

UNICEF Canada



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UNICEF Canada Marks 20th Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

20 years of progress for children's rights, but more work still to be done

TORONTO, ONTARIO--(Marketwire - Nov. 19, 2009) - November 20 marks the twentieth anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and people will celebrate this historic milestone for children's rights with events across Canada and around the world. But even as we recognize what has been accomplished for children over the past two decades, UNICEF's **State of the World's Children** report reminds us that much work remains to ensure that every child in every country has every chance to survive and thrive.

Adopted by the United Nations on November 20, 1989, the Convention on Rights of the Child is the first and farthest-reaching legally binding international instrument designed to provide for and protect the rights children the world over.

"The twentieth anniversary of the Convention is a time to celebrate two decades of significant progress for children," said UNICEF Canada President and CEO Nigel Fisher. "But we must not be complacent. The real test of our commitment to children's rights is not how well the majority is doing, but how well the most vulnerable children—those marginalized by poverty, gender, ethnicity, geography, and ability—are faring and there we have much more work to do."

Progress for children

The Convention has supported significant progress for children over the past 20 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.

In Canada, we celebrate a range of improvements for children among them the fact that today most provinces have independent advocates for children. Our legal framework to protect children from exploitation is among the strongest in the world.

Much more to be done

Yet, despite these signs progress, there is much more to be done.

Globally, as the special edition of UNICEF's **State of the World's Children** report released today shows, millions of children are still dying from preventable and treatable illnesses. An alarming number of children still do not receive an education. Far too many have no protection from violence and abuse. And for many, childhood still means long hours of tedious, often dangerous work rather than hours of play.

In Canada, despite our relative wealth, about one in nine children live in poverty. Too many children are in the child welfare and justice systems and too few receive adequate mental health care. Rates on almost every indicator of wellbeing show that our Aboriginal children fare worse than Canada's children overall.

Our work for the next twenty years must be to confront the unfinished work to ensure the rights of all children everywhere are fulfilled.

UNICEF Canada along with many organizations and citizens is calling for a national Children's Commissioner able to call attention to children's best interests, to bring together information and analysis on status of our nation's children and to ensure that when legislation, policy and budgeting are developed, regular consideration is given to their impact on children.

On the international stage, as Canada prepares to host the G8 and G20 meetings next year, Canada can champion a G8 commitment to further invest in children's well-being. It would be an historic and forward-looking legacy.

UNICEF Canada is marking the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child with partners and advocates at many events across the country including educational forums, museum exhibitions and special legislative sessions.

"Lullaby, The UNICEF Anthem"

UNICEF Canada Ambassador and world renowned composer Steve Barakatt has dedicated an original composition to the world's children to mark the 20th Anniversary of the Convention. The anthem was played in space at the international space station, thanks to the support of the European Space Agency (ESA) and NASA and ESA astronaut and UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador Frank De Winne.

"Lullaby, The UNICEF Anthem" music video will be shown at the United Nations headquarters in New York City as part of a special celebration of the Convention for the international community on November 20. It will also be performed by many orchestras around the world and orchestras in British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec.

About the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The Convention on the Rights of the Child represents one of the most significant milestones in an historic effort to achieve a world fit for children. It codifies into a binding treaty of international law principles which Member States of the United Nations agreed to be universal, for all children, in all countries and cultures, at all times and without exception, simply through the fact of their being born into the human family. Since its adoption by the United Nations, this treaty has been ratified by almost every country in the world. It has inspired changes in laws to better protect children, altered the way that international organizations see their work for children, and supported an agenda to better protect children in situations of armed conflict.

About UNICEF

UNICEF is on the ground in over 150 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and HIV and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments.

Attention editors and broadcasters:

Multimedia packages developed for the 20th anniversary of the Convention, including photos and b-roll as well as "Lullaby, The UNICEF Anthem" and video of the anthem at the International Space Station are available at www.thenewsmarket.com/unicef.

The anthem is also available on Youtube:

<http://www.youtube.com/unicefcanada#p/a/u/0/vza57EVpta8>

See the anthem at the international space station at:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/unicef#p/u/1/Vfo7uoFvmIA>

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