

Ensuring child rights still a challenge, 20 years after treaty – UN officials



Secretary-General Ban (third right) with youth delegates at Convention on the Rights of the Child event

20 November 2009 – The Convention on the Rights of the Child has become the most widely accepted human rights treaty in history, but 20 years after its adoption, much more remains to be done to turn its promises into reality for millions worldwide, top United Nations officials said today.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said the Convention, which has been ratified by 193 States, has inspired new approaches and advances in child survival and education, as well as increased awareness of children’s specific problems.

“But realizing the rights in the Convention remains a huge challenge,” he **told** a special event in New York, just one of over 160 events taking place worldwide to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the landmark treaty by the UN General Assembly.

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The Convention articulates a set of universal children’s rights, such as the right to an identity, a name and a nationality, the right to an education, and rights to the highest possible standards of health and protection from abuse and exploitation.

The Secretary-General noted that millions of children still die before their fifth birthday from largely preventable causes. Millions more lack access to clean food, water and education, and are victims of violence and exploitation.

“That is why children should always have the first claim on our attention and resources,” stated Mr. Ban, who met earlier in the day with youth activists, including from Brazil, Kenya and Pakistan.

However, this is especially true now, at a time when multiple crises threaten the poorest people, particularly in developing countries, he added. "Children must be at the heart of our thinking on climate change, on the food crisis, and on the other challenges we are addressing on a daily basis."

The head of the UN Children's Fund (**UNICEF**) also stressed that much more remains to be done, despite all that has been achieved during the past 20 years. "That an estimated 8.8 million children continue to die before they celebrate their fifth birthday is simply unacceptable," Executive Director Ann M. Veneman **declared**.

She also shared the stories of some of the children she has met during her travels, such as the girls in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) who have been subject to sexual violence, the boys who were abandoned by their families as witches in central Africa, and children abducted from their families and forced to serve as child soldiers or sex slaves.

"As we mark the 20th anniversary of the Convention, let us remember the unspeakable violations of rights that occur almost daily to the most innocent of innocents, children," she told the event, which was emceed by UNICEF's Advocate for Children Affected by War, Ishmael Beah, a best-selling author and former child soldier from Sierra Leone.

"The world must build on the progress achieved to ensure that stories such as theirs become part of the past."

Earlier this week, as part of its commemoration of the Convention's anniversary, UNICEF launched a special edition of its flagship *The State of the World's Children* report, tracking the impact of the treaty and the challenges that remain.

Among other things, the report stressed that the rights of girls still require special attention, noting that the majority of children not attending primary school are girls, and girls are more likely to suffer sexual violence, be trafficked or forced into child marriage. In many regions they are also less likely to receive essential healthcare.

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