent on primary health care. As a result, we have achieved very low rates of infant, child and maternal mortality and low birth rates, eliminated nearly all immunizable diseases, and provided better sanitation and safe drinking water. However, we still face the challenges of malnutrition and the emerging threat of HIV/AIDS.

I have been deeply conscious of the fact that children in my country have been abused and victimized, most often by adults. That issue had not been addressed, due to its sensitive nature. I decided that a bold step was needed, and legislation was enacted to establish a national child protection authority. The concept of that authority, with responsibilities to prevent child abuse and exploitation, is new and unique in our region. Its achievements include legal amendments targeting sexual exploitation, trafficking, child abuse, juvenile justice, child pornography, child-friendly court procedures, campaigns against corporal punishment and programmes to promote awareness of child rights and children's rights to free expression and participation. Following ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991, we developed our own Sri Lankan charter and ratified all International Labour Organization protocols and conventions relating to child labour.

One of Sri Lanka's greatest challenges in recent times has been the protection of children from the impact of an 18-year civil conflict. We provide all children living in conflict zones with free food, health care and schooling. We also face the problem of recruitment by rebels of children as young as 10 and 11 years old as child soldiers. We collaborate with international agencies, including the United Nations Children's Fund, to advocate against the conscription of children.

My Government has accorded priority to the prevention of the misuse of tobacco, alcohol and drugs, particularly by youth. We have had success in reducing the use of these harmful substances by young people.

Investing in social infrastructure development and poverty reduction is imperative if we are to seriously bring to centre stage the rights and well-being of our children.

It has been my special privilege to join you, my friends, in this leadership endeavour, which has no parallel, to place children at the heart of all our development efforts.

In conclusion, may I express my gratitude to all those who worked hard to make this summit possible under the dynamic leadership of Ms. Carol Bellamy, and for the opportunity afforded me to make this opening statement. I wish the summit every success. I know that together we can, and we must, make the world a better place for our children.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Ion Iliescu, President of Romania.

President Iliescu: As we assemble here today for a special session of the United Nations General Assembly on children, the reason why it had to be postponed, almost eight months ago, is still very much on our minds. The tragic events of 11 September brought home in a most dramatic fashion the cruel reality of the world we live in.

The recent traumatic experiences shed new light on the lasting significance of the documents we adopted at the first World Summit for Children, in 1990. I vividly remember the sense of responsibility, commitment and solidarity between generations that permeated our debates at that time. Indeed, the Summit and the subsequent entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of the Child managed to place the subject high on the agenda as a political priority for action both nationally and internationally.

At the same time, we have to agree with the sobering analysis in the Secretary-General's statement, as well as with the report of the Preparatory Committee. Romania endorses the sound recommendations and strategic directions outlined in the report and wholeheartedly supports the forward-looking provisions of the draft outcome document and action plan.

The condition of children cannot be separated from the state of the overall political, economic and social environment. Children are the most vulnerable to the persistent scourges of poverty, disease, armed conflict, discrimination, exploitative practices and environmental degradation. Those issues were highlighted in the Millennium Declaration, and they were also discussed during the recent International Conference on Financing for Development, held at Monterrey. We shall certainly have to engage in a comprehensive examination of all the logical linkages at the forthcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development, to be held in Johannesburg.

In many respects, the case of Romania is relevant to the daunting problems that a country in transition to a mature democracy and a functional market economy has to face. An appalling legacy, especially concerning the condition of children, has compounded the painful social costs of radical transformation. We are now able to report tangible progress, for which we owe a lot to the very able guidance and assistance we have received from various United Nations agencies — and in particular from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) — European Union institutions, the Council of Europe and a large number of non-governmental organizations and well-meaning individuals.

For historical reasons, and also as a matter of practical necessity, we had to address seriously the question of institutionalized children. While their numbers have been reduced in the past 10 years to less than one third of what they were, we shall continue to provide every child in distress with a setting as close as possible to a normal family environment. In order to make absolutely sure that the children's best interests are properly served and protected, we have had to suspend the practice of international adoption for one year, pending the enactment of appropriate legislation and procedures.

In close partnership with the International Organization for Migration and civil society, we have developed and made operational a national plan of action against trafficking in human beings, children in particular. Since widespread poverty is still a major challenge in Romania, a comprehensive set of measures has been devised to make the best of the limited resources available under our national strategy for child protection, involving the education and public health ministries, specialized agencies and local authorities.

Currently, free milk is provided to all infants. As part of a wider programme to enhance the quality of educational services, school supplies are distributed to about 1 million children in primary and secondary schools. To encourage attendance, particularly by Roma children, a free meal is offered at school. Special support measures have been devised for one-parent families and for the prevention of child abuse, discrimination and other forms of exploitation. Further steps cover additional areas of vital significance, such as preventive programmes and generalized access to treatment and care for HIV/AIDS patients, to be introduced by the end of this year as a result of a partnership with relevant United Nations agencies and pharmaceutical companies, and universal salt iodization by the end of 2003.

The Government of Romania has decided to prepare and submit to Parliament a special bill on children. We also envisage creating the necessary infrastructure and regulatory mechanism for the effective operation of the newly established institution of Ombudsperson for Children.

We in Romania take seriously our pledge to say "Yes" to children. Deeds always speak louder than words.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Majesty King Letsie III, Head of State of the Kingdom of Lesotho.

King Letsie III: We bring warm you greetings and felicitations from the people of Lesotho on this auspicious occasion, Sir, as you preside over the special session on children. This session comes at a critical time when the world is grappling with threats and challenges concerning the welfare of children.

More than a decade ago, the World Summit for Children was held here at United Nations headquarters. That Summit adopted a Declaration and Plan of Action in which we, the world leaders, jointly committed ourselves to giving every child a better future. When we take stock of the progress attained in pursuit of those undertakings and commitments, we find that the record is a mixed one. While notable progress has been made in the realization of the goals enshrined in the Declaration, new threats and challenges have surfaced, making it necessary for us to meet once again to review our performance, formulate new strategies and set new goals in our bid to create a better world for children.

For most of us in the developing world, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, the central challenges we face in fulfilling the obligations which we undertook in 1990 include insecurity, severe and widespread poverty, famine, environmental degradation, internal conflicts and the spread of diseases, including HIV/AIDS and malaria. For us, therefore, a world fit for children means a world where children are not killed, maimed or displaced by incessant armed conflicts; a world where children are not forcibly recruited into military services; a world where children are not subjected to and traumatized by sexual violence and mutilation. Above all, it is a world where children are not orphaned and left destitute by AIDS and hunger. In short, it is a world where children are nurtured and allowed to grow to full adulthood in a tranquil environment that permits them to display their natural talents and creativity.

Since the last Summit, notable successes have been recorded in the global movement for children's rights. The implementation of the Machel study on the impact of war on children has led to the establishment of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflicts. This development strengthens the international response to children in situations of strife by enabling the Security Council to take action for their protection.

In this context, we welcome the promulgation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child related to the recruitment of children, boys and girls into military service by either national or non-State party forces and Security Council resolution 1261 (1999). My Government supports efforts by United Nations agencies and other international partners to implement these provisions with immediate effect.

Since the last Summit, the world community has formulated legal protections for children exposed to hazardous forms of child labour and children caught in the insidious trap of commercial sexual exploitation. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child has come into force and the oversight mechanism is being established. These developments globally and regionally embolden national Governments to take action that will make a difference in the lives of their children.

The Government of the Kingdom of Lesotho has successfully disseminated the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Lesotho throughout the country. Young

people and national organizations are playing an active role in the implementation of the Convention. In a related development, children and youth have participated actively in national, regional and international preparatory meetings for this special session, giving children in Lesotho an opportunity to make meaningful contributions to the outcome document. This exercise was undertaken in the firm belief that children have a right to express themselves freely and that their views should be respected and promoted in all matters affecting them. Moreover, young people are taking part in processes of legal reform as well as in the formulation of a national vision for our long-term development. As a young nation with a young population, Lesotho values the contribution of children and youth to our country's economic and social development.

The Government and the people of Lesotho share the view that access to basic education and literacy is a fundamental right of every child. We are also committed to providing a healthy start in life for young children in recognition of their right to care and as an investment in successful learning later in childhood. Guided by that principle and following the Millennium Summit, Lesotho took the bold step of introducing universal free primary education. By 2006, all the primary school children throughout the country will have access to basic education. Since the launch of free primary education, we have witnessed dramatic increases in school enrolment, with many older children now eagerly beginning their schooling. As part of this national campaign, literacy programmes for out-of-school youth have been expanded and community-based early childhood development programmes are being introduced.

In the food and nutrition sector, intensive efforts are being made to combat micronutrient deficiency through food fortification with vitamin A and other supplements. The national campaign for universal salt iodization is ongoing. Satisfactory progress has been recorded in universal immunization coverage as well as in universal access to safe drinking water and sanitary means of waste disposal. The community health worker is central to ensuring that communities have access to basic health services and that pregnant women have access to quality antenatal care.

As our efforts begin to bear fruit, new challenges have arisen. Chief among those is the prevalence of the deadly HIV/AIDS disease, particularly among youth

and children. HIV/AIDS, together with increasing levels of poverty, not only threatens to undo much of the progress we have made in the health sector, but also is largely responsible for the disintegration of families — loss of household income, increased child labour, neglect and exploitation, and lower school enrolment. The changing structures of the family unit caused by increasing household poverty, unemployment and migrant labour have eroded the traditional support structures for children without parental care, including those orphaned by HIV/AIDS. The need for the community as a whole to assume new roles as care providers for the most vulnerable children has become even more urgent. As a result, we are determined to persevere and to redirect our scarce resources towards building an environment for children that is consistent with the core values, principles and commitments enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Because of the complexity of the task at hand and the substantial financial and technical resources required to implement it, we are hopeful that the United Nations system and the international community will continue to assist us in our efforts to realize all the rights of our children. In creating an environment conducive to children's development, we have to address, in a holistic manner, the social, economic and ideological factors that have inhibited the fulfilment of our obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In protecting children and in charting a new course for their future, we will have to redouble our efforts to eradicate poverty. As we all know, children are hit hardest by poverty because it strikes at the very roots of their potential for development — their growing minds and bodies. Additionally, we will have to change our mindset and treat every child as a person who has intrinsic value and whom nature has endowed with unique gifts that have the potential to enrich our lives immeasurably if they are allowed to flourish.

Before I conclude my remarks, I would like to pay tribute to all the people involved in the preparatory work for this meeting. My special tribute goes to Ambassador Durrant of Jamaica, Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee, for her meticulous preparations and for her robust efforts to finalize the Plan of Action and Declaration for our meeting. Much of the success of this meeting reflects the tireless efforts and dedication of the country offices of the

United Nations agencies and children's rights organizations, in particular the United Nations Children's Fund and the Save the Children Alliance.

Our successes and failures of the past decade in pursuing the goals of the 1990 World Summit for Children and in implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child have taught us many lessons. It is therefore our duty to draw on the lessons learned as we recommit ourselves to creating a safer, fairer and healthier world for our children. The Secretary-General's report, "We the Children", tells us that our failures to achieve most of the goals of the World Summit for Children have not been because those goals were too ambitious or unaffordable or technically beyond our reach, but largely because the requisite political decisions were not taken. In that regard, I share the view expressed by the Secretary-General, when he says that, in order to secure a better future for our children,

"... leaders at every level of government and civil society must exert the political will necessary to bring about a decisive shift in national investments to favour the well-being of children. The special session of the General Assembly on children must be the juncture at which that first step is taken." (A/S-27/3, para. 47)

I sincerely and earnestly hope that all of us will heed that call for the sake of all the world's children.

The President: At this point, I should like to remind delegates that statements in the plenary debate are limited to five minutes.

The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Bernard Makuza, Prime Minister of the Rwandese Republic.

Mr. Makuza (Rwanda) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of my delegation and on my own behalf, I should like to express my sincere and heartfelt congratulations to you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of this special session on children and to express our thanks to its organizers.

It will be recalled that this session would have been held last September had it not been for the terrible tragedy of 11 September, which claimed countless human lives. Therefore, we should like to take this opportunity to address our deepest sympathy to those who lost their loved ones and to reaffirm the determination of the people and the Government of

Rwanda to combat terrorism in whatever form it may appear.

Twelve years ago, Rwanda, like the other Member States of the United Nations, undertook a 10-year commitment to implement various actions for children.

Today, the time has come to take stock. In the case of Rwanda, despite a period of four years — from 1990 to 1994 — during which implementation of the plan of action was interrupted, we can be proud that, despite the difficult context following the genocide, the last eight years have been marked by some significant achievements, including, first of all, the signing of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two additional Optional Protocols. In this context, the Government of Rwanda has undertaken a process of constitutional and juridical review to ensure that our legislation is now in keeping with these international instruments.

Secondly, Rwanda has also joined the world campaign entitled “Say Yes for Children”, and our people voted en masse for the following three priorities: combating AIDS; ending violence against children and the exploitation of children; and guaranteeing that every child has an education.

