

Your Excellencies, distinguished child delegates, young people, international organisations, and governmental and non-governmental agencies, I and my organisation, Plan International are highly honoured to have been chosen to address this august body on behalf of the NGOs around the world. I wish therefore to start by thanking all those who have made it possible for me to be here.

So here we are 5 years on from the WFFC declaration. Gathered here to celebrate an anniversary and ask ourselves how far we have come in attaining those noble goals.

If we are to reach the objectives we have set for ourselves, then it is vital that we recognize both the successes and failures of our past efforts. Only by being honest with ourselves can we hope to overcome the remaining obstacles that stand in the way of a better life for all the world's children.

The "World Fit for Children" declaration as we know, rightly puts tackling poverty and improving access to services at the heart of our efforts. The strong future focused agenda highlighted four key priorities: promoting healthy lives; providing quality education for all; protecting children against abuse, exploitation and violence; and combating HIV/AIDS.

And it called on a wide range of actors, and especially children themselves, to play active roles, in achieving these targets. But how far have we really come in realising those goals since we first promised to "Say Yes to Children" five years ago?

There are of course some shining examples of progress. For the first time in the modern era, the number of children who die before their fifth birthday has fallen below 10 million. In East Asia the proportion of children under five who go hungry has been cut by almost two-thirds.

More children than ever before are completing primary education. Nineteen out of every twenty primary school-age children in North Africa and Latin America are enrolled at school and millions more in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia now receive an education - children who would previously have never seen the inside of a classroom.

However, for every significant step forward there are similar and significant steps backward. In countries where there is progress in a particular area, there is dismal failure in another. And inequality and inconsistency continues to hinder progress in EVERY country.

The hard fact is that progress in many areas is not accelerating but slowing. The most striking declines in child mortality took place in the years between 1960 and 1990 – before our current targets were even on the agenda. Over these three decades, the number of child deaths fell by 2.5 per cent per year. Since 1990, the average annual fall has been just 1.1 per cent.

Even where we are doing better, progress is often insufficient to realise our targets. Since 1999, the proportion of sub-Saharan African children in primary schools has risen from just over fifty per cent to seventy per cent. Impressive, but not nearly enough if we are to reach our goal of universal primary education by 2015. Despite that promise of universal access, there are still 72 million children for whom primary education remains a distant dream. And as for early childhood care and development it is too often an afterthought despite being critical to children's chances of success at school. We all know the evidence shows that investment during a child's early years delivers a much greater return than money spent later.

Globally, four thousand children die every day as a result of dirty water and poor sanitation. One, that's one, in 20 children in sub-Saharan Africa sleeps under an insecticide-treated bed net. And every minute a child dies from an AIDS related illness.

These statistics show the scale of the challenge still facing us. But they do not tell the whole story. I was recently in Cairo, where the African Union was reviewing its progress towards an "Africa Fit for Children" During this meeting, Plan presented the views of 1,000 children in 30 countries across the continent. Their verdict was stark and straight to the point: we adults have not kept our promises nor have we sought their expertise and opinion on what we have been doing for them. In short – we are failing them.

Above all, they said, we are failing those children who most need our help. While appreciating that some progress has been made, they deplored the increasing divide between children in urban and rural areas. While urban children were on the whole relatively positive that there had been some improvement in their lives. Rural children talked of being "left behind", of suffering poorer health and education services as well as lower incomes. They spoke of poor access to immunization programmes, the high cost of food due to inflation; and the mismanagement and poor distribution of preventive and curative resources like impregnated nets and drugs.

The children we talked to complained of growing inequality. While private schools improve, the quality of state education is falling; a result of the poverty in their communities, insufficient school infrastructure and the poor quality education staff. This is where the quality of education matters, not just the quantity as measured by the MDGs and many of our other indicators. Education for all will prove a hollow victory if pupil numbers rise and standards fall.

Children complained that marginalised groups are being left even further behind. Those living with disabilities often miss out completely on access to education and life-saving services.

These children's views are supported by the statistics. While more than four in five urban children receive a primary education, almost one in three rural children miss out on school altogether. Poorer children in developing countries are more than twice as likely to die before they are five than those from wealthier families.

The uncomfortable truth is the hardest part is yet to come. We all face a new threat, and children in particular. Unchecked, Climate change has the potential to turn the development clock back thirty years by increasing children's vulnerability to natural disasters, disease, and famine. And as the planet warms conflicts will rise over increasingly scarce resources - posing even more threats to children. And as always it is the poorest and the most vulnerable that will suffer most.

