



General Assembly

Sixty-second session

72nd plenary meeting

Thursday, 13 December 2007, at 10 a.m.
New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Kerim (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Ileka (Democratic Republic of the Congo), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting Devoted to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children

Agenda item 66 (continued)

Promotion and protection of the rights of children

(b) Follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children

Report of the Secretary-General (A/62/259)

Draft resolution (A/62/L.31)

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I invite His Excellency Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, chairman of the delegation of France, to take the floor.

Mr. Lacroix (France) (*spoke in French*): Today I have with me Ms. Joyce Bukuru, who will make a statement as a representative of children.

Five years ago, the Member States of the United Nations, meeting in a special session of the General Assembly, developed a vision of a world fit for children and collectively subscribed to commitments to transform this vision into reality by 2015.

France has therefore presented the fundamental lines of its action with a view to the advent of a world fit for children, based on the universalization of the

right to education, particularly for girls, and the right to health, especially in the face of the tremendous challenges from pandemics such as HIV/AIDS. France has also pledged to spare no effort to combat the worst forms of exploitation and violence against children, such as the enlistment of children in armed conflicts, sexual violence against children or pornography involving children. It has also worked to end the practice of female genital mutilation.

This meeting must demonstrate more than ever our commitment to redoubling efforts to help children and to speed up implementation of the declaration adopted five years ago. We are pleased that the report prepared by the Secretary-General notes substantial progress in some areas, such as the overall reduction in infant mortality and the success of major immunization campaigns. The pace at which infant mortality has declined thus far, however, is too slow for the relevant target to be reached. The same is true for the targets for immunization, with rare exceptions.

With regard to access by all children to education, significant progress has been made in access to primary education. Nevertheless, excessive disparities persist in school attendance rates for girls and disadvantaged children.

France also deplores the fact that the worst forms of exploitation and abuse persist in spite of the international community's efforts to strengthen the normative framework and the programmes of assistance that have been developed for the most

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vulnerable categories of children. Allow me to mention three areas upon which we intend to focus.

First, with regard to the scourge of child soldiers, France has supported the development of the Paris Principles, adopted in February 2007; these commitments aim at preventing the recruitment and use of children by armed forces or groups and at obtaining their release and their reintegration into their communities. The Principles have already been adopted by 66 States, and we intend to continue taking initiatives to implement them in full. France will also continue to work in the Security Council, particularly in the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, which it has chaired since it was founded and which has achieved some encouraging initial results in terms of the release of children involved with armed forces or groups. Lastly, our efforts will be supplemented by bilateral and multilateral cooperation in partnership with United Nations agencies.

Secondly, France supports the strategies for child survival, in particular in partnership with the World Health Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in the context of the Integrated Management of Childhood Illness programme. France has undertaken an effort to protect children against the main diseases that can be prevented by immunization. To that end, France mobilized a total of €45 million for 2004-2006 to support the Global Polio Eradication Initiative and the GAVI Alliance. France also has a grant arrangement with the International Finance Facility for Immunization for one quarter of the initial €4 billion in financing over 20 years. Through the airline ticket solidarity contribution and the launch of the International Drug Purchase Facility (UNITAID), France is contributing to the purchase of paediatric drug formulas for the three major pandemics: AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. UNITAID has already mobilized over \$300 million. At the same time, France has become the second leading donor to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and will allocate €900 million over the next three years.

Thirdly, education for all is essential for social cohesion and international development solidarity. A great many countries face major difficulties in formulating and implementing sustainable education policies. Primary education for all, one of the Millennium Development Goals, is a priority in French cooperation. France is committed, through its strategy, to a goal that goes beyond primary education and

includes post-primary educational and occupational training.

At the multilateral level, we are also contributing to the attainment of the goal of education for all through the European Fund for Development, the funds of the World Bank in that sector and UNESCO, and we are actively supporting the fast-track initiative for the accelerated implementation of education for all in developing countries.

On the occasion of this commemorative debate, the Secretary-General has asked for the greatest possible response from all Governments and for them to engage all of their capacities in confronting the challenge facing us. France will respond positively to this appeal and will continue to implement its commitments.

I would now like to introduce Ms. Joyce Bukuru.

Ms. Bukuru (France) (*spoke in French*): My name is Joyce Bukuru, and I am speaking also on behalf of my friends Manuel Guzman and Clara Dessaint, who are here with me. We are all students at the Lycée Français de New York, at which over 50 nationalities are represented, so we actually experience cultural diversity every day.

As children of the world, having lived in different countries, we want to bring a message of hope and optimism for the world's children. There has been considerable progress, especially in education and health. However, there are still far too many situations that require our attention. We want children to have the necessary resources to become the legitimate architects of their own humanity and, therefore, their own future. Recently, we attended the launch of a charity, Batonga, which focuses on and promotes education for girls in Africa. The education of girls is essential if they are to play a vital role in the future of humankind.

But new challenges are emerging, including global warming. Such problems affect everyone, but children first of all. For example, lack of water — drought — can bring famine and other problems. As Antoine de Saint Exupéry wrote, "We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children."

It was an honour to address the Assembly at this special event. Never forget that, to build a world fit for children, children's voices must first be heard. Thank you for listening to ours.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Peter Maurer, chairman of the delegation of Switzerland.

Mr. Maurer (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): First of all, Switzerland would like to thank the President of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General and UNICEF for organizing this event. We thank UNICEF in particular for its excellent documentation, which enables us to assess the progress achieved and the gaps that remain to be closed in this area.

Since I have only five minutes for my statement, I would like to highlight five aspects of this subject to which Switzerland attaches particular importance. I refer members to the full text of my statement, which has been distributed in the Hall.

First, the exploitation of children, whether boys or girls, and acts of violence committed against them can never be justified and must, always and in all situations, be condemned. Effective measures need to be urgently taken to determine the scale of the problem and to identify, combat and prevent the causes. Switzerland has therefore strengthened its legislation and its internal measures to provide children with more effective protection. The possession of pornographic material involving children is now punishable by law, and a national coordination service was introduced in 2003 to fight Internet crime, together with another service responsible for fighting trafficking in human beings and trafficking in migrants. In addition, a variety of campaigns have been launched in Switzerland to raise public awareness of the problems of sex tourism, sexual abuse and violence against children. Lastly, activities have been initiated that will culminate in the introduction in 2009 of a national programme for the protection of children.

Secondly, to speak about rights is also to take into account those associated with sexual and reproductive health. HIV/AIDS, sexually transmittable diseases and early and unwanted pregnancies remain matters of concern among adolescents and young people. Progress in that regard will be achieved only if we ensure that all adolescents and young girls and boys have equal and unrestricted access to information, services and the means of protecting their sexual and reproductive health. Switzerland is focusing its efforts on achieving this objective both at the domestic level and within the

scope of international cooperation, and it calls for increased efforts in that context.

Thirdly, Switzerland is aware of the importance of discussing with children all issues concerning them, and of respecting their views in accordance with article 12 of the Convention. It was in that spirit that the Swiss Federation of Youth Parliaments and a number of children's parliaments were created. By becoming involved, children can become constructive players in society, building bridges between different milieux and cultures, and thus contributing to the prevention of violence and discrimination. Switzerland continues to do its utmost to ensure that foreign children and children of immigrants can be involved in all areas of society by integrating them into the educational system and into professional life, as well as by giving them equal opportunities specifically geared towards improving their language skills and providing adequate education.

Fourthly, Switzerland is taking more effective account of the specific rights and needs of children in its international cooperation activities, including those related to good governance, gender equality and human security. In the United Nations, we will continue our efforts to prevent all forms of violence and sexual exploitation against children, including Internet pornography and prostitution.

Fifthly, Switzerland will continue its activities to ensure that more attention is given to the rights and needs of children in emergency situations, and to ensure respect for the principle of non-involvement of children in armed conflict as either governmental or non-State troops. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict is an essential instrument in that context, and we appeal to all States that have not yet done so, to ratify it without delay and without stating any reservation incompatible with the objective and purpose of that instrument.

Switzerland is eager to contribute to global efforts to ensure that the Convention on the Rights of the Child can become a reality for every girl and every boy.

We would like to pay a special tribute here to the UNICEF's tireless advocacy of children's rights, as well as to the efforts of many players to secure adequate and permanent protection for children.

To conclude, Switzerland would like to reiterate its belief that it is essential to coordinate all actions at all levels in order to find effective and sustainable solutions to the many challenges that still must be overcome.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. Gojko Čelebić, chairman of the delegation of Montenegro.

Mr. Čelebić (Montenegro): I am pleased to take part in this High-level Meeting Devoted to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children. I would like to highlight the participation of children and young people from all over the world. The gesture of their participation emphasizes the fact that they are citizens and active participants in the construction of our societies.

Montenegro fully aligns itself with the statement made by Her Excellency Idália Moniz of Portugal on behalf of the European Union presidency. I would like to make a statement in my national capacity, pointing out a few issues that are of particular importance for Montenegro.

The document “A world fit for children” (resolution S-27/2, annex) identified challenges and made recommendations on actions needed to achieve progress related to the protection of children, with an emphasis on the significance of the full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The document complements the Millennium Declaration (resolution 55/2) and is interlinked with the Millennium Development Goals. The report of the Secretary-General (A/62/259) contains a review of the progress achieved in implementing “A world fit for children” on a global level, and it acknowledges that there has been notable success since 2002. However, it also highlights the fact there remains much to be done.

Montenegro belongs to the family of small nations of the world, and the birth of every child is crucial for the sustainable development of the nation. We have recognized the significance of investments in children, and have put children’s rights high on our list of priorities. After gaining independence, Montenegro acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the two Optional Protocols, and has started the process of strengthening the institutional environment for their implementation. The overall reform processes are guided by the Convention’s four general principles:

the best interests of the child; non-discrimination; survival and development; and participation.

In 2003, the Government of Montenegro formed the Committee for the Protection and Promotion of Children’s Rights, chaired by the Government’s Vice-President and composed of the representatives of the line ministries and the Ombudsman’s Office. In 2004, we adopted a national plan of action for children. The plan describes the reform processes in Montenegro, and serves as a framework for the strategies, policies and programmes that Montenegro assumed in accordance with “A world fit for children”. We have recognized the importance of close cooperation among national and local governments, civil society and United Nations agencies in order to promote and protect the human rights of children in an effective and comprehensive manner. The mechanisms established have enabled effective implementation of the plan.

A series of new laws, strategies and action plans has been adopted, including the law on child and social protection, the national strategy for HIV/AIDS, the law on inclusive education for children with disabilities, the national plan of action to combat trafficking in children and the national strategy for sustainable solution of refugees and internally displaced persons, all of which will have a positive impact on lives of children.

Montenegro realizes that the one of the best investments we can make in children is to guarantee good educational choices for them, and we have carried out a range of activities related to education system reform. The school network has been rationalized, and numerous activities are being implemented to create schools fit for children, in a programme which promotes new working methods and the active participation of children. Partnerships among parents, schools and local communities are encouraged, and private initiative in education has been promoted. Furthermore, activities aimed at increasing the inclusion of children from socially vulnerable families, including children of refugees and internally displaced persons and children with special needs, are being implemented.

The Montenegrin health-care sector, in line with the health care development strategy for Montenegro, has recently implemented programmes focusing on the prevention of diseases, the promotion of health and on the implementation of activities designed to improve

the health of vulnerable population groups, with a special focus on children. The sector also puts a high priority on the protection of children and young people from HIV/AIDS.

