



On the Record for Children

Issue 3: January 30, 2001

Contents:

- **Lack Of Investment Undermines World Summit Goals, Warns UNICEF**
- **Torture Of Children Being Downplayed, Say Advocates**
- **COMMENT: Sister Mary Rose McGeedy President, Covenant House**
- **Support Builds For The Optional Protocol On Child Soldiers**
- **Sadness And Spirit - Children And HIV/AIDS**
- **Sisters For Life, Preventing AIDS**
- **One Step Forward, One Step Back For Guatemala's Street Children**
- **A Day With Children's Express**

From the AP Editorial Desk

Lack of Investment Undermines World Summit Goals, Warns UNICEF

Mixed Report Card Since 1990

A lack of investment in basic social services has undermined progress in achieving the goals of the World Summit for Children, UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Kul Gautam told delegates at the opening Prepcom session yesterday.

Developing countries are only investing between 12 percent and 14 percent of their national budgets in basic social services, said Mr. Gautam. Industrialized countries are not playing their part either by allocating roughly 10 percent of their development aid budgets to these crucial sectors. This remains well below the levels suggested by the 20/20 Initiative.

Mr. Gautam also said out that many governments had not yet submitted their end-of-decade reviews - another important goal set by the World Summit. A UNICEF official said later that about 70 countries had reported. UNICEF is hoping to make the reports available on the Web this week.

Mr. Gautam gave a preview of the assessment that would be presented to the Special Session, and it looks like something of a mixed bag. The Summit set the goal of reducing infant mortality among children under the age of five by one third. Globally, the death rate has fallen from 13 million to 10 million since 1990. But roughly 30 countries - mostly in Africa - have not improved their performance, or seen a deterioration.

Primary school enrollment is also disappointing, with only a small increase. 'Clearly this is one of the great challenges for the current decade,' said Mr. Gautam. Several low-income countries had achieved high enrollment rates, including Bangladesh, Malawi, Uganda and Vietnam.

Immunization remains a success story, he said. But here, too, there are significant regional variations. 'Reviving an upward trend in childhood immunization in Africa must surely be one of our priority tasks for this decade,' he commented. Elimination of iodine deficiency disorders was another 'major success story of the 1990s', despite setbacks in CEE/CIS countries.

Gautam warned that national figures could conceal huge disparities, between town and village, between one part of town and another, between men and women. Babies born to mothers without formal education are twice as likely to die before age five than babies born to mothers who went to secondary school.

'The conclusion is very clear: educating girls saves lives. Girls' education is key to breaking the inter-generational poverty cycle.'

Torture of Children Being Downplayed, Say Advocates

PrepCom Seeks to Ignore State Violence

State violence against children, including the use of torture, must be given more prominence by the PrepCom process, according to the World Organization Against Torture (OMCT).

Roberta Cecchetti, Children Program Officer at OMCT, said that over the last five years, at least 2,300 cases of state violence against children, amounting to torture, have been documented by OMCT. Yet, she said, there is consensus among many NGOs that the Outcome document attempts to sidestep this scandal by avoiding a clear definition of 'state violence' and by trying to shift responsibility from state institutions to communities and non-state actors.

State abuse against children is a major concern of child rights advocates, and in their eyes it can range from all-out torture to corporal punishment in state institutions. Also falling into the category are the arbitrary arrest and detention of street children, forced disappearances, executions, and capital punishment.

According to advocates, these abuses are almost always carried out by agents of the state or in state-run institutions and programs - juvenile justice and welfare, schools and orphanages.

Advocates also believe that the emphasis should be placed firmly on the reintegration of children rather than their punishment - and here again they differ from many governments. 'Children should be re-integrated not punished,' said Ms. Cecchetti. 'Any state institution which uses physical punishment as a tool to educate is committing an act of state violence against children.'

NGOs have been finding it hard to win allies for this position at the international level. Last September, the Committee on the Rights of the Child discussed state violence on its annual

Thematic Day. The debate generated more NGO submissions than any other theme in the committee's history.

But the Committee can only make recommendations which may or may not be followed by governments. In addition, when governments report to the Committee 'they almost never tackle the issue of torture,' said Ms. Cecchetti from OMCT. Governments make an initial report to the Committee, and then report every five years.

The UN Convention Against Torture has a clear mandate to address torture. But, said Ms. Cecchetti, the definition of torture under Article 1 only refers to adults in adult situations.

