

**STATEMENT BY CAROL BELLAMY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
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PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ON
UN REFORM: WORKING FOR CHILDREN**

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It is a pleasure to join you today to address the issue of UN reform and, in particular, making it work for children.

The issue we are dealing with is one literally of life and death. As we reported in this year's *State of the World's Children*, half of all children in the world today suffer from some form of extreme deprivation. Whether it is lack of clean water, lack of health care, lack of schooling, or lack of protection; whether it is displacement in war, exploitation due to economic desperation, or the losses caused by HIV/AIDS, more than one billion children are today robbed of their childhood.

Three major underlying forces today disrupt these childhoods: poverty, conflict and HIV/AIDS.

Poverty means one child in three has no access to clean water, sanitation or basic health care;

Conflict has occurred in 59 countries since 1990 with 55 of these having been civil in nature. Wars within countries have meant that most casualties have been non-combatants; nearly half of those killed since 1990 have been children; and

AIDS has orphaned more than 15 million children – with millions more affected by the deaths of teachers and other key adults in their lives.

These sad statistics are not the result of some natural calamity. They are not conditions that are somehow pre-ordained or beyond our control as societies.

Deprivation of services, conflict, and the spread of AIDS are all related. Poor allocation of national resources over time often leads to internal conflict. Conflict spreads AIDS more readily, and causes even greater deprivations. Disrupted childhoods lead to another generation of adults who fail to reach their full potential, and the vicious cycle of inter-generational poverty continues.

Fundamentally, we are looking at a failure in leadership. The continuation of these threats to childhood is the result of deliberate choices made by governments and others in positions of power. Poverty does not persist because it is the natural order. War does not emerge spontaneously. HIV does not spread through the air. We make choices on priorities, choices on how we allocate resources and on how often we consider children – these are the moments that shape the future.

Although poverty, conflict and AIDS may often seem intractable, the fact is that they can be curtailed and stopped. Once we decide in favour of children, we can accomplish nearly anything.

It has been 15 years since the till then largest gathering of heads of state and government met for the first time ever to discuss children, 15 years since the Convention on the Rights of the Child set out a basic, universal standard for a healthy, protected, decent childhood for every human being. It has been almost five years since the world adopted the Millennium Declaration that put children at the core of the development agenda, dedicating six of the eight MDGs to their well-being. Progress has been made towards these standards and targets, there is no question. Yet with half of all children still deprived of childhood, we are clearly and massively failing to meet our commitments.

I am pleased that the organization I have had the privilege of leading for the past ten years, UNICEF, and the entire UN system have acted decisively in recent years to improve the way in which we address the challenges I have just enumerated. And the reforms in the UN system have been part of a larger paradigm shift in which all development partners at country level are working more closely together.

Although now somewhat obscured by a recent and unfortunate focus on scandal and sensationalism, the United Nations system has gone, and continues to go, through a process of internal reform and governance changes that is making us a more effective institution for addressing the threats facing the children of the world.

As with all major innovations, we are going through changes in both process and culture. We have the mechanics of reform initiated by the Secretary-General and driven by General Assembly resolutions. There has been dramatic progress in this area over the last few years. We have seen the creation of a single UN system wide development ethic, embodied in the UN Development Group. We have seen the coming together of UN humanitarian agencies in the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs and, joined by NGOs, in the Inter-Agency Steering Committee, to offer a collective response in crisis situations. We have seen the closer integration of development, humanitarian, human rights and political actors in complex emergencies and in the prevention of armed conflict.

We have seen the creation of framework instruments at the country level – the World Bank and IMF Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) and the UN's Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAF). We have seen the focus of the world community on poverty eradication and the Millennium Development Goals. We have seen the recognition of the leading role played by governments of developing countries and their need for appropriate capacities; the increasing role of civil society; recognition of the importance of the private sector in many areas of endeavour.

Monterrey gave us a pledge of new resources – now being realized in fact, as well as the acceptance of new instruments and the concept of partnership with obligations upon both recipients and donors.

We also have the changes proposed by the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change. The Panel has proposed an enlargement of the Security Council and revision of the criteria for membership; a greater consideration of conflict prevention issues in the design of development programmes; as well as the consideration - in a more integrated manner - of the issues of crisis, conflict and development.

The Security Council is already addressing issues such as HIV/AIDS, children in armed conflict, the effect of armed conflict on women and civilians in general, the role of the private sector in conflict, as well as calling for the Secretary-General to “name and shame” violators of child rights in armed conflict situations.

Soon the Secretary-General will report on the implementation of the Millennium Declaration and, in particular, the Millennium Development Goals, followed by a Summit level review of achievements over the last five years.

Within this broad sweep of change and revival, we see an extraordinary opportunity for the world community to achieve unprecedented progress for children. We in UNICEF and the UN System have changed dramatically the way we operate and we will continue to do so. But we cannot act alone and now need the support of governments and others to complete the job at hand.

We need the support of governments attending the Millennium Review to reaffirm the Millennium Development Goals. But, we need more than a Summit that will review and reaffirm a report. We need action and a commitment to sustained future action.

This will mean resources. While the MDGs are better funded than any other initiative of recent times, while developing countries have committed additional funds and ODA is rising again after 20 years of steady decline - we have estimated that supporting all low-income countries in filling their MDG financing gap would require donors to double today's ODA to GNP ratio for the period up to 2015. This global level of 0.5 percent of GNP is “doable”, is well below agreed targets and has already been accomplished by an increasing number of donors.

This will also mean action on a group of Quick Win actions - those identified in the Report of the Millennium Project team led by Professor Jeffrey Sachs; the 16 life-saving steps identified by The Lancet public health panel. Among these key actions are free mass distribution of bed nets and anti-malarials, ending user fees for primary schools, expansion of school meals programmes, universal tetanus vaccination and others. In development as in all other endeavours - success breeds success. Quick wins can serve as entry points for on-going sustainable development.

We need more emphasis on conflict prevention and transition - always less costly than crisis response and certainly less destructive of human lives and property. To be effective, we also need to recognize that most existing conflict prevention mechanisms developed over the years assume conflict between states, while most conflict today is within states, and to make appropriate adjustments.

For the first time in history we have the practical means, the resources and the institutions to end extreme poverty; we have the political and the operational frameworks in place. All that is needed is action which will follow the exercise of political will – a *sine qua non*. This will require all of us – governments at all levels, civil society, private sector, UN system, Bretton Woods institutions, to work even more closely together. The stakes are enormous. Tens of millions of lives can be saved. Billions more people can enjoy the benefits of the rapidly growing global economy.

Thank you.