A network of State institutions is working on the prevention of trafficking in children and other forms of violence and exploitation of children by strengthening the existing system and introducing new mechanisms of child protection. The existing forms of child victim protection can be strengthened by improving identification and reference and protection mechanisms, as well as by improving protection and reducing the vulnerability of child victims.

Montenegro has made substantial progress in the protection and promotion of children's rights, but there are challenges ahead. We are implementing numerous activities aimed at strengthening administrative capacities for reform implementation and for the development of an appropriate institutional framework. The process of further harmonization of legislation with relevant international instruments in the field of the protection of children's rights is under way.

We stress that all of us have to remain focused on the need to ensure that the follow-up to the outcome of the special session will bring real benefits to children. We commit ourselves to protecting and promoting children's rights and to creating a world fit for children.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Denis Dangué Réwaka, chairman of the delegation of Gabon.

Mr. Dangué Réwaka (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): Before I read out a statement on behalf of Mrs. Angélique Ngoma, Minister for the Family, Child Protection and the Advancement of Women of the Republic of Gabon, who could not be with us today, I would like, on behalf of the Government of Gabon and on my own behalf, to express our great indignation at the horror in Algeria two days ago as a result of the bloody suicide attacks against the Supreme Court and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. I wish to convey our sympathy and support to the Government and people of Algeria at this especially difficult moment.

I shall now read out the statement on behalf of the Minister.

“This Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting, which is being held five years after the adoption, in 2002, of the Declaration and Plan of Action set out in the document entitled ‘A world fit for children’, provides me with an opportunity to inform the General Assembly about the efforts made by the Government of Gabon to promote and protect the rights of children, especially in the areas of health, education and in combating all forms of violence against children.

“My Government has taken several steps to protect children from the collateral damage caused by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, tuberculosis, malaria and other infectious diseases. The most important of those steps are the following.

“The Government has established programmes on preventing the transmission of HIV from mother to child. In the first quarter of 2006 alone, those programmes have made it possible for us to save 204 children born of HIV-positive parents.

“The Government is also providing care for children affected by HIV/AIDS, in particular through the establishment of a national nutrition centre that looks after children from the most needy sectors of the population who are affected by the pandemic and through the provision of school materials to those children, with the assistance for the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, the United Nations Development Programme, the World Health Organization and UNICEF.

“In addition, the Government organizes annual polio vaccination campaigns at the national level for children aged from three months to five years.

“The education of children is one of the priorities of the Government of Gabon. The Government devotes more than 15 per cent of the national budget annually to education. Schooling is free of charge and mandatory up to the age of 16.

“The Government has already enrolled more than 1,800 economically disadvantaged children and single mothers as part of its day care centres programme. That programme frees single mothers from child care responsibilities in order to obtain

training that will enable them to take part in income-generating activities.

“Protecting children from all forms of exploitation and violence is another concern of my country, which is in the process of strengthening its national legislation in this area while emphasizing the fight against the recruitment of, trafficking in and sexual exploitation of children. That legislation also provides for a family reintegration process for children who are victims of trafficking.

“Gabon has signed on to every international obligation concerning the promotion and protection of the rights of children, including by signing and ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols. With a view to improving the implementation of those instruments at the national level, in 2006 the Government created a national observatory for children’s rights.

“All of those undertakings have required substantial financial efforts from the Government. Despite our efforts, however, we are still lagging behind in effectively implementing the recommendations adopted in 2002 by heads of State and Government at the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly devoted to children. We have therefore called for the strengthening of international cooperation aimed at a greater mobilization of resources to improve the living conditions of our children.

“At the recently held second Pan-African Forum on the Future of Children, African countries, whose children continue to confront numerous challenges, including extreme poverty, approved the launch of an appeal, eloquently introduced by the Minister of Women’s and Children’s Affairs of Ghana, for accelerated efforts to implement the Plan of Action contained in a document entitled ‘An Africa fit for children’. That appeal is a testament to the political will of African Governments to contribute to the well-being of the children of the continent. Our fervent wish is that the international community will support that appeal, thereby making a significant contribution to the flourishing of our children.”

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Zachary Muburi-Muita, chairman of the delegation of Kenya.

Mr. Muburi-Muita (Kenya): On behalf of the children and Government of Kenya, I wish to express our sincere gratitude to the President for convening this Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting devoted to reviewing the progress made and challenges remaining since the convening of the special session on children and the adoption by the General Assembly, in May 2002, of the Declaration and Plan of Action contained in the document entitled “A world fit for children”.

We wish to associate ourselves with the statement made by Ms. Alima Mahama, Minister of Women’s and Children’s Affairs of Ghana, on behalf of the African Union.

The special session produced ambitious but achievable goals aimed at improving the lives of children and young people all over the world. This Meeting therefore serves to remind us of the pledge we made in 2002 to implement the outcomes of the special session. I shall now endeavour to recapitulate concrete actions taken by Kenya to enhance the status of the child.

As my country commemorates the forty-fourth anniversary of our independence, it has long been recognized that Kenya’s future lies with the well-being of our children and youth, who constitute some 65 per cent of the population. We have therefore focused on that group as the core priority for policy decisions. As in many developing countries, our children and young people are faced with the challenges of poverty, hunger, discrimination, neglect, disease, illiteracy, abuse and the deprivation of acceptable standards of living.

It gives me great pleasure to inform the Assembly that Kenya reaffirms its commitment to fulfil the obligations set out in the Declaration and the Plan of Action of “A world fit for children”. Kenya has also complied with the reporting obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and has submitted its second State party report on the implementation of the Convention. In 2006 we submitted the initial State party report on the implementation of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the African Child. The process of compiling those reports accorded us the opportunity to

take stock of what we have done to enable children to realize their rights to survival, development, protection and participation.

Over the past five years, we have paid special attention to the spirit of “A world fit for children” and have undertaken various legislative and policy reforms to ensure that our children realize the full range of rights in respect to the four priority areas identified by the special session on children.

To mention but a few examples, there has been a substantial increase in the budgetary allocation to the social services sector. The national budgetary allocation to the Ministry of Health, for example, has been doubled over the past five years. That period has been marked by a firmer commitment by the Government to spearhead national vaccination programmes for diseases such as polio, the provision of free medical care for expectant mothers and children under the age of five, free treatment for malaria and tuberculosis and free provision of antiretroviral drugs in public hospitals. Additionally, there has been a nationwide campaign to promote the use of insecticide treated nets. International assistance in the health sector — in particular by the United Nations Population Fund, the Clinton HIV/AIDS Initiative, the World Health Organization and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS — is greatly appreciated.

Malezi Bora, which means proper upbringing, is a landmark initiative implemented by stakeholders seeking to promote maternal and child health at all health facilities and to publicize and mobilize communities as regards nutrition.

The provision of free and compulsory universal primary education has been the most ambitious, yet key, achievement for Kenya in the past five years. The Government has made efforts to train additional teachers, to build new facilities and expand existing ones and to make provisions for essential materials such as books and writing materials for schools, thereby easing the financial burden for many poor families that could otherwise not afford to send their children to school. In that respect, we thank UNICEF, the World Food Programme and others for their support. To ensure the transition from primary to secondary school, the Government has pledged to waive tuition fees in all public schools beginning next year.

My Government has increased the budgetary provision for education from \$1.2 billion in 2004 to \$1.6 billion this year. Notwithstanding the increase in resources for both the health and education sectors, those resources are still far from adequate. There is an urgent need for partnership in that regard.

In July 2006, in collaboration with UNICEF, the Government initiated a campaign against violence. The campaign is aimed at creating awareness about the rights of the child.

Recognizing that child participation is one of the pillars of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, we have developed and put in place child participation guidelines.

I wish to conclude by reiterating Kenya’s commitment to the Declaration and Plan of Action of “A world fit for children”, and by saying that I believe that children deserve a better future. We all have a duty to ensure that children live in peace and happiness in an environment conducive to growth and development. As we leave New York, it is my hope that we can launch a renewed commitment to make the world indeed a place fit for children. Let us again reaffirm together our commitment to ensure the survival, protection, development and participation of all children. Let us further embrace the children’s statement of 2002, that a world fit for them is a world fit for all.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Miloš Prica, chairman of the delegation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mr. Prica (Bosnia and Herzegovina): Five and-a-half years ago, Member States, represented at the highest level, adopted the document entitled “A world fit for children”. Some 180 States agreed that, in all actions related to children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration. A whole set of goals and deadlines were defined in the most important areas relevant to children’s lives. Now, we are here again to see where we stand and to ascertain whether the world is firmly on track to achieve the just goals in the tasks we defined in May 2002 in this very Hall.

Needless to say, all the goals contained in the final document adopted during the special session on children are fully in line with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Today’s assessment will signal whether the world is going in the right direction,

whether we can improve the situation more quickly, whether we have really utilized all the tools available and whether every possible effort has been made, not only to save the lives of children but also to make their lives healthier and more prosperous.

As is well known, my country suffered a terrible and bloody war that produced a large number of casualties and more than a million refugees and internally displaced persons. The economy plummeted to one fifth of its pre-war level, there was enormous destruction of infrastructure and housing, and children were the vulnerable group to suffer the most. The quality of health care, education and every social service was significantly downgraded in comparison with pre-war levels.

With the assistance of the international community, the situation began to improve significantly after the war. As of 2005, our economy had tripled in size and the quality of life had improved. With an average growth rate of 5 to 6 per cent, all aspects of life in Bosnia and Herzegovina have continued to improve. We are now on track to achieve most of the targets of the MDGs and "A world fit for children".

Despite all the efforts and improvements, however, children have continued to suffer the consequences of war. Many have become disabled or bear emotional scars from that horrible time. There are still many minefields in the country, which pose a huge threat to children's lives. I would like to thank all the members of the international community that have provided assistance in the area of mine action. I also appeal to them to continue their support until all minefields in my country are eliminated.

Bosnia and Herzegovina's council for children was established in 2002. That body operates within the framework of the State Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees in order to monitor the implementation of the national action plan for children for the period 2002 to 2010, which was drafted in accordance with the Plan of Action of "A world fit for children". The council for children has established valuable cooperation with civil society and international organizations, monitoring all activities related to children, from the level of municipalities to that of the State.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express our deepest appreciation for the support and assistance provided by UNICEF in promoting

children's rights in my country. The partnership with UNICEF, its guidelines and support are seen as an enormous contribution to the fulfilment of the goals set out in "A world fit for children". Cooperation with UNICEF and other national and international organizations has also contributed to numerous initiatives and action plans, including the poverty reduction strategy paper adopted by our Council of Ministers.

In addition to ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Bosnia and Herzegovina became one of the first countries to sign the Convention's Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, as well as the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflicts. I would like to express our full support for the idea of establishing a department for the rights of the child within the framework of the Office of the Public Attorney, proposed by the Independent Human Rights Institution for Children. Such a step would further strengthen the country's ability to implement all human rights instruments dealing with children's rights at the national level.

Our medium-term development strategy, which was developed in cooperation with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, provides action-oriented recommendations in a number of areas relevant to the improvement of the environment for children, including in the areas of health care, education and social protection. The strategy was developed fully in accordance with the Millennium Development Goals and the targets set in "A world fit for children".

In May 2004, the Governments of the Federal Republic of Germany and Bosnia and Herzegovina successfully organized the second Intergovernmental Conference on Making Europe and Central Asia Fit for Children, which was held in Sarajevo. The overall objective of the Conference was to reiterate the regional commitment to children's rights and to strengthen the awareness of the importance of the final outcome document "A world fit for children" (resolution 27/2, annex). It was also a good opportunity to assess the achievements made after the first Intergovernmental Conference on Children in Europe and Central Asia, which was held in Berlin in May 2001. We adopted by consensus the Sarajevo Commitment as a follow-up to the previous Berlin

Commitment. Representatives of 45 countries attended the Conference.

