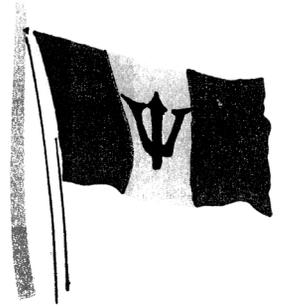




*Permanent Mission
of Barbados to
the United Nations*



STATEMENT BY

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ON BEHALF OF CARICOM

TO THE

THIRD COMMITTEE ON ITEM 105
PROMOTION AND PROTECTION ON THE
RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

OCTOBER 14, 2002

NEW YORK

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Mr. Chairman

I have the honour to intervene on Items (43) follow-up to the outcome of the Special Session on Children and (105) Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Children, respectively. I intervene on behalf of the fourteen Member States of CARICOM, namely: Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, St. Kitts/Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname and my own country Barbados.

The Special Session on Children in which all the CARICOM countries actively participated was the culmination of extensive world-wide consultations and meetings involving many thousands of participants including children and young people. A record number of side events pertaining to children took place involving Member States, the United Nations' organizations and agencies, inter-governmental organizations, religious leaders, parliamentarians, NGO's and the private sector.

The high point of the session was the adoption of the final outcome document: "A World Fit for Children" which reaffirmed the commitment of Governments to complete the unfinished agenda of the 1990 World Summit for Children. The document contains a Declaration and Plan of Action which together aim to chart a course for global action that would strengthen global activities for the promotion of children's rights in the 21st century.

Indeed, the Declaration clearly discusses all the steps that had to be taken in building a new world for children. It defines the significant national efforts, including the mobilization of human, financial and material resources which are essential for achieving the targets outlined in the document.

The roundtable sessions at the Special session also provided the opportunity for leaders as well as children to frankly exchange views and freely identify the areas needed for immediate action in promoting children's rights. The areas identified were: the need to promote education, especially for girls and other disadvantaged groups such as indigenous children and disabled children. The necessity of the wider use of technology in all education was stressed.

Poverty and the urgent need of financial resources in general were discussed as a vital prerequisite to addressing children's rights. Many young delegates in war-afflicted areas highlighted the impact of war on their lives and stressed that adults should pay special attention to the special needs of refugees, street children and ethnic minorities. The impact of health and nutrition was stressed as well as the basic human rights of access to education and other basic social and human rights.

The findings of these roundtables served to reaffirm the United Nations millennium goals enunciated in 2000. Above all, the ominous problem of HIV-

AIDS as an obstacle to development for all but particularly those children in the most affected part of the world was reiterated.

For the past two consecutive years CARICOM countries have stressed in this Committee the terrible effect of the HIV-AIDS pandemic on the development and lives of children in the region. CARICOM is particularly concerned at the HIV-AIDS problem as it is one of the region's in the world that has the fastest growing rate of HIV. A recent UNICEF publication has stated that in the Caribbean, HIV-AIDS continues to take its toll. In one territory it was reported earlier this year that "some families have as many as four or five children, ranging from babies to young teenagers who have all become orphans at the same time." It is believed that the high incidence of "single parent" families in the Caribbean contributed significantly to the rising number of children orphaned by AIDS as many children become statistically "orphaned" because their only parent had died by the disease. (Children in Focus UNICEF 2002).

To repeat there, what we have noted in previous statements, the Caribbean is ranked second to Sub-Saharan Africa as having one of the highest prevailing rates of this disease.

This means that children affected by HIV-AIDS will continue to be a growing problem in the region. A recent UNICEF fact sheet indicated that because of the substantial increase in the new HIV-AIDS cases in the region, the rate of children orphaned by HIV-AIDS is expected to increase dramatically i.e over the next 8 years.

All the experts agree that prevention is the key to minimise new HIV infections. Caribbean Governments have been working closely with UN and other agencies to stop the spread of the disease. The UNICEF Caribbean Area office has also worked closely with UNAIDS and other United Nations partners at AIDS prevention and expansion in the region. They focus on four priority interventions in twelve program countries in the Eastern Caribbean and Suriname to plan and implement the CARICOM Health and Family Life Education (HFLE) Project. Self esteem, lifestyles, life skills and positive behaviour are some of the key components of the HFLE projects aimed at ultimately benefiting children. Other areas supported included the prevention of Mother-to-child Transmission (MTCT) counselling, youth employment, care and assistance to the affected and their families and formulating projects with countries to develop and implement national policies on orphans.