Other actions have also been taken and efforts made: a national programme for children; rehabilitation of the infrastructure for our schools following the genocide, which has meant that more than 1.5 million children have gone back to school; participation in the programme entitled “Education for All”, and a campaign against violence and sexual abuse committed against children. Finally, we have set up an expanded immunization programme for children under five.

As I am sure the Assembly is aware, this last decade for Rwanda has been marked by severe upheavals, culminating in the genocide of 1994, which cost us more than 1 million innocent lives and left us with 500,000 orphans or children separated from their families, 65,000 of whom are heads of household. Added to these are street children, children orphaned by HIV/AIDS, children whose parents are in detention, children living in exile and former child soldiers.

The Rwandese Government, in cooperation with national and international partners, has made every effort to help all of these people. Thus, more than 120,000 children have been reunited with their families

or have been placed in foster families. Four thousand four hundred child soldiers have been demobilized and have been reintegrated into society. An education and social reintegration programme is now under way for former child soldiers. Finally, all children under 14 who had been imprisoned on suspicion of the crime of genocide in 1994 have been released and are now following a social reintegration programme.

The genocide of 1994 and its consequences have seriously disrupted all of our efforts for and commitments to children. The challenges we now face are enormous. The magnitude of the needs to be met is well beyond the means that we have available.

That is why, from this rostrum, we appeal to the international community to help us, first, with the assistance programme for the most needy survivors of genocide; secondly, in providing access to vaccines, even the most expensive ones such as those against hepatitis and meningitis; thirdly, in the repatriation of Rwandese children adopted in certain countries, without the consent either of their parents or the Government of Rwanda; fourthly, in the financing of programmes connected with basic health care and education for all and, finally, in the financing of programmes to combat AIDS, particularly to prevent mother-child transmission.

The Government of Rwanda, like all nations present here, is concerned at the many violations of the rights of the child committed throughout the world. That is why, today, we must say “no” to all of these shameful, degrading practices, such as trafficking in children, child prostitution, the use of children in armed conflicts and so on.

After the historic vicissitudes that Rwanda has been through, my country is resolved to invest in children.

In conclusion, I wish to recommend that in all of our decisions and daily actions priority be given to the higher interest of children, so that children can remain central to our concerns.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Stjepan Mesić, President of the Republic of Croatia.

President Mesić (*spoke in Croatian; English text provided by the delegation*): I have not come here to talk about declarations or resolutions or to present statistical data and figures. I have come to talk about

children, the children in the world in which we live, the children to which our present-day world is often denying the right to live and, even more frequently, failing to provide them with the opportunity to lead the life they deserve — as human beings, as children.

We, the politicians holding positions of the utmost responsibility, represent this world, and we run it as the leaders of our countries. We have assumed that responsibility.

Let me ask you a question. When you remember the thousands — the tens and hundreds of thousands — of child beggars, labourers and soldiers, children who are victims of family violence and of sexual abuse, do you dare to say, “We are doing everything we can and this world cannot be better than it is, not even for children.”?

I cannot say that, nor do I dare say it. I am convinced that this world can and must be better. For the children as well.

Let me ask you another question. When you face information on how many children lack the slightest chance to reach adulthood because they will die of hunger or otherwise curable diseases — incurable for them because drugs will never reach them — or information on how many children have no opportunity to attend school and learn at least the essentials, do you dare to say, “We have done everything that could be done, and we cannot do better in the present-day world — not even for the children?”

I do not dare say it. I have absolutely no doubt that this world not only must, but also can, be better — primarily for the children.

I know that today the position of children is better than it was literally yesterday. I also know that it is substantially better than it was in the mid-twentieth century. Finally, I know that it is incomparably better than it was in the early twentieth century — not to go further into the past.

But let us face the truth. The position of children is not good, and in some parts of the world, particularly in underdeveloped countries — but not only in them — it is disastrous.

I have already referred to the child labourers, beggars and soldiers, children condemned to death by hunger and curable diseases, children condemned to

illiteracy and to the lack of education, and children who are victims of violence of all kinds.

As long as even one such child exists, we cannot be satisfied with the condition of the children in this world. We have to fight this problem both individually and together. Some simply cannot fight it on their own, while others find it difficult to decide to do even what they can do. If we really want to, together we will be able to do it.

We therefore need a concerted, coordinated, long-term effort, a clear concept and, of course, the required funds. It is precisely with the United Nations that this can be accomplished, or, to be quite specific, only within the United Nations. However, it is an old and often confirmed truth that the accomplishments of the United Nations are equal to the desire of the Member States. This brings us back to ourselves.

We — both States and their leading politicians — are the ones who must first face the truth and then agree on a course of action. In doing so, we must be fully aware that we will achieve practically nothing unless we proceed from the fact that the problem of our children can be dealt with only within the broader context of the problems facing the present-day world.

Let me list, however briefly, the basic factors that should be sought at the root of the present, unsatisfactory conditions of the world’s children, and — let me add, though I thereby seem to exceed the framework of the session’s topic — not only of the children.

Those factors include the still inadequately widespread and unequally developed state of democracy based, among other things, on the strict respect for human rights, including the rights of children; the inadequate presence of the welfare state; wars and internal conflicts; underdevelopment; massive unemployment; lack of awareness that the use of children as labourers or as soldiers is equal to crime, and that the lack of education denies the future not only to children but also to the countries in which they live.

In other words, the propagation and the reinforcement of democracy, the development of the welfare state, the elimination of wars and armed conflicts of all kinds, investments in development and development aid, and, concurrently, the reduction of unemployment, the enhanced awareness of the need to ensure a carefree childhood followed by education —

all this will improve the overall status of children in the world. And not only of children but of the members of the human race in general.

If we really want to give the children of the world a better future, after last year's tragic events in this city and in Washington, factors to be eliminated should certainly include global terrorism, because children are also abused when they are trained to be future terrorists. Moreover, throughout the world, children are also victims of terrorism.

The time has come to change things, all over the world. The time has come to restore childhood to our children, to offer them prospects and thereby ensure the future of our nations.

I declare that the Republic of Croatia will support and be actively involved, within the context of the efforts taken by the United Nations, in every project focused on improving the status of children in the world.

I affirm that my country will consistently pursue the policy of peace, firmly convinced that it is only in conditions of peace that we can build democracy and provide for development, without which there is no life of dignity for children, or for the working population or for the elderly. Let me reiterate that we have assumed the responsibility. Let us behave responsibly. Let us make our world better than it is for the children, but not only for them.

I began my address with a question. Let me conclude with a question as well: can we do it? This is the place and the time, high time, to answer that question. Let us answer it together, and let us answer it in the affirmative. Then, let us do what has to be done, for the sake of our children and the children of their children, for the sake of the future of our world.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Nambar Enkhbayar, Prime Minister of the Republic of Mongolia.

Mr. Enkhbayar (Mongolia): It is indeed a great honour and privilege for me to address the special session of the United Nations General Assembly on children on behalf of the Government and the National Children's Council of Mongolia. As a young nation with children under 18 making up over half its population, Mongolia attaches primary importance to this special session to inspire the vision, commitment and leadership that is needed to fulfil the promise of a

better future for every child at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

The Secretary-General's report "We the Children: End-decade review of the follow-up to the World Summit for Children" reveals mixed results, with both achievements and setbacks. It is gratifying to note that significant progress has been registered towards a number of important Summit goals. They include a substantial reduction of under-five mortality rates, high and sustained levels of child immunization, an increase in school enrolment rates for children and in adult literacy rates, and heightened awareness of child rights issues across the world. All in all, issues relevant to children are being placed higher on national and global agendas.

Yet, much more needs to be done to effectively address both the persistent and the evolving threats to the survival and development of children. It is absolutely unacceptable that at a time of unprecedented global prosperity and opportunity, over 10 million children still die each year, often from readily preventable causes, 170 million children are still malnourished, and nearly 120 million have never seen the inside of a school.

To redress this depressing situation, the world needs to generously invest in children. Through investing in our children, in their health and education, we can effectively attack chronic poverty by breaking its vicious circle within a single generation. Through investing in basic social services, including the 20/20 initiative, we can save more precious lives and prepare our children from their early childhood years to become productive citizens. Through investing in children we will honour our moral imperative of creating a world fit for children.

One of the important lessons learned from the past decade is that a lack of success in some important areas was largely due to insufficient investment in children. That is why this special session, including the interactive roundtables of world leaders — one of which I have the privilege to co-chair this afternoon — is called upon to renew our unreserved commitment to put children first and to achieve that through action-oriented and time-bound follow-up measures.

Among the priority areas of action, I wish to highlight quality education. It goes without saying that education is a key factor in creating a world where people can develop their full potential and lead

productive lives, thus the need to ensure that all children have access to primary education that is free, compulsory and of good quality.

In this regard, I wish to emphasize, *inter alia*, the importance of the United Nations Literacy Decade, proclaimed by the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session last December, which represents a major global initiative to meet our renewed commitment to education for all.

The creation of a world fit for children requires genuine partnerships between all stakeholders: parents, Governments, parliaments, non-governmental organizations, civil society, the private sector and the mass media, as well as regional and international organizations. What is also important is the active participation of the children themselves in shaping the world they will inherit.

Looking back at national implementation of the Summit goals, it is gratifying to note that, despite the enormous economic difficulties and constraints of the ongoing transition period, Mongolia has been able to achieve the national targets of reducing infant and under-five mortality rates; substantially reduce the number of school dropouts; improve child immunization coverage; and develop a rights-based approach in dealing with issues relevant to children.

The Government of Mongolia places children high on its overall agenda of ensuring human security and human development. It has increased its investment in the social sector, including its infrastructure and basic social services, through shouldering the cost of dormitories, providing free schooling supplies to children from poor and large families in secondary schools, and extending scholarships to higher educational institutions for children from poor families and herders as well as for families with three or more student children. Thus we have been able to improve the quality of education, increase the number of secondary schools and enrolment rates, and foster educational opportunities for children, especially for the poor and vulnerable.

But we still face daunting challenges to ensure sustained growth and sustainable development, to substantially reduce poverty and unemployment as well as to effectively address and prevent hitherto hidden problems related to street children, juvenile offences, alcohol and tobacco abuse and emerging transboundary threats such as child trafficking and the spread of

sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. In our efforts to ensure the well-being of children, we have been cooperating closely with international organizations, including the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); foundations such as the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) and SOROS; non-governmental organizations such as Save the Children; and other bilateral and international partners.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate that my Government will spare no effort in implementing the goals and objectives envisioned in the Declaration and Plan of Action, in close and active partnership with fellow members and regional and international organizations.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Abdoulaye Wade, President of the Republic of Senegal.

President Wade (*spoke in French*): It is a great honour for me to take the floor and to participate in this general debate of the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly on children.

Allow me at the outset to thank you, Mr. President, for having participated in the Dakar Summit on partnership with the private sector for financing Africa's growth through the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and for having visited me. For us Africans, NEPAD — because of its partnership with the public sector, represented by the G-8, and its partnership with the private sector — is both a vision and a strategy and the only way to make Africa internationally competitive and place it on an equal footing, in order to ensure the growth of the world economy.

First of all, I should like to pay tribute to my brother and friend, President Nelson Mandela, and to Ms. Graça Machel, who, through their inspiring initiative, have spearheaded an unprecedented and global movement for children.

The review of the outcome of the Plan of Action adopted at the 1990 Summit by the leaders of the entire world has shown that significant progress has been made in the area of survival, development and protection of children. I should like to summarize my written statement by explaining in particular what we in Senegal have done.

With respect to our country, I will not stress the results of the end-decade review of the follow-up to the World Summit for Children. I should like only to say that Senegal was one of the first countries in the world to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child, that it played an active role in promoting its adoption by all countries of the continent, and that we are endeavouring to implement it.

The implementation of robust measures has also helped to overcome childhood diseases, reduce the rate of malnutrition and improve the lives of girls and women by giving them equal access to health care and to education.

Since the advent of a democratic system in Senegal, and through the holding of the World Education Forum, Senegal has made the development of young children one of its main priorities. We have broad-based vaccination programmes and provide iron and vitamin A supplements. We iodize salt, promote breastfeeding exclusively, and provide nutritional counselling and education. The community-based nutrition project has been made into a programme to provide better nutrition, the main recipients of which are children under the age of 5, pregnant women and nursing mothers. The Association for Education and Health has also launched a programme to produce spirulina to enrich food.

Polio has been practically eradicated in Senegal, and Guinea worm has totally disappeared. The Assembly is also aware, I am sure, of the positive results we have achieved in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Indeed, the rate of infection in our country is now 1.5 per cent. We are very concerned about stopping the spread of AIDS and are involved in AIDS research with the help of two world renowned Senegalese experts.

In February 2003, under the auspices of the Ministry of Health, we will be organizing a seminar in Dakar with leading global experts on the topic of malaria, whose theme is "Ending malaria".

With the declared goal of educating all children, we have launched an initiative, aimed at very young children, to expand pre-school services. Those services will be provided in each of the 28,000 villages in Senegal. They will be open to children aged 2 to 4, who will be given educational toys to play with, like those available to children in the developed world. In addition, during the day, a grandmother or a

grandfather will tell the children one of our well-known legends — a story with a moral lesson.