Regional consultations have proved to be a valuable contribution to international dialogue, especially because of the opportunity it affords to share best practices, making possible improvements in national programmes and plans.

In early 2006, the Commission for the Coordination of Youth Issues was formed at the State level and included a number of youth representatives from the non-governmental organization sector. In general, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, children's participation in relevant decision-making processes has been strengthened during the last five years.

The world today is producing more goods and services than ever before. We cannot but note with sadness and deep concern the conditions in which many children still live around the globe. The horrific fact that over 50,000 children under 5 years of age died during the first two days of our conference in New York because of malnutrition or diseases that are easily preventable today should be sufficient reason for all of us to redouble our efforts in undertaking necessary urgent measures. As the Executive Director of UNICEF rightly pointed out two days ago, it is not a matter of possibility; it is a matter of will.

By fulfilling the commitment to create a world fit for children, we are achieving the goal of creating a future fit for humanity.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. María Rubiales de Chamorro, chairperson of the delegation of Nicaragua.

Ms. Rubiales de Chamorro (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like at the outset to express to the fraternal people and the Government of Algeria the condolences of the people and the Government of Nicaragua and our condemnation of yesterday's barbaric attack involving reprehensible acts perpetrated against the United Nations in which innocent civilians were killed.

In 2002, 190 countries came together at a special session of the General Assembly to address the issue of children; the outcome was that we adopted a Declaration and Plan of Action which were included in the document entitled "A world fit for children" (resolution S/27-2, annex). Today, five years later, we view with satisfaction the progress that has been made

with respect to some of the objectives we set for ourselves. However, we are sad to note that much remains to be done.

Poverty continues to be the most important challenge to the advent of a world fit for children. Over 143 million children under 5 years of age in the developing world continue to suffer from malnutrition, and nearly one third have delayed growth. This situation leads to health problems and learning difficulties. That is why, in Nicaragua, the Government of National Reconciliation and Unity has set as a main goal the eradication of poverty and has emphasized the gender perspective.

To achieve that goal, above and beyond devising Government plans and policies, a serious commitment to investment in social sectors must be made. Neo-liberal policies do not seek to give any importance to investment in those sectors as they think that it runs counter to macroeconomically sound policies. However, we recently signed an agreement with the International Monetary Fund that acknowledged that our economic programme

"offers significant opportunities for consolidating the gains that have been made, while moving forward with greater momentum to reduce poverty and increase investment in key sectors such as energy, water, education, and health".

We cannot speak of the well-being of children without guaranteeing access to health care in the poorest and most vulnerable sectors or free access to primary education to all girls and boys, without any discrimination whatsoever.

We have developed a citizens action programme for 2008, with a social agenda that makes it possible for us to go from being a highly vulnerable country that has been subject to neo-liberal policies over the past 16 years to a country enjoying a life with dignity, in which the basic needs of our people can be met.

But this increase in social investment must be a responsibility shared with the international community as a whole, as a form of compensation for inequities in international trade relations. Meeting the target of 0.7 per cent of gross national income for official development assistance, as agreed in Monterrey, would give developed countries an opportunity to make a contribution to the well-being of world children and to

contribute hope to hundreds of millions of children in our developing countries.

At the national level, the Government of Nicaragua has done its utmost to ensure promotion and protection of the rights of children. We are continuing to move forward on a legal framework appropriate for children, and we recently adopted a law on paternal and maternal responsibility and reforms of the law on adoption.

We would stress that the Nicaraguan State possesses institutions in the area of child protection, such as the Ministry of the Family, the supervisory body on matters related to childhood and adolescence; the National Council on Comprehensive Care and Protection of Children and Adolescents; and the Special Office of the Attorney for Children and Adolescents, the principal objective of which is the promotion and protection of the human rights of children and the promotion of their participation in decision-making.

We are also implementing a programme of comprehensive care for the children of Nicaragua, from which 87,027 children under 6 years of age in 60 rural municipalities have benefited. The national system to defend the rights of children and adolescents is helping 18,470 children and adolescents. We intend to record 18,470 new birth certificates for girls and boys under 6 years of age, and there will be a corresponding registration in the civil registry for individuals, with the goal of registering 269 children per municipality.

As far as education is concerned, one of the first measures announced by our Government when it came to power was to declare that primary education would be free for all children without any discrimination whatsoever, as an effective way to ensure that they have a better future. Next year, 161,000 more students will be included in the public education system, so that the total enrolment will be 1,370,000 students; 1,500 teachers will be hired for new positions throughout the country. In addition, the Government will be delivering 386,000 school supplies kits to primary and secondary school students and 186,000 school uniforms to primary school students. More than 157 million meals will be served to 995,000 students at the preschool and primary levels, and more than 276,000 schoolbooks will be distributed to primary school students throughout the country. Other tasks carried out by our Government to improve the quality of education for

Nicaraguan children involve training 10,171 teachers' assistants in all the country's schools.

One of the bulwarks of this revolutionary Government has been literacy training. A powerful literacy campaign has been started so that the country can soon be declared free of illiteracy. More than half a million Nicaraguans will become literate in 153 towns in the country. Thirty-six thousand literacy centres have been established, provided with audiovisual and other teaching material. Five hundred and twenty thousand Nicaraguan brothers and sisters will be provided with literacy training in the national literacy campaign called "From Marti to Fidel".

Children are the first priority for the Government of Nicaragua. We will continue to combat HIV/AIDS, dengue fever and malaria. Next year we plan to carry out popular mobilizations, through which 3.2 million vaccinations will be provided, 8.8 million mosquito breeding grounds will be destroyed and 2 million tanks will be treated with larvacide, and almost a million homes will be fumigated.

We will continue to guarantee free access to health care and medicine for all Nicaraguans, as well as expanded specialized medical services such as gynecology and pediatrics. We will increase prenatal care, institutional birthing and care during growth and development throughout the country in order to reduce infant and maternal mortality and to affect nutrition levels.

We are aware that this task must be shared by the family, civil society and the private sector. The special programmes being developed by the Government to eradicate poverty will primarily benefit mothers and children. That is the impulse for job training for 6,400 female heads of household and for the psychological and nutritional attention and training provided for children and adolescents, as well as for the network of social protection in the rural areas of the country.

Ten thousand children under six years old will be cared for under the programme for comprehensive care for vulnerable women and children and the establishment of 2,500 family gardens and 500 school gardens. This is all being carried out in common agreement with our ministries and with the people organized through the Councils of Citizen Power. United, we can create better opportunities for our children.

Finally, we reiterate our firm commitment to achieve the goals adopted in 2002 to make our country a world that day by day becomes more fit for children. We also recall the responsibility of the United Nations and developed countries to cooperate increasingly with the developing countries with a view to fully meeting the Millennium Development Goals and go beyond those goals to attain a world in which children are no longer the victims of poverty — which will simply be an historic memory for future generations.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I call next on His Excellency Mr. Araya Desta, chairman of the delegation of Eritrea.

Mr. Desta (Eritrea): I wish to add my voice to those of delegations that have expressed their profound condolences to the Government and people of Algeria for the lives lost during the terrorist attacks.

Children deserve the utmost attention and care that we can provide, and for that reason my delegation is honoured to address this High-level Plenary Meeting Devoted to Children. We are gathered here today, as representatives of all the States, not only to commemorate this special occasion on children, but also to assess the progress made so far and the continuing challenges in building a world fit for children.

As highlighted by several previous speakers, there have been encouraging advances toward meeting some of the goals we set for ourselves five years ago. The reduction of mortality rates and progress towards the creation of a loving and a caring environment that will contribute to the emotional, mental, physical and social development of children are commendable achievements. However, great challenges still persist. A great number of children continue to suffer from extreme poverty and hunger in many developing countries, not to mention the growing number of children that continue to be affected by armed conflict, violence and displacement.

At the national level, Eritrea has been doing its part to ensure that the four major goal areas of the special session on children are met. It has been pursuing a strategy that allows closer cooperation and collaboration among the various segments of the ministries, civil society and partners. In order to improve the lives of children, the strategy included a policy framework that provided special protective measures for vulnerable children, in particular victims

of war and AIDS orphans, by reintegrating them into the extended family system.

To promote healthy lives, more hospitals, clinics and health centres that greatly benefit children and mothers have been built. Moreover, with the support of UNICEF, the Government has endeavoured to ensure full immunization coverage and appropriate management of childhood illnesses. Childhood immunization, which covered only 10 per cent of the children at the beginning of the independence of Eritrea, has now risen to 73.8 per cent. It is encouraging to report that Eritrea became the first country in the Eastern African region to eliminate maternal and neonatal tetanus. It is also worth mentioning that Eritrea is moving towards the full elimination of measles, which was once one of the biggest childhood killers in the country.

In improving the quality of children's education, the Government has treated education for children as a human right. All children are entitled to equal educational opportunities, irrespective of their ethnicity, language, sex, religion or disability. As a result, there has been increased access to schools, with particular emphasis on disadvantaged children. In addition, the provision of free basic education, which is compulsory for all school-age children, has been one of the Government's top priorities.

My country has done extensive work to make early childhood development centres more responsive to the needs of orphans and vulnerable children and has designed projects for improving girls' participation and performance in education. However, it must be noted that education reform in Eritrea is taking place in a "no war, no peace" situation, which acts as a constraint on speedy progress in that endeavour.

In protecting children from abuse, exploitation and violence, Eritrea has banned the practice of female genital mutilation, treating it as a form of violence against women. Other harmful traditional practices in general, and the practice of early marriage in particular, are also being systematically addressed. To widen and deepen awareness about children's rights throughout the country, the Government has been undertaking advocacy efforts through various means, led by young people as well as traditional and religious leaders.

At a time in history when we are witnessing a lethal pandemic that is taking millions of lives

worldwide, my country is actively and effectively working to combat HIV/AIDS, as well as other diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis. The Government has developed national HIV/AIDS policies and guidelines, as well as a national HIV/AIDS monitoring and evaluation framework. Eritrea is pleased with the developments in the fight against HIV/AIDS; it is even more encouraged at having been able to exceed the Roll Back Malaria goal. We are ranked as one of the five top-performing countries in Africa in the fight against that deadly disease.

In conclusion, I should like to take this opportunity to renew once again the commitment of my Government to creating a world fit for children. Eritrea will continue to take appropriate actions aimed at child-centred development, in which children are not just recipients of the benefits of services and programmes, but the focus of development itself.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Samar Al-Zibdeh, chairperson of the delegation of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

Ms. Al-Zibdeh (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I wish to express our sympathy and condolences to the Government and the people of Algeria, to the staff of the United Nations and to the families of the victims who fell as a result of the recent terrorist attacks in Algeria.

Today, at the halfway point in the time period established for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, we must face a number of facts, including the following. There are 72 million children who do not attend school and 774 million adults who cannot read or write. One out of every four women is illiterate. The goal of increasing the number of boys and girls in elementary schools by 2005 has not been achieved in 113 countries. Only 18 countries are likely to achieve gender equality in education by 2015.

Today, millions of children throughout the world need our help. The level of children's development and progress depends on whether they have the possibility to attain the highest possible level of health and education in a safe environment. Thus, we welcome this Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting devoted to the follow-up to the outcome of the twenty-seventh special session, on children. It reminds us that, despite the challenges facing us all with regard to

children, progress can be made if there is genuine political will and the resources to transform ideas into tangible national plans, strategies and initiatives that can be built upon and can produce results.

