



Our Rights, Our Responsibilities 2002 - 2005

UNICEF Partnership



Introduction

In 2003 WAGGGS and UNICEF signed a joint *Memorandum of Understanding* which heralded a closer collaboration within the framework of the WAGGGS “Our Rights, Our Responsibilities” Triennial Theme. The purpose of the new agreement is to instigate a programme of co-operation to take forward the work of this Theme as well as to follow-up and implement UNICEF work, particularly around the *World Fit for Children* campaign and the *Global Movement for Children*. These are explained in some detail within this pack, which also includes more general information on the United Nations and UNICEF.

What is the United Nations?

The United Nations (UN) is an international organization which was founded on October 24th 1945, after World War II. The six principal organs of the United Nations, as outlined in the 1945 UN Charter, are the **General Assembly**, the **Security Council**, the **Economic and Social Council**, the **Trusteeship Council**, the **Secretariat** and the **International Court of Justice**.

The United Nations is an organization of sovereign nations – not a world government. It provides the machinery to help find solutions to disputes or problems, and to deal with virtually any matter of concern to humanity. The UN and its family of organizations work together and individually to protect human rights; promote the protection of the environment; help the advancement of women and the rights of children; and to fight epidemics, famine and poverty. Throughout the world, the UN and its agencies assist refugees and help improve telecommunication; deliver food aid and protect consumers; combat disease and help expand food production; make loans to developing countries and help stabilise financial markets. UN agencies define the standards for safe and efficient transport by air and sea, work to ensure respect for intellectual property rights and co-ordinate allocation of radio frequencies.

To read more about the United Nations, go to: <http://www.un.org>, and about WAGGGS and the United Nations, please go to: <http://www.wagggsworld.org/about/unwork/>

The United Nations and human rights

“Human rights are what reason requires and conscience demands. They are us and we are them. Human rights are rights that any person has as a human being. We are all human beings; we are all deserving of human rights. One cannot be true without the other.” **Kofi Annan**, Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Just over 50 years ago, with the crimes against humanity and human rights violence of the World War II still fresh in their minds, members of the international community came together on 10 December 1948 to adopt a group of principles and standards of behaviour for all people, called the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**. This Declaration describes the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all men and women in all nations, everywhere in the world. It states that the rights to liberty, equality and dignity are the birthright of every person and that the rights to life, liberty and security of person are essential to the enjoyment of all other rights.

Among the civil and political rights recognised by the Declaration are the right to freedom from slavery, from torture, from arbitrary arrest and from interference with family; the right to recognition before the law; the right to a fair trial; the right to marry and have a family; and the right to freedom of thought and peaceful assembly. The economic, social and cultural rights the Declaration recognised include the right to work and the right to equal pay for equal work, the right to education, the right to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being, the right to rest and leisure and the right to participate in the cultural life of communities.

Since 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has become the inspiration for national and international efforts to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms. It set the direction for all efforts in the field of human rights and provided the basic philosophy for the legally binding international instruments that followed, including instruments addressing the rights of ethnic minorities, women's rights and, most recently, children's rights.

To read more about the United Nations and Human rights, you could visit the site of the UN High Commission for Human Rights: <http://www.unhchr.ch/>

What is UNICEF?

Created by the United Nations General Assembly in 1946 to help children after World War II in Europe, UNICEF was first known as the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund. In 1953, UNICEF became a permanent part of the United Nations system, its task being to help children living in poverty in developing countries. Its name was shortened to the United Nations Children's Fund, but it retained the acronym "UNICEF" by which it is known to this day.

UNICEF maintains programmes in 161 countries. There are eight regional offices and 125 country offices world-wide, as well as a research centre in Florence, a supply operation in Copenhagen and offices in Tokyo and Brussels. There are 37 National Committees for UNICEF, who raise funds and spread awareness about the organization's mission and work. UNICEF headquarters are in New York.

UNICEF helps children get the care and stimulation they need in the early years of life and encourages families to educate girls as well as boys. It strives to reduce childhood death and illness and to protect children in the midst of war and natural disaster. UNICEF supports young people, wherever they are, in making informed decisions about their own lives, and strives to build a world in which all children live in dignity and security.

Working with national governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), other United Nations agencies and private-sector partners, UNICEF protects children and their rights by providing services and supplies and by helping shape policy agendas and budgets in the best interests of children.

To read more about the work of UNICEF, go to: <http://www.unicef.org>

Why children's rights?

