“Life’s aspirations come in the guise of children.”

:: RABINDRANATH TAGORE ::

In 2002, the United Nations adopted a resolution called “A World Fit for Children.”

SGI-USA has created this exhibit to illustrate some of the points in the resolution and to create dialogue about the rights of children throughout the world. We hope that people of all ages can learn from this exhibit and from one another. Together we can foster safe, healthy, and happy children—the leaders of tomorrow.
The Rights of Children

"I wish all adults would have a great heart that they will always understand the children."

Cynthia Barreda Vilchez, Age 9, Peru


The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights includes special care and assistance for children.

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) is made a permanent part of the United Nations.

The United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child is adopted.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, the most widely accepted human rights treaty in history, is adopted unanimously by the United Nations General Assembly.

UNICEF sponsors The World Summit for Children, the first global meeting dedicated to improving children’s lives.

The UN Millennium Development Goals specify targets related to children, including achieving universal primary education.

The Special Session of the UN General Assembly on Children is convened to review progress since 1990 and re-energize the global commitment to children’s rights.

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The Covenant of the Rights of the Child contains basic protections for children.

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UNICEF sponsors The World Summit for Children, the first global meeting dedicated to improving children’s lives.

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The Special Session of the UN General Assembly on Children is convened to review progress since 1990 and re-energize the global commitment to children’s rights.
A World Fit for Children

In 2002 the United Nations issued a Millennium Declaration, setting out a blueprint for a better world with a decent standard of living for all.

The Millennium Development goals are to:

• Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
• Achieve universal primary education
• Promote gender equality and empower women
• Reduce child mortality
• Improve maternal health
• Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
• Ensure environmental sustainability
• Develop a global partnership for development

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989, is an international human rights treaty that places children at the center of the world with a universal application of human rights.

The Convention spells out the basic human rights that children everywhere—without discrimination—have: the right to survival; to develop to the fullest; to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and to participate fully in family, cultural and social life.

"Life's aspirations come in the guise of children."

— Rabindranath Tagore

In 2002 more than 7,000 people participated in the Special Session of the UN General Assembly on Children. The nations of the world committed themselves to a series of goals to improve the situation of children and young people.

Some 180 nations adopted the document, "A World Fit for Children."

The new agenda—"and with the world's children, each in its capacity, work and struggle for the next decade. The agenda focused on four key priorities:

• Promoting healthy lives;
• Providing quality education for all;
• Protecting children against abuse, exploitation and violence;
• Combating HIV/AIDS.

The document called upon all of us to join in a global movement to build a world fit for children.
The 2002 United Nations Special Session on Children was unique—the first time children were official delegates to such a session.

More than 400 children and adolescents—representing 154 countries—met before the session in a Children’s Forum. All the participants had been selected through competitions in schools or communities.

The young people took part in decision-making, discussions, media events and celebrations. They discussed ways for children to work with governments and organizations to make the world a better place.

Two children selected by the group presented the statement, “A World Fit for Us,” at the opening of the General Assembly debate, formally addressing the Assembly on behalf of children for the first time in the United Nations’ history.

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The 10 Imperatives for Children

1. Leave no child out
2. Put children first
3. Care for every child
4. Fight HIV/AIDS
5. Stop harming & exploiting children
6. Listen to children
7. Educate every child
8. Protect children from war
9. Protect the earth for children
10. Fight poverty: invest in children

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Child Delegates to UN Special Session

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Vietnamese Boy Loses Hand and Leg

When Pham Van Rot was 14 years old, he walked down to the stream near his house in the village of Quet Thang in Viet Nam to check his family’s fish traps. Rot noticed a strange object in the water. Rot picked it up to look at it more closely and it exploded in his hand. It was a cluster bomb, left in the area by US Navy attacks many years ago.

The bomb took off Rot’s left hand above the wrist and his left leg below the knee. He also had many internal injuries, and his family didn’t expect him to live. An international charity provided funds for Rot to be treated at a local hospital, and will make sure that he gets the treatment he needs, and a new hand and leg.