Young people are of major interest to us, and we are creating centres for young people in each of the 35 departments in Senegal. In those centres, young people can put on plays, talk to one another and explore the Internet.

All of these measures are backed up by an institutional plan. We have set up a ministry for the health of small children. We want to ensure a secure family environment for young children, and we want to strengthen Senegalese families.

We have two young representatives in the National Assembly, at least one of whom is a student. We have set up a ministry for youth, which deals with young people's problems and also with combating environmental degradation.

I should also stress the establishment of mechanisms to facilitate dialogue with young people, in particular the National Council for Young People and the Children's Parliament, which aim to take into account their concerns and dreams regarding all different matters.

The report of the Secretary-General, which provided a stark analysis of the situation of children in the world, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, identified the challenges that we, as leaders, must meet in order to build a world fit for children. These challenges seem to have been well understood by the States members of the African Union, which adopted a Declaration and a Plan of Action during the Lusaka Summit in July 2001. The main themes of that common African position were presented and discussed by our representatives here in New York.

This special session must be an opportunity for us, the leaders, to solemnly declare our intention not only to consolidate what we have already achieved, but also to build a world fit for our children — a world of peace, solidarity and economic and social progress, with access to education, health care and nutritious food for all.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Runaldo Ronald Venetiaan, President of the Republic of Suriname.

President Venetiaan: My delegation would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, as well as the

Secretary-General, the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the entire United Nations system, for the valuable preparations that were made for this special session and for the documents that have been provided. We would also like to commend the Bureau of the Preparatory Committee for its tireless efforts to prepare the outcome document for this special session.

At the 1990 World Summit for Children, we promised to improve the well-being of our children. More than a decade has since passed. Suriname has made great strides in achieving the goals set forth at the 1990 World Summit, despite political, structural and financial constraints. There have indeed been changes for the better for children. We have assessed our national legislation, and we are in the lengthy process of amending laws that do not conform to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. For example, Suriname's National Assembly adopted legislation to eliminate discrimination against children born out of wedlock.

Vaccination coverage has improved; the maternal mortality rate has decreased; and a great deal of effort has been put into the prevention of childhood diseases and malnutrition.

In order to ensure the right to education for all, the Government is placing great emphasis on mobilizing more resources to invest in the education sector.

Substance abuse prevention and treatment programmes are being provided to young persons, while life skills programmes are informing children of health-risk issues and aim to equip them with the skills necessary to make healthy choices.

In 1999, a Youth Congress was held in Suriname, which led to the establishment of the National Youth Council, a body whose task it is to advise the Government on child-related issues.

We have conducted a situational analysis of children, as well as a child-labour study; the results show that important progress has been achieved. But as long as there are still children deprived of basic social services, basic health care and basic education, and as long as children suffer abuse and exploitation, we cannot and will not be satisfied.

Among the greatest obstacles we will all have to overcome in promoting and protecting the rights of

children are poverty, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, malaria and war.

Children are hardest hit by poverty. The eradication of poverty must, therefore, remain one of the priorities of our development efforts.

Urgent action is needed if we are to halt and reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015. It will require comprehensive and concerted action by us all, and many more resources than are now available.

This also applies to combating diseases like malaria. In Suriname, this disease has re-emerged as a major cause of morbidity and mortality for the people who live in the pristine rainforests that cover most of my country.

Let us take the bold steps needed to achieve a world that is indeed fit for children. When we adults look at the statistics of the families of our generation, we realize that we are among the survivors. We survived the adversities of the world in which we grew up. Let us commit ourselves to creating a world in which our children can all be survivors.

Let all the children survive.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Marc Forné Molné, Prime Minister of the Principality of Andorra.

Mr. Forné Molné (Andorra) (*spoke in Catalan; English text provided by the delegation*): The sad events that took place in New York on 11 September 2001 forced this summit to be postponed. The memory of the victims of that tragedy and the desire to overcome and combat such acts strengthen our resolve to fight against intolerance and fanaticism. Education is one of the key elements in the training of people. Living together with respect for others in a just, democratic and egalitarian society must be one of the essential pillars of the education of our young people. We welcome this special session because we are firmly convinced that, if we wish to obtain a fairer world for all, actions aimed at our younger citizens are of the utmost importance and must occupy a prominent place in the work of this Organization, which is making an enormous effort to improve the living conditions of peoples throughout the world.

At the outset, I would like to congratulate Ms. Bellamy and the United Nations Children's Fund for the great coordination effort that they made during

preparations for this special session and for the enormously important work that they are carrying out for children. I would also like to congratulate the Jamaican Ambassador, Miss Durrant, who worked tirelessly throughout the negotiation process in her capacity as Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee. We are also conscious, however, of the enormous amount of work done by all concerned in preparing for this meeting, and we thank all of those involved for their dedication.

What is the meaning of this special session? Why have we come to New York for these three days from all corners of the world to take part in a series of meetings, round tables, presentations and other activities related to the future of children? I believe that the answer is very clear. We all know that a society in which boys and girls do not receive the basic services that are their right as citizens is a society whose future is in jeopardy. That is why I would like to believe that all of us who are sitting here today in this Hall, as well as those who will be taking part in other meetings during these days, have as our basic aim the development of policies for children. This is a matter which deserves clear, precise action. The space for speech-making should be limited to this Hall; afterwards, we must go on to take specific action, particularly in the areas of education and health.

Andorra has proven to be most responsive to actions in these two spheres, as we are a country with a high percentage of young people. There are 9,000 schoolchildren in an educational system that offers parents a free choice between different systems, and schooling is compulsory up to the age of 16. Ninety-two per cent of those 9,000 schoolchildren have said yes to the world movement. They wish to be heard and to contribute, and they firmly believe that no child should be excluded.

Andorra is also a country where health care for children is attended to with a whole series of primary services that enable the provision of personalized quality attention.

Today's children are tomorrow's adults, but they are today's young people and, as such, must play an active part in our daily lives. In our country, the local councils and various associations, together with the Parliament, are promoting joint participatory policies that will be reflected in the National Youth Council.

That is why we clearly advocate the strengthening of all educational policies for all children.

But we would like our voice to be heard in favour of specific action for girls, as we firmly believe that their access to education from the very beginning of their lives helps them to become citizens who are aware of their rights and duties. In the composition of my Government, 33 per cent of the ministers are women, a clear example of women's participation. So I would like to point out my country's undertaking to seek out practical ways in which it can cooperate in projects aimed at improving the education of girls, especially in those regions where their situation is most precarious.

At the level of education, we would also like to show our interest in all projects that seek to facilitate the entry of young people into the world of work. We know the difficulties inherent in that, and we reaffirm our wish to cooperate in activating international projects that may open up new ways of thinking and acting.

I now wish to touch upon the cruellest situation in which children may find themselves, the situation that, beyond a shadow of a doubt, justifies our participation in international meetings: exploitation. Nothing can justify the abuse of children, whether that entails the participation of children in armed conflict, their exploitation in work or their trafficking and sexual exploitation. We all know that this happens, and I believe that we all must assume some responsibility in this regard. That is why our presence here today must be used to send the world a clear message of condemnation of all these activities. No more child soldiers, no more young people exploited through work, and no more boy and girl prostitutes.

We are aware of the difficulties inherent in avoiding these situations, but as a citizen and as the head of the Government of a country where care for children is one of the cornerstones of its social development, I believe that my voice has to be used to demand decisive action to put an end to these situations. It is my firm belief that we are here to reaffirm our commitment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, along with its two Optional Protocols, and, above all, to add our voice to the international proclamation on behalf of children and young people in our world. As the children said, today's boys and girls are tomorrow's men and women.

That is why, if we want a better future for our children, we must work tirelessly as of now in all sectors that constitute our society. That is without doubt the thrust of our meeting, and we trust that the results will confirm it.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Pedro Verona Rodrigues Pires, President of the Republic of Cape Verde.

President Rodrigues Pires (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin my statement by extending my warmest congratulations to the Secretary-General and to the bodies of the United Nations system, particularly UNICEF, for their in-depth work and systematic efforts since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. That Convention is nothing less than an extension of the United Nations Charter to guide international efforts and national policies with regard to children. That basic work on behalf of children fits perfectly into the overall framework of the struggle for respect for human rights. As such, it emphasizes all areas of interest to the human being as a whole.

As we speak here in the prestigious setting of this Hall, detailed reports containing disturbing statistics tell us that, despite all the efforts made by the members of the international community since the adoption of the Declaration and Plan of Action adopted at the World Summit for Children, held in September 1990, millions of children still die every year due to avoidable causes. One of the latest UNICEF publications estimates that 150 million children are undernourished and that about 120 million do not attend school, 53 per cent of those being girls.

Wars provide no respite. In the decade of 1986 to 1996, 2 million children were killed in armed conflicts; 6 million were wounded or disabled, in particular by anti-personnel landmines; and almost 1 million have been orphaned. Moreover, there are currently over 22 million children who have been displaced or have become refugees due to violence. Many of them have applied for political asylum without success, thereby adding the pain of exclusion to the suffering of isolation. Many children die of hunger and AIDS. The children of immigration are victims of outdated policies, racism, intolerance and exclusion. In closer circles and even in the family, which should guarantee protection and foster love, children suffer in silence

behind closed doors from ill-treatment, negligence and violence.

I wonder how many children are at this very moment wandering the streets looking for survival or passing from refugee camps to regroupment camps due to interminable conflicts that exist for reasons unknown to them and increasingly unacceptable. Take the example of Palestine, a situation which constitutes an act of violence against the human conscience.

I believe it fair to recognize that mankind has made considerable efforts throughout history to promote human dignity in all its dimensions. In that regard, it is appropriate to welcome all the progress made through universal law, the sustained efforts of the United Nations to make the issue of children affected by war in particular a priority in international action, and the determination to include their protection in peace processes.

I share the opinion that the difference between one country and another rests, first and foremost, in the treatment that the generations of today give to children. Moreover, the world to which we all aspire and which we wish to build would become a reality if we could all convince ourselves that investing in children is the way to guarantee mankind's future. Cape Verde is willing to do everything possible, particularly in the implementation of the pertinent recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child contained in Cape Verde's first national report, to ensure that the children of Cape Verde can enjoy full protection for their sound development, both physically and intellectually.

Children in my country enjoy a set of reinvigorated rights, as all the conventions and protocols applicable to children have been ratified. However, I believe that it is one thing to have rights and entirely another to be able to exercise them. The challenge we are facing is to create the essential conditions for children to be able fully to enjoy their rights. The road to those legitimate ambitions is a long one.

We are convinced that the children born with the new century will be able to live in a fairer world based on greater solidarity; a world in which the majority will no longer be fated to hunger and justice will not depend on the colour of one's skin, beliefs or social status; ultimately, a world that will be safer for all, open to the legitimate aspirations of peoples, based on

the solid foundations of peace, cooperation and multilateralism, and rooted in international legality.

We must do our utmost to ensure that the youth of today and of the future are capable of resisting the ideologies of hatred, obscurantism, violence and rejection. We believe in the future of the men and women that the children of today will become.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Boris Trajkovski, President of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

President Trajkovski: It is my great pleasure to take part in this important gathering aimed at the benefit of all children of the world. The special session of the General Assembly on children is a historic opportunity for us to make the needs and rights of children a priority in all development efforts and thus to ensure a better, healthier and safer environment for every child. There could be no nobler or more precious cause than creating a world fit for children.

I would like to take this opportunity to express special recognition of the Secretary-General's report, which highlights effectively the issues of concern to children, giving them a global perspective. This forward-looking, comprehensive, frank and objective analysis of the situation of the world's children and the problems that they continue to face can guide us in our future efforts.

It was 12 years ago at the World Summit for Children that the world's leaders called for joint action in securing a better world — a world of equal opportunities for every single child. Significant progress has been made since then in promoting and protecting the rights of the child and in assuring the well-being of our children. Now is the time to renew and reaffirm the commitments made 12 years ago, to review the progress and achievements made for children in the decade following the World Summit for Children and the World Declaration and Plan of Action, and to formulate specific actions and programmes for the years to come. The key and pressing issues of the past decade, such as children's health, education, the elimination of poverty and exploitation, remain central to the new global goals. Nevertheless, we should not forget the newer challenges related to child protection and HIV/AIDS.

The Republic of Macedonia attaches utmost importance to international activities, particularly those within the United Nations system, to promote the rights of children all over the world. After more than a decade of experience in implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child, this is a perfect occasion for us to reaffirm the commitment and the political will to implement that important international treaty. It is time not just to learn more about what is being done for the well-being of children, but for every individual, every family, every society, every political leadership, every State and every organization to do their utmost. Success relies on our determination and sustained action towards pursuing the key goals of promoting healthy lives, providing quality education and protecting children from abuse, exploitation and violence. In other words, it depends on our ability to address the major challenges of our time: poverty, the scourge of war and terrorism, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the risks it poses to children.

The bitter experience of South-East Europe in the past decade, including the most recent events in my country, are yet further proof of the imperative need for the full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two Optional Protocols. My Government is making efforts to review its legislation and to adopt appropriate amendments to ensure full conformity with the Convention and that its provisions and principles are reflected, applied and enforced in state policy and administrative practices. The National Action Plan has been incorporated into a national development plan, social policies and a sectorial programme. Macedonia has signed the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. Furthermore, the National Commission for the implementation of the National Action Plan was established for the effective evaluation and implementation of the rights of the child, as stipulated in the Convention. An Ombudsperson for children's rights was also appointed within the National Ombudsman's Office.