The Outcome document currently before the PrepCom does little to provide clarification. It notes that 'physical violence and mental abuse directed at children are pervasive in the home, in schools, in institutions and in the community.' But this does not specify whether the institutions are state-run nor what is meant by 'community violence.' The words 'state violence' are nowhere to be found in the Outcome document.

In the light of this, several NGOs have formed a new caucus to lobby the PrepCom on the issue.

Comment: Sister Mary Rose McGeady, President, Covenant House

As representatives from around the world gather here in New York for the United Nations' General Assembly Special Session on Children to address the great challenges facing so many of the world's young people, I know there will be much discussion of global politics and the significant social and economic movements which impact the welfare of children the world over; all complex questions not easily shaped or understood.

For me, it is at times such as these that I need to go back to the most fundamental goals -- men and women of good will set for themselves in nurturing children into fulfilling adulthood. Put quite simply, we all need to work for a world where:

- parents genuinely care about their children -- and spend time with them;
- our teachers are truly committed to teaching the young people in their charge and preparing them with worthwhile job skills to make a contribution to that world of the 21st century;
- all children have access to quality medical care
- the juvenile justice system puts its emphasis on training and rehabilitation not primarily punishment;
- violence becomes the last problem solving tool in this society, not the first;
- the media promotes the values of truthfulness, justice and respect for all human life;
- young people can grow up in the knowledge that they are loved and cherished, where the values which shape their own vision of that world extend beyond immediate satisfactions to the lived realization that they truly are children of God, and in a world, finally, where adults are committed to supporting them in their journey to responsible adulthood.

- Covenant House is the largest privately-funded childcare agency in the United States providing shelter and service to homeless and runaway youth. It was incorporated in New

York City in 1972 and has since expanded in the United States to New Orleans, Houston, Fort Lauderdale, Orlando, Los Angeles, Oakland, Anchorage, Newark, Atlantic City, St. Louis, Detroit, Washington, DC, Philadelphia and Atlanta. In Latin America, besides Guatemala, it has established programs in Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, and in Canada, Toronto and Vancouver. In addition to food, shelter, clothing and crisis care, Covenant House provides a variety of services to homeless youth including advocacy, health care, education, vocational preparation, drug abuse treatment and prevention programs, legal services, recreation, mother/child programs, transitional living programs, street outreach and aftercare.

Support Builds for the Optional Protocol on Child Soldiers

Non-State Actors Seen as Partners

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers is using this PrepCom to press governments to ban the use of child soldiers. The coalition is urging immediate action.

The coalition would like to see 100 states sign one of the two optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, by the time of the Special Session on children. It is also pushing for 50 ratifications by that date.

Currently 76 states have signed and only Bangladesh, Canada and Sri Lanka have ratified. Ten ratifications are required to bring the measure into force. 'Universal ratification of the optional protocol by 2003 will be one of the agreed-to targets of the meeting in September,' said Martin Macpherson of Amnesty International, who is on the steering committee of the coalition. 'But we don't think that is soon enough.'

The optional protocol is a direct response to many of the issues that were avoided during the drafting of the CRC. The additional protocol obliges states to ban the use of children under 18 in hostilities. It also bans compulsory recruitment, and raises the minimum age of voluntary recruitment to 16.

Mr. Häggström of Save the Children Sweden sees the first anniversary of the signing of the optional protocol on May 25, 2001 as an opportune moment to start enforcing the optional protocol. 'It is time to enter phase two with this standard. That includes implementing the standard and working it into national legislation.'

Campaigners want to extend curbs on child soldiers to rebel armies as well. In southern Sudan, where it is estimated 9,000 children are fighting and the long running civil war has cost two million lives, there have been unexpected successes in demobilizing children from rebel factions.

Last October, Commander Salva Kiir Mayardit, the deputy chairman of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement promised UNICEF's Carol Bellamy that children under 18 would not be recruited or allowed to stay in the ranks.

Mr. Häggström's organisation runs child soldier education and rehabilitation programmes with both the Sudan People's Liberation Army and the Sudan Independence Movement. He said that international legal mechanisms provide a persuasive argument for rebels.

'If you use the optional protocol and CRC as the basis for dialogue and for training, then experience shows that this makes a difference on the ground when working with military actors.' He said that child soldiers are no longer fighting where Save the Children Sweden runs programs in Sudan.