To achieve a world fit for all children we need to improve the lives of those who are hardest to reach; girls, children in rural areas, young people in war zones and those with disabilities. This will require all of us to leave our comfort zones. We need to recognise that helping the hardest to reach is expensive, but sustainable development requires a sustained and consistent commitment to make those resources available. Governments owe it to themselves and their children to rise to this challenge.

In today's globalised world, no country can afford to waste the talent and resources that their young populations possess. Those who do will be left behind as the rest of the world streaks ahead.

Economic gains alone will not deliver a world truly fit for children. It requires more than that. It demands that children's rights are not only respected but promoted by us all; governments, international organisations, NGOs and communities.

It is 18 years since the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The early years and adolescence of the UNCRC have seen governments create systems that promote children's best interests. Legislation has been passed to protect children from sexual exploitation, trafficking and abuse. But again legislation alone is not enough; in some countries what is missing is not the systems or laws, but the implementation and the will to implement. We need sustained and consistent political will resulting in real action and practical steps.

Throughout the world millions of children are being physically and emotionally abused by those who are charged with their care and duty bound to protect them. Less than 10 per cent of 193 countries worldwide have declared a total ban on corporal punishment and 117 countries and dependent territories still allow children to be beaten at school.

We know that in spite of our promise to protect, each year, 223 million children suffer forced sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual violence, up to 140 million girls and women undergo some form of female genital mutilation, 126 million children are involved in the most hazardous forms of child labour, and 1.2 million children are victims of trafficking. And each year 53,000 children are murdered

Too many countries have failed to introduce even the most basic laws to protect children from violence in school and at home. And even in countries that have introduced legislation, those laws are too often not enforced. There are no more excuses for failing to protect children from violence. Enough is enough; children have the right to Learn without Fear.

I know many development organisations already have violence against children as their top priority. Plan is no exception. Next year, following on from the success of our campaign to promote universal birth registration, we will launch our second global campaign. **Learn Without Fear** - will target all forms of violence in school.

But we, the NGO community, can't act alone we need nations to come with us. Governments must outlaw all forms of violence against children and make schools safe places to learn, free from physical and sexual violence, bullying and harassment. They must safeguard children at home by putting in place comprehensive protection systems that prevent abuse and support children and families. And most of all – they must rigorously and consistently enforce them. And we will support them every step of the way.

At eighteen, it is time for the UNCRC to come of age, and for us, the world's adults to live up to our responsibilities to children. That means attaching as much importance to children's rights as we currently do to the MDGs.

The whole world agreed to do just that. But they have still not delivered. That is why we welcome the recent announcement of a UN special representative to hold to account countries that fail to meet their legal and moral obligations to promote the rights of children.

“He or she must be a well-respected, senior international figure, independent of existing agencies ready to provide real leadership and stand-up to all those failing to protect children.” And he or she must be given the authority, resources, backing and teeth to fulfil the role.

Your Excellencies, distinguished delegates, It is time we listened to the people we claim to represent. As Linda Yohannes, an eloquent young activist said in Cairo. No more resolutions we want action and we children are part of the solution.

We have come a long way in our quest to make the world a truly better place for our children but we still have a very long way to go. To achieve our goals and ensure no child is left behind we need to put in place mechanisms, strategies, and the political will to accelerate action that will ensure in an

integrated way the survival, development, protection and participation of all children. This requires strategic partnerships and alliances between governments, civil society, the private sector, the media and the parents and children themselves.

I call on all the governments represented here to live up to the promise you made five years ago and lead “a global movement for children that creates an unstoppable momentum for change.” You can rely on the support of NGOs and wider civil society in helping to overcome the barriers that stand in our way. It is critical that in doing so we reflect seriously about what it is we have so far accomplished, but more importantly what we can have achieve if we listen to children and work with them instead of for them.

Our call, your Excellencies, distinguished delegates of children, and fellow development workers in government and civil society, is that for a world truly fit for children we need to listen to what the children have told us and work with them in ensuring their recommendations are realised. If we are going to jumpstart the next generation we need sustained and consistent commitment. The challenge before us is too great for any one government, organisation or agency – it will take real participation, real political will and real strategic alliances at every level. We can't solve the entire problem without including everybody. We must act now before our legacy to the next generation becomes a series of broken promises. I thank you all for your attention.