The human rights of children and the standards to which all governments must aspire in realising these rights for all children, are expressed in one international human rights treaty: the **Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)**. The Convention is the most widely adopted human rights instrument in history – it has been ratified by every country in the world except three – and therefore uniquely places children centre-stage in the pursuit of the universal application of human rights. By ratifying the CRC, national governments have committed themselves to protecting and ensuring children's rights and they have agreed to hold themselves accountable for this commitment before the international community.



The Convention on the Rights of the Child spells out the basic human rights that children everywhere – without discrimination – have: the right to survival; the right to develop to the fullest; the right to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and the right to participate fully in family, cultural and social life. The Convention protects children’s rights by setting standards in health care, education and legal, civil and social services. These standards are benchmarks against which progress can be assessed. States that are party to the Convention are obliged to develop and undertake all actions and policies in the light of the best interests of the child.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the first legally binding international instrument to incorporate the full range of human rights – civil and political rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights. Two Optional Protocols (these are a set of procedures that are added to the CRC as an annex), on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, were also adopted. The Optional Protocols are meant to strengthen the provisions of the Convention in these areas. They entered into force, respectively on 12 February and 18 January 2002.

The underlying values – or “guiding principles” – of the Convention guide the way each right is fulfilled and respected and serve as a constant reference for the implementation and monitoring of children’s rights. The Convention’s four guiding principles are as follows:

- Non-discrimination (articles 2)
- Best interests of the child (article 3)
- Survival and development (article 6)
- Participation (article 12)

To read more about the Convention on the Rights of the Child, you can go to:
<http://www.unicef.org/crc/index.html>

Why do people need to know about their rights?

People who know their rights are better able to claim them. Promoting the Convention on the Rights of the Child and making its necessities widely known are therefore important steps to realising children’s rights. Many organizations can help boost awareness in their own community of the Convention and its aims by:

- Organising informational meetings and distributing materials within the community about the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Working with local churches, schools and community groups to create grass-roots support for the Convention.
- Urging local and national lawmakers to provide education and training on child rights for all those working with children – teachers, medical professionals, social workers, members of the police force and other law enforcement professionals.
- Joining the Global Movement for Children.

Why make a special case for children?

There are strong reasons for making a special case for children’s rights:

- Children are individuals.
- The healthy development of children is crucial to the future well-being of society.
- Children start life as totally dependent beings.
- The actions – or inactions – of government impact children more strongly than any other group in society.
- Children’s views are rarely heard and rarely considered in the political process.
- Many changes in society are having a disproportionate – and often negative – impact on children.
- The costs to society of failing its children are huge.
- The global trend of urbanisation has taken an especially severe toll on children.



What is the Global Movement for Children?

The **Global Movement for Children (GMC)** is a force for change involving each and every one of us. The GMC encourages people from all walks of life, of all ages, and at all levels of society to take responsibility in realising children's rights. It is a call to action to governments, NGOs, community leaders, the media, artists and entertainers, and particularly children and young people – anyone and everyone who is willing to take the time and effort to do something to help children.

The Global Movement for Children is a partnership effort. A group of the world's advocates for children, including WAGGGS, have joined to work together, and with children and young people, to try and ensure that the world's children are given more attention. The GMC is open – anyone can join as long as they are willing and ready to take action for children. What is wanted is that children and young people become the heart of the GMC, and that they help to make it happen.

It will not be enough, however, to change the world *for* children. The start of doing anything about children's rights is to listen to what children have to say and to ensure that we work together with children to tackle these issues – which is why the GMC says it wants to **change the world *with* children**, not *for* children. It is important to listen carefully to what young people have to say and give them every opportunity to speak. It is important to reach out to them and enable them to participate in the decision-making processes that affect their lives.

How can we listen to children and adolescents?

Over the last few years UNICEF has conducted research in 72 countries among children from 9 to 18. Over 40,000 children and young people were consulted. It has been amazing to hear the results of these **opinion polls**, in which children and adolescents were asked what they believe is important. The results are fascinating – particularly what children say about being listened to: 60 per cent of children in Europe and Central Asia felt their opinion was not taken into account by their government, and over half the children in the Latin America-Caribbean region felt unheard at home and in school.

UNICEF's **Voices of Youth**, an rights project on the internet, provides an opportunity for children and young people to learn about global issues, particularly in the light of how they affect children and young people worldwide, share their views with others and look at ways in which they can take action in their own communities. In November 2002 WAGGGS members around the world participated in online discussions about children's rights with other young people.