Here, Jordan reaffirms its full commitment to the implementation of the Declaration and Plan of Action set out in "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex), the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two optional Protocols, the Cairo Declaration on an Arab world fit for children and the Arab Plan of Action for Children for 2004-2015.

"A world fit for children" prompted us to set up national plans for children and to join the international movement for children, which builds upon past achievements and which has transformed ideas into tangible measures for children. Queen Rania Al-Abdullah, UNICEF Eminent Advocate for Children, undertook that initiative in 2000, declaring her commitment to the global movement to protect children. Our institutions and Government are promoting policies that protect and care for children in Jordan, ensuring that all Jordanians continue to protect children's rights in order to ensure a better life and future for Jordanian children.

Jordan seeks to create a safe environment conducive to the development of children — an environment that protects them and ensures their participation in society. While education for all is a universal goal, quality education is a priority in Jordan that we are implementing at the level of policy by building child care centres throughout the country, thus ensuring an increase in primary and secondary school enrolment. We are also striving to increase gender equality in secondary schools and teaching posts, with 12 per cent of the Government budget allocated to education. Computers are available at 72 per cent of our schools. Development indicators for universal education show that Jordan ranks 45th out of 122 countries. Jordan is striving to provide high-quality education so that children can develop academically and become creative individuals with an aptitude for analysis and criticism.

Jordan is at the forefront in providing proper health care for children in the region. Ninety-eight per cent of the population receives health care, and we have made high-level political commitment to ensuring the steady implementation of health programmes for women and children. Jordan promotes child nutrition

and health care. Our achievements include reducing the infant mortality rate to 22 per 1,000 live births and the child mortality rate to 27 per 1,000. The vaccination rate has reached 98 per cent for all vaccines, with the exception of the tuberculosis vaccine. Jordan has been free of polio and diphtheria since 1975. Despite our achievements, we must make additional efforts to ensure the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in order to protect children's lives by 2015.

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, while making such achievements on behalf of Jordanian children, women and young people, has never forgotten about the children of Palestine and Iraq.

Those children deserve the attention of the world; their daily suffering, their human rights, their rights as children and their right to security should also be remembered by the world.

The children of Palestine and Iraq have had a great share in the Government's policies in the areas of health, education, nutrition and social care, and we call upon the international community to assume its responsibility with regard to those children. We should all join our efforts in the Jordanian policy, along with the assistance of the United Nations specialized agencies, civil society organizations and the private sector, to ensure a secure environment for children, because children are indeed our future.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. Zahir Tanin, chairman of the delegation of Afghanistan.

Mr. Tanin (Afghanistan): First of all, I would like to join previous speakers in expressing condolences to the people and Government of Algeria, other countries and international organizations for the terrorist attacks that took place in Algeria. We condemn that act as criminal and unjustifiable.

Allow me to express my delegation's appreciation for the organization of this High-level Plenary Meeting on a topic that requires special attention from the family of nations represented in this Organization: the future of our children. The protection of the rights of the child remains a fundamental responsibility of the human community, requiring that children be raised in a healthy environment and that their physical, psychological, social, emotional, cognitive and cultural development be ensured.

This value represents a high priority in a country like Afghanistan, where the devastating consequences of three decades of war have particularly affected the most vulnerable part of our population, namely children and women. During this period, the basic rights of Afghan children have been undermined due to the vicious cycle of violence, poverty and lack of access to education and health facilities.

Since the end of 2001, despite facing many challenges in our State-building efforts, we have achieved substantial progress in addressing the rights of our children. In 2002 we ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two Optional Protocols, and included provisions in our domestic law designed to protect the rights of children. Improving the lives of our citizens and providing our children with a better and brighter future stands high among our policy objectives. We remain committed to addressing the plight of our children by implementing our Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through the Afghanistan Compact and our Interim National Development Strategy.

During the special session of the General Assembly on children in 2002, it was recognized that building a world fit for children would be a major step in fulfilling the commitments of the Millennium Summit. The four major goals of the Plan of Action (see resolution S-27/2, annex) strongly reinforce the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs, all of which address and affect the rights of children. In the efforts to achieve this noble task, we have submitted our first progress report, covering the period 2002 to 2006. We count on sustained financial assistance from our international partners to implement our national development strategy, and we remain hopeful that a greater share of such assistance will be provided, on the basis of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.

Allow me to briefly refer to some achievements in protecting and promoting the rights of our children and improving their socio-economic conditions.

In the area of education, close to 6 million children have returned to school, 35 per cent of whom are girls. More than 3,500 schools have been built, and new curriculum and textbooks have been developed for primary education. In addition, the number of teachers has increased seven-fold.

Those figures mirror achievements made in the area of health. Our Ministry of Health continues to

work diligently to implement nation-wide programmes to improve the lives of mothers and children. Infant and maternal deaths annually have been reduced by 85,000 and 40,000, respectively. In September and October alone, more than 100,000 previously non-immunized children were vaccinated against polio in southern Afghanistan. The distribution of basic packages of health services has improved coverage in this area from 9 per cent of the population in 2003 to 81 per cent in 2007. That includes assistance in the form of maternal and newborn health, child health and immunization, public nutrition, and control of tuberculosis, malaria, HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases. We are thankful to UNICEF for making our achievements possible and for rendering services under the most difficult conditions.

Our Government is strongly committed to addressing child protection issues. Our national strategy on children at risk, which lays out specific activities to prevent violence towards and exploitation of children, was launched in May 2006. Our nationwide programme to demobilize child soldiers was completed in that same year. A total of 7,444 under-age soldiers between the ages of 13 and 18 were demobilized throughout the process. In order to facilitate their social integration, local demobilization and integration committees have been established throughout the country. Important steps towards preventing child-trafficking have been taking place. We have established a special task force to protect children in border provinces from falling into the hands of traffickers. As a result, since 2002, 429 cases of child trafficking have been discovered, out of which 317 children have been rescued from traffickers.

The prevention of the HIV/AIDS epidemic is among our priorities. However, effective policies to combat HIV/AIDS in Afghanistan are hampered by the lack of reliable data on prevalence and means of transmission. Nevertheless, Afghanistan created its National HIV/AIDS Control Programme in 2004 to collect systematic data on the prevalence of HIV/AIDS. We are also taking every measure possible to avert a full epidemic through an awareness campaign.

Despite the progress made, Afghan children continue to face insurmountable challenges. They remain the prime victims of terrorism in Afghanistan. Just last month, a terrorist attack in northern Baglon province led to the death of more than 50 children.

Close to 90 children were wounded. The horrific incident was among the latest of numerous attacks illustrating the effects of terrorism on the lives of our children.

As part of their intimidation campaign, the Taliban and Al-Qaida have resorted to new and brutal tactics, such as executing young children for teaching English and for being in possession of foreign currency. Terrorists are also attacking students and burning schools. Between August 2006 and July 2007 alone, at least 133 incidents of school attacks took place, mainly in the southern provinces. As a result, 384 of the 721 schools in four southern provinces are currently closed.

Other tactics used by terrorists include the deliberate targeting of female teachers and students, as well as the use of children as suicide bombers. Many of those present here today may recall the incident in which a 6-year-old boy from a village was deceived by terrorists into wearing a vest laden with explosives. Having refused to carry out the attack, the boy confessed to the authorities. He had been told that, when he pressed the button, flowers would spring out of the vest. The use of children as tools by terrorists is a new phenomenon that must be prevented.

Despite the significant increase in the enrolment of children in school, a great number of children — particularly those living in rural areas — continue to face difficulties in gaining access to educational institutions. To date, approximately 1.2 million primary-school-age girls remain at home, owing to various factors, including the dire socio-economic conditions and insecurity in some areas. We call on our international partners to support the implementation of our national strategic plan for education, whose objectives also include the development of community-based schools that are closer to home.

The challenges facing children are not confined to the area of education. Recent estimates indicate that the rates of child and maternal mortality in Afghanistan remain among the highest in the world. Close to 900 children under the age of 5 die daily. More than 60 women die every day from pregnancy-related complications. Reversing those trends will require continued international assistance to enhance the capacity of our health centres in all parts of the country. In that regard, we stress the importance of the development of accessible family planning services

and emergency obstetric care, which will help reduce the number of deaths.

In Afghanistan, poverty remains the biggest obstacle to achieving the MDGs and the Plan of Action set out in “A world fit for children”. We would like to stress our need for full partnership and expanded cooperation with the international community in our mutual commitment to achieve the MDGs and to create an Afghanistan fit for children. In that regard, we highlight the need for a considerable increase in the level of official development assistance for least developed countries — particularly countries emerging from conflict — so that they can achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jorge Argüello, chairman of the delegation of Argentina.

Mr. Argüello (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, permit me to express once again the condolences of the Government of Argentina to the families of the victims of the inhuman attacks that took place in Algeria and Lebanon and, through you, Mr. President, to the Secretary-General for the victims among United Nations staff.

In view of the pressures of time, I shall confine myself to a summary of my statement, the complete text of which is being circulated in the Hall.

The issue of children, by virtue of its many dimensions, its sensitivity and the multidisciplinary nature of its implications, requires coordinated and concerted action by all actors involved in various aspects of the comprehensive protection of children and adolescents. In its national policy, Argentina seeks to avoid overlapping efforts, duplicating structures and the establishment of untimely objectives, so that we can mobilize and coordinate resources, administrative networks and joint endeavours. Our recent past has taught us that set formulas and orthodoxy lead only to great frustration. We cannot absolve ourselves of the responsibility to develop specific, creative and appropriate responses to reality.

When the Government of President Néstor Kirchner assumed power in 2003, the President called on all citizens to participate in the building of a more just and more equitable country, reaffirming the State’s commitment to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to the principles and objectives set out in

the document “A world fit for children” (resolution S-27/2, annex), including the targets established for 2015.

The law for the comprehensive protection of children and adolescents, adopted in 2005, is based on the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and is the guiding framework for our national action plan for the rights of children and adolescents — the State’s strategy to ensure the full exercise of the fundamental rights of Argentine children and adolescents. The national action plan sets out policies, programmes and activities to be undertaken by the State and civil society, in line with their responsibilities, to guarantee the enjoyment of children’s rights by achieving dignified and just conditions.

The social policies of the Ministry of Social Development aimed at children and adolescents are based on the family. Since 2003, we have promoted activities to combat hunger and promote social inclusion through active policies aimed at job and income creation, directing particular efforts towards families in situations of poverty and social vulnerability. Among the major initiatives in that regard, I should mention the national family plan and the national food security plan.

I should like to briefly cite a few statistics. The target of Millennium Development Goal 1 proposed for 2007 — reducing the percentage of the population living below the poverty line to less than 30 per cent — has been reached. The percentage of people living below the poverty line in the first quarter of 2007 was 23.4 per cent. The level of indigence has also been drastically reduced, from 24.8 per cent in May 2002 to the current 8.2 per cent.

Argentina will soon attain the objective of providing universal access to primary education, through the adoption of a law on education financing and a law on technical education. Among the challenges before us, we are making it a priority to overcome the fragmentation among various uncoordinated subsystems, to promote universal access to school for 5-year-olds, to ensure that all children and adolescents complete 10 years of compulsory education by 2010 and to strive to guarantee that all children and adolescents can complete post-compulsory primary education by 2015.

The significant achievements accomplished in the area of reducing infant mortality mean that Argentina is well placed to meet the intermediate target proposed for 2007.

With regard to the fight against HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, Chagas disease, malaria and other illnesses, satisfactory progress has been made in reducing the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate among pregnant women aged 15-24, and the intermediate targets regarding the HIV/AIDS mortality and prevalence rates have already been met.