I would also like to stress the good cooperation between our Government and the United Nations Children's Fund in the field of child protection, especially in the areas of primary health care and education. We are now in the process of signing the third master plan of operation for the period 2002-

2004. Programme activities are expected to be of direct benefit to the entire child population under the age of 18, which numbers approximately 650,000 children in the Republic of Macedonia. Special emphasis is given to activities related to the reduction of infant, prenatal and maternal mortality rates and to better formal pre-school education, covering the social, intellectual, psychological, emotional and physical aspects of the child's development, especially for children from rural and ethnic communities. In addressing this issue, the government services will closely collaborate with the local communities, the national network of non-governmental organizations and international organizations and non-governmental organizations, which have largely contributed to the success of such projects in the past.

The almost universal adoption and ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child makes it even more important that all States parties to the Convention fully respect and implement its provisions. Recalling the promises of the World Summit for Children, lessons drawn from the past and assessments of what remains to be done, I am convinced that the adoption of the Declaration and Plan of Action at the present special session will be a clear expression of our political will and partnership in carrying out our joint task of promoting children's rights. Let us not forget the days of our own childhood and what we dreamed about while waiting for adults to arrange our world. Let us do better; let us do more.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Cándido Muatetema Rivas, Prime Minister of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea.

Mr. Muatetema Rivas (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, I should like to fulfil my duty to convey to all representatives of the friendly countries participating in this session of the Assembly the warmest and most sincere greetings of His Excellency Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, whom I have the high honour of representing. Because of unavoidable obligations of State, he was unable to share with the Assembly his reflections on the current state of our planet's children, who everywhere are subject to many physical and psychological traumas that risk their future as human beings called upon to ensure the survival and development of humanity.

Our meeting today takes place within the context of our concern at the unfortunate state of our children, the world in general and the developing countries in particular. Indeed, the concern of the international community and the fervent desire of everyone to improve and secure the situation of children have been shown in various declarations adopted by the Assembly, in particular the Declaration of the Rights of the Child and the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children.

Nevertheless, we still watch helplessly as children continue to be the innocent victims of armed conflicts, maltreatment and every kind of social injustice perpetrated by human beings older than they. To all those, one must add the persistence of great pandemics such as AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, as well as hunger and malnutrition, inter alia, all of which result from the poverty that harms the lives of more than 200 million children in the world.

In fact, our concern should not focus on children only because they are the primary victims of such calamities. A conscientious analysis of humanity's global situation reveals that, as the result of the actions of human beings themselves, we are facing an imminent disaster whose sacrificial victims would be children.

Therefore, we must reflect carefully to realize that the insecurity threatening the survival and development of today's children is a result of the behaviour of the society in which they live. Our children are a faithful reflection of what we have wanted: a world full of uncertainty, on permanent alert for threats by human beings themselves. We are the ones who are responsible for wars, terrorist acts and the marginalization of human beings because of race, religious belief or opinion. We are the destroyers of the environment and of ecosystems; it is we who threaten the survival of human beings on Earth — among them our children, the guarantors of the future.

For my Government, the solution lies in the eradication of poverty to help make possible a better life for future generations. However, we do not want development that promotes licentiousness in youth, acceding to immoral vices under the pretext of defending their rights and freedoms. The freedom of children should be circumscribed by freedom of thought and expression arising out of their liberal, creative and humanistic character.

Motivated by those concerns, the Government of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea has not failed to adopt relevant strategies for the protection of the rights of the children of Equatorial Guinea.

In 1991, a National Plan of Action for Children and Women for the decade 1991-2000 was elaborated and adopted.

In 1992 the Convention on the Rights of the Child was ratified. Also, there was the elaboration of the General Law of Education, which promotes the principle of free and compulsory primary education; the implementation of the nonformal preschool project; the implementation of the expanded vaccination programme; and the strengthening of primary health care to achieve better community participation in the management of social services.

In 1996 there was the promulgation of the Law on Family Planning, which lays the groundwork for the protection of mothers and children, and, in collaboration with UNICEF, the organization of the First National Forum on the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to carry out a medium-term evaluation of the National Plan of Action.

In 1997 the National Committee on the Rights of the Child was created as an organizational platform for the implementation of the Convention. In the same year there was the First National Economic Conference, during which the medium-term economic strategy was adopted and the Government decided to allocate 40 per cent of total public expenditure to the social sector, distributed as follows: education and science, 15 per cent; health and social well-being, 10 per cent; social affairs and the condition of women, 4 per cent; youth and sports, 3 per cent; culture, 3 per cent; the communications media, 3 per cent; the labour sector, 2 per cent; and activities of the population, 1 per cent. The National Forum on Education was held in 1997, and there was the national implementation of a local development programme whose objectives are to promote local economic and social development and dialogue about the decentralization and strengthening of civil society, giving impetus to its participation in development. The Poverty Alleviation Project was implemented to improve the standard of living of the most vulnerable social strata through the granting of loans to finance microprojects.

In 1999 came the promulgation of the law on the regime of non-governmental organizations. At present, various non-governmental organizations and associations operate in the country, of which three focus on children. The initial report on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child was prepared.

Science and technology constitute the best vehicles for strengthening relations between countries and for ensuring the full development of children. If we do not make use of them, we will widen the gap between developed and developing countries and pass it on to future generations.

Equatorial Guinea recognizes that great efforts have been made and that much remains to be done. We are totally convinced that with the assistance of the international community we will be able to achieve a world fit for children.

I do not wish to end my statement without taking this opportunity to thank, on behalf of the Government and people of Equatorial Guinea, the President of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for the constant material, financial and technical support that we have received over the past 10 years, which has constituted important support in our achieving the objectives outlined. Our gratitude is also extended to the Government and people of the United States for the hospitality extended to my delegation since our arrival in this beautiful city of New York.

I would like to end by requesting that for the future of humanity and in the spirit of this world Organization, we remove the barriers that prevent the full development of the inhabitants of our planet. With this we will have said "yes" for children and taken a big step forward in the honourable task of building a world fit for children.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency The Right Honourable Percival James Patterson, Prime Minister of Jamaica.

Mr. Patterson (Jamaica): We meet today not only to assess our stewardship since the World Summit for Children; we are also fully seized of the compulsion to plan adequately for the future development of all the children of Mother Earth.

From this same podium in November last year, at its fifty-sixth session, I exhorted the General Assembly

to proclaim the beginning of the renaissance of the United Nations. Nothing could make a more propitious start to effecting such a renaissance than a universal commitment at this special session to creating a world that is indeed fit for our children.

Let me commend the United Nations, and UNICEF in particular, for spearheading initiatives which have placed children's issues high on the international agenda and secured widespread recognition of children's rights within the international community.

We can record with considerable satisfaction the progress that has been achieved in many parts of the world: reduced mortality rates for children under five, heightened levels of immunization, dramatic progress in preventing iodine deficiency disorders, and an increase in the activities of civil society and those who advocate the rights of children. We have witnessed a tightening of the legal regime governing those rights with the entry into force of the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Jamaica will ratify during this session.

But all too soon, the landscape changes. As if stepping out of an idyllic painting and into another world, we are confronted with the lamentable reality of children who are robbed of their childhood innocence as they fall victim to war and who are used as pawns in a cruel game, as drug traffickers and as perpetrators of crime and violence. Others are victims of the ugliest and most shameful human activities — some sold into slavery and sexually abused. Many are devastated by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which not only impedes their physical and emotional development but makes them vulnerable orphans as well.

The advent of globalization has not reduced appalling hardships, especially for children in developing countries. Poverty remains the single biggest obstacle. It causes death, stultifies growth and breeds abject despair.

Children now have their place on the national agendas of many Member States and in the work programmes of several international organizations. In my own country, our policy makers have been focusing on children and youth in the process of national development. We have fashioned a comprehensive approach to children's issues, in fulfilment of our commitment to improving their situation. The process has involved national consultations with key players,

including government, the private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and youth representatives.

An important milestone has been the development of a national plan of action for children. Other supportive policies include a national youth policy, a revised national population policy, a national poverty eradication policy and programme of action, and special programmes to assist children with disabilities.

In order to provide an enabling environment, Jamaica has undertaken legislative review and reform, which will culminate in the promulgation of a new child care and protection act. Jamaica is particularly proud of the contribution it has made in the shaping of the important review process, both through regional initiatives, which gave birth to the Kingston consensus, and at the international level through the work of the Preparatory Committee for this special session.

It is imperative that we all continue to engage our intellect, our resources and our actions to fulfil the mandates of the Millennium Declaration. At this special session, we the peoples of the United Nations must set meaningful goals and targets aimed at ensuring a better quality of life for children everywhere. We must continue to build on actions taken by the Security Council to meet the needs of children and adolescents in conflict situations.

We must take the necessary steps to bridge the widening gap in opportunity between rich and poor countries. We must harness the advances in technology, particularly in the area of research, to benefit children in developing countries whose needs for education, primary health care and food are still to be fully met.

We must isolate and punish those who perpetrate some of the most heinous crimes against children. We must seek to spare our children from the hideous tentacles of drug abuse and from debilitated and shortened life span as a result of HIV/AIDS. Investing in our children is our best way of ensuring long-term development and global harmony.

Let this Assembly transmit a message of hope and determination. Let us, as heads of State and Government, policy makers and leaders of civil society, undertake to ensure that political policies and economic programmes serve to improve the status and well-being of children.

Let us forge the full participation of young people to ensure that their interests are always truly protected. We must act in concert and say yes for children, and construct a world fit for children, recognizing that since they are central to the progress and continued development of mankind, they must be afforded priority attention. Investment in our children is a prerequisite to ensuring that the key objective of the United Nations, in creating one world of peace and stability, is attained.

Let us reaffirm the apt conclusion in the 1990 Summit Plan of Action:

“There is no cause which merits higher priority than the protection and development of children, on whom the survival, stability and advancement of all nations ... depends.”

Let every nation gathered in this forum depart from here with a determination to transform fine rhetoric into resolute action, and to translate the universal consensus into early and effective action within our sovereign borders and thereby everywhere on this planet.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. El Hadj Omar Bongo, President of the Gabonese Republic.

President Bongo (*spoke in French*): The present special session of the General Assembly, convened 12 years after the World Summit for Children, gives us an opportunity to learn collectively from our past experiences and to outline new solutions to ensure that our children have a better future.

The situation of our children today is not outstanding. Most children do not share the privilege of living moments of happiness, gaiety and joy. Their dreams and hopes are often crushed by scourges they are far from creating. While our children make up one third of the world population, they are paradoxically the first victims of poverty, violence and disease. The world that we offer them today is far from being the one they aspire to. So, let us try to create a new world consonant with their aspirations.

If we acknowledge that poverty is a major obstacle to the respect of children's rights, we have to admit that the situation of children in the developing countries is the most chaotic. As these countries do not possess sufficient material and financial resources, they cannot always, in spite of their efforts, provide children

with good living conditions. Despite those economic difficulties, Gabon has, since its independence, always made education a priority, providing for the education of our children to the minimum age of 16. As well, sustained efforts are being made in the areas of health, particularly in the protection of mothers and their children. In accordance with those concerns, primary and secondary schools, maternity hospitals and primary, maternal and child health centres have been built throughout the Republic. We must not lose sight of the fact that those activities, carried out within the framework of the fight against poverty, are aimed at the well-being of our children.

In Gabon, we say that youth is sacred. It is a belief we have long held, and it is why children and adolescents are at the very heart of our policies. That is why I welcome the initiative of the United Nations Children's Fund to organize, on the margins of this event, a special forum enabling children to speak of their problems and to communicate to us their perception of the world.

Building a world fit for children is a considerable task, requiring the mobilization of significant human and financial resources. To achieve this, we must immediately put in motion a worldwide movement of solidarity and effective cooperation as a source of growth. Accordingly, and because children are our sole link to the future, the present session must not disappoint our children's expectations and hopes.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Excellency Madam Nguyen Thi Binh, Vice-President of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam.

Mrs. Nguyen Thi Binh (Viet Nam) (*spoke in French*): In the name of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, I have the great honour of extending my warmest greetings to the President of the special session, to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and to the delegations present on the occasion of the United Nations special session of the General Assembly on children.

We entirely support and appreciate the comprehensive and concise report of the Secretary-General on meeting the objectives set during the 1990 World Summit for Children. One could say that in the last 10 years the Convention on the Rights of the Child has been a driving force and a noble and worthy objective for all Member States in their efforts and actions. A great number of States and regions in the

world have overcome numerous obstacles and challenges to meet their commitments towards children, and their efforts have been rewarded in many instances. Thanks to this, although a certain number of objectives have not been achieved as desired, it should be noted — as the Secretary-General's report underlined — that more children's lives have been saved, more children have been able to attend school, more leisure-time activities have been offered to children and more international treaties and conventions on children have been concluded and ratified than in the previous decade. Above all, we can observe among the leaders of the world a greater awareness of children's rights and of their obligations to ensure the respect of those rights.