Rot’s family is very poor, and though he will have treatment and artificial limbs, it will take a lot of courage and perseverance for him to succeed in his new life.

Vietnamese

"Whole groups of children are being denied a future because of the color of their skin, their physical/intellectual characteristics, their ancestry and their gender."

-- Rehka Thapar --

The Numbers

- 90 percent of domestic workers, the largest group of child workers in the world, are girls between 12 and 17 years old.
- There are between 120 million and 150 million children and young people with disabilities in the world. It is estimated that less than 2 percent of them go to school.
- In Japan, by law, children born out of wedlock only inherit half of what children born to married couples receive.
- In Bulgaria, 42% of the Roma, a minority subjected to racism, prejudice and stigmatization, have no completed basic education. In Greece, more than 80% of Roma children are not enrolled in school.

Every girl and boy is born free and equal, with dignity and rights. All forms of discrimination affecting children must end.

Children are discriminated against in large and small ways all over the world. Basic efforts on behalf of children—in education, health care, and ending child poverty—often come last. In many parts of the world, girls are particular targets of discrimination. Children with special needs require special services.

What can you do to ensure the fair and equal treatment of children in your community?

1.

"Leave No Child Out"

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Gabriela Azurduy Arrieta, 13, from Bolivia, was one of two delegates to the 2002 United Nations Special Session on Children selected to deliver a message to the General Assembly. It was the first time that children had addressed a formal session of the United Nations.

"We are children whose voices are not being heard: it is time we are taken into account," Gabriela said. "We are united by our struggle to make the world a better place for all. You call us the future, but we are also the present."

Children all over the world, despite many difficulties, are taking charge of their own lives, creating networks, and influencing policy.

**The Numbers**

- At the UN Special Session on Children in 2000 more than 400 children from 154 countries attended the Children’s Forum, where they explored ways to expand children’s rights.
- Voices of Youth, a UNICEF sponsored Internet discussion site, has reached thousands of young people in more than 180 countries.
- Almost half of Iraq’s total population is children under 18. The war in Iraq puts children at particular risk. UNICEF’s key priorities in Iraq are the recovery of basic health services and the immediate opening of classrooms.

**Write a children’s rights slogan and submit it to the United Nations**

It is all of our responsibility—from governments to children themselves—to ensure that children’s rights are respected.

**Adults** must ensure that children in every area are able to access the services they need: health care, education, food, shelter, protection. Children’s needs are often the last considered—they are the last to receive attention from the public. The voices of children are often lost in the shuffle. Children have a life of their own.

**What are you doing to ensure that children’s rights are respected and that children are heard in your community?**

When I approach a child, he inspires in me two sentiments: tenderness for what he is, and respect for what he may become.”

—Louis Pasteur

Put Children First

**2 Kid Power Everywhere**

BOLIVIA

**La Paz**

**Sucre**

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**Adolescence: A Human Right**

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Ryan Hreljac lives in Canada. He was 6 years old when his teacher told his class about people in Africa who had a hard time getting clean water and access to wells. Without clean water, people, especially children, can get sick and sometimes die.

Ryan asked his parents for extra chores so that he could earn money to dig wells in Africa. Soon he discovered that one well cost $2,000, but he wasn’t discouraged. He began to make speeches and help to raise even more and more money. His organization, Ryan’s Well, eventually helped to raise nearly a million dollars.

Ryan says, “I have learned that every child needs certain things if they are going to be healthy and happy no matter where they live. Kids need clean water and sanitation, they need enough food to eat, they need to be able to go to school, and they need a chance to play and have fun. That way, they can help out in the world too.”
People who live in wealthy nations often don’t know about the horrifying impact that HIV/AIDS is having throughout the world. The statistics listed here are only a small indication of the worldwide effects of this scourge. Complicated by misinformation and discrimination, AIDS impacts children everywhere.