Perhaps the greatest challenge in the area of public health is to interrupt the vectorial transmission of Chagas's disease. We therefore continue to intensify our policy, which includes three areas of focus: promotion of health; prevention, diagnosis and specific treatment of the disease; and rehabilitation.

A country's commitment to children cannot be seen only in policy development, but also in the allocation of resources. In that connection, between 1995 and 2007, our investment as a percentage of our gross national product increased by 30 per cent. We have also increased per capita investment from less than 300 Argentine pesos per child in 1995 to almost 1,100 pesos in 2006.

The effective development and implementation of policies, which is necessarily multidisciplinary in nature, must be coordinated among the various branches of national Government, the judiciary, parliament and civil society, including trade unions, the private sector and non-governmental organizations.

Similarly, international cooperation, including South-South cooperation, is without a doubt a very important tool to support national efforts to meet the objectives established in "A world fit for children", as well as in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). We note here that Argentina has worked closely with UNICEF, and has received invaluable assistance from it in devising sustainable policies. We would also like to emphasize the contribution that we have received in the form of technical assistance and cooperation from the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, the World Bank, the Inter-American Children's Institute, the International Labour Organization and the Committee on the Rights of the Child, inter alia.

In summary, our country is firmly committed to implementing the principles and objectives of "A world fit for children". National policy in this area is based upon a participatory, multidisciplinary and coordinated approach, which can be summarized in the words of the first of those principles: "Put children first" (*resolution S-27/2, annex, para. 7*). That was reaffirmed by Ms. Cristina Fernández de Kirchner when, on Monday, 10 December, she became the first woman to be elected President of our country. She reaffirmed in her inaugural address that to "find appropriate ways to defend public education" would be one of the key priorities of her Government.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Saúl Weisleder, chairman of the delegation of Costa Rica.

Mr. Weisleder (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation would like to express to the peoples of Algeria and Lebanon, as well as to the entire United Nations community, our profound grief at the terrorist attacks that occurred the day before yesterday. We convey our sincere condolences to the families of the victims and condemn these criminal acts perpetrated against innocent persons. Such acts cannot be justified in any way whatsoever.

Today, my country reaffirms the commitments it entered into in this Hall five years ago, and welcomes the joint effort undertaken by the international community, which has made possible tremendous progress in securing respect for the rights and well-being of children. We are aware, however, of the remaining challenges. We understand the importance of this moment, which lays down a challenge: as the Secretary-General writes in his report, "Failure to achieve the goals of 'A world fit for children', will significantly undermine efforts towards realizing the aspirations of the Millennium Declaration" (*A/62/259, para. 87*).

Costa Rica is determined to meet the objectives put forward in the four main areas. Our important efforts and progress on education, health and protection and safeguarding of the rights of children illustrate this. We have reached most of the general goals set at the World Summit for Children, and next year we will commemorate the tenth anniversary of our Legislative Assembly's adoption of the Childhood and Adolescence Code as part of the process of harmonizing Costa Rica's legal framework with the

letter and the spirit of the Convention of the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1989 and ratified by Costa Rica in 1990.

Much remains to be done, however, and we are working tirelessly to stem the rise of poverty and to combat the serious problems of inequality and social exclusion, which have the greatest impact on our young people. Reducing poverty by more than 3 percentage points this year is a most important step, but we are still aware of the great challenges ahead, such as ending the unequal distribution of income and access to opportunities.

In order to improve in this respect, we have identified key actions, which will have an impact on our achievement of the goals of the Declaration and Plan of Action, including the implementation of a participatory, cross-cultural and multisectoral national policy for children and adolescents with children and young people as its focus, holistically taking into account all the factors that have an impact on each stage of their development.

The relevant institutions are working to formulate and implement national plans and strategies that take into account all sectors of our society, particularly vulnerable groups, in order to eradicate malnutrition, prevent and treat violence, combat the commercial sexual exploitation of children, universalize secondary education, implement plans to prevent and treat HIV/AIDS, develop a system of childhood and youth indicators and implement institutional reform of the National Children's Council, the governing institution at the national level in this sphere. The reform includes a model for comprehensive protection of the entire population of minors decentralization of services and enhancement at the regional and local levels in order to facilitate access for those facing the greatest difficulties and those living in remote areas with poor access.

Our experience over recent years and the path that remains before us demonstrate that Governments must intensify their response to the needs of children and young people. It is also crucial for the international community to shoulder more commitments and to form broader alliances, with a view to achieving our goals. Our children, particularly those who are poor, must have a better future than their parents and grandparents. Accordingly, as the Executive Director of

UNICEF has said, we must realize how to apply and capitalize on existing resources.

The withdrawal of international cooperation which has affected middle-income countries such as my own has a considerable impact on social programmes for children. It is our responsibility to make progress on our concept of inequities and domestic asymmetries, whether they relate to age; geographic or gender. These are frequently hidden behind data or aggregate figures. The responsibility of the international community and donors is not to punish nations for making appropriate efforts, thereby putting at risk the sustainability of what has already been achieved.

Finally, my delegation would like to say how pleased we are that the post of Special Representative on violence against children was recently established. We hope that its work will contribute meaningfully to the achievement of a world fit for children.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Raymond Wolfe, chairman of the delegation of Jamaica.

Mr. Wolfe (Jamaica): Allow me at the outset to join other delegations in expressing profound condolences to the delegation of Algeria and through that delegation to the Government of Algeria on the tragic loss of life resulting from the dastardly terrorist attacks carried out in Algeria, which took the lives of dozens of Algerian citizens and United Nations personnel.

We wish to align ourselves with the statement made by the representative of the Bahamas on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). In so doing, Jamaica joins our sister countries in reaffirming the region's commitment to implementing the Declaration and Plan of Action entitled "A world fit for children", adopted five years ago at the special session on children. As a CARICOM State, Jamaica must play its part in advancing the welfare of the children of the region by continuing on the path undertaken to create a protective environment for them.

Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by the Jamaican Government in 1991 was a first major step that signalled this resolve. The Government of Jamaica stands firm in its commitment to improving the lives of the nation's children, who account for over 37 per cent of the population.

Today, 16 years after becoming a signatory to the Convention and five years after accepting the objectives set forth in “A world fit for children”, our Government remains steadfast in our mission to vastly improve the situation of the children of Jamaica. We have committed ourselves to continue to build on the groundwork laid in such areas as education transformation, early childhood development, child protection, health care and child justice.

The Government of Jamaica understands that childhood means more than just the interval between birth and the attainment of adulthood. It refers to the state and condition of life and the quality of those years. To this end, the Government has not reneged on its commitment to deliver free education up to the secondary level, and there is certainly no intention to reverse the previous commitment to provide free health care for all children.

We recognize that sustained change and the creation of an environment fit for children must be driven by a strong political will and competent social actors. Indeed, even as we struggle with the virulent challenges of crime and violence, HIV/AIDS and decay in family values, the Government of Jamaica has not wavered in its commitment to be the lead agent of change.

At the same time, the Government has no reservations about actively pursuing and forging strategic partnerships which have not only facilitated broad-based consultation with the citizenry, including children, but have also been critical to human resources capacity-building, improving service delivery and data collection as well as advocacy. Our international development partners, particularly those within the United Nations system — in particular, UNICEF — are critical stakeholders in this regard, and we take this opportunity to again thank them sincerely for their unwavering support.

So intertwined are the issues affecting our children that they cannot be tackled in isolation from one another. Recognition of this fact has led us to develop initiatives that employ a multifaceted and multisectoral approach. The Education Transformation Initiative in Jamaica, for example, employs more than one strategy. In order to effectively raise the standard of education and examination success rates, a safe schools programme was introduced to combat the issue of violence in the classroom through the dispatch of

specially trained law enforcement personnel as school resource officers in institutions identified as being at risk.

Again, improving education comes with institutional strengthening and capacity-building. Therefore, the Government of Jamaica is implementing initiatives to enhance key areas such as curriculum development and use, reading skills, education leadership and school management, particularly at the early childhood level. Indeed, we are justly proud that the Early Childhood Commission in Jamaica was chosen by the Bernard van Leer Foundation of the Netherlands as the lead partner to execute a project focused on the dissemination and full application of General Comment 7 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which concerns implementing child rights in early childhood. Lessons learned from this initiative will be utilized worldwide to ensure that our very young children are not left behind.

The success of our education transformation initiative also hinges on a crucial factor further upstream, namely, effective parenting. Currently, our Government is moving swiftly to establish the country’s first parenting commission, the executor of a national parenting policy being developed by a multiagency committee spearheaded by the Ministry of Education. At the same time, the Early Childhood Commission is making significant progress with the initiation of a critical phase in the regulation of early childhood institutions. The Commission is now registering these institutions, which must be in compliance with the standards and regulations of the Early Childhood Act.

The interplay of factors is such that no meaningful discussion on child development can preclude the matter of child protection. After all, children become at risk when one or more of their rights are being violated or are being eroded by some of the very factors that we are seeking to correct. When a child becomes at risk, the Government of Jamaica must be in a position to ensure that the programmes and services offered to that child counter the effects of abuse, neglect, abandonment and exploitation.

A major priority of this Government is to ensure the transformation of child care and protective services in Jamaica. This entails, *inter alia*, transformation from a system characterized by reliance on the old and traditional child rescue model, to a new approach built

on the family support model, with primary prevention taking centre stage. The Child Development Agency, the arm of Government that has responsibility for providing a stable and nurturing living environment for children in need of care, is forging ahead with this new approach, which is aimed at preventing children from entering the traditional residential child care system by maintaining them in families or in a family-oriented environment.

The Agency's programming is geared towards family life and the application of a child-centred approach to addressing their issues. Child participation, therefore, ranks high on the Government's list of priorities, and is featured prominently in the reform of the Jamaican justice system, a process which relies heavily on civil participation.

The Government of Jamaica is also embarking on early intervention and preventive work with families and communities upon whom such factors as illness, social exclusion, poverty and violence have had a negative impact on their ability to sustain healthy families. Considering the relatively high exposure of children to violence in their communities and the link between such exposure and later aggressive behaviour, our Government considers it imperative that swift action be undertaken to strengthen supportive environments in the home, at school and in communities that can build resilience and promote better outcomes for them children.

When we consider those under the age of 18, two other very special cohorts come to mind, namely, our adolescents and our youth. By virtue of developmental factors alone, these age groups are among the most vulnerable of our population. We are tackling their unique challenges on several fronts, all of which are dedicated to enhancing life opportunities by improving their knowledge, skills and attitudes. Flagship initiatives in this regard include our Youth Information Centres, the National Youth Service, the Child and Youth Justice Reform Programme and a healthy lifestyles project called JA-Style, which is being implemented in partnership with United States Agency for International Development. Integral to all these endeavours is the active and direct participation of children and youth themselves at every level and stage of programme development from design to implementation and evaluation.

Important groundwork has already been laid, but we are well aware that a long road leading to our final destination — a Jamaica truly fit for children — remains to be travelled. The Government of Jamaica is intent on arriving at an overarching, integrated and coherent framework for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and for the fulfilment of its obligations under “A world fit for children” through the building of an inclusive and accessible social protection and welfare system, formal training for families that need assistance in building their capacity and skills in communication and coping strategies, quality alternative care services and social investment in children.

We remain unequivocal and steadfast in our commitment to complete this journey, within the agreed upon time frame. As a country, we are blessed with many talents and resources for which we are well known and highly sought after internationally. It is only fitting that our greatest treasure — our children — should have their rightful share of this bounty.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Nurbek Jeenbaev, chairman of the delegation of Kyrgyzstan.