However, in recent times, the world has gone through highly complex political, economic and social changes, which have given rise to problems whose scope we had not previously appreciated: terrorism, armed and ethnic conflicts, endemic famine, the scourge of HIV/AIDS, the degradation of the environment and the challenges of the accelerated process of globalization. All this has prevented us — especially the developing countries — from fulfilling all our commitments. It is precisely because of all these problems that today, in this Hall, we must reaffirm our intention to follow through on our promises, to seek appropriate measures and to combine our collective efforts in order to construct — in this new century and with a new vision — a world fit for our children.

Viet Nam is fully aware that the implementation of the Declaration and Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children and of the Convention on the Rights of the Child constitutes for us a great and onerous task; today as in the past, the difficulties Viet Nam faces are those of a poor country affected by economic underdevelopment and unending economic disasters. As well, although the war ended a quarter of a century ago, its consequences still weigh heavily upon a considerable number of families and children.

It is under these conditions that we have made great efforts to progress in three areas: improving the legal system, taking inspiration in particular from the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in order to enrich our national legislation; developing and implementing the Programme of Action for children, with the involvement of all stakeholders ranging from the central authorities to grass-roots organizations, and incorporating it into State social

programmes; and working to ensure the participation of our various social organizations in the process of realizing the rights of children.

Thanks to that approach, although Viet Nam remains one of the poorest countries in the world, our people can be proud of what we have done for our children. Most of the goals set out in the National Programme of Action have been achieved, with the help of an annual budget that was increased by 8.42 per cent in 1991 and 12.2 per cent in 2000.

Tangible results include a reduction of more than 30 per cent in the mortality rate for children under 5; an expanded vaccination programme, with 95 per cent coverage; eradication of polio and of vitamin A deficiency; universal primary education; and eradication of illiteracy. In addition, 50 per cent of districts have cultural and recreational facilities for children, and 70 per cent of orphaned or homeless children have been admitted into accommodation centres.

Our new Programme of Action focuses mainly on achieving those goals set for the 1991-2000 period that have not been realized. We are endeavouring to reduce infant mortality, as well as maternal mortality related to pregnancy and childbirth, and to reduce malnutrition. We are addressing the issues of the provision of safe drinking water and of a healthful environment.

We are also working towards some new objectives: the creation of preschool centres; improved primary and secondary education; equal opportunity for the participation and development of children and minors, in particular of girls; and the prevention of and fight against HIV/AIDS.

The State of Viet Nam also devotes great attention to the protection of children from all types of abuse and is striving to enable nearly 1 million disabled children — especially those who were affected by toxic chemicals, such as Agent Orange, which was widely used in the 1960s and 1970s during the Viet Nam war — to enjoy their fundamental rights, like all other children. Our Programme of Action for children is entirely compatible with our strategy aimed at eradicating famine and reducing poverty, which has been implemented by the State for many years.

Building “A World Fit for Children” in line with the benchmarks set by the Declaration will not be easy, but it is a necessary task — an imperative need dictated

by conscience and honour. It is also a condition for the stable development of each nation and of the entire world.

Viet Nam undertakes to continue imbuing authorities, at all levels, with a great sense of responsibility and to ensure greater participation by all families and communities in children's programmes. We will spare no effort in ensuring that our children can enjoy a happy life in conditions of dignity.

It is in this spirit that Viet Nam expresses its sympathy with the difficulties and the suffering experienced by women and children in the poorest nations and those most affected by war and embargoes, such as Palestine, Afghanistan, Cuba and Iraq. The international community must focus on, and provide effective assistance to, the peoples of those countries in order to allow them — especially women and children — to enjoy normal living conditions and normal development.

I should like to take this opportunity to express Viet Nam's sincere thanks for the generous and effective assistance provided by the Governments of a number of countries, in particular Sweden, Denmark, France, Japan, South Korea, among others, and of various United Nations agencies, in particular the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Development Programme. We wish also to thank the non-governmental organizations.

We sincerely hope that Governments and international organizations will continue to help Viet Nam and other developing countries successfully to implement national and global children's programmes, so that we can say "yes" to all of our children.

The President: I should like to remind speakers once again that statements in the debate in the plenary are limited to five minutes.

The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Serene Highness Crown Prince Albert, Crown Prince of the Principality of Monaco.

Crown Prince Albert (Monaco) (*spoke in French*): In 1990 — nearly 12 years ago — during the landmark World Summit for Children organized by the United Nations, the international community expressed its concern about important issues such as child labour and the education and health of children.

Today, at a time when terrorist violence, which is essentially nihilistic and which has already delayed this event, is trying to destroy the values underpinning the United Nations, these matters are still of concern to us. Now other, especially serious concerns, which affect us deeply, have been added to them: the question of increasing poverty and the AIDS pandemic, which inevitably affect children; the use of children in armed conflict; and child prostitution.

The current international situation and economic and social conditions, which are continuing to deteriorate in many countries, are clear evidence that we must tirelessly emphasize the imperative need to respect and safeguard the rights of children, which the United Nations Convention of 20 November 1989 formally recognized and which should now be a fundamental source of inspiration in our work, our commitments and our future efforts.

Almost all of the States Members of our Organization have acceded to this text, recognizing — in the wake of the 1924 Geneva Declaration and the Declaration on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the Assembly on 20 November 1959 — the need to provide children with special protection because of their lack of both physical and intellectual maturity. That need was likewise recognized by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and by the two International Covenants on Human Rights.

I have briefly referred to the principal international instruments on human rights to underline the fact that, in one way or another, all States — even those that are not formally parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child — are in duty bound to respect them and to promote the principles and the values that inspire them.

In addition to the specific rights that have been identified for them, surely children must also be able to enjoy those universal rights — particularly the social and cultural rights — that have been internationally recognized as belonging to all human beings.

The Principality of Monaco has entered into international commitments by ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and by signing the Additional Protocols, one of which — on children in armed conflict — has already been ratified. The Government of the Principality has been making financial contributions to the fund set up in that connection since its inception. It has fulfilled its

commitments at the national level through legislation that guarantees strict respect for such rights through Government agencies and the courts.

With regard to the protection of children, especially the most vulnerable among them, the Government has adopted measures not only in the legal area but in the economic and social fields as well. The implementation of such measures is the responsibility of the relevant administrative authorities, which are particularly concerned with their full implementation, consistently in the interests of children.

Within the Principality, respect for children is almost a religion, as shown by the widespread involvement of principal actors in political life and community organizations. This involvement has been strengthened by the active participation and regular financial support of the Government and the population of the Principality for the various charitable institutions whose aim is to improve the living conditions of children, in particular those living in disadvantaged countries.

Programmes with evocative names, such as Tears Without Eyes, which is helping to combat infant blindness, and the Schools of the Four Winds — schools that are adapted to the way of life of street children — are run by the World Association of Friends of Children (AMADE), whose headquarters is in Monaco, acting either alone or in cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), to which I would like to pay a well-deserved tribute. Another group, Mission Childhood, is working tirelessly to increase schooling, improve the health and promote the integration of children, in particular disadvantaged children, from the South as well as the North. The organization known as Frankie's Children tries, with great talent and affection, to entertain and thus provide some relief to hospitalized children.

All of those organizations in Monaco, as well as many others, deserve a mention because of their remarkable achievements and the selfless devotion of their members. Nor should we forget those organizations — such as the Monaco Red Cross, which I have the honour of chairing, Monaco Aid and Support and Friendship Without Borders — which, although not devoted exclusively to improving the lot of children, accord them great importance in their local charitable work, as well as their international activities. I should also like to mention the Junior Chamber of Commerce

of Monaco, which, every year on 20 November — the anniversary of the adoption of the Convention — organizes a Children's Day, involving fund-raising activities to benefit children in difficulties, such as a “no finish line” race, while raising public awareness of the most disadvantaged children and their most pressing needs. That organization would like every country to institute a World Day for Children's Rights, to be commemorated on 20 November.

I should also like to mention the Princess Stephanie Youth Centre, which provides a place for young people to play and relax together during the school year, as well as for the many young people who visit Monaco on vacation. Finally, I should like to mention “I Am Listening, Youth”, a telephone service that provides moral support year-round to young people who find themselves in difficulties.

Thanks to the activities of such humanitarian organizations, the Principality of Monaco is a centre for proactive initiatives as well as a place for ethical reflection — a place where scientific and technical evolution in our societies, which is constantly obliging us to confront new ethical issues, can be considered. In that context, in Monaco in April 2000, after serious and in-depth scientific preparation, an international symposium took place, hosted jointly by AMADE and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, on the theme of bioethics and the rights of the child. The multidisciplinary — I might even say cross-cutting — work undertaken at that very high-level meeting culminated in the Declaration of Monaco: Considerations on Bioethics and the Rights of the Child, which advocates, *inter alia*, respect for the dignity of the embryo and for the genetic diversity of humankind.

Furthermore, in the spirit of General Assembly resolutions entitled “Building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic ideal” — which Monaco sponsored — our Government is providing financial assistance for the construction and maintenance of a sporting infrastructure for the Central American and Caribbean Games. After the Games have concluded, that infrastructure will be used by young people from the suburbs of San Salvador to develop a taste and aptitude for sport, which is associated with educational and social action. Children surely have a right to access to sporting activities, just as they have a right to education, of which sport is a part.

In the context of the irreplaceable role of sport in the education of young people, I would also like to refer to its role in rehabilitating mentally handicapped young people. The exemplary and very worthy commitment of the Special Olympics Monaco association deserves every encouragement in this regard.

This commitment to children, which can be observed throughout the world, since the cause of suffering children is universal — it is, perhaps, the most universal cause of all — prompts us to express the hope that this special session of the General Assembly will be crowned with great success. The Declaration and the World Programme of Action which will be its outcome will, I am sure, provide a further stimulus for our ambition to improve the living conditions of children throughout the world, first and foremost the most unfortunate among them: those involved in armed conflict; those who are sexually abused; those whom poverty has left on the margins of society by denying them what they need for their development, so that they are sometimes obliged to seek food by searching through garbage dumps; and those who are affected, either directly or indirectly, by terrorism.

Among the issues dealt with in the excellent texts under consideration — on which I would like to express congratulations and gratitude to the Preparatory Committee — we believe that some are of major importance. This is particularly the case with regard to the determination that we have observed to increase young girls' access to education. I am deeply convinced that providing girls with greater cultural opportunities will increase their children's chances of happiness and success. Such education should not only take account of the gender perspective, but also help to protect the girl child by shielding her from evils with very serious consequences, such as prostitution or early motherhood. The global organization AMADE and its 25 national branches have for many years been helping to promote appropriate education for young girls. Such education is all the more important given that it is generally recognized today that women are an irreplaceable agent for progress and development.

As the Assembly knows, our delegation represents one of the smallest States in the world community. In our small country, built on a rock, the belief in protecting children throughout the world by promoting their development has long been the most

widespread. It was in 1963 — almost 40 years ago — that my mother, Princess Grace, founded the global organization AMADE, to whose activities I have often referred. That association, of which I am the honorary President, is currently presided over by my sister, Her Royal Highness Princess Caroline of Hanover. It is intended essentially to prevent threats to the intellectual, moral or physical lives of our young people by protecting them from all forms of violence, sexual abuse and other ill-treatment.

As that international non-governmental organization clearly and resolutely suggests, it is surely our duty to do everything we can together, both nationally and internationally, to strengthen all means, including legal ones, to ensure, over and beyond constraints of time and boundaries, the prosecution and punishment of unnatural crimes against children by classifying them as crimes against humanity. That would make such crimes not subject to the statute of limitations, and their perpetrators would be subject to extradition procedures. That would similarly serve to consistently protect children from the threats posed by the senseless violence of international terrorism, of which they are frequently the first and most innocent victims — which it is also incumbent upon us to do.

The Principality of Monaco has unreservedly and with full conviction associated itself with the Monterrey consensus. The summit against poverty represents a fundamental phase and marks undeniable progress in the area of financing for development. International action in this field, including efforts on behalf of children, can no longer be what it once was. The time of begging and condescending charity is something of the past. Recipients and donors should become true partners, determined allies intent on devising and implementing joint efforts that take realities into account, that is to say, the needs of the former and the possibilities available to the latter.

Consultations between donors and recipients should be broader and better balanced. Educational projects of increasingly wider scope should be undertaken so that, from the very beginning of their lives, children will be aware of the human values essential to their development — and in particular to their blossoming — as well as of their freedom and the respect due their dignity.

Whether it is direct, tangible aid given to a child who is sick or threatened by an epidemic or a

pandemic; one whose health is affected by any kind of pollution resulting from irresponsible assaults on the environment, especially toxic spills that poison water tables; or a child who is a victim of the ignorance that leads to illiteracy, the key to succeeding in the new partnership we aspire to should be an ongoing and uncompromising evaluation of the projects undertaken and the effectiveness of their results.

We in Monaco want to contribute to a new impetus for the harmonious development of children and their protection. That for us is not an end, but a duty. The times in which we live, and the future to come, should be, despite problems and difficulties to be encountered, times in which more and more new ideas and projects are developed on behalf of children, who are the reason we are gathered here this week at this special session of the General Assembly.

