



PERMANENT MISSION OF
JAMAICA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

STATEMENT BY

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TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

TO THE EU SEMINAR

ON

**CHILDREN AFFECTED BY ARMED CONFLICT AND
FORCED DISPLACEMENT**

SWEDEN, 1-2 MARCH 2001

Hon. Maj-Inger Klingvall
Minister for Development Cooperation, Migration and Asylum Policy

Honourable Gun-Britt Andersson
State Secretary for Development Cooperation, Migration and Asylum Policy

Honourable Maria Minna
Minister for International Cooperation of Canada

Mrs. Carol Bellamy
Executive Director, UNICEF

Mr. Olara Ottunu
Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children
and Armed Conflict

Ambassador Thomas Hammarsberg
Personal Representative of the
Prime Minister of Sweden to the Special Session on Children

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

When I met Minister Klingvall last September at the Winnipeg Conference on war-affected children, I was excited to learn of the plans to hold this Seminar during Sweden's presidency of the European Union.

Minister Minna, it is good to see you here. Let me also use this opportunity to thank the Canadian Government for the attention paid to the protection of civilians in armed conflict during Canada's membership of the UN Security Council (1999-2000) and for the continued focus on the plight of war-affected children.

Distinguished delegates,

The discussions over the past two days have certainly pointed to the catalytic nature of the contribution which the member states of the European Union can make in reducing the gap between norms and practice in relation to children affected by armed conflict and forced displacement.

It has also been made clear that the issues of development cooperation and humanitarian assistance, migration and asylum policies and international

peace and security cannot be dealt with in isolation, one from the other, if we are to achieve "a world fit for children".

The background papers correctly emphasised the "right to education", the "rights of children to be heard" and the "right to psycho-social rehabilitation" as demanding attention on behalf of war-affected children worldwide.

Although significant progress has been made in many countries in achieving a majority of the goals and objectives of the 1990 World Summit, and in realizing the rights enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, we are still daunted by many challenges.

We know, for example, that some 10 million children under the age of five die each year, mostly from preventable diseases and malnutrition. HIV/AIDS, inadequate sanitation, poor hygiene, drug abuse and limited basic social services are a few of the factors which threaten the survival of millions of children across the globe.

During the 1990s, more than 2 million children died as a result of armed conflict – and more than three times that number were permanently disabled or seriously injured. The negative impact of armed conflict on the growth and development of children was certainly identified among the major challenges at the 1990 World Summit. Indeed, world leaders then pledged to protect children, and, *inter alia*, to take measures to prevent armed conflicts in order to ensure a peaceful and secure future for children. The Summit's Declaration also included the commitment to ameliorate the plight of displaced and refugee children; to promote the values of peace, understanding and dialogue in the education of children, and to protect the special needs of families.

The Summit did not, however, identify any global quantitative goals. Nonetheless, thanks to the seminal work of Mrs. Graça Machel over the past decade, greater attention has been focused on the plight of children affected by armed conflict, and this has stimulated a number of innovative and practical initiatives – including the appointments of the first Special Representatives of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict – Mr. Olara Otunnu – and the adoption of ground-breaking resolutions by the UN General Assembly and Security Council. These, in turn, have strengthened the advocacy work of the Special Representative and of UNICEF, and have enhanced the ability of the United Nations to implement programmes on the ground in affected countries. As a result, the issue has now been placed firmly in the international peace and security agenda.

As UNICEF's Executive Director, Carol Bellamy pointed out, these actions have been complemented by the normative framework established in the

Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court, and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, among other legal instruments. In their Millennium Declaration, Heads of State and Government resolved to ensure the protection of children who suffer disproportionately in armed conflict, and also urged the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols.

The issues of armed conflict and displacement are particularly important for the Special Session on Children, as, despite the commitments made by our leaders, children are still being killed, maimed, used as combatants, uprooted from home and community and forced to live in conditions of extreme deprivation. There is no doubt that armed conflict and displacement exacerbate poverty, reduce progress in human development, increase children's vulnerability to sexual exploitation and physical abuse, and, as such, constitute some of the most serious obstacles to the full implementation of the World Summit's goals.

The challenge of the Special Session on Children is how to change this tragic reality by adopting an innovative and action-oriented approach.