There are also special programs aimed at the youth. In many countries, working within the framework of the national strategic plan of action youth councils and youth generally are supported by the Youth Empowerment Programme which provides training and skills necessary for young people to protect themselves from HIV-AIDS, and STDs. In partnership with community-based organizations, general peer education and communication systems have already been initiated

to assist the youth. There is also training and capacity-building among health workers to equip them to counsel and help HIV-infected mothers. In most territories, there are advocacy programmes to prevent discrimination against the HIV-infected.

Caribbean countries with the aid of the United Nations have been working assiduously to defeat HIV-AIDS. We are indebted therefore to UNICEF in helping to implement the goals of "A World Fit for Children" to quote, "States Parties resolved to develop by 2003 and to implement by 2005, national policies and programs to build and strengthen institutional, family and community capabilities to provide a supportive environment for orphans, girls and boys infected and affected by HIV-AIDS (etc.)."

These health programs are noted in a region which health surveys confirm that almost 60% of the youth are sexually active before the age of 14 years. In some cases as early as 12. The early onset of sexual activity, considered with the involvement of multiple sexual partners renders youth highly vulnerable to HIV-AIDS.

CARICOM States here would like to laud the efforts of UNICEF and PAHO in the region for their support and involvement in the CARICOM's Regional Strategic Plan of Action for HIV-AIDS and other such programs in which they are involved in every country in the region and the Caribbean community.

At the heart of all action pertaining to children is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, a human rights instrument which has the highest number of signatories and ratifications in the international community.

In spite of such commitment the world in 2002 seems a more dangerous place for children than it was 10 years ago. For example, the world has more children living in poverty than it did in 1990 and it is certainly more unstable and violent than it was in 1990. Globally, one in 4 children lives in abject poverty – in families with income lower than \$1.00 a day. In developing countries one in 3 children live in abject poverty. Such poverty has been discussed as a world of darkness where each day is a struggle to survive.

The United Nations for over a decade has embarked on a series of activities to force the international community to face the global inequities that exist and formulate plans and initiatives to remove these disparities between the rich and the poor world wide. The global market place has been highly successful for a small minority with capital and skills. The problems and inequalities engendered by globalization demand both global and national responses. It is to be hoped that the United Nations recent conferences on Financing for Development and the Review of Agenda 21 recently held in Mexico and Johannesburg, respectively, will start a new effort to push countries to help reduce the economic and social inequalities which still beset the world. It should be noted that women

and children are among the first to suffer when crises erupt in the world, whether man-made or natural disasters.

While poverty remains a factor crippling the vulnerable in all societies there are other phenomena which prohibit the achievement of A World Fit for Children. Among the greatest of these are the involvement of children in armed conflict and the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. CARICOM countries welcomed the adoption in 2002 of the UN General Assembly of the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on these two problem areas.

Caribbean States joined in the consensus of the adoption of these protocols and some are endeavouring to consider their ratification.

Although Caribbean countries have been deeply involved in the war against HIV-AIDS, the territories have not abandoned the other areas in which their children need attention. While we continue to build on the solid base we have established in Early Childhood Education, we have not abandoned our adolescents. This can be seen in the numerous programs being initiated in all the territories by UNICEF and with such partners as the Red Cross Red Crescent Society and other national NGOs.

Indeed, the Caribbean has moved with the rest of Latin American region and at the Tenth Ibero-American Summit adopted the Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents. This Plan was designed to guide nations over the next decade in their efforts to meet the priority needs of children and adolescents. Then the 14-member Caribbean Community, CARICOM, took the lead in organizing and providing political support and monitoring the progress in the implementation of various programs as was seen in the meeting in Kingston, Jamaica which produced the Kingston consensus. The statements delivered by Caribbean leaders at the Children's Special Session show further proof of the region's commitment to make a better world fit for children.

Mr. Chairman

While we recognize that the obstacles to realizing the rights of children in the 21st century are daunting, we must acknowledge that the world did make significant achievement in the previous decades.

The challenge remains for all of those who hold political power and public trust, those with the greatest opportunity and the greatest responsibility to accomplish change.

The United Nations has established international treaties, set standards and instituted programs. All international nations must try to meet the commitments they so vocally accepted at the Children's Summits in 1990 and in May 2002.