To share your ideas on Voices of Youth and to read what others have said, go to:
<http://www.unicef.org/voy/>

Another way of gathering children's opinions was a big, international campaign that was started in April 2001 by the Global Movement for Children. The **Say Yes for Children Campaign** is a global pledging campaign to give people everywhere, and especially young people, the chance to pledge their support for ten imperatives for children. The ten imperatives are built on the Convention on the Rights of the Child – from ensuring an education for every girl and boy, combating HIV/AIDS and poverty, to ending discrimination against children in all its forms.

The first step is a very simple action – to go online or sign up on paper, and pledge your support for the ten actions and principles that are needed to improve the lives and protect the rights of children and young people everywhere. Many Member Organizations and individual members of WAGGGS have already pledged their support.

The call to action of Say Yes is also very simple and straightforward: leave no child out, put children first, care for every child, fight HIV/AIDS, stop harming and exploiting children, listen to their opinions, educate every child, protect children from war, protect the earth for children and fight poverty by investing in children.



When you sign the pledge to *Say Yes for Children*, you can also indicate which of the ten actions you think are most urgent in your country. In many countries children took the lead in making *Say Yes* a success – in Moldova the Children’s Parliament gathered pledges; in Uganda the Girl Guides and Boy Scouts worked together with Interact clubs to get the message out; in Jordan university students counted and analysed the pledge forms; in Sri Lanka a thousand young people got together at a peace camp in April 2001 to mobilise around *Say Yes*.

By 2003, more than 95 million people had pledged their support for *Say Yes*. The results of *Say Yes* were compiled and were officially handed over to Nelson Mandela, who presented the results at the **Special Session on Children** which was held by the United Nations General Assembly in New York 8-10 May 2002.

To read more on the Global Movement on Children, check out their web site on:
<http://www.gmfc.org/>

To find out more about the *Say Yes* campaign, you can go to: http://www.gmfc.org/en/sayyes_html

What was so special about the Special Session on Children?

Every year the UN General Assembly meets on a regular basis to discuss various issues. Sometimes these meetings are called “Special Session”. Between the time the UN was founded and 2002 there had been twenty Special Sessions – on social development, women and disarmament, on HIV/AIDS, etc. In May 2002 the United Nations held its first Special Session on Children. The session was attended by nearly 70 Heads of State and Government and other high-level government participants, 250 parliamentarians from 75 countries, almost 2,000 delegates from non-governmental organizations, hundreds of journalists and dozens of business leaders and celebrities. What made this Special Session special was the participation of around 600 children from more than 154 countries. Young delegates representing WAGGGS attended the event and spoke out about issues affecting girls and young women.

Three days prior to the Special Session, more than 400 of these children gathered in a **Children’s Forum**. They agreed on key actions that need to be taken in the areas of health, education, child exploitation, children and armed conflict, HIV/AIDS, poverty, the environment and child participation. They came up with a message to the Special Session, called “**A World Fit for Us**”, which was presented by two young delegates to the opening ceremony of the Special Session on 8 May. It was the first time in the UN’s history that children formally addressed the General Assembly on behalf of children.

Participants at the Special Session, including children, discussed what progress had been made during the ten years or so since the World Summit on Children, another big meeting on children, was held in 1990. Governments reviewed what had been achieved and which goals on improving children’s lives had not been met since 1990. They also decided on what should be done in the next ten years to make a world fit for children.

The discussions resulted in a document that explains the promises governments have made and the actions they will take to help ensure that children’s lives are improved. The document is called, “**A World Fit for Children**” and outlines four key areas in which we need to take action:

- 1 Promoting healthy lives.
- 2 Providing quality education.
- 3 Protecting against abuse, exploitation and violence.
- 4 Combating HIV/AIDS.

To make sure that action is taken and monitored, the governments also agreed that they would try, by the year 2003, to develop national and/or regional plans of action in which they set measurable goals in line with those of a World Fit for Children. These action plans should take into account the best interest of the child and should be based on national laws, religious and ethical values and the different cultural backgrounds of people in each country or region. Governments also agreed that they would report on the progress that they are making in realising these goals to the Committee on the Rights of the Child (a



committee that monitors that countries that have ratified the CRC live up to their promises and commitments) and by providing the same information to UNICEF. UNICEF will then compile all country information and report on this. The Secretary General of the United Nations will also keep the General Assembly informed on a regular basis of the actions that are (or are not) being taken.