The President: I once again appeal to speakers to limit their statements in the plenary meeting to five minutes.

The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Excellency Mrs. Milagros Ortíz Bosch, Vice-President of the Dominican Republic.

Mrs. Ortíz Bosch (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of the Dominican Republic salutes the Bureau and congratulates the Secretary-General on the initiative to hold this special session on children as proof of the interest of the nations of the world in their children.

The Dominican Republic is a country where, despite years of economic growth, poverty has increased as a result of the accumulation of wealth by privileged minorities. This has affected in a heart-rending way the most defenceless, the children of our country. We are here before the Assembly today to explain the efforts being made by the Government, under the leadership of President Hipólito Mejía Domínguez, to reverse that painful process.

In 1991, the Dominican Republic ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We undertook to comply with the doctrine of the integral protection of children; this entailed changes in the legal environment and the organization of our institutions. We have adopted a law on the protection of children and adolescents, a general law on education, a law on domestic violence, a general law on youth, a general law on the protection of disabled persons, a law on

social security and a general law on health. We have ratified Convention 138, on the minimum age for admission into the labour force; Convention 182, on the prohibition of the worst forms of child labour; and we are in the process of accepting the amendment to article 43, paragraph 2, of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We are also involved in ratifying the Optional Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children — a protocol to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime — and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

With the legal reforms, the country is facing the challenge of promoting administrative measures in line with the commitments undertaken. Together with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and a coalition of 15 non-governmental organizations (NGOs), we are organizing a national consultation that will serve to support the plan to ensure the exercise of the rights of children and adolescents. That plan set as a priority the registering of births, the prevention of commercial abuse and sexual exploitation and guarantees for children in trouble with the law.

In the field of health and education, we are implementing programmes to create children's development centres for children from 45 days to two years of age, community children's homes for children of three and four years of age, and centres for comprehensive care located in marginal zones of extreme poverty for the children of those areas. These centres provide comprehensive education for the child population.

In order to fulfil the commitment entered into by President Mejía in Panama in November 2000, all school-age children in the Dominican Republic, whether they are citizens or immigrants, are enrolled in public school whether they have birth certificates or not, thereby obliging the State to issue the documents while they study. We have expanded primary school attendance to 93 per cent, and we have assumed the commitment to provide full access to all primary school students by the end of 2003.

An ambitious programme has been undertaken for the benefit of schoolchildren in the poorest areas of the Dominican Republic, who receive a free education, with textbooks, breakfast, uniforms and shoes. Through

their school records, we will ensure that each child below the fourth grade is provided with vaccinations, anti-parasite treatment, vitamins and other supplements, dental and eye care, and height and weight monitoring. These are all measures we are taking with our own resources and international aid.

The Government of the Dominican Republic is quickly moving to improve the lot of our children. In January 2002, in an unheard of step forward, the department of the armed forces began a new kind of project: to provide hostels and residences for children and adolescents on the street, in order to allow for their civic re-education and later reintegration into society and schools, thereby removing them from crime and delinquency. In an effort to improve primary education, the schools built since 16 August 2000 are free of all physical and architectural barriers. We have implemented an inclusive type of education to allow children with special needs access to the national education system.

The quality of education is a primary factor in increasing the participatory competitiveness of our human resources. That is why, together with the United Nations Children's Fund, we have perfected a model of multi-grade rural schools that is being implemented in rural areas of the Dominican Republic and will be launched in September with the implementation of pilot programmes for full-day studies to improve the quality of education. We are seeking to improve the quality of education by including ecological education as a comprehensive part of the curriculum.

The President of the Republic has created a social cabinet in which government bureaux coordinate actions to target interventions to improve, quantify and follow up on the social investment being made and in which non-governmental agencies and private companies alike participate. The cabinet promotes and carries out action on behalf of families and their environment through the anti-poverty campaign in the context of the effort to achieve the progress and well-being of Dominican families. We wish to highlight the loans offered to families to establish small businesses, which create economic and social capital that will benefit their children, as well as home improvement and sewage and water maintenance to improve the habitat for children.

For the first time in the history of the Dominican Republic, we have a government council devoted

exclusively to children, headed by the President of the Republic, to analyse, define and follow up on the official policy for children and adolescents and principally to ensure the protection of children at personal and social risk. We have created the Office of the First Lady, in charge of executing programmes for children, including for assistance to pregnant adolescents; for young women in rural areas; for training young leaders; and for the development of a culture of peace, with the support of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Through its lead agency for children and adolescents, the Office of the Attorney General is implementing the law for the protection of children. The law on social security adopted in 2001 will, as of November, ensure care for the children of workers.

Within the context of the strategy for the development of education in the period 2002-2012, we address the challenge of bringing education into modern times through the use of technology. I am pleased to inform the Assembly that the Ministry of Education has installed hundreds of computer laboratories and virtual classrooms in middle schools and is preparing an intranet network to provide ongoing communication and information within a modern school-management system. Also in the context of this project, a national congress of students is being held to allow them to contribute their vision and experience to their own needs in the educational system. Civil society institutions and international agencies are helping to promote action on behalf of Dominican children. This union of forces is being headed by President Hipólito Mejía Domínguez, who is committed to the human development of the country.

Finally, the challenge of creating a modern, open and globalized society obliges us to undertake a consensus dialogue and joint action with communities, families, children and adolescents, the organizations and entities of civil society, the mass media and the private sector to guide our actions on behalf of children.

That is what we are doing. Before concluding, however, I wish to point out two things. This special session was to have been held in September 2001. Its delay is emblematic of what the children of the world require: peace and the struggle against violence. Despite the poverty and the lost decades and years, our Government is working for the hope embodied in our children.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency The Honourable George Saitoti, Vice-President of the Republic of Kenya.

Mr. Saitoti (Kenya): I wish to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report on the review of the follow-up to the World Summit for Children held in 1990. The report makes it clear that significant progress has been made in a number of areas relating to the welfare of children. However, many drawbacks remain that threaten the achievements already made. It is my hope that this special session will adequately address those drawbacks.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child remains one of the most important instruments for defining and safeguarding the rights of children. The Convention has served us well, especially in strengthening action on emerging issues that affect the well-being of children. Kenya is among those countries that ratified the Convention in 1990. We immediately established a task force to draw up a national plan of action based on the 1990 World Summit's goals to re-examine and update laws relating to children.

A new comprehensive children's status has been enacted by Parliament and became operational with effect from 1 March. The legislation has all the safeguards of the rights and welfare of the child. In addition, a family court has been established to promote the welfare of the family as a custodian of the rights of children. Similarly, we have established a specific programme for maternal and child health and immunization. These measures have assisted in preventing such early childhood diseases as measles, tetanus and diarrhoea and in monitoring and improving the health of the child, reducing malnutrition among children and significantly improving the levels of education for child caretakers. Towards these ends, Kenya has developed an early childhood development policy, focusing on the child up to the age of six. The Government's long-term vision is to achieve quality education and training, while paying special attention to alternative approaches to basic education.

Poverty remains a major challenge to our efforts to meet the needs of children. Moreover, the high incidence of poverty has greatly compromised our ability to address the pressing needs of children in such areas as primary health care, nutrition and basic education. On the other hand, poor health and

malnutrition are the key reasons for the persistence of poverty. In an attempt to respond to these challenges, we have developed a poverty reduction strategy paper, outlining priorities in poverty reduction.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic is a major obstacle in the way of achieving the national goal of promoting the welfare of children. Resources invested in education are lost due to school drop out arising from AIDS-related diseases. AIDS orphans are exposed to malnutrition, abuse and disease due to lack of basic care and financial resources. The pandemic seriously threatens the recent gains made in child enrolment and education. As part of our effort to address these problems, the Government has formulated a policy to facilitate intervention for children affected by HIV/AIDS. Children orphaned by AIDS are provided with the necessary support to access primary education and other basic services. These are efforts realized through mutual partnership between the Government, civil society and communities. The National AIDS Control Council has embarked on a comprehensive programme of AIDS education and placing advocates in schools and other centres of learning.

The burden of external debt continues to limit the ability of many developing countries to invest in the development of children. Some of these countries spend over 30 per cent of their gross national product to service external debt. In the past decade alone, Kenya, for example, used more resources to meet its external debt service obligations than it actually received from the donor countries. We are particularly concerned that the burden of external debt is increasing at a time when there has been a sharp drop in official development assistance. Debt relief measures should therefore be accompanied by an increase in official development assistance. This would enable us to invest in basic social services.

Africa continues to experience problems associated with armed conflict. Over the past decade, Kenya has hosted thousands of refugees fleeing from civil war and strife in their countries. We have witnessed at first hand the challenges that armed conflicts pose to the rights and welfare of children. The number of children affected by abuse, neglect and exploitation is rising. The traffic in children is increasing, especially in conflict situations.

As we renew our commitment to future action for children in the coming decade, I invite world leaders to

strive to achieve the targets of the major United Nations summits and conferences, especially those of the United Nations Millennium Declaration. The outcome of the International Conference on Financing for Development — the Monterrey Consensus — and the outcome of the forthcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development should be at the centre of implementing policies favourable to vulnerable groups, in particular children.

I should like to conclude by appealing to the United Nations to remain at the forefront of the struggle to improve the rights and welfare of our children. A sound foundation has been laid for us to address matters of particular relevance to children at the national, regional and international levels. I am confident that this session will result in a concrete programme of action that will address the concerns and the well-being of our children. That definitely requires our collective efforts.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Excellency Mrs. Dilbar Gulyamova, Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Mrs. Gulyamova (Uzbekistan) (*spoke in Russian*): I am glad to greet all Assembly members and other participants on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan at this special session of the General Assembly, which is making a valuable contribution to creating the necessary conditions and opportunities for the development of children worldwide and for ensuring their happiness.

Like many other States, Uzbekistan has supported and approved all United Nations initiatives aimed at protecting children's interests. Experience in recent years has demonstrated that protecting children's interests, in particular during the transitional stage of a country's development — which Uzbekistan has experienced for the past 11 years — cannot be kept outside the sphere of State policy. Therefore, it was no accident that in 1992 one of the first steps Uzbekistan took after it acquired independence was to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Uzbekistan thus demonstrated that it had undertaken, before the international community, the responsibility and the obligation to comply with all the provisions of the Convention. The young State of Uzbekistan proclaimed to the world that concern for the protection of children's interests was the most important priority of its policy. At the same time, we

created and set in motion a system in our country to monitor the observance of women's and children's rights and to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

As one of the main trends in Uzbekistan's State policy over the past decade, the protection of children's interests has involved taking the following steps: creating and developing a legal framework for the protection of the interests of the family, in particular mothers and children, making use of international experience and legal systems; creating economic conditions conducive to strengthening the family and to the material well-being of children, avoiding conditions that would lead to the neglect of children and teenagers; implementing a set of measures aimed at raising healthy children, starting with a healthy family and achieving the main objective of healthy mothers and children by providing free State medical assistance for childbirth and free child care and vaccination services, as well as free children's health care; implementing a national educational programme that provides a free, comprehensive and compulsory 12-year education and awards significant State grants for the secondary and higher education of young people, including girls; providing State support for socially vulnerable groups of children, including the disabled, orphans and those from needy families; and creating favourable social conditions and a system of ethical norms and rules with regard to the family, in particular mothers and children.

The implementation of that policy is strictly controlled and forms part of various government decisions aimed at protecting the interests of children, women and families, as well as of national programmes financed by the State and through donations.

To provide for the protection of children's interests, Uzbekistan is implementing the following measures: a national programme for the training of personnel, including professional training; a health-care reform programme that provides women with free medical assistance for childbirth and for children's health care; programmes to enhance the role of women in society — the Healthy Generation, Mother and Child and Family programmes — aimed at creating the necessary legal and economic conditions to fulfil the interests of women and children, to enhance the role and participation of the family in reforming society and to strengthen the role of women and the family by raising a physically healthy, spiritually rich and

harmoniously developed new generation; and a programme aimed at supporting socially vulnerable sectors of the population for the period 2002-2003.

In the first steps it took after independence, Uzbekistan focused its attention on reviving and further developing spirituality, improving its educational system and raising the quality of life to international standards. In our country, particular attention and social support are guaranteed to children who come from needy families, who have psychophysical development problems or who lack a family environment and are in difficult living situations.

That the issue of raising a healthy generation is a priority of my Government's policies is illustrated by the fact that one of the first honorary medals established in Uzbekistan was entitled "For a Healthy Generation"; this is awarded for selfless acts aimed at raising physically and morally healthy children.

As the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Mr. Islam Karimov, has said,

"... our cherished dream has been to build a State with a promising future and a free society. The strategy for our progress is based essentially on raising a healthy generation and is aimed at its development."

In order to achieve that cherished dream, Uzbekistan has undertaken a set of specific measures to improve the economic circumstances of the entire population, to create additional conditions conducive to strengthening the health of mothers and children, to promote full personality development and to prepare young people for an independent life in a free society.

