



PERMANENT MISSION OF
JAMAICA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

STATEMENT BY

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE P.J. PATTERSON, QC, MP
PRIME MINISTER OF JAMAICA

AT THE

TWENTY-SEVENTH SPECIAL SESSION OF THE
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
ON CHILDREN

NEW YORK, MAY 8, 2002

(Please check against delivery)

Mr. President,

We meet today not only to assess our stewardship since the World Summit for Children, but 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, 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:

- a reduction in the mortality rate of children under five;
- heightened levels of immunization;
- dramatic progress in preventing iodine deficiency disorders;
- 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 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; who are used as pawns in a cruel game; as drug traffickers, as perpetrators of crime and violence.

Others are victims of the ugliest and most shameful human activities, 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 orphans of them.

Mr. President,

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

Children now have their place on the national agendas of many member States and in the work programmes of several international organisations.

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 fulfillment of our commitment to improving their situation.

The process has involved national consultations with key players including government, the private sector, 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.

Mr. President,

It is imperative that we all continue to engage our intellect, our resources and our actions to fulfill 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 the benefit of 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 lifespan as a result of HIV/AIDS.

Investing in our children is our best way of ensuring long-term development and global harmony.

Mr. President,

Let this auspicious Assembly transmit a message of hope and determination.

Let us, as Heads of States and Governments, 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 truly protected.

We must act in concert and "**Say Yes For Children**", and construct "**A World Fit For Children**", recognising 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 august forum depart with a determination to transform fine rhetoric into resolute action; to translate the universal consensus into early and effective action within our sovereign borders.

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