



Malaysia

Permanent Mission to the United Nations

28

STATEMENT BY

**THE HONOURABLE DATO' DR. TAN KEE KWONG
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
REPRESENTATIVE OF MALAYSIA**

ON

**AGENDA ITEM 40: FOLLOW-UP TO THE OUTCOME
OF THE SPECIAL SESSION ON CHILDREN**

AT

**THE PLENARY OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
THE 59TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
NEW YORK**

TUESDAY, 26 OCTOBER 2004

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Mr. President,

1. On behalf of the Malaysian delegation, I wish to thank the Secretary-General for his report, which contains the second update of progress made in the follow-up to the special session of the General Assembly on Children. We are pleased to join Mr. Kul Gautam, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, who introduced the report at the Third Committee on 18 October, in noting that governments are taking substantive measures to pursue the goals aimed at creating "A World Fit for Children", as envisaged in the Declaration and Plan of Action adopted at the special session in May 2002.

2. It appears that rapid progress has been achieved in certain areas while setbacks have occurred in others. We note the Secretary-General's assessment that while in 2003 many countries had taken concrete actions to translate the commitments made in 2002 into national action plans and policies, the overall rate of progress has been uneven. The situation seems to be more encouraging now. We note especially that almost two-thirds of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa have opted to integrate the goals of the special session into their poverty reduction strategies and that some 18 countries have developed or intend to develop a national plan of action or policy paper on children.

3. My delegation remains sensitive to the fact that some 30,000 children lose their lives everyday to preventable causes. While there is a clear and genuine effort to strengthen partnerships within the international community to increase child survival and promote healthy lives, more surely needs to be done to achieve targets set under the Millennium Development Goals in areas such as reducing infant and under-five mortality, increasing routine immunisations and supplies of vitamins for children, improving maternal health, reducing preventable diseases and providing greater access to safe drinking water. Similarly, greater efforts are required to promote the other goals set at the special session, namely providing quality education, protecting against abuse, exploitation and violence and combating HIV/AIDS. Malaysia is pleased to participate in some of these efforts at the regional and multilateral levels. At the national level, much of our efforts have been carried out in the context of the Second National Plan of Action for children, encompassing the period 2001 to 2020. This Plan has been formulated in conformity with the nation's Vision 2020, the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as the outcome document of the special session on children.

4. While the goals of "A world fit for children" have set a particular focus on four areas, Ministers in the East Asia and Pacific region, during the sixth East Asia and Pacific Ministerial Consultation on Children held in May 2003, had identified education as an overarching imperative for the region. In addition, the Ministers set four issues as regional priorities – action against commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking; fighting HIV/AIDS; improving nutrition, and reducing maternal and neonatal mortality. Malaysia feels that these are important areas which may merit consideration in some other regions as well.

5. My delegation commends the invaluable support and commitment demonstrated by relevant United Nations development agencies in gearing their activities to assist and support Member States in implementing the policies, plans and programs as proposed by the Plan of Action. We urge the relevant United Nations agencies to continue their efforts in assisting developing countries to establish and strengthen their national capacity and institutions for the promotion and protection of the rights of children. They could also explore the possibility of working in tandem with regional organizations, where appropriate, to assist Member States achieve the goals set by the Special Session.

i. Providing quality education

6. Malaysia has consistently made a conscious decision to set education as the cornerstone of the national agenda. This commitment is underscored by the fact that 20.6 per cent of the total development allocation under the Eighth Malaysia Plan (for the years 2001 – 2005) is allocated for education. In the budget presented by the Government to the Parliament recently, the largest allocation is for the education sector, accounting for almost a quarter of total operating allocations.

7. The National Education Policy is geared towards providing basic education for a minimum of nine years. There is equal access to educational opportunities for both girls and boys, with the rate of enrolment between the two genders being almost at par (50.4% boys, 49.6% girls), except at the tertiary level where there is higher enrolment by girls compared to boys. Having put in place educational facilities throughout the country for the disabled, the Government has now made primary education compulsory for all.