Mr. Jeenbaev (Kyrgyzstan) (*spoke in Russian*): First and foremost, I would like to assure the President of the General Assembly of the readiness of the Kyrgyz Republic to cooperate in continuing to defend the interests of children at this High-level Meeting.

In recent years in Kyrgyzstan, the prevention of child poverty, the protection of the rights of children and improving their status have been enhanced by practical actions. Kyrgyzstan has ratified the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Kyrgyzstan is cooperating with the ILO in eliminating child labour in Kyrgyzstan, and it has developed a State-sponsored programme of action for social partners in order to eliminate the worst forms of child exploitation.

An initial step in carrying out the goals and tasks set forth in the Convention on the Rights of the Child was the approval by the Government of Kyrgyzstan in August 2001 of a State-sponsored programme entitled “A New Generation”, which has created a list of specific actions to be carried out by 2010 in order to

protect the rights of children and which declared as basic priorities the survival, protection and development of the child.

As part of the New Generation programme for 2006, we adopted a Children's Code, which has been worked out with the help of UNICEF. The Code is unique in Central Asia and is designed to introduce into our legislation international norms and standards based on United Nations provisions and, in particular, the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In pursuit of this goal, the Administration of the President of our country has established a national council to coordinate the activities undertaken in the context of the Children's Code. Evidence of the great significance that we attach to issues involving children is the appointment of the chairman of that council as a State Secretary of the Kyrgyz Republic.

In 2005, we adopted a State-sponsored five-year programme to prevent the HIV/AIDS epidemic and its social and economic consequences. In that same year, a Kyrgyz Government decree set the State standard for preschool education and child care.

In the area of health care reform, we have carried out a second stage in the reform of the "Manas Talimi", which is an integral part of our development strategy, a major element of which is improving free-of-charge health care for pregnant women and children up to the age of five, beginning in 2006.

To date, the most important normative document in the area of the rights of the child is a decree on the protection and support of children, signed on 31 August 2007 by the President of Kyrgyzstan, Mr. Kurmanbek Bakiev.

In 2006, Kyrgyzstan implemented 20 social programmes involving the prevention of child abandonment and exploitation of child labour, covering 1,771 children. In 2007, we announced a second competition for social programmes. To date, 20 projects have been carried out in Kyrgyzstan, of which five were designed to deal with street children, four for working with children with special needs, one concerned child offenders, two were designed to prevent children from becoming permanently institutionalized, and four involved social rehabilitation, trade schools and preparing the graduates of such schools for life in society.

The Kyrgyz Republic attaches great importance to cooperation with international organizations in protecting the rights of the child. Working together with local governmental and non-governmental organizations, many international organizations have successfully undertaken activities for the development of children in Kyrgyzstan. These include UNICEF, UNESCO, the United Nations Development Programme, the World Health Organization, SOS-Kinderdorf International, Save the Children, the Eurasian Fund, City of Hope International and others. I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the Government of Kyrgyzstan, to express the deep gratitude of my Government to all international organizations that have taken an active part in solving children's problems in Kyrgyzstan. In particular, we highly value the visit of a member of the Executive Board of UNICEF to Kyrgyzstan in April 2007.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm that the Government of Kyrgyzstan will continue to pursue a policy designed to improve the status of children in Kyrgyzstan and to implement the basic document on children's rights: the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Guillaume Bailly, chairman of the delegation of Côte d'Ivoire.

Mr. Bailly (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): May I first of all join with previous speakers in conveying to the Algerian delegation the sympathies of the Ivorian delegation following the murderous attacks in Algiers.

I would like to convey our assurances of the interest that the Ivorian authorities attach to this Plenary Meeting, as they did for the special session on children. We also express our full support of the statement made by Ghana at the 66th meeting on behalf of the African Union. Finally, I commend the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Ann Veneman, as well as her team, for the excellent work they have been doing, in spite of the enormous risks that unfortunately exist in the field.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, open for signature since 1989, has been universally ratified, with the exception of a few States. Major promises were still being made to children in 1990, during the World Summit for Children. Moreover, in 2002 the General Assembly adopted a declaration of

commitment to create a world fit for children. And still, five years on, throughout the world we continue to see children in the streets, in kitchens, in pornographic films, in minefields, in cacao production and in the fields of battle. The list is a lengthy one, and the situation of children remains precarious. That is why my country welcomes all the major initiatives, such as those being taken today, that call upon leaders of the world to deal with the situation of children, in particular through the appointment of a special representative of the Secretary-General to combat violence against children.

During the Assembly's special session on children in 2002, from this rostrum my country talked about and was proud of its positive actions in improving the situation of children in all areas. In fact, my country — which has always advocated the rights of children — ratified without reservation the Convention on the Rights of the Child on 4 February 1991 and has adhered to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. In fact, in September 1992, Côte d'Ivoire adopted a national plan of action for the survival, development and protection of children, pursuant to the recommendations of the 1990 World Summit, and submitted its report to the committee on implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Our Government policy has been reflected in the establishment of a number of specific actions directed to the promotion of children's rights and by the adoption of laws designed, inter alia, to prohibit female genital mutilation and forced or early marriages and to implement operational strategies for the development and protection of children.

The intensive social awareness campaign against HIV/AIDS infection, which involved the First Lady of Côte d'Ivoire, has had an impact on behaviour. The campaign to eliminate polio has also enjoyed remarkable success, and measures to promote the use of treated mosquito nets have been encouraging in reducing deaths due to malaria. Mortality caused by the most widespread childhood diseases has declined, thanks to a vaccination campaign.

The crisis that has raged since 2002 has somewhat frustrated various activities, but without overcoming our country's determination and commitment to deal with our obligations in accordance

with the recommendations of the international community.

Côte d'Ivoire has developed a plan of action for children, which takes up all the objectives and targets in the plan of action of "A world fit for children". The Ministry for Family, Women and Children and the Ministry dealing with AIDS have, inter alia, been setting up structures for the implementation of this policy to promote the rights and welfare of children. The activities of that Ministry are supported by the National Committee to Combat Trafficking in and Exploitation of Children, the National Committee to Combat Violence against Women and Children and the National Commission for Women and Children.

The reunification of the country and the decrease in insecurity should help UNICEF actions, especially for the survival of children. Quite recently — in September 2007 — Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, said she was optimistic about the status of children affected by the Ivoirian conflict, following her three-day visit as part of the work of the Security Council. The Ivoirian Government told Ms. Coomaraswamy that it would set up an inter-ministerial body to ensure strategic coordination in defending the rights of children.

The phenomenon of transborder trafficking in children, which has increasingly been denounced in the media, is a subject of major concern for the Ivoirian Government, which has undertaken energetic steps to eliminate that scourge. Actions are being carried out nationally, subregionally and internationally. In the international sphere, we should note the ratification of International Labour Organization Conventions Nos. 182 and 138, dealing, respectively, with the worst forms of child labour and immediate action to eliminate them, and the minimum age for admission to employment, the instruments of ratification of which have already been transmitted.

Nevertheless, because our borders are porous — due to a lack of material, human and financial resources — in the face of the increasingly sophisticated methods developed by those who traffic in children, there are calls in this area, as in so many others, for action coordinated and planned by the international community.

Ensuring the welfare of children is not just ensuring a child's health but also giving that child a

solid education in order to make that child a future agent of development. Our Government is endeavouring to do that in spite of the difficulties in implementing a consistent policy to promote education directed towards the employment of youth. It is encouraging to note that for the first time since the beginning of the crisis, school enrolment, in September 2007, throughout our country allowed children at the required age to attend school.

In order to consolidate such achievements, Côte d'Ivoire plans to undertake several actions. It will establish a committee to ensure strategic coordination in all areas pertaining to the protection of children. A study group will be created with a view to adopting a plan of action to put an end to sexual violence against children. A national reintegration programme for children affected by war will be established to provide services and basic necessities — security, health and education. Institutions that deal with reintegration of child soldiers and their long-term follow-up within their communities will be strengthened. A civic service will be set up to aid with the reintegration and social readjustment of more than 400,000 young people. There will be a national plan to combat child labour.

In his report (A/62/259), the Secretary-General referred to promoting healthy lives, providing quality education for young girls and boys, protecting against exploitation and combating HIV/AIDS as priority objectives for the millennium. That is why the Ivorian Government would like to cooperate with all United Nations institutions in order to achieve all the objectives set for a world fit for children.

Today, thanks to the Ougadougou political Agreement of 4 March 2007, endorsed by Security Council resolution 1765 (2007), Côte d'Ivoire is experiencing a situation that is more calm. On the sidelines of that Agreement, the Ivorian Government has committed itself to make children an essential part of the peace process. In a statement to the Assembly at its 6th meeting, on 26 September 2007, President Laurent Gbagbo, aware of the status of children in our country and still in the spirit of building a world fit for children, said

“My presence, today, here in New York, at this rostrum, is the best proof of the climate of calm prevailing in Côte d'Ivoire today, following the signing of the Ouagadougou political Agreement, which was the outcome of direct dialogue

between the State and the former rebels.”
(A/62/PV.6, p. 26)

May this summit increase the desire to make all our resources available to give every child, regardless of origin, the chance to live and to prosper, because children are the future of humankind.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor next to Mr. Somduth Soborun, chairman of the delegation of Mauritius.

Mr. Soborun (Mauritius): Mauritius joins previous speakers in condemning the heinous and despicable acts of terrorism, which once again claimed innocent lives in Algiers, on Tuesday, 11 December. We convey our profound sorrow and extend our deep condolences to the Government and people of Algeria at this very difficult and trying time.

Let me start by thanking the President for convening this Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting. We also thank the Secretary-General for his progress report entitled “Follow-up to the Special Session of the General Assembly on Children” (A/62/259).

We associate ourselves with the statement delivered at the 66th meeting by the Minister from Ghana on behalf of the African Union.

There is no denying that reasonable progress has been achieved since 2002, when, at the Assembly's twenty-seventh special session, Member States dedicated themselves to building a world fit for children. Indeed, we have witnessed a decrease in child mortality from preventable and treatable diseases and a sizeable increase in primary school enrolment worldwide during the past five years. However, we also acknowledge that a lot remains to be done to ensure that many more children survive, that they are well nourished, that they have appropriate shelter and that they are duly protected from violence, exploitation and abuse.

In spite of the strong commitments contained in the Millennium Declaration and the subsequent reports on “A world fit for children” and the Declaration and Plan of Action for Africa Fit for Children, it is unfortunate that more than 28 million African children have already died since 2001. It is high time that we commit ourselves to redoubling our efforts to arrest this trend. In this context, my delegation calls upon the international community to continue to give high

priority to accelerated action and the swift implementation of the commitments undertaken in respect of the welfare and protection of the children.

For the sake of brevity, I shall focus my intervention mainly on what Mauritius has realized so far at the national level in creating an environment conducive to the overall development of children.

We are party to a number of international human rights instruments, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child; the South African Development Community Declaration on Gender and Development and its Addendum, the Declaration on the Prevention and Eradication of Violence against Women and Children; the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child; and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

Furthermore, Mauritius is among the first African countries to appoint an ombudsperson for children, and, in line with its commitment to human rights in general and to child rights in particular, the Government of Mauritius, with the assistance of UNICEF, recently issued a national children's policy.

Of the four major areas of the report "A world fit for children", I would like to emphasize the following with regard to Mauritius.

