

# The World's Children Commemorates 20 Years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

The World For World Organization (WFWO), NGO based in Italy and operate internationally observed and Stand Up with UNICEF to mark the 20th anniversary of a landmark agreement protecting children the Ceremonies are taking place around the world.

The UN says the Convention on the Rights of the Child has transformed the way children are treated. But it says a billion children in the world still go without food, shelter or healthcare and that millions are facing lives of poverty and abuse. On the eve of events, a British charity warned millions of the world's children have no parents or family around them. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), signed in 1989, guarantees children the right to life, to education, the right to play and to be protected from abuse. It has the widest international support of any human rights treaty - ratified by 193 countries, with only the US and Somalia yet to give their backing. The UN says the achievements of the convention have been "remarkable" - 30% more children live beyond the age of five and more than 80% of children now attend primary school.



'Children matter' Elizabeth Gibbons, deputy director of the UN children's agency Unicef, said the impact of the convention on children's lives was clear. "At any time across the world, in any city, in any media, you'll find a story about children's rights, that's the big change," she said. "Yes, there are many problems not resolved, but now children matter, they matter to society, they matter to the media, they matter to politicians." But the UN says 24,000 children under the age of five still die every day from preventable disease and illness and that governments must not cut back on provision for children in times of financial hardship. On the eve of the anniversary, British charity Everychild said increasing numbers of children were growing up with no parents or separated from their families. The charity said Russia and other former Soviet countries were of particular concern, with more than a million children living in institutions, many of them with at least one parent still alive but too poor to care for them. Everychild warned that other countries were in danger of following the same path by focusing on building orphanages rather than trying to keep families together.

UNICEF's State of The World's Children report commemorates 20 years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. A special edition issue of UNICEF's flagship The State of the World's Children report, tracking the impact of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the challenges that remain, was released today on the eve of the 20th anniversary of the Convention's adoption by the UN General Assembly. "The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most ratified human rights treaty in human history," said UNICEF Executive Director Ann M. Veneman. "It has transformed the way children are viewed and treated throughout the world." The Convention has 193 ratifications, the process by which countries decide to be bound by the articles of an international treaty. It articulates a set of universal children's rights, such as the right to an identity, a name and a nationality, the right to an education, and rights to the highest possible standards of health and protection from abuse and exploitation. These rights are based on four core principles - non-discrimination; the best interest of the child as primary consideration in matters that affect them; rights to life, survival and development, and respect for the views of children. The Convention also identifies the obligation of governments to do all they can to deliver these rights, and acknowledges the special role of parents in their children's upbringing.

The State of the World's Children report describes the timeless relevance of the Convention.

More than seventy countries have incorporated children's codes into national legislation based on the Convention's provisions, and awareness and advocacy on child protection issues have increased markedly since the Convention was opened for signature 20 years ago.

Considerable progress has been made through the past twenty years:

- The annual number of deaths of children under five years of age has fallen from around 12.5 million in 1990 to an estimated 8.8 million in 2008, representing a 28 per cent decline in the rate of under five mortality;
- Between 1990 and 2006, 1.6 billion people world-wide gained access to improved water sources;
- Globally, around 84 per cent of primary-school-age children are in class today and the gender gap in primary school enrolment is narrowing;
- Children are no longer the missing face of the HIV and AIDS pandemic;
- Important steps have been taken to help protect children from serving as soldiers or trafficked into prostitution or domestic servitude; and
- The age of children getting married is rising in some countries and the number of girls subjected to genital cutting is gradually falling.

But children's rights are still far from assured, according to UNICEF.

"It is unacceptable that children are still dying from preventable causes, like pneumonia, malaria, measles and malnutrition," said Veneman. "Many of the world's children will never see the inside of a school room, and millions lack protection against violence, abuse, exploitation, discrimination and neglect."

The rights of girls still require special attention. The majority of children who do not attend primary school are girls, and girls are more likely to suffer sexual violence, to be trafficked or to be forced into child marriage. In many regions they are less likely to receive essential healthcare.

The report includes special expert essays from public and private sector representatives, alongside examples of the child rights situation in a range of countries.

Many of the expert essays offer advice on the role the Convention can have, in an increasingly populous, urbanized and environmentally challenged world, over the next 20 years and beyond. The report also provides a range of suggestions that could ensure the protection of children's rights continues to advance.

More than 160 events are taking place worldwide commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Convention. The special edition of The State of the World's Children is part of UNICEF's contribution to those commemorations, which also includes jointly hosting, with civil society and government partners, a global commemoration and panel discussion to be held at the United Nations Headquarters on the 20th of November.

"The big challenge of the next 20 years is to firmly position the best interests of children at the heart of all human activity," said Veneman. "It is our collective responsibility to ensure every child's rights to survival, development, protection and participation."

Resources from UNICEF

WFWO's Communications Team