8. With a rate of 98% enrolment in primary school, the Government has now moved a step further by embarking on the provision of quality education to ensure that children have access to the best learning system to enable them to cope with the rapid progress of the information age. Efforts undertaken in this regard include modernizing schools, ensuring well-trained teachers and equipping all schools with computer laboratories and ICT equipment.

ii. Promoting healthy lives

9. A sum of RM5.5 billion has been allocated under the Eighth Malaysia Plan to further develop the health sector. Malaysia is constantly upgrading its medical facilities and programmes. There has been a steady decline in maternal and neonatal mortality in Malaysia, which currently stands at 0.2 and 5 per 1000 respectively. Health and community clinics, set up throughout the country and which provide services such as immunisation and normal development assessment for children ensure that the child is in optimum health condition.

10. Malaysia has become committed to the concept of "total rehabilitation" for disabled children since it was first highlighted in 1979 during the 4th Asian Conference for the Handicapped. This entails a multi-disciplinary approach whereby rehabilitative services for disabled children are provided by the Department of Social Welfare through institutional services, with the Ministry of Health providing technical inputs. The Department has also forged smart partnerships with NGOs by supporting them financially in the administration and management of the institutional centres they operate.

iii. Protecting children against abuse, exploitation and violence

11. The Child Act 2001, formulated in line with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, sets out provisions for the care and protection of children in Malaysia. A Court for Children has been established, which allows the affected child to participate in discussions and deliberations in court. In the area of child abuse, Malaysia has developed mechanisms for child protection, care and rehabilitation through the setting-up of inter-sectoral Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect (SCAN) teams at district and state hospitals. A milestone in preventive measures is the establishment of Child Protection Teams, which sets out multiple programmes run by the community, for the community. Among others, they run parental education activities and serve as a counselling centre.

12. While having identified action against commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking of children as the first of the four regional priorities, Malaysia is mindful that this challenge could not be surmounted by any one country acting alone. Malaysia subscribes to the ASEAN Declaration on the Commitments for Children in ASEAN in 2001, the first document fully dedicated to ASEAN children in this Millennium. Under this Declaration, ASEAN has drawn up cooperation programmes to combat child-trafficking and inter-country adoption. At the same time, programmes have been put in place to provide alternative family care arrangements for the victims of child abuse, neglect and exploitation, as well as to address the special needs of children with disabilities.

iv. Combating HIV/AIDS

13. Recognising the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS, which poses serious health and developmental challenges to humankind, and which disproportionately affects the young, Malaysia participated actively at the ASEAN Summit on HIV/AIDS was convened in Brunei Darussalam in November 2001, in conjunction with the 7th ASEAN Summit. The objective was to place the issue of HIV/AIDS on the highest political agenda among the ASEAN countries, and to make a commitment to collaborate in inter-country and cross-border issues as well as to exchange technical expertise and experiences in order to address the HIV/AIDS problem. On the home front, Malaysia continues to give serious attention to actions to combat HIV/AIDS. The Government has given very serious attention to measures to combat HIV/AIDS although the reported cases of HIV infection are relatively small compared to our population. The Government has taken a comprehensive and integrated approach to deal with this problem, which includes preventive measures, care, support and treatment for those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. The Government works closely with NGOs in this regard, in particular the Malaysia AIDS Council (MAC), an umbrella organization headed by Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir.

Mr. President,

14. Malaysia's Vision 2020, which sets out the direction for the country's development and progress over the next two decades, envisages that "... every child born should be brought up in a healthy environment, provided with all necessary protection against diseases, receive proper nurturing, care and affection, receive general and higher education as far as possible, receive appropriate skills in necessary fields, imbued with cultural and human values". We are confident that the well-being of children and women are reliable indicators of a healthy society and of good governance. Therefore, the Malaysian Government will continue to promote and facilitate the rights of the child, especially in the areas of protection, development and participation.

Thank you, Mr. President.