The first area is the promotion of healthy lives. Health care in Mauritius is free and accessible to everyone. About 35 per cent of the national health budget is devoted to the health care of children. The maternal mortality rate has fluctuated around 0.22 per thousand live births in the recent years, immunization coverage has reached almost 90 per cent, and the infant mortality rate has dropped from 14.5 per thousand live births in year 2002 to 13.2 per thousand live births in 2005. The implementation of a project to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS has reduced the risk of such transmission from 30 per cent to 1 per cent.

The second area is providing quality education. Education is free at pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary levels. It is compulsory for every child to attend school at least until the age of 16. To date, the

enrolment rate at the primary level is almost 100 per cent, while it is around 95 per cent at the secondary level. Since September 2005, the Government has provided free transportation for all school children, including students attending universities in Mauritius. In conformity with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Mauritius recently adopted the Early Childhood Care and Education Authority Bill to regulate and monitor programmes carried out by institutions providing education to young children.

We have noted with great satisfaction that the latest report of the Global Campaign for Education, comprising 150 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) worldwide, has ranked Mauritius first among the developing countries in the attainment of the Millennium Development Goal 2: achieve universal primary education.

Area three is protecting against abuse, exploitation and violence. The Child Protection Act of Mauritius, which was enacted in 1994, provides protection to children with respect to physical, psychological, emotional or moral injury, as well as sexual offences and sexual exploitation. It was amended in 2005 to criminalize child trafficking, abandonment and abduction. A residential drop-in centre has been set up to aid in the rehabilitation and reintegration of children victims of commercial and sexual exploitation. A Community Child Protection Programme has been set up, acting as a formal forum to address child protection issues from the grassroots level to the highest policy-making body. It includes the establishment of District and Area Child Protection Committees and community child watch in high-risk areas. A national parental empowerment programme has been launched with the aim of enhancing relationships between parents and children through improved parenting skills with respect to care, safety, security and education.

Just two days ago, the code civil mauricien was amended to provide a legal basis for continuation of the relationship between a child and his or her grandparents or any third party with whom the child has developed a tie of love and affection, over and above the child-parent relationship, after the dissolution of a marriage. It also prevents the separation of a child from his or her brothers and sisters. This amendment will go a long way in mitigating the emotional stress that a child faces following the divorce of his or her parents.

The Government has also launched the “Women and Children Solidarity Programme” with an initial budget of about \$1 million to finance social projects submitted by NGOs to address the problem of violence and abuse against women and children.

The fourth area is combating HIV/AIDS. Mauritius has taken several measures to protect children from the scourge of HIV/AIDS. A National Youth Network on HIV/AIDS has been set up to encourage and enlist young people to participate actively in the fight against HIV/AIDS. The Government also provides antiretroviral drugs free of any costs to the user, to all HIV and AIDS patients, including children who may need them. In order to give the best chances of survival to unborn babies and to prevent them from contracting the HIV virus from their infected mothers, all pregnant women using antenatal clinics are screened for HIV. Those who test positive are offered a prophylactic antiretroviral treatment.

In order to maintain the edifice of a welfare State since independence in 1968, Mauritius has spared no efforts to put the best in terms of resources, institutions and legislations on the side of the Mauritian children. However, we are also cognizant of the fact that no matter how much has been achieved, a lot still remains to be done for the overall development of children.

In closing, let me say that while conventions and legislation provide the necessary legal frameworks and safeguards for the protection and promotion of the rights of children, it is of paramount importance that parents assume their full responsibilities, critically from the day the child is born, in order to set the stage and sustain a world fit for children.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Francis Butagira, chairman of the delegation of Uganda.

Mr. Butagira (Uganda): First of all, I would like to extend my delegation’s condolences to the people and the Government of Algeria and to the Secretary-General on the tragic terrorist incident recently, which resulted in a number of deaths and casualties. In the same vein, I would like to extend our condolences to the people and Government of Lebanon for their loss at the hands of the terrorists. Those are indeed tragic events, and I am sure that the world condemns these terrorist acts.

I would like, first of all, to associate my delegation with statement made by Ghana on behalf of the African Union. Uganda is a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two Optional Protocols, one on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and the other on the involvement of children in armed conflict. It is also party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. In addition, Uganda has ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, a regional instrument promoting rights and responsibilities of children. In the same vein, Uganda was among the countries that made a commitment to the Plan of Action for “A world fit for children”.

Of the total number of children in Uganda, about 41 per cent live in poor households. A total of 9.5 million Ugandans live below the poverty line, a large portion of whom are children. Furthermore, an estimated 6.5 million children and women are living with the effects of conflict, mainly in the northern part of our country. In addition there are some 240,000 refugees in Uganda as a result of other conflicts beyond our borders.

Poverty eradication is the major development goal of the Government of Uganda for which it drew up a poverty eradication action plan in 1997. The Uganda National Plan of Action for Children for 1999 to 2002 has now been integrated in the revised poverty eradication plan. The three-year rolling plan provides the national framework to address the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and most of the commitments of the report, “A world fit for children”. In addition, most of the MDGs related to health, education, HIV/AIDS and the protection of internally displaced persons are contained under pillars 3, 4 and 5 of the poverty eradication action plan.

The Government of Uganda has put in place policies and a legislative framework which provide an enabling environment for the observance of children’s rights. This commitment is embodied, as I have indicated, in the poverty eradication action plan goals, a national gender policy, a policy on orphans and vulnerable children, a related national strategic programme plan of interventions for orphans and other vulnerable children, a national youth policy, a policy on the elimination of child labour and a policy concerning street children. The Government of Uganda has also launched an internally displaced persons

policy and a Uganda national HIV/AIDS policy, among others.

In addition to such cross-sectoral policies, specific social-sector policies and sector-wide approaches have been introduced, notably an education sector investment plan, a second health sector strategic plan through 2010, water and sanitation plans and a social development sector investment plan through 2008, as well as a decentralization and justice, law and order sector plan. These sector-wide approaches have enhanced collaboration and participation of development partners and civil society organizations through the harmonization and alignment of development assistance around national policies and strategies.

While Uganda has made significant progress towards meeting some of the targets of “A world fit for children”, possibly attaining them before their deadlines — especially those relating to poverty, universal primary education and HIV/AIDS — there have been major setbacks in some areas. Of serious concern is the fact that infant and child mortality has been on the increase, that malaria continues to be the most prevalent cause of morbidity and mortality among children, that malnutrition affects a significant proportion of young people and that poverty remains high among them. Furthermore the implementation of the policies I have listed for the benefit of children is the main challenge faced by Uganda, due to resource constraints.

In conclusion, the past five years have served as a period of self-assessment for the Government of Uganda, and have yielded the identification of areas where progress has been made and those in which we are still lacking. Uganda reaffirms its commitments to the goals of a world fit for children.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Carsten Staur, chairman of the delegation of Denmark.

Mr. Staur (Denmark): I would like to begin my intervention by extending condolences to the Government and the people of Algeria, victims of a heinous terrorist attack only two days ago. The bombs were also an attack on the United Nations system and on the world community. Our sincere condolences go to the families of all the victims. Both adults and children were targeted, as we know, the bombs taking the lives of numerous school children. We are thereby

reminded of the many threats to the lives and well-being of children and young people, including the threat from terrorism.

Children and adolescents make up more than half of the world’s population. They represent our future, and when we meet today to advance their rights and discuss how to create a world fit for children, we are also laying the foundations of our societies for the decades to come.

By gathering here today we are reaffirming a truly global consensus. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most widely accepted human rights instrument. It states that in advancing the conditions of children and young people we must also base ourselves on a rights-based approach. Children and young people expect to be protected from discrimination, economic exploitation, abuse and violence, and it is our obligation to promote and to protect those rights.

The special session five years ago marked a turning point by empowering and giving a voice to children and young people. We must make sure they also participate as stakeholders in the design, planning and implementation of policies aimed at improving their lives. Young people are powerful agents of change. Empowering them is a key to good governance and accountability. We must therefore continue to engage in real dialogue, much like the ones we have had with the representatives of children at the present session. Their contribution has been more than significant; it has been indispensable. To quote one of the youth delegates, young people are not the sources of the problems but the resources needed to solve the problems.

The yardstick for measuring success is simple: we must assess how far we are in achieving the goals we collectively defined five years ago to improve the lives of the world’s children. Unfortunately, the comprehensive progress report (A/62/259) leaves no room for complacency. Advances have been made during the past decade — for example, in primary school enrolment and immunization against measles and polio. The bottom line, however, is quite dire. We are presently not on track to attain the goals we agreed upon to improve the health, education and protection of the world’s children. More needs to be done. We need to bridge the gap between legislation and enforcement and between the normative consensus we are

reaffirming today and the concerted action we agreed upon five years ago.

Insufficient progress has been achieved in stemming the HIV/AIDS epidemic. AIDS continues to orphan millions of children, especially in Africa, and HIV/AIDS is increasingly a disease of the young, particularly girls and young women. The international community must do more. Denmark will continue to give high priority to cooperation in this area. My Government recently decided to contribute nearly \$12 million to the Unite for Children, Unite Against AIDS campaign, undertaken by UNICEF, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS and the World Health Organization.

Education is a key factor in reducing poverty and promoting democracy, tolerance and development. At this very moment, up to 48 million girls are not attending primary school. While progress has been made, achieving complete gender parity in education must continue to be a key priority for us all.

In the area of protection, Denmark remains particularly concerned about the plight of children in armed conflict and humanitarian situations. In that context, special attention needs to be directed in particular to the needs of especially vulnerable groups such as refugees and internally displaced children and young people, disabled children and orphans.

Chronic poverty remains a key obstacle to meeting needs and protecting children. In developing countries, one child in four lives in a family surviving on less than \$1 a day. If we want to make progress, we have to strengthen the global partnership for development and build up capacity with our partners. The Government of Denmark is committed to allocating 0.8 per cent of gross domestic product to official development assistance. Guidelines governing our development cooperation put the rights and welfare of children and young people at the very centre of development cooperation.

The future of our children is at risk because their basic rights are not upheld. The health and well-being of adolescents cannot be safeguarded unless we promote their sexual and reproductive rights. Complications related to childbirth and pregnancy remain a major cause of death among adolescent girls, especially in developing countries. Too often, taboos cost lives, and bigotry impedes the action needed to

reverse those trends. The rights and needs of adolescents therefore have to be recognized.

All children have rights irrespective of their gender or economic, social and ethnic background. However, disabled children and children of ethnic minorities and of indigenous origin have special needs, which have to be met. Unfortunately, inequity and discrimination remain central obstacles in building a world fit for children. Gender-based discrimination is serious, widespread and comprehensive. A girl child in 2007 faces higher risks of malnutrition, disease and early death. She is less likely to be enrolled in primary school than her male peers. And abhorrent practices of genital mutilation and forced marriage continue to endanger the well-being of girls and female adolescents. Girls and young women are also the main victims of trafficking, as well as sexual and economic exploitation. At the same time, recurrent humanitarian crises and armed conflicts lead to conditions conducive to gender-based violence. We must therefore collectively address all those issues as a matter of high priority.

In closing, I would like to refer to the proverb that says that it takes a village to raise a child. The saying highlights the collective responsibility for ensuring the well-being of our children. I hope the Assembly — this global village — will recognize its responsibility and take the necessary steps, as a matter of urgency, to build a world fit for children. We owe it to them and to future generations.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Hamid Al Bayati, chairman of the delegation of Iraq.

Mr. Al Bayati (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, on behalf of the Government of Iraq and on my own behalf, I would like to extend our condolences to the brotherly people and Government of Algeria in connection with the recent terrorist attacks that took the lives of innocent persons in the capital of that country. My country too has suffered from the dangerous scourge of terrorism directed against innocent civilians. We would like to take this opportunity to condemn strongly that scourge and to urge the international community to make all efforts to eliminate it.