There are several identifiable steps to be taken in the pre-conflict and post-conflict phases and during conflicts to address the plight of children in an integrated and comprehensive manner; and these have been alluded to by nearly all the speakers during the Seminar.

- In the first place, attention must be given to the prevention of armed conflicts – as the best way to reduce harm done to children is to prevent armed conflicts from breaking out.
- Addressing the root causes of conflict must therefore be a matter of priority for the international community. There can be no real substitute for dealing with the political, economic, social and humanitarian circumstances that fuel children's recruitment and participation in armed conflict.
- The international community must also ensure respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and encourage specially designed post-conflict peace-building and rehabilitative programmes which can reduce the likelihood of the re-emergence of armed conflicts.
- The promotion of a culture of adherence to humanitarian norms and standards is therefore of critical importance, especially in the light of the increased violations of international humanitarian law

in conflict situations. A vital component of any effective strategy must include clear efforts by States to end current levels of impunity by prosecuting those who deliberately violate the rights of children. Genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and other egregious crimes perpetrated against children should be excluded from amnesty provisions contemplated during peace negotiations. By the same token, child ex-combatants should be regarded primarily as victims rather than as perpetrators, and exposed to rehabilitative treatment rather than prosecution.

It is equally important that appropriate monitoring and reporting mechanisms be established to ensure the compliance of armed groups and non-state actors.

- Initiatives by the UN System to develop strategies to protect children must be accompanied by better and more effective cooperation and coordination with regional and sub-regional bodies, multilateral and bilateral donors and non-governmental organizations.
- The illicit trade in small arms and the illegal exploitation of and trade in natural resources must also be addressed.
- We must also include children and youth on planning and implementing programmes benefiting them; replicate successful initiatives to protect children affected by war, at the community level; make education an essential component of humanitarian assistance; and include information on the security of children in all reports on conflict situations prepared by the UN Security Council.

How will these issues be treated at the Special Session? During discussions in the Preparatory Committee, official and non-governmental delegations have stressed that the impact of armed conflict on children should be among the areas of focus of the outcome document for the Special Session. It was suggested that the Session should promote targets relating to education as a central component in preventing conflict and in promoting peaceful means for conflict resolution, and should also encourage measures to address the challenges of poverty eradication and sustainable development.

The hope was expressed that the outcome document will represent the renewed commitment of the international community to taking future action to create a child-friendly world through national action and international cooperation; promoting respect for the human rights of children; reducing discrimination and violence based on ethnicity, religion and inequality; and institutionalising the protection of children in armed conflict on the international peace and security agenda.

Some delegations identified the need to enhance partnerships to promote human security; to develop a culture of peace and non-violence; and to reiterate commitments to improving policies and programmes for the protection, care and well-being of refugees, internally displaced children - especially those who are unaccompanied, and children of migrant workers.

It was also recognized that, consistent with their evolving capacities, children must be actively involved in peace-building initiatives and in emergency and other humanitarian assistance policies and programmes, and that recognition should be given to their capacity to participate in and to have their voices heard in conflict resolution and in initiatives to promote their health and nutrition, education and learning, physical and psychological recovery and social integration.

The Special Session must point the way to action on these issues at the national, regional, and international levels, so that we will not return in ten years time to lament the lack of progress, while we have deprived yet another generation of their childhood.

I know that we can count on the cooperation of the European Union and its member states not only in the months leading up to the Special Session but thereafter to use the "best interest of the child" as a benchmark in their development and humanitarian assistance programmes.

Distinguished delegates,

For the benefit of those who have not attended the meetings of the Preparatory Committee, let me make some comments on the process now underway.

We have put in place some of the lessons learnt from other Summit review processes. These include –

- ♦ stressing the importance of a participating process at the national, regional and international levels, and establishing partnerships with a broad range of actors, including civil society, children and youth. In this way, we hope to ensure a “bottom up” rather than a “top down” approach;
- ♦ requesting Heads of State and Government to appoint Personal Representatives in order to encourage the full and effective participation of member states. In this connection, I wish to express appreciation to Ambassador Thomas Hammarberg who has been of tremendous assistance in his capacity of Personal Representative of the Prime Minister of Sweden. Nearly 30 other Personal Representatives from all regions have already been appointed.
- ♦ focussing on “emerging issues” and “future actions” while not neglecting the review and assessment of the World Summit’s goals.