Getting involved in creating a 'World Fit for Children':

There are many ways in which children can be involved. The following are some suggestions:

- Contacting their government to learn about its plan of action to meet the goals set out at the Special Session. Finding out how young people can contribute to its development and implementation.
- Making sure other children in the country know about their rights.
- Getting involved in peer counselling and education to help other young people learn about their rights and ways to avoid risky or dangerous behaviours that can lead to HIV/AIDS.
- Launching a campaign to educate the public about the effects of poverty and war on children.
- Advocating for peace through marches, games, theatre and music.
- Getting involved with local and national NGOs that help children and families.
- Taking every opportunity available to get an education.
- Letting the media know about the importance of children's issues and rights.
- Working with governments and organizations to create support for children orphaned or affected by AIDS.

To read more about the Special Session on Children and how children and young people were involved in it, go to: <http://www.unicef.org/specialsession/>

To read "A World Fit for Children", you can go to:

<http://www.unicef.org/specialsession/documentation/documents/A-S27-19-Rev1E-annex.pdf>

How does all this fit in with WAGGGS and the Triennial Theme?

UNICEF shares WAGGGS' special commitment to young people, especially girls and young women. UNICEF has demonstrated a commitment that *"no girl will be left behind as her country attempts to move forward and that every girl will be educated so as to assume her rightful place as an agent in her country's development"*.

UNICEF has pledged to add and concentrate resources, intensify interventions and work closely with national governments and a wide range of partners to reach out-of-school girls. UNICEF is ready to accompany countries and their partner agencies in their commitment to girls' education and bring an intersectoral approach to ensuring robust and sustainable achievement in reducing the gender imbalances in primary and secondary education.

At the same time UNICEF wishes to support and lead a global- and country-level advocacy and communication campaign to raise public expectations, mobilise political action and encourage financial support. UNICEF's concerns about girls' education are urgent. *"Without immediate, focused attention on out-of-school girls, we fear that the world is likely to lose not only this generation of girls but also the next generation of girls and boys – the children of under-educated women – to infant and child mortality and morbidity, illiteracy and under-development."*

UNICEF believes that girls' education is critical because:

- it exerts a strong force for social transformation;
- in many countries, the state of girls' education presents a broad social crisis and a human rights tragedy;
- continued failure perpetuates entrenched inequities.



It is not surprising that UNICEF has shown a special commitment to WAGGGS, since WAGGGS' contribution to providing non-formal education opportunities to girls and young women is significant. This is especially so in countries with a strong son-preference or outright gender discrimination, since here girls are often the last to be enrolled in school and the first to be withdrawn.

The significance of girls' education is identified by UNICEF in the *Say Yes for Children* imperatives. These imperatives also associate closely with the Triennial Theme activity packs and demonstrate broader reasons than education for the link between WAGGGS and UNICEF:

"Say Yes for Children" Imperatives	Our Rights, Our Responsibilities
LEAVE NO CHILD OUT	THE RIGHT TO BE ME
PUT CHILDREN FIRST	ALL PACKS
CARE FOR EVERY CHILD	ALL PACKS
FIGHT HIV/AIDS	THE RIGHT TO BE HAPPY
STOP HARMING AND EXPLOITING CHILDREN	THE RIGHT TO LIVE IN PEACE
LISTEN TO CHILDREN	THE RIGHT TO BE HEARD
EDUCATE EVERY CHILD	THE RIGHT TO LEARN
PROTECT CHILDREN FROM WAR	THE RIGHT TO LIVE IN PEACE
PROTECT THE EARTH FOR CHILDREN	THE RIGHT TO WORK TOGETHER THE RIGHT TO BE HAPPY
FIGHT POVERTY: INVEST IN CHILDREN	THE RIGHT TO WORK TOGETHER THE RIGHT TO BE HAPPY

So how will UNICEF and WAGGGS work together in practice?

UNICEF offices throughout the world are ready to work with WAGGGS to identify and support rights-based approaches to help solve the many complex problems that affect children's lives, such as HIV/AIDS, child labour, malnutrition, lack of access to basic education and armed conflict. Together, it is hoped that our two organizations will reach more young people and especially those most marginalised and exploited and whose rights are often least respected.

We hope that the information provided in this pack and the activities proposed within the Triennial Theme packs are the starting point for deeper understanding, enhanced commitment, joint collaboration and above all a more secure and rewarding future for the children and young people of our world.

***"We cannot waste our precious children.
Not another one, not another day."***

Nelson Mandela and Graca Machel

