



*The  
Bahamas*

**58<sup>th</sup> SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**AGENDA ITEM 41 – FOLLOW UP TO THE OUTCOME OF  
THE SPECIAL SESSION ON CHILDREN**

**STATEMENT BY**

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TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

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**Please check against delivery**

Mr. President,

A little over a year ago, world leaders gathered in New York to reaffirm their commitment to building a world truly fit for children. The twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly was notable not only for the levels of political will manifested, and the adoption of a set of time-bound goals to improve the state of the world's children, but also for the participation of children themselves, for the first time at the General Assembly. Their presence in New York reminded us of the importance of the task at hand, and the impact of their attendance should stay with us as we examine the measures that we have already undertaken, and those that remain to be done as we commit ourselves to building a world fit for them, and succeeding generations.

My delegation thanks the Secretary General for presenting the comprehensive report we have before us. The report shows that there have been mixed results thus far in implementing the Declaration and Plan of Action adopted at the special session, and that, unfortunately, there has been a lack of consistent and systematic follow up to this point. My delegation trusts that our consideration of this item at this session will provide a new impetus to the critical follow-up process.

Mr. President,

The Secretary General's report offers a timely reminder that all of the actions undertaken by the international community ultimately have an impact on the world's children. Accordingly, the commitments we have undertaken at the major conferences and summits of the 1990s, and in more recent times, are about children, whether we may have realised it at the time or not. The outcomes of the World Summit for Social Development and its five-year review, the Fourth World Conference on Women and its five-year review, the International Conference on Financing for Development and the World Summit for Sustainable Development have committed us to a series of actions that will truly test our commitment to creating social and economic development, to eradicating poverty, preventing environmental degradation and ultimately preserving our world for future generations. These commitments are perhaps best captured in the Millennium Development Goals, and we call on all States to reaffirm their commitment to implementing these goals.

In this context, my delegation wishes to reiterate the importance of international cooperation and assistance in meeting these goals. We have set ourselves a truly ambitious agenda, which no State can achieve alone. Accordingly, resource mobilisation at the national and particularly the international level, through ODA, debt relief and international assistance, is critical to ensuring that all States are able to meet their obligations, particularly those that affect the daily lives and future of the world's children.

Mr. President,

The Bahamas is a young nation, both in terms of its political independence, and in terms of its population. According to the most recent national census, 35% of the

population is under the age of 18. Thus it is an imperative that actions be undertaken to safeguard the well being of this segment of our population. We recognise that our future development and prosperity depend on our children, and it is with this reality in mind that The Bahamas Government has sought to translate its commitment to children into a series of significant national actions. As an archipelagic state, The Bahamas faces peculiar difficulties in the delivery of social and other services to the populations of each of its twenty-two inhabited islands. Notwithstanding these difficulties, however, the Government of The Bahamas has committed itself to providing social and other services to the entire population of the country, a commitment that has necessitated duplication of infrastructure in each of the islands, and the allocation of scarce resources in this regard.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child remains the overarching framework for The Bahamas as it seeks to safeguard the well-being of the nation's children, and meet its obligations in each of the designated areas of promoting healthy lives, providing quality education, protecting children against abuse, exploitation and violence, and combating HIV/AIDS.

The Bahamas recognises that the health of a nation is the wealth of a nation, and that, without a healthy population, no development and progress can be achieved. Accordingly, the Government of The Bahamas has devoted considerable resources to providing universal access to healthcare, in each of our islands. We are pleased that we have been able to secure a dramatic reduction in infant mortality rates over the last decade, and the Ministry of Health is working, in partnership with other government agencies, to continue to reduce these rates. Considerable focus has also been placed on the importance of immunisation in halting the spread of preventable childhood diseases. Accordingly, immunisation rates stand at 90% for children under the age of five, and efforts are continuing to increase this figure.

Mr. President,

Equal emphasis is placed on the importance of educating our children, to enable them to take their places as productive members of society and to contribute to the development of the nation. Accordingly, the Government of The Bahamas devotes the single largest share of the national budget to providing universal access to education for all up to the age of 16. Free primary and secondary education is available to all Bahamians, on a non-discriminatory basis. The Government has also provided free pre-school education at many of its public schools. The Bahamas seeks to provide a well-rounded quality education, including technical and vocational training and access to information technology, to its children, to provide the best possible start for our young people, and provide them with the tools they need to make their way into the world.

The sad reality of abuse, violence and exploitation of children is one that none of us in the international community has been able to fully prevent. The Bahamas is, however, fully committed to eradicating the practices that would harm our children, and prevent them from enjoying their full human rights. The Bahamas has a legislative framework in place that seeks to protect children, augmented by the work of Government agencies with a mandate to investigate instances of abuse and

violence, and intervene when necessary. The Government is constantly reviewing this framework in an effort to ensure that the nation's children are not vulnerable to those that would seek to do them harm, and to meet its international obligations in this regard. When we put our children at risk, we put our future at risk, and we will take every step necessary to ensure that this does not happen.

Mr. President,

As is well known, the HIV/AIDS pandemic has ravaged the world, and threatens the development prospects of many nations. The Caribbean region is the second worst affected region in the world, and The Bahamas has not been exempted from this. The Bahamas Government has waged an intensive campaign against the pandemic, through the provision of care, treatment and prevention programmes, coupled with awareness-raising and education activities. Children are perhaps the most innocent victims of this disease, and The Bahamas has sought to limit its impact on our children. Accordingly, The Bahamas has sought to increase access to anti-retroviral drugs, particularly for HIV-positive pregnant women, and has recorded a reduction in the rate of mother-to-child transmission to 3% in 2002. The Bahamas has also taken action with respect to the increasing numbers of HIV-orphans. While we cherish the extended family that continues to characterise our nation, the Government has also taken steps to intervene where that extended family cannot, to provide care and support for these children. Our commitment to combating HIV/AIDS, and particularly its impact on children, will not wane.

Mr. President

While national action will ultimately prove the most effective in protecting the world's children and safeguarding their well being, my delegation also wishes to stress the importance of regional and international action. In this context, my delegation wishes to pay tribute to the work of UNICEF and other specialized agencies in the UN system, for the sterling work they have undertaken in pursuit of the goals contained in 'A World Fit for Children'. We look forward to continuing to work in fruitful partnership with these agencies in this regard.

Mr. President,

The view has been expressed in some quarters that the United Nations has become nothing more than a talk shop, from which concrete action rarely emanates. In fulfilling our obligations to the world's children, let us put the lie to this assertion. The world's future depends on the actions we take today to safeguard the welfare and well being of our children. Let us not fail them, and ourselves, and reaffirm our commitment to building a world that is truly fit for children.

Thank you Mr. President.