Sadness and Spirit - Children and HIV/AIDS

The HIV/AIDS epidemic means that an entire generation of children is facing sadness, fear, isolation, and even death. But by threatening their families and society, the pandemic is also forcing children to assume greater responsibility. Many are rising to the challenge. The crisis of HIV/AIDS is about spirit as well as sadness.

In this issue, *On the Record* talks to Lydiah Bosire, from Kenya, about the creation of Youth Against Aids, a new organization that seeks to engage young Africans in the fight. In the second article, two teenage reporters from *Children's Express* profile the work of Metro TeenAIDS, a group in Washington DC that is trying to do much the same for young African Americans that Youth Against Aids would like to do for young Africans.

Young people have to be more involved in designing AIDS policies if the pandemic in Africa is to be slowed, according to a newly-formed lobbying organisation named Youth Against AIDS (YAA).

'AIDS policy is too old fashioned,' said Lydiah Bosire, a 23-year old Kenyan student who is one of the founders of YAA. 'Policy makers don't understand the pressures on youth. This is a big obstacle to combating the disease.'

Ms. Bosire told *'On the Record'* that the disease kills 500 people in her country every day, and that young people are particularly vulnerable to AIDS because they are inquisitive, open to new ideas and trends, and of course sexually active. 'AIDS policy must be designed around the special needs of youth. We are not the problem. We must be part of the solution.'

Recent years have seen enormous attention given to AIDS in Africa, and several governments – notably Uganda and Senegal – have started to control the pandemic through public awareness campaigns. But these successes have been few and far between, and the lessons have still not sunk home, said Ms. Bosire. It was not until end of November 1999 that AIDS was declared a national emergency in her own country, Kenya.

One reason for the delay, she said, was opposition from Kenyan religious leaders. This attitude lives on among older Kenyans who still see AIDS as a crisis of morals rather than as a public health emergency. 'Our parents frown on sex before marriage,' she said. 'But this is completely unrealistic in this day and age.'

Young people are often discouraged from seeking advice from family planning clinics, which are supposed to be leading the fight to prevent AIDS, by the disapproval of clinic managers. 'There is no incentive to find out about AIDS, take preventive measures, or get tested for the virus.'

Ms. Bosire comes from a highly educated family in the town of Kisii, in Western Kenya. She recently came face to face with the ravages of AIDS when a first cousin died at the age of 27. Instead of understanding and sympathy, she said, the response from the whole family was shame and embarrassment.

The opportunity to make a contribution came when Ms. Bosire won a scholarship to the United World College in Wales (UK). Here she met two others who felt like her – Rebecca Maina, also from Kenya, and Leo Metcalf from Madagascar.

The idea of YAA came to her when Ms. Bosire attended the Forum 2000 Conference in Prague in 1999. She listened to speakers pontificate about Africa's problems and found the discussion abstract, impersonal, and all about statistics. There was little said about the AIDS crisis. Speaking as a young African woman – the most vulnerable group – she made her disappointment clear.

The same frustration drives YAA and gives it focus. The latest recruit to the core group, Sabrina Langlois, met Mr. Metcalf at a summer course in Washington and instantly responded to the YAA message. She remembers her family's shame when an uncle died from AIDS in San Francisco in the early 1980s. It helped her understand the challenge facing her colleague Lydiah, who is from a continent she has yet to visit.

YAA's central message is that dialogue between young people can actually slow the spread of AIDS. This makes networking a goal unto itself, and as one might expect of young people, the YAA group is already exploiting the Internet. The YAA website has been designed by one of the core group, Naim Darghouth from Tunisia, and is currently hosted by the World Voices, an initiative started by the United World Colleges in 1997. The site has already attracted attention and inquiries from young Africans and Americans alike.

Ms. Bosire is currently on a scholarship to Cornell University, where she is studying Government and International Relations. In between classes, she and her colleagues have been building a network of young AIDS activists throughout Africa. So far, they are in contact with 15 advocates in 13 different countries as far apart as Nigeria, Kenya, Zambia and Liberia. Ms. Bosire said the group is 'surprised and excited' by the response.

Once the network is in place, they plan to ask two African journalists to profile the work of their African partners. They would also like to organize a meeting in Africa to develop an agenda on youth and AIDS which can be presented to aid agencies and governments.

But networking is only one item on their agenda. They have created an advisory group of sympathetic professionals, and also started some modest fund-raising. During a stay in the United States, Mr. Metcalf organised a fund-raising event for an AIDS clinic in Zambia that raised \$700.

Expect to hear more from Youth Against AIDS!