While there are now many drugs on the market that effectively control AIDS, few of these are available or affordable in poor countries. Africa has 70 percent of the adults, and 80 percent of the children in the world who are living with HIV/AIDS, but the disease is also out of control in many other parts of the world. A UN report says “low visibility of the disease is no guarantee that it is not spreading.”

- Do the children in your life have accurate information on how AIDS is transmitted?

"My friend with AIDS is still my friend."

Xolani Nkosi was born with HIV in South Africa, where more than 70,000 children are born HIV-positive every year. Gail Johnson, a volunteer at an AIDS center, fell in love with the wide-eyed two year old Zulu boy. She arranged to become his foster mother.

When Johnson tried to send Nkosi to primary school, some parents opposed his enrollment because he was HIV-positive. Johnson fought against his disease and for other children. He became a national figure in the campaign to help people to understand AIDS. In July 2000 Nkosi addressed delegates at the international AIDS conference in Durban. "Please help people with AIDS," he said. "Support them, love them, care for them."

Nkosi fought against his disease and for other children. He became a national hero in the campaign to help people to understand AIDS. In July 2000 Nkosi addressed delegates at the international AIDS conference in Durban. "Please help people with AIDS," he said. "Support them, love them, care for them."

Nkosi died on June 1, 2001. He was 12 years old, and a national hero.
IMPERATIVE NUMBER FIVE

STOP HARMING & EXPLOITING CHILDREN

There are so many ways that children are harmed and exploited throughout the world that it can seem overwhelming. All around the world, children are being abused and neglected. Yet there is something you can do to help, often in your own community. Even seemingly small steps—offering child care for a stressed-out friend or volunteering in a youth group—can have big results.

Violence and abuse must be stopped now. The sexual and economic exploitation of children must end.

- Look for the Rugmark label on rugs. It certifies that child labor was not used in the manufacture of the carpet.
- If you believe or suspect a child has been abused, neglected, or exploited, contact the appropriate government or agency right away.

THE NUMBERS

- More than 1 million children worldwide are being detained as a result of being in conflict with the law.
- 266 million children work, with about 180 million engaged in the worst forms of child labor.
- Two million children are exploited through prostitution and pornography.
- Forty million children below the age of 15 suffer from abuse and neglect.

Iqbal's Story

When Iqbal was four years old, he went to work in a filthy carpet factory in Pakistan. As he grew older, he was chained to a loom and worked twelve hours a day, six days a week.

In 1993, when Iqbal was ten years old, he went to a meeting sponsored by the Bonded Labor Liberation Front. There he learned that children had rights. He spoke about his suffering, and his speech was printed in the local paper.

Iqbal went to school and became a leader. He traveled and gave speeches. He taught other children about their rights, and helped to free many thousands of children from bonded labor.

His dream was to grow up to become a lawyer. But his activities made him a target of the carpet industry. In 1995, when he was twelve years old, Iqbal was assassinated while riding his bike.

We are guilty of many errors and many faults, but our worst crime is abandoning our children... To them we cannot answer "tomorrow." Their name is "today."

- Gabriel Mistral

PAKISTAN

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LISTEN TO CHILDREN

Respect the rights of children and young people to express themselves and to participate in making the decisions that affect them.

Today's children are the leaders and citizens of tomorrow. Yet children's voices are missing from most of the bodies that make decisions that affect their lives. It is critical that children's views be sought out and considered, from the highest levels of government to the daily functions of family life.

Listening is only one step; adults should also take action based on children's input.

- Are there children on the governing councils of the schools, churches, and other organizations with which you are involved?
- How much do children participate in your family's decisions, large and small?

"The first duty of love is to listen."
- Paul Tillich

UNICEF supports 23 weekly programs on Radio Mozambique, in 12 local languages, all written and produced by 27 children. Program topics range from children's rights to HIV/AIDS.

In Madagascar in 2004, 90 school children presented an action plan to the National Assembly. One student said that the experience "made me forget that I am poor because... at least someone has listened to me."