It will be recalled that the 1990 Summit brought together what was, up to that time, the largest gathering of Heads of State and Government, at which 71 leaders endorsed a World Declaration and Plan of Action.

The process leading up to this multilateral consensus was made possible by the fortunate combination of at least four crucial factors, viz:

- (i) the well-being of children is one subject on which parties can perhaps agree more easily than on other issues. The spirit of the entire process was reflected in the closing sentence of the World Declaration which states that “There can be no task nobler than giving every child a better future”. Child survival and protection have long been priorities in most national and international development strategies. Therefore the major challenge was not in the recognition of children in policy formulation, but rather in policy implementation; in the

availability of resources, and in the effective use of those resources.

- (ii) A second factor was that the Declaration and Plan of Action focussed on problems in which the information available allowed the formulation of a clear diagnosis and a set of effective and feasible actions. This information also made it possible to identify measurable goals in areas such as education, health and nutrition and sanitation. Focused on future actions rather than on descriptions of the past, the Summit's outcome document was impressively concise.
- (iii) Another important factor was that the Plan of Action contained clear follow-up arrangements. It spelt out what was expected at the national and at the international level and called upon specific organizations – primarily UNICEF – to support national efforts in the implementation and follow-up of agreed actions.
- (iv) The last factor I wish to mention is that the consensus in favour of children had led to the adoption one year earlier of the convention on the Rights of the Child. The national reports submitted to the Committee on the Rights of the Child have formed an important element, not only in the monitoring of the implementation of the Convention, but also of national plans of action and of the annual report on the Progress of Nations prepared by UNICEF.

Against this background, we have a great responsibility to organise the 2001 Special Session to serve as a renewal of the global commitment to children.

I wish to acknowledge the excellent support which I and my colleagues on the Bureau of the Preparatory Committee – from Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany and Mali – have received from the Executive Director, Ms. Carol Bellamy and her staff at UNICEF, which is the substantive secretariat for the Special Session. The approach we have taken makes us confident that the Special Session will build upon the factors I have just described.

I must say that the political consensus in favour of children is still alive. The Preparatory Committee has, to date, held three successful sessions. We expect to complete our work in June 2001, and so to set the stage for a child-focussed session in September, which we hope that a large number of Heads of State and Government, as well as children, will attend.

A significant number of member states have already submitted national reports on the implementation of the 1990 World Declaration and Plan of Action. These reports (which are posted on the Session's website) together with regional analyses represent a key input for the report which the Secretary-General will submit to the Preparatory Committee in June 2001.

Second, consultations are being held in every major region of the world in order to update the strategies of each region for the survival, protection and development of children; and these results are being fed into the review process. (The Regional Meeting for Europe and Central Asia will take place in Berlin in May).

Third, the contribution of NGOs has been facilitated by the decision of the Preparatory Committee to invite to its meetings not only the NGOs accredited to the UN Economic and social Council (ECOSOC) and to UNICEF, but also NGOs which have a collaborative relationship with UNICEF at the national level. The General Assembly has already confirmed the participation of these organizations in the Special Session in September.

Fourth, we have encouraged the inclusion of children and young people on official as well as on NGO delegations, and many have attended the meetings of the Preparatory Committee and have participated in national and regional consultations. These young people have already told us that they want an outcome document which responds to their needs, is written in language they can understand, and which will not require "interpretation".

If we get it right, the Special Session will result in a renewed commitment and a pledge for specific actions for the next decade, and a plan of action which will be devoted to ensuring three essential outcomes, *viz:*

- the best possible start in life for all children;
- a good quality education for all children;
- the provision of opportunities for all children to meaningfully participate in their communities.

Key support for the Special Session has come from Mrs. Graça Machel and her husband, former President Nelson Mandela. They have spearheaded the Leadership Initiative as part of the Global Movement for Children which calls on governments and leaders to increase their investment in children's health, education, rights and protection to give children the best possible start in life.

Their support will, I am sure, generate a positive response from other world leaders.

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

In preparing for your own participation in the Special Session, I ask that you hold in your mind the picture of a particular child who is close to you. What you wish for this child – health, education, happiness, freedom from fear and want, success and more – that vision must lead us as we define goals and strategies. A measure of the Special Session must be whether our work moves us closer to a world in which each and every child enjoys a life of dignity, serenity and self-fulfilment. Only then will we have moved closer to "a world fit for children".

I thank you.