Sisters for Life, Preventing AIDS

CE News team: Geneene Green, 16 and Crystal Nelson, 16, Washington, D.C. Bureau

Two young ladies in Washington, DC are out there helping to inform young people about HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases and drugs. Hearing their stories made us feel very good about our generation.

Shannon Waller, 21, works for Metro TeenAIDS, whose mission is to educate and empower young people to prevent HIV infection, and to support and care for those living with AIDS in the Washington, DC Metropolitan area. She assists with the group's Sisters for Life program, which works with young African-American females living in the Arthur Capper housing project, to promote self-esteem and healthy decision-making.

'The girls that we're interacting with come with the same struggles as most youth of today, dealing with drugs, crime, violence in an inner-city neighborhood,' she said. 'A lot of times, we think these things don't affect us. Instead of verbalizing, we do other things, like we get smart or act real disrespectful. But the program is just there to say, 'Yeah, you can feel these feelings and you can verbalize it. This is what I am feeling and this is what I am going to do about it.'

Crystal is 11. She's a member of Sisters for Life. She knows a whole lot of stuff about AIDS and sex education. She also has a good foundation at home, because her mom and family members talk to her about sex. She has some real good points on educating other kids.

When asked what she would tell someone about what has most impacted her about Sisters, Crystal said, 'First I got to find someone who would listen to me. If I was like a big sister, I would try to explain that it's not right to have sex at an early age, they are taking a big risk having sex in the 6th grade.'

Waller said she winds up learning, too. 'The information I'm giving them I had to learn before I gave it to them. I think sometimes youth are not informed [because] they're afraid to ask. They don't have anyone that looks like them to give them the answers.'

Titra Whitted, 17, is a community outreach worker with Metro TeenAIDS. She's received the organization's Ryan White Youth Service award for organizing an AIDS Awareness week at her high school.

'I picked up a lot of skills which I could use to bury a lot of ideas and perceptions of people with AIDS or living with HIV,' said Titra. 'You get to cross out all those misbeliefs. I'm not going to say it makes me feel all good and warm and fuzzy inside, 'cause that sounds just like everyone else, but you get a good feeling from it.'

What Titra and Waller do sends a different message to girls, different than the message moms would. Young people respond better to young people. Until Titra found out she received an award for doing this, she didn't realize the importance of her work.

'When I got the letter in the mail, at first I sort of blew it off, 'Oh, OK, I'm going to get some little certificate. Whoop- de-do.' Then it dawned on me how special this award is: 'You actually did something to help your peers become aware about something as massive as AIDS.' It made me feel good, but there's a lot of untouched people out there who still don't know everything they should about AIDS.'

One Step Forward, One Step Back For Guatemala's Street Children

Arturo Echeverria, National Director of Casa Alianza Guatemala, talks to On the Record about his organization's campaign to end the violence against street children.

At the end of 1999 the Guatemalan branch of Casa Alianza/Covenant House, a prominent child rights advocacy organization, won an unprecedented victory for children when the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) brought judgment against the government of Guatemala for violation of the rights of street children.

Then last year, the new Congress showed that progress would not be so easy, by suspending a new law on children that it had adopted (but not implemented) in 1996. It was typical of the difficulties facing those who are working on behalf of Latin America's street children and of their campaign – one step forward and one step back.

There are at least 5,000 street children in Guatemala City alone, and they are among the most unprotected members of society according to Arturo Echeverria, who is the Guatemala director of Casa Alianza.

Mr. Echeverria said that some were orphaned in war. Many suffered physical abuse at home. But the main reason, he said, was socio-economic. 'The unjust distribution of resources impoverishes families.'

Once children are on the street, they are subject to hellish abuse. Most have been sexually exploited, and many end up as prostitutes. Street children commonly sniff glue or paint thinner to blunt hunger pangs. Disease – including AIDS – is an ever-present risk.

Asked about the greatest danger to street children, Mr. Echeverria responds simply - adults. 'Adults push the children out onto the street. Adults introduce the children to drugs. Adults exploit the children for sex and for labor. And adults are indifferent to the plight of the children.'

'Street children only become an issue when they break the law, but no effort is made to prevent them from becoming street children,' said Mr Echeverria. Businessmen look on street children as thieves, pressure the government to remove them, and even hire private security companies to terrorize and murder them – a practice that is known as 'social cleansing.'

In one famous case, a 12 year old beggar was given a bag of food which contained a hand grenade. The courts have traditionally turned a blind eye when such children are abused.