In a 2001 UNICEF survey, adolescents said that they want to participate in decision-making processes concerning their lives. 86.7% of adolescent boys and 89.6% of adolescent girls want more say in family decision-making.

Jennifer Jadwero, a 14-year-old Kenyan girl, addressed the UN Special Session on Children in 2002. She talked about the many different kinds of discrimination against girls.

Jennifer described how she started a club in her school. She asked both boys and girls to work together against gender-based violence.

Jennifer said, "If one child is told, and that child tells another child, the message can be spread rapidly."

Jennifer was invited to speak at a conference on violence against women, and has now helped to start clubs around the world.

"The Numbers"

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Every child—all girls and boys—must be allowed to learn. Children are born eager to learn. All too often they do not have access to education. Today, more than 130 million school-age children worldwide, mostly girls, are not going to school and millions more are receiving poor quality education.

A quality, basic education is every child’s fundamental right. Children from families without money are entitled to an education. Girls are entitled to an education. So are children who must work, children of ethnic minorities, children with disabilities, and children affected by violence, conflict or HIV/AIDS.

More than 15 percent of poor girls between seven and 17 have never been to school of any kind.

Infants born to mothers with no formal education are twice as likely to die before their first birthday than are babies born to mothers with primary school education.

One million children and adolescents aged 12 to 17 are still unable to read and write. More than 121 million children never see the inside of a classroom.

Makka Goes to School

"Education is not filling a bucket but lighting a fire." — William Butler Yeats

Makka Adoum Ounou is an 11-year-old girl. She and her mother escaped from war in the Sudan, and now live in a crowded refugee camp in Chad. More than 8,200 Sudanese refugees, the majority women and children, live here in a hot desert. But the children have classrooms made of wood frames and plastic sheets. They sit on the bare floor using school supplies donated by UNICEF. Nobody complains—they are happy to be able to go to school.

"For Makka, school is very important. "My mother did not go to school," she says. "She was going after the cattle. Now with these terrible events, she has lost her cattle and she has nothing left. If she had been to school, she would not have lost her knowledge. That’s why I want to go to school and learn how to read and write."

Do you support or volunteer in your local schools?

How are you helping your school-age children to enjoy their school years and stay in school?
Millions of children are witnesses, combatants, or victims of warfare every year. Hundreds of thousands lose parents or other family members. Even when they are not directly involved, children suffer from the effects of war.

After the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, a clinical psychologist said, "Among the symptoms manifested by children are nightmares, difficulty in concentrating, depression and a sense of hopelessness about the future." Everywhere in the world, children worry about war, conflict and violence.

- Do you talk to the children in your life about their fears?

At any one time, 300,000 children under the age of 18 are serving as child soldiers.

Since 1990, more than a million children have been killed in wars, 6 million have been seriously injured and more than 22 million have been driven from their homes.

In Cambodia children account for up to 30% of landmine casualties. In Somalia more than 50% of landmine victims are children.

Sixteen of the world's 20 poorest countries have suffered a major civil war in the past 15 years.

Zlata Filipovic was 11 years old when civil war began in Bosnia. She kept a diary from 1991 to 1993.

Zlata wrote about her life in a city without food, electricity or water, and wrote of the death of her best friend in a bomb attack. One day she wrote, "War has crossed out the day and replaced it with horror, and now horrors are unfolding instead of days."

"It looks to me," she wrote, "as though these politics mean hills, trees and Muslims. But they are all people. They are all the same."

Zlata and her family escaped to safety in Paris in 1992. Her diary has been published in 20 languages. Zlata and her parents started a charity to help the victims of the Bosnian war, especially the children of Sarajevo.

"No child should experience the horrors of armed conflict."

"When will our consciences grow so tender that we will act to prevent human misery rather than avenge it?"

- Eleanor Roosevelt
PROTECT THE EARTH FOR CHILDREN

IMPERATIVE NUMBER NINE

Nearly two million children every year die from waterborne diseases. Another two million die of acute respiratory infections resulting from air pollution.