As I said earlier, Uzbekistan will continue to support all United Nations initiatives that relate to children's interests. In that context, I should like to inform the Assembly that our country participated in the global "Say Yes for Children" petition and that more than 3 million signatures were collected from both adults and children. A coalition of non-governmental organizations also works in our country to serve the interests of Uzbekistan's children.

In conclusion, I should like to wish all participants in this special session of the General Assembly good health, happiness, prosperity and success in their noble work.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Highness Sheikha Moza Bint Nasser Al-Misnad, President of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs of Qatar.

Sheikha Moza Bint Nasser Al-Misnad (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): It gives me great pleasure, Sir, to extend to you, on behalf of the State of Qatar, sincere congratulations on your assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at its twenty-seventh special session, devoted to children. I cannot but express sincere appreciation to Her Excellency Ambassador Patricia Durrant, the Permanent Representative of Jamaica to the United Nations, for her valuable efforts in conducting the work of the Preparatory Committee for this session.

This session has been convened at a date other than the one originally scheduled, because of the events that occurred and their repercussions, which affirmed our shared conviction that the only way to uproot terrorism is through the promotion and consolidation of cultural dialogue among nations.

All of this strongly prompts me to steer away from such individual matters as the achievements of the State of Qatar with respect to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the challenges it is facing, but to speak instead of universal concerns and of the conflicts and turmoil experienced by the children of the world, although both areas form an integral whole in an interconnected and interdependent world.

It is our duty and our responsibility to espouse the principle of dialogue in our conduct, at home with our children, in our educational curricula, in our immediate environment and beyond. Only in that manner can we establish a positive, universal, communal culture based on a balance between interests and values — one that acknowledges the right to differ on the basis of cooperation, virtue and righteousness.

Here, I would like to emphasize that, regardless of our different philosophical principles and ideological choices, our subscription, free from any sense of superiority, to the system of values of the divine religions, whose stated objective, as we know, is to develop the Earth, would establish a moral consensus paving the way to dialogue, through which we can stem violence and extremism and spread tranquillity and peace.

We can say that this session reaffirms the role of the child in our societies, now and in the future. In my view, it is not enough to rely on the codified rights of the child guaranteed by the United Nations Convention to realize our expectations for that role. Rather, we have to stress the basic principle that we owe it to the children to teach them to recognize the rights of others. Otherwise, we will raise rebellious, selfish individuals, unmindful of their duties and incapable of living and interacting with others.

Analysis of the present situation bitterly reveals the flagrant contradictions between ideals and legal rules on the one hand and reality on the other. How can we speak of the sacred human right to life in the face of the tragic reality unfolding on the land of Palestine, where city squares are rife with hideous scenes that offend all creeds and value systems. What sin have infants and children committed to be deprived of food, medicine, education and even life? Were not the men perpetrating violence and oppression in those regions once children accustomed to exercising their own rights without heeding the rights of others? In the face of such facts, we must pledge, individually and collectively, to sensitize our children to their identity and to the dictates of humanity.

Today we face a real test of our ability to commit ourselves to implementing what was agreed upon in the final documents of the World Summit for Children, which stressed, *inter alia*, the need to give priority to children. Let us begin with the children of Palestine and then continue with all the children of the rest of the world. Then and only then will this session truly be a special session, not only in the significance of its having been convened, but also in the level of its resolutions and recommendations.

Since we are on the subject of the rights of the child, it is the view of the State of Qatar that such rights hinge on the realization of the rights and duties of the family. We do not want the links of children to their families and communal values to be severed. Rather, we want children to enjoy intimate relations with their immediate environment and beyond based primarily on human instinct rather than on legal codes.

When we advocate the rights of the child, we should link that to the system of rights that all human beings are supposed to enjoy in their societies. Any real progress in that regard must be measured by the extent of the evolution of public freedom, participation

in decision-making, and the expansion of the functions and roles of civil society organizations whose leadership role in human development is universally recognized.

However, so as not to be idealistic or utopian, we must realize that the rights of the child require, first and foremost, genuine political will and, equally important, the mobilization of the necessary resources, without which the situation will remain unchanged. Many developing countries, no matter how strong their resolve, will find it difficult to commit themselves to any plans for the advancement of children as long as they are chafing under the burden of indebtedness. It is our international responsibility to divert part of the indebtedness of those States to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to be invested, according to an institutional scheme, in those development fields that affect the status of the child.

We have come to this important gathering entertaining great hopes, and prompted by the desire and the resolve to rise to the level of this critical juncture in the process of our children's development. We, as adults, are duty-bound to seek the realization of their aspirations by restoring their confidence in the present and the future and by teaching them how to match ideals with deeds. I am certain that the serious dialogue prevailing at this session will strengthen our resolve to overcome the fear, oppression and deprivation that are the lot of millions of children.

On behalf of the State of Qatar, once again, I renew our thanks to you, Sir, and extend sincere appreciation to His Excellency the Secretary-General and his colleagues for their valuable efforts for the success of this session.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency The Honourable Tommy Thompson, Secretary of Health and Human Services of the United States.

Mr. Thompson (United States of America): As the Secretary of Health and Human Services of the United States of America, it is my privilege to represent President George W. Bush at this special session on children.

Although the terrorist attacks of 11 September prohibited us from meeting as originally planned, our commitment to advancing better health for the world's children remains undiminished. In fact, the events of 11

September make it even more essential that we gather here today for the sake of children all over the world.

Since the World Summit for Children 10 years ago, the United States has continued to make substantial progress for our children in the areas of health, nutrition, education, labour and the environment. The United States takes great pride in creating a future with limitless potential for our children.

For example, the child poverty rate in the United States has declined over the past 10 years. In 1999, only 17 per cent of United States children lived in families with incomes below the established United States poverty line, which is a 17.5 per cent decrease from 1990.

Routine immunization coverage levels for children 2 years of age are at, or near, all-time highs, and the United States is at record low levels of vaccine-preventable diseases, including measles, mumps and tetanus.

Recently, the United States has begun promoting healthy behaviours and right choices for young people. Our efforts include strengthening close parent-child relationships, encouraging the delay of sexual activity and supporting abstinence-education programmes. As President Bush has said, abstinence is the only sure way of avoiding sexually transmitted disease, premature pregnancy and the social and personal difficulties attendant on non-marital sexual activity.

But our work to support children and families also extends well beyond the United States borders. It encompasses a wide array of partners, including faith-based and other non-governmental organizations, foundations, the research community and private industry. Let me highlight two wonderful examples of that type of collaboration. One is definitely the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. The United States already has committed \$500 million to this multinational effort — 25 per cent of the total effort. And the United States Centers for Disease Control, which is an agency within my Department of Health, is working with the World Health Organization and Rotary International in a global effort to eradicate polio. We are now down to less than 500 cases.

Last month, I personally visited Africa and saw first-hand the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS, particularly on children. Of the roughly 13 million

AIDS orphans in the world, 12 million are in sub-Saharan Africa.

These realities break our hearts even as they spur us on to action, and action is what the United States is taking, in tandem with many who are here today as our partners. We must join forces, public and private, through the Global Fund, to eradicate HIV/AIDS, just as we are on the verge of eradicating polio. That is what partnership truly is all about.

Over the past decade, the United States has enhanced its global efforts to improve the lives of children, mothers and fathers. For example, the United States provided over \$2.5 billion in assistance to child survival programmes in developing countries, supporting maternal and child immunization and the prevention and treatment of respiratory infections, diarrhoeal diseases and malaria.

By September of this year, we will have contributed nearly \$157 million to the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour. We provide more than \$10 billion in development assistance to support a range of activities that improve the lives of children today — health care, agricultural development and food assistance to those especially vulnerable — but also to support those countries and communities that are working to establish a long-term future for their children by their efforts to provide quality education, growing economies that generate jobs and sound environmental management.

In fiscal year 2000 alone, we provided new resources to help prevent the trafficking in and exploitation of children in developing countries and to provide services and model programmes for their protection and rehabilitation. Let me emphasize that this issue is of great concern to President Bush and to me personally. We are eager to work with all countries where child trafficking and exploitation occur in order to help eliminate these evil practices wherever they exist.

Despite our accomplishments, we also face critical challenges as we work to foster responsible parenting and safe and stable families. All children deserve to live in nurturing homes and communities and to realize their own unique promise.

President Bush's new education plan — No Child Left Behind — enables all students in the United States to have a better chance to learn, excel and live out their

dreams. Since the cognitive development of children must start in the home, in early April President Bush and my Department announced a new early learning initiative — Good Start, Grow Smart — to help prepare children for a future of learning.

We are working with fellow members of the Assembly to that same end. We have provided \$1.5 billion in assistance to basic education in developing countries. A sound education is a global pathway to success for children in every society, and we welcome joining you as partners in this wonderful effort.

Just as with education, President Bush is also making the physical health of every American child a number-one priority, from the womb to adulthood. We place a high priority on prenatal care for our women and children. It is exemplified by our Department of Health and Human Services extension of government health benefits to the unborn. Our Children's Health Insurance Program makes sure that children, particularly those in low-income families, have access to medical care. President Bush is calling for an unprecedented expansion of community health clinics — neighbourhood medical facilities that traditionally serve low-income populations. And we have launched a major preventive health initiative to discourage illness and disease from ever starting.

Too many American children and other children throughout the industrialized world are inactive, and the consequences are being found in the deteriorating health of many children. In America, for example, Type 2 diabetes is growing at epidemic proportions and the number of overweight and obese children has tripled in the past two decades. I applaud the World Health Organization for making physical activity and fitness its theme and priority for the year. We must get the world moving, literally, and we must begin with our children. The consequences for all our nations are too dire if we do not act now.

All children deserve a global strategy that is focused, visionary and, yes, action-oriented. We must wed the unfinished agenda of the past decade to the future challenges facing children and their families.

Today, at this very special session, we have the opportunity to create a new and better world for all of our children: a world where children are safe and healthy and where they are not exploited; where parents guide their children safely through infancy and childhood to adolescence and then on to adulthood.

The United States remains absolutely committed and is passionate about giving all children the hope of a new day and the promise of a better tomorrow. Our children and their families deserve nothing less.

The President: I call on Mr. Essop Goolam Pahad, Minister in the Office of the President of South Africa.

Mr. Pahad (South Africa): I address the Assembly today on behalf of President Mbeki and on behalf of the people, and especially the children, of South Africa. Many States have rightly stressed the significance of this impressive gathering. Let me add my voice to that sentiment and let me also say that this is a truly momentous occasion for our country.

On this occasion, where the lives and the well-being of children are the focus, we remember vividly that children — many of them hardly in their teens — were instrumental in the fight against apartheid, and we salute and remember those children today. They faced police and army bullets, for instance at the time of the Soweto uprising in 1976. Thousands died and countless numbers were injured, detained or went into exile from the land of their birth. All they had to pit against the might of the apartheid State were their bare hands and their unshakeable devotion to the principles of non-racialism and democracy. In that struggle, many of our children were so preoccupied and harassed that they missed out totally on their youth.

Given our own bitter experience, we feel the daily pain and anger caused by the continuing brutalization of Palestinian children. Those children deserve to live in peace, comfort and security. We express our solidarity with all children throughout the world caught in the nightmare of war and armed conflict. The South African Constitution strongly promotes the rights of children. Their well-being is of paramount importance to the State. South Africa has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and a number of other international treaties, such as the Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour. We have also ratified the African Union Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. The African Charter points the way to important regional cooperation.

Only when we work together as the African continent will we be able to address the issues that plague us, such as poverty and gross

underdevelopment. We all know about the impact of poverty and underdevelopment on mortality, disease, hunger and suffering. But for the first time in our history we are in the position to bring about change and to work to bring about real development and prosperity for our continent, our nation, our people, and especially our children.

The plan of action known as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), can be an important vehicle for the advancement and sustainability of the rights of our children, women and poor people.

Upon ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, under the leadership of President Mbeki, we developed a National Programme of Action for Children. This has effectively mainstreamed issues affecting the lives of our children; it commits all spheres of government and it ensures that the rights of children will remain on the agenda of the legislature, the executive branch and the judiciary. The National Programme of Action is coordinated by the Office on the Rights of the Child in the Presidency. This coordinating and monitoring body works with all government departments, international agencies and civil society.

We come from a history of strong civil society involvement and participation, and that input remains crucial to the growth and development of our country. Health-care services are free for pregnant mothers and for children under the age of six. Primary health care is free for all children. A strategy for the integrated management of the childhood illnesses has been introduced at primary health-care facilities to address principal causes of childhood illnesses and death. An expanded programme on immunization has been introduced in order to immunize children against serious childhood infections. The programme on immunization has succeeded in reducing both polio and measles to close to the point of their elimination.

Child nutrition remains one of the priorities of the South African Government. We aim to provide children of poor households with one meal a day. In addition, we have a child-support grant for lower-income households. In 2000 we released a White Paper on early childhood development, which provides for a compulsory reception year in all public schools. This ensures the best start for all children towards quality education, now starting at the age of 6 and continuing

through the age of 15. That was followed by a White Paper on inclusive education to cater for children with special educational needs.