Mr. Echeverria told On the Record that the laws in force regarding children are so antiquated that they violate Guatemala's constitution and the Convention on the Rights of Children.

With this in mind, Casa Alianza has filed over 400 legal cases before the courts in Guatemala in the mistreatment of street children, but fewer than 20 have been heard. Frustrated at this official indifference, Casa Alianza filed a complaint with the Costa Rica-based Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, charging the government with neglect in the case of five street children who were tortured and murdered in 1990 by members of the National Police.

In late 1999 the Commission brought judgment against the State of Guatemala for violating the American Convention of Human Rights. It was the first case in the 30-year history of the Commission involving children and human rights.

In an apparent change in attitude, the Guatemalan government admitted that it had made mistakes, and it paid compensation to the families of the murdered youths. Newly elected President Alfonso Portillo declared that his government wanted to cooperate with the IACHR in the protection of human rights.

Then the pendulum swung back again. In 1996, as Guatemala's 36-year war was drawing to a close, the government approved a new package of laws to protect children, the Guatemalan Child and Adolescent Code.

This was an important event. Under the previous law, children had no rights. The new law 'treated them like human beings.' But immediately upon passage of the new Code the Guatemalan government postponed its implementation for one year, citing 'prohibitive costs.' The delay continued until last year, when the Guatemalan Congress suspended the Code altogether. This is proof, for Arturo Echeverria, that laws must not only be adopted but implemented. He said that the IACHR decision 'shows that when the justice system is not working in Guatemala, we can go to the international court for assistance. 'At the same time, real justice for the street children is still clearly a long way off.

A Day With Children's Express

CE News Team: Monica Clark, 17; Kisha Kantasingh, 17 and Gwen Kehrig-Darton, 8

Our editorial partners from Children's Express tried to venture into the United Nations for the first day of the PrepCom. They were surprised at what they found...

Kiddies don't get into the kiddie conference. That's the theme of the first day of the United Nations Special Session on Children - or at least it should have been. The conference promoted child participation yet made it difficult for a team of young reporters to cover the events. It's ironic that anyone under 13 must be accompanied by an adult at a conference completely focused on kid issues. Maybe that's why we didn't see many kids.

The whole point is children representation. Without it you just have a lot of adults talking about what should be done but they don't have the experiences or stories of the kids involved.

We did manage to find one teen from Kosovo who was part of the conference. Dafina worked with the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children.

Dafina lived through the bombs falling and destruction in her town. Fortunately, the war did not destroy her. 'They have guns filled with hatred,' she said, in a calm voice.

She told us about all the landmines that the kids had to watch out for. They had only small paths to follow on the way to school. If they got off the paths they risked stepping on a mine.

'The only hope is going to be with the youth,' said Jane Lowicki, an adult who worked with Dafina on the report. She told us that 50 percent of Kosovo is under the age 24.

The fact that they have to figure out what type of paths to take to get to school is huge. It's tragic. As young New Yorkers our biggest tragedy is figuring which subway to take to our schools.

Gender discrimination is also an issue, Dafina said. The girls aren't encouraged to go to school because there is no point when they are just going to end up marrying and having kids. Many girls have also been sexually exploited. After the war, they were looked down upon for being impure. Dafina said these girls would have rather died than lived through the experience of being exploited. There is no support for them. Nowhere for them to turn.

We also talked to Khadijah Elshayyal, 18, who was with the International Islamic Organization. Her branch works with girls 18 to 25 and focused on ways to help ease people's suffering. One problem they discovered was that families weren't as stable as they used to be. This is an international problem. She got involved because she felt like she should spend her time serving the community but didn't know how until she found the IIO.

That seems like the nature of all kids. They want to get involved but they don't know how. Maybe that's why there weren't that many kids at this conference. Adults need to do a better job of recruiting kids. They need to go to schools, youth groups and after-school programs. They need to go through parents.

It's easier than it seems to get kids involved. Kids want to tell their problems. They love the attention. Adults just forget to listen. Sometimes the most obvious thing to do is the thing you forget.

Overall, the conference had the right idea in mind. They just made it more complicated than it needed to be. All they needed to do was put people in a room and give each a chance to say how the world could be a better place.

Making the world a better place for kids is hard to do without money, and that's where the adults come in. Maybe when they were hanging the signs at the UN that said that every child has the

right to health, nutrition and school they should have read them. We're sure one of them said kids have the right to speak, but there were no kids there to be heard.