One-third of global disease can be attributed to environmental risk factors. Over 40% of diseases caused by environmental factors affect children under five years of age.

In a UNICEF survey, 26% of children polled in Europe and Asia would like their country to be a place in which there is no pollution. Environmental issues such as poor lighting and high levels of traffic were cited by 20 per cent of European and Central Asian children who feel unsafe in their neighborhoods.

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Children are the primary victims of many of the effects of the degradation of the natural environment. They are also those who will have to deal with every problem that we do not solve.

Do you and your children recycle, conserve energy, and water, use public transportation, walk or ride your bike? What other earth-friendly things can you do?

Air and water pollution, overpopulation, global warming, the disposal of hazardous waste, acid rain and the destruction of the rainforest threaten us all.

There is no such thing as a local problem—environmental issues affect everyone. Interconnections are evident in the natural world. We must face environmental issues and look for solutions.

“We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.”

:: Native American Proverb ::

Safeguard the environment at global, national and local levels.

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Verner Wilson, an Alaska Yup’ik Native, was 15 years old when he attended a meeting sponsored by the National Wildlife Fund. The meeting inspired him to become an environmental activist. He is also determined to preserve his culture.

Verner is soft-spoken, but passionate. He makes speeches, writes newspaper columns and letters, and has started an environmental youth group in his hometown, a small, coastal community where fishing is a way of life. Verner cares deeply about issues such as pollution, subsistence foods, and traditional lifeways. He sees these issues as threatening his Native way of life.

Verner was nominated for a statewide “Spirit of Youth” award for his efforts.

Children are the primary victims of many of the effects of the degradation of the natural environment. They will also be the ones to deal with every problem that we do not solve.

Do you and your children recycle, conserve energy and water, use public transportation, walk or ride your bike? What other earth-friendly things can you do?

Air and water pollution, overpopulation, global warming, the disposal of hazardous waste, acid rain and the destruction of the rainforest threaten us all.

There is no such thing as a local problem—environmental issues affect everyone. Interconnections are evident in the natural world. We must face environmental issues and look for solutions.

“We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.”

:: Native American Proverb ::

Safeguard the environment at global, national and local levels.

THE NUMBERS

Nearly two million children every year die from waterborne diseases. Another two million die of acute respiratory infections resulting from air pollution.

One-third of global disease can be attributed to environmental risk factors. Over 40% of diseases caused by environmental factors affect children under five years of age.

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The Numbers

- A child born today in the developing world has a 4 out of 10 chance of living in extreme poverty.
- Malnutrition in children under two causes permanent and irreversible damage on the body and mind. Babies who are poor and malnourished are more likely to contract respiratory infections, diarrhoea, and measles.
- Less than 56% of the population in 18 countries uses improved drinking water sources. Children are particularly susceptible to water-borne diseases.

“Vanessa had never been on an airplane before she and her group, from CARE Corps Teens, took off for a rural valley outside Lima, Peru. Vanessa helped to harvest artichokes, tried weaving on a wooden loom, and taught children about hand washing and recycling. She and her friends worked on farms and helped to build clean water systems for their homes.”

Vanessa said, “It’s given me a new respect for hardworking people.”

Invest in services that benefit the poorest children and their families.

**Children** are the chief victims of poverty all over the world. Even in wealthy countries poor children lack basic health and educational resources. In some countries, many children walk the streets, begging, selling goods—or themselves.

- **Do you donate** time or money to a local charity that provides services to poor children?
- **Can you influence** policy in your community?

American Teens Work with Children in Peru

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"WE WILL LEAD A GLOBAL MOVEMENT FOR CHILDREN THAT CREATES AN UNSTOPPABLE MOMENTUM FOR CHANGE..."


It is the obligation of every person to ensure that all children are raised in what the United Nations has called the “spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, and equality.”

When each of us takes responsibility to create change, our efforts are like ripples in a pond that can radiate out to the whole world.

What can you do?