I would also like to congratulate the President on having convened this important Commemorative High-level Meeting Devoted to the Follow-up of the

Outcome of the Special Session on Children. The Declaration we adopted in 2002 committed us to building a world fit for children. Five years ago, we also committed ourselves to implement the principles, objectives and strategies in the Declaration and Plan of Action of "A world fit for children". We are here today to review the steps we have taken since then.

We all agree that interest in the children's sector is the best possible investment we can make on behalf of future generations in our societies. In my country, Iraq, that idea was absent from the minds and policies of the previous regime of dictatorship. Children were the first victims of the irresponsible policy of war that was in place for 30 years. They were also the first victims of the economic sanctions imposed against Iraq following the invasion of Kuwait by the previous dictator. For 13 years, the children of Iraq paid the price for those sanctions and for the mistakes of the previous regime. Today, following the fall of the previous dictatorship, children in Iraq continue to suffer from the scourge of terrorism, which does not discriminate between women, men, children or the elderly. Children are exposed daily to dangers that threaten their lives and futures, injure them and make them handicapped. Despite those grave daily dangers, however, our children still have the will to live and have hope in the future. Their parents and the State encourage them to continue their education in order that they can contribute as much as they can to the building of a new Iraq.

I would like to point out that thanks to a noticeable improvement in recent months in the overall security situation in Iraq and the considerable reduction of terrorist acts, the Government of Iraq, in cooperation with the Multinational Force, has tried to put an end to terrorism in order to enable international and social organizations and humanitarian agencies to implement measures to alleviate the suffering of children in Iraq.

The Government of Iraq has made major efforts in recent years to achieve a world fit for children. One significant step was the establishment of an ad hoc national advisory committee charged with considering the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The committee has recommended that Iraq ratify the two Protocols, as there is no contradiction between their provisions and the law in effect in our country, and as they complement the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Iraq

ratified in 1994. The Government also intends to promulgate a comprehensive law on children's rights that would serve as the organic legal point of reference for the promotion and protection of children's rights, in line with the current status of children's rights throughout the world. By protecting the rights of children, we are promoting all human rights.

Our permanent constitution bans all forms of economic exploitation of children and guarantees the rights of individuals, families, women and children. The Government is endeavouring to put in place new legislation and to amend existing laws to eliminate all forms of violence against children in order to secure a safe environment for children. We are working to provide a larger number of social care institutions for children orphaned as a result of violence in Iraq. We are also working to allocate resources for children's groups and institutions working to eliminate all forms of child conscription.

Let me refer to the major role being played by non-governmental organizations and civil society institutions to promote and protect the rights of children. Such groups are working actively in Iraq alongside United Nations bodies and agencies, in particular UNICEF, to promote and protect the rights of children in Iraq.

My Government has officially invited Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, to visit Iraq for a first-hand assessment of the situation of children in our country and of the Government's efforts to improve the situation of our children.

During the present session, the Third Committee approved a draft resolution on the rights of the child (see A/62/435, para. 32) that we hope will soon be adopted by the General Assembly. In doing so, the Assembly will agree to the mandate of the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General on violence against children. My Government voted in favour of the draft resolution in the Third Committee, given its vital importance to strengthening children's rights. We hope this step will lend further momentum to our efforts to combat all forms of violence against children, especially those who are victims of terrorism.

In conclusion, my Government would like to appeal to the international community, to the United Nations and to international humanitarian

organizations to continue to cooperate with our national and non-governmental institutions to improve living conditions for Iraq's children and to alleviate their suffering.

Finally, I would like to thank all sisterly and friendly countries and international organizations and non-governmental organizations for the assistance they have provided the children of Iraq in their current circumstances. We hope that these efforts will continue, so that we can implement the provisions of the Declaration we adopted five years ago for building a better world — a world fit for children.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Enkhtsetseg Ochir, chairperson of the delegation of Mongolia.

Ms. Ochir (Mongolia): At the outset, my delegation wishes to join previous speakers in condemning, in the strongest possible terms, the terrorist attacks carried out two days ago in Algeria. We express our sincere sympathy to, and solidarity with, the people and the Government of Algeria and the United Nations Secretary-General on the tragic loss of innocent lives, including civilians and international civil servants.

During the course of the past two days, we have reaffirmed anew our commitment to fully implement the Declaration and the Plan of Action adopted at the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly. As we evaluate the progress made over the past five years in the four major areas of the Plan of Action, it is encouraging that significant headway has been made. Yet, we have also to acknowledge that many complex challenges still exist that require renewed political will to intensify our efforts towards making the world truly fit for children. The implementation of the Plan of Action will also provide a major boost to fulfilling our commitments under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Mongolia has taken seriously its commitment undertaken at the twenty-seventh special session by adopting and implementing its national programme of action for the protection and development of children for the period 2002 to 2010 as a main policy document tailoring to the national context the goals set in the Plan of Action of "A world fit for children". Our national plan of action includes specific goals and targets under the six areas, namely, child-friendly legal reforms, a healthy and safe environment for children,

quality education for the development of children, family-based child protection, child and adolescent participation and access to information, and building the capacity of national organizations working on behalf of children.

The overall implementation and coordination of all activities under our national plan of action is entrusted to the National Authority for Children, which is an implementing agency of the Government that, in turn, serves as the secretariat for the National Council for Children, which is headed by the Prime Minister of Mongolia. At the local level, provincial governors are responsible for implementing the respective local action plans developed within the framework of the national plan of action.

In the area of promoting a child-friendly legal environment, a number of existing laws have been revised with a view to harmonizing them with the relevant international instruments to which Mongolia is party. For instance, following Mongolia's ratification, in 2002, of the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, our national law on the protection of the child was amended to include new provisions to protect children from being sold and from trafficking, slavery, exploitation, violence, abuse and neglect.

The criminal code was also amended to include a new chapter on crimes against children, families and social values. In addition, a host of new laws and regulations have been introduced to promote the well-being of children and to better protect their rights, including laws against domestic violence, the prevention of HIV/AIDS, the prevention of iodine deficiency disorders, the social security of people with disabilities, and monetary provisions for children and families, to name just a few.

Under the health-related targets, child malnutrition has been reduced. Infant and under-five mortality rates have also been drastically reduced. As of 2005, the immunization coverage of infants had reached between 97 and 99 per cent, resulting in reduced incidence of infectious disease.

Certain headway has also been made with regard to the goal of providing primary education for all, with increased numbers of children now enrolled in kindergartens and primary schools. Furthermore, the implementation of the master plan for the educational sector for the period 2006 to 2015 will improve access

to, and the quality and competitiveness of, the national education system.

My Government has also undertaken a number of quick-impact initiatives aimed at protecting and promoting the rights of children. Those include the provision of a monthly allowance to each and every child in Mongolia — who total about 1 million, or almost half of the entire population — as well as the provision of one-time monetary support to newlyweds and new-born children and the introduction of a free school meals programme for primary school children.

The five-year review of the implementation of our national plan of action has also identified a number of challenges, both existing and emerging, faced by Mongolia in its efforts to promote and protect children's rights. The reduction of poverty has to be singled out as one of the major causes of concern. One third of our population still lives below the poverty line. Single-parent households with many children and migrant families are at a high risk of slipping into poverty. Furthermore, protecting children in difficult circumstances, children with disabilities and curtailing child labour are among the persistent challenges that require more targeted policy action at the national level and enhanced international cooperation in the years ahead.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate my Government's strong resolve to spare no effort to implement the goals and objectives set forth in the Declaration and Plan of Action through our national efforts — coupled with our continued cooperation with other Member States, organizations of the United Nations system, in particular UNICEF, and international and national non-governmental organizations.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I should like to inform the General Assembly that the observer of the African Union has requested to take the floor as the last speaker in this morning's debate. I understand that the observer of the African Union must leave New York early this afternoon. May I take it that the General Assembly agrees, without setting a precedent, to hear from the Observer of the African Union as the last speaker during this morning's debate?

It was so decided.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Bience Gawan, Commissioner for Social Affairs and chairperson of the

observer delegation of the African Union.

Ms. Gawan (African Union): The Commission of the African Union (AU) would like to add its voice to the expressions of condolences to the Government and people of Algeria, one of our member States, as well as to the United Nations family, in connection with the recent tragedy.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the statement made by Mr. Touré, President of Mali, and in particular for his devotion to, and friendship with, the children of Africa. I also wish to express my gratitude for the statement made on behalf of the 53 member States of the AU by the Minister of Women's and Children's Affairs of Ghana, representing the Chairperson of the African Union.

Africa would not have been as prepared as it is for this meeting had it not been for Egypt's hosting of the second Pan-African Forum on the future of children to review the programme "An Africa fit for children", as our contribution to this week's plenary meetings. In that regard, the First Lady of Egypt must be acclaimed, not only for having agreed to be patron for the Forum but also for her personal crusade on behalf of the children of Africa.

I also wish to recall and commend the efforts of all organizations and individuals in the promotion and protection of children's rights and to ensure their survival, development and participation.

Under the leadership of UNICEF, the United Nations has promoted the rights and welfare of children worldwide, particularly in Africa, where the need is the greatest. Allow me to pay tribute to Mr. Kul Gautum, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, who served the children of the world for more than three decades, upon his retirement yesterday.

Many non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations have worked tirelessly at various levels, often in unsafe environments, to protect children and provide them with services. I wish to commend them for that.

That someone is a child by virtue of young age and the fact that they are still growing up and developing and are dependent upon us as adults speaks volumes. In addition to the daily needs required for healthy growth and development, children need and crave love and care.

We met here in 2001 and committed ourselves to make the world a better place for our children. Many efforts were deployed to secure that. African Union heads of State held a special debate on child survival and adopted the Sirte Declaration on Child Survival. The Abuja call for achieving universal access to HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria services in Africa placed children at the centre of efforts and highlights actions for orphans and vulnerable children. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the African Child remains the most important African blueprint. The European Union-Africa plan of action on human trafficking, especially in women and children, was recently endorsed at the Lisbon Summit.

Aware of the vulnerability of the girl child and in response to the appeal made by the First Lady of Egypt, the African Union Commission, in collaboration with its partners, is organizing a conference on female genital mutilation next year, not only to discuss the negative impacts of that practice but, most importantly, to celebrate the achievements in our fight against that harmful practice.

We have also conducted a study on social protection systems to ensure that all vulnerable and marginalized groups, in particular children, are protected and cared for.

At the Pan-African Forum, held a month ago in Egypt, African ministers and partners spoke honestly

and frankly about the progress achieved and about shortcomings. They recommitted themselves to more effective implementation of the 2001 commitments and to deal with emerging issues. African children held regional and national consultations and provided their input to the deliberations of the Pan-African Forum. The ministers heard the children urge that there should be no more resolutions without solutions.

Following adoption by the ministers of a call for accelerated action, the children said the following: If we want to accelerate action, give it to those who run fast. No more should children die or be disabled from preventable causes; no more should children go hungry in a world of plenty; no more should they be abused, exploited trafficked or neglected; no more should they become adults caring for their sick relatives or for their siblings; no more should they play with guns, but rather with toys. It is high time that the world deliver on its promise.

Just as Africa made a contribution to the debate in 2001, it has come to this Meeting with an African common position encapsulated in the call for action. The priorities of the call are similarly echoed in the priorities set for this Meeting. I wish to appeal to the Assembly to use the call for accelerated action as a reference document for its deliberations.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.