Protecting children in the criminal justice system is a priority for our Government. The South African Parliament will shortly debate a child justice bill, which deals with children accused of crimes. That bill, once adopted by Parliament, will set a new minimum age for criminal capacity, ensure individual assessment of each child, establish a special legal procedure and provide for a creative range of sentencing options. The Government has also amended existing legislation to provide for a more comprehensive definition of commercial sexual exploitation of children. The National Programme of Action has also requested the South African Law Commission, through relevant ministries, to undertake a comprehensive review of child care legislation. Also under review by the Government is the very important focal area of sexual offences against children. These proposed laws will bring about drastic changes to present South African law and will repeal many of the archaic laws that reflect patriarchal ideology.

While legislation is an effective tool in realizing the rights of the child, we are very mindful of the need for effective implementation. In that respect, we have established specialized sexual offences courts, one-stop multidisciplinary centres and shelters for victims and survivors.

To eradicate all forms of abuse against children, we are committed as a South African nation to reflect on our moral values. We have commenced with a dialogue among our people on the issue of moral regeneration in our society. This process is led by the Deputy President, Mr. Jacob Zuma, and our collective aim is to rebuild families and communities, promote a culture of zero tolerance of abuse and exploitation and build a caring society, as envisaged in our Constitution.

We in South Africa held our own Say Yes for Children campaign, and more than 4 million children had a chance to air their views on what priorities we should have as a nation. Our children prioritized the following. Of the children, 68.1 per cent said that educating every child is a priority; 65.4 per cent of children said that we must put children first and care for every child; and 50.2 per cent of children said that there is an urgent need to fight poverty and HIV/AIDS in their communities. We remain committed to those

priorities and have aligned our programmes with the aspirations of all the children who participated in the survey.

One of the main priorities of the presidency is effective service delivery to children. Much has been achieved in this realm, but much more needs to be done. In order for services to be delivered, policies and programmes must be implemented. The National Programme of Action is well placed to ensure that such implementation takes place. The Government of South Africa will accelerate delivery to children. We will strengthen our resolve to do more for our children. The South African Government therefore wishes to take this opportunity fully to commit itself to creating a world fit for our children.

The President: I now call on Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak, Chairperson of the delegation of Egypt.

Mrs. Mubarak (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): This session assumes great importance because it will assess our achievements over the last decade in achieving goals for our children and will agree on a plan to protect the rights of children in the future. When we speak about the protection and rights of children, we are calling for a new world capable of fully protecting and guaranteeing their rights. In this regard, I wish to refer to the violations in the occupied Palestinian territories, where observance of international conventions and agreements, particularly those related to the rights of children and human rights, has been lacking. The effects of the tragedy in the Palestinian territories are not just limited to its negative impact on Palestinian children. The tragedy is affecting also all the children of the region and the world. It has sown seeds of fear and hatred and has created an atmosphere of violence and extremism. However, the world has not done anything. We ask, "Have we lost our conscience, or are different standards being applied today?"

In view of our collective responsibility, I call on the members of the Assembly to contribute to putting an end to human rights violations, to stopping the bloodshed in the occupied Palestinian territories and to seeking just and peaceful solutions to provide good lives for children, regardless of their nationality or loyalties. Children are innocent creatures who should not bear the responsibilities of the past. They are the children of the future.

I participated in the World Summit for Children and I also have the honour of participating in this

session, which is witnessing unprecedented challenges to us and to our children, namely globalization and its economic and political effects, technological development, structural reforms, armed conflicts and the spread of HIV/AIDS. All these challenges have influenced the developing countries and their ability to deal with children's causes and their growth and protection.

Although much progress has been made through legislation, policies and institutions, we would still like to know what the international programmes of action for the next decade are. What are the priorities at the national and regional levels? The complementarity of the desire, the ability, the commitment and the resources will lead to true international partnership, which will enable us to confront the problems of childhood and the challenges faced by the developing countries in this regard.

Egypt has dealt with these difficult problems, and I am very proud of the achievements made for the children of Egypt. Yet, I would like to reiterate that we still have a long way to go and that many more challenges remain, particularly the use of lessons learned, so that all the progress achieved can be enjoyed by all children who need special care, as we called on the Special Representative of Children to do this morning.

We proudly belong to the Arab and African worlds. We had the honour of hosting the preparatory work for this session. In Cairo we began the "Yes for Children" campaign. The thirty-seventh summit of African countries in Lusaka has entrusted me with the honour of presenting to the Assembly the unified position of the African people, which has been circulated among members. The African continent represents the greatest international challenge to development. While there have been some achievements, the African child still has the most needs. This was expressed well by African children in Cairo. I express their views to the Assembly and call on the international community to contribute to translating their dreams and aspirations into the reality of a bright future. It is time that we accept this goal. The world can no longer ignore the children of Africa.

In conclusion, I wish to confirm that achieving stability and peace and putting an end to the suffering resulting from foreign occupation and armed conflict, not only in the Middle East and Africa but in the entire

world, are preconditions for present and future family stability. World peace and stability are indivisible. Children of the world are one and alike. Our goals should be collective and unified in order to achieve a world that is worthy of our children.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Liwski, Secretary of State and President of the National Council for Children, Adolescents and Family of the Argentine Republic.

Mr. Liwski (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish at the outset to convey to the members of the special session on children the warm and fraternal greetings of the constitutional President of the Argentine Republic, Mr. Eduardo Alberto Duhalde, and of his wife.

It would be inconsistent and unacceptable to consider the evolution of the status of children and adolescents in my country since the 1990 World Summit for Children until now without acknowledging that we are going through some of the most difficult times in our democratic history. It is worth recalling that just about 100 days ago political and social tensions peaked. The entire world witnessed acts of social violence and eruptions that resulted in the loss of human life and created the risk of social disintegration. However, institutional strength and the unwavering democratic calling of the Argentine people made it possible to restore governance. Strictly observing the national Constitution, the Argentine people built a transition Government based on the goals of national unity and salvation.

My country is going through the most serious economic and social crisis of its contemporary history. This severity is apparent in, among other things, the unfair concentration of wealth, the crisis of a financial sector that is alien to the most minimal definition of human dignity and a crushing foreign indebtedness. This situation, together with the existence of a leadership that in many cases is attacked by a society expecting transparency and dedication to service, has had a traumatic impact on millions of families. Unemployment and underemployment have become the driving force of an accelerated process of social exclusion and they are weakening the ties and roles within the family.

In my country the situation of the children and adolescents living within these families presents the most dramatic and stark face of the crisis. They are the

most visible victims of the current emergency, and we know that, should the situation persist, we will have jeopardized Argentina's future for several generations to come.

Thus, we are dealing with true structural problems having cumulative effects and requiring complex solutions.

Currently, 6 of every 10 Argentine children grows up living below the poverty line. Approximately 1.5 million adolescents are excluded from education and the workplace. Both children and adolescents show symptoms of great social vulnerability. Moreover, when adolescents lack support and advocacy, their behaviour often brings them into conflict with the law. In response to this situation, we aim at social integration of these groups through active policies and not through calling for simple reforms of the penal code.

In the Argentina of today, one can also observe pockets of child malnutrition; the premature entry into working conditions with resulting physical and psychological risks; school leaving before the completion of the basic mandatory cycle of education; the victimization of boys and girls through sexual and other abuse, child pornography and child prostitution; the victimization of children by organized illicit drug trafficking and consumption of, and addiction to, illicit drugs; the persistence of factors causing infant mortality, 60 per cent of such deaths being attributable to curable causes, in particular the spreading of HIV/AIDS; teenage pregnancy with the attendant vulnerability with respect to the child's right to family ties and identity; and the continued problems due to the abduction of children during the past military dictatorship and the current abduction of children, both within and beyond our borders.

These problems demonstrate new and grievous realities. However, for the State I represent, they constitute a formidable challenge spurring us to implement innovative courses of action. These entail active social policies based on the exercise of the rights enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, with recognition of the active participation of non-governmental organizations.

When assessing our success in meeting the objectives set by the 1990 World Summit for Children, the Declaration and the Plan of Action, I believe that it is important to underline the following aspects.

The decrease in the national infant mortality rate has reached and gone beyond the objective set. However, the infant mortality rate continues to be double that of the Latin American countries with the lowest rates: Chile, Cuba and Costa Rica.

After the approval of the Federal Education Law, the Argentine Republic initiated great efforts to create a process for increasing the number of students attending school, to extend the mandatory basic cycle of free education and to improve the quality of education.

However, due to the current economic and social crisis, rising numbers of youth dropping out of school put at risk the achievements made so far.

With regard to legislation, in 1990 the Argentine National Congress unanimously approved Law No. 23,849, which incorporates the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and reaffirms recognition of the rights of the child from the moment of conception. In 1994, the Convention was incorporated into the national constitution. Yet, many things still need to be done, including the adoption of a law for the comprehensive protection of the rights of children and adolescents.

Argentina is committed to overcoming its complex and profound social deficits. The national social emergency requires actions of justice and redress from the State agencies. However, above all, it requires immediate and transparent responses, as well as competence in decision-making and the management of scarce resources.

It has therefore been proposed that we further integrate civil society in the process of identifying and solving those problems and encourage the active participation of youth in this process as well. That way, we will be able to build a consensus giving meaning, sustainability and importance to the efforts towards social healing and national salvation.

The main lines of action to benefit children and adolescents — not precluding the objectives presented to the secretariat of the special session — can be grouped in the following areas: commitment to the sectors in the interior of the country; the development of strategies to strengthen families; the leading role of civil society and churches; the strengthening of actions of protection and advocacy; a higher profile for national efforts dedicated to public policies for

children, adolescents and families, reflected in new budget and service structures; and, fundamentally, the promotion and consolidation of full compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In this respect, we fully agree with the three principal objectives specified by the special session.

To conclude this message, I wish to return to my country's social-economic crisis. I know that even amid such misfortune we can discern signs of the potential and opportunities for change and transformation leading towards a world more fit for children.

We should underline, as a spontaneous and immediate response to the crisis, the commitment and mobilization of civil society and of organizations of all types, which in their solidarity have extended to children and adolescents throughout the country networks of advocacy, assistance and the promotion of rights of the child. We also want to underline the importance of the opening of the Argentine dialogue as a way of building a new, national consensus. The Catholic Church and the United Nations Development Programme have rendered us excellent service in this respect.

In conclusion, I would like to affirm that just as our delegation will draw on its legal and moral principles to build consensus among the nations of the world to create a programme favouring children and adolescents, we call upon all sectors of the world community to strengthen their commitments to the children, adolescents and families most vulnerable and most at risk in Argentina.

Argentina, now more than ever, has need of the world in order to begin healing the wounds to its social fabric caused by the economic crisis. It needs understanding, solidarity and help from a world that it has never turned its back on.

His Holiness Pope John II called upon the powerful of the world to "globalize hope". In accordance with this decree, the Government and society have set the goal of getting Argentina back on its feet and directing it towards the future of peace that its children deserve.

By promoting development, social justice and the full exercise of the rights enshrined in the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, Argentina will meet those objectives of universal humanity and will

once again be that country where, as a President once said, “the only privileged people are the children”.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Korea.

Mrs. Lee Hee-ho (Republic of Korea): I am deeply honoured to participate in this meeting, convened to promote the rights and welfare of all children around the world.

We have reawakened to the value of world peace and security for all peoples. A world fit for children is a peaceful and prosperous world for all. I sincerely hope that this special session will go down in history as a great milestone for the future of humankind.

There has been much progress since the World Summit for Children in 1990. The United Nations has been the leader in this process and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) its most active agency. Under its Executive Director, Carol Bellamy, UNICEF has successfully undertaken the Global Movement for Children and the “Say Yes for Children” campaigns. I should like to take this opportunity to pay my respects to them.

Three weeks from now, Korea and Japan will co-host the 2002 FIFA World Cup. During the World Cup games, UNICEF and Korea will join forces to sponsor the Children’s World Peace Festival. This will be an excellent opportunity for children from different corners of the globe to make friends and to experience the value of peace by visiting Korea.

War is the most feared enemy of all humanity, especially children. To deter war and to bring peace to

the Korean peninsula, the Korean Government has consistently pursued its “Sunshine Policy” towards North Korea. Just last month, South Korea dispatched a special presidential envoy to Pyongyang, and the two Koreas agreed to resume efforts to improve relations. I trust that the world will continue to give us its full encouragement in the quest for peace on the peninsula as well as for the success of the upcoming World Cup games.

We need only look around the globe to know that a world fit for children has not yet been achieved. Countless children are falling victim to poverty, malnutrition and abuse, in addition to many dreadful diseases, such as AIDS. It is time for us to act decisively to relieve the pain of all children on Earth, so that they can have bright and healthy lives. Korea is host to the International Vaccine Institute, the only international organization devoted exclusively to research on new vaccines for children. Governments, the United Nations, international organizations, the media, schools and civic groups should cooperate positively with each other.

The education of children is the most important investment that can be made for the future. UNICEF’s “Back to School” programme and other support projects for Afghan children are truly praiseworthy. The Korean Government will make every effort faithfully to fulfil all of the pledges made during the current special session. It will also gradually increase its contributions to various UNICEF activities.

Let us all join our hearts, minds and efforts to build a world fit for children.

The meeting rose at 2 p.m.