

A YOUNG PERSON'S GUIDE TO: THE UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL SESSION ON CHILDREN

You are about to read a paper that will tell you more about the United Nations Special Session on Children.

This guide has been developed so that you can have a clear picture of what will take place in New York City on May 8-10th, 2002. You will learn about all the following information:



- What is the United Nations Special Session on Children?
- Events that led to the United Nations Special Session on Children.
- Details about what is happening at the Special Session.
- Information about documents being discussed at the Special Session.
- And much more.



Before you get started there are a few words and some information you should know about:

- **The United Nations:** Often referred to as the "UN" for short, it was created after the Second World War. It provides a place for all the countries of the world to discuss problems and deal with issues that affect them all. It has a key role in trying to maintain international peace and security. The United Nations is based in New York and Geneva, but also has offices in other countries.
- **The UN General Assembly:** The United Nations is made up of 189 countries that are all represented in the UN General Assembly. The General Assembly is like a parliament of the nations which meets in New York to discuss the world's most important problems. Although the UN is not a world government, it is a place where countries can agree how they want to work together to tackle issues.
- **Definition of a child:** Using the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child is considered to be any human being below the age of 18 [CRC Article 1].
- **Official UN reports, documents and papers** have strange letters and numbers on them, for example: A/51/256 or 54/93. These number and letters are used so that documents don't get mixed up and confused with other documents with similar names or titles.
- **The Secretary General:** Kofi Annan is the head of the United Nations, called the Secretary General. He was elected in 1997 as the UN's seventh Secretary General. Recently he was re-elected for a second period of four years.
- This guide gives you a quick and brief look at information relating to the Special Session on Children. If you want **more information** check out one of the web sites below. Good luck!

www.unicef.org

www.savethechildren.net



THE ROAD TO THE 2001 UN SPECIAL SESSION ON CHILDREN: HOW DID WE GET HERE?

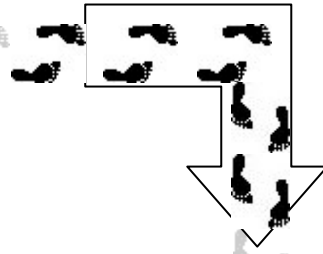


1. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

On November 20th, 1989 the United Nations General Assembly promised certain things to children when it formally adopted the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (also known as the CRC). The CRC provides the framework for the promotion and protection of the basic human rights for all children, everywhere, all the time.

The CRC explains that children's rights include the right to:

- be protected from all types of harm;
- be provided with things they need to survive and grow;
- take part in community and political life;
- grow up in their own family, culture, language and religion whenever possible.

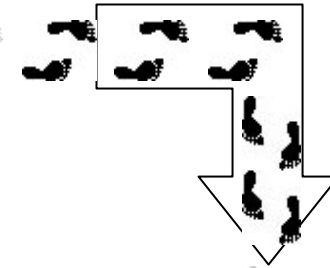


2. The 1990 World Summit on Children

In 1990 governments held a big meeting called "The World Summit for Children" in New York. The main goal of the meeting was to develop promises and commitments to improve and invest in the lives of children. At this meeting they promised to always put the best interest of children first, in good times and in bad times. They made 27 promises for children which they said they would achieve by the year 2000 and which they put in a document called the "World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and Plan of Action".

3. National Programmes of Action

After the 1990 World Summit for Children, world leaders returned to their home countries. They now had to look at ways to make the promises a reality in their home countries. Many countries developed what is called, "A National Programme of Action". These Programmes of Action explained how governments would achieve the goals and promises they had made. They also included ways of working in partnership with non-governmental organizations, other levels of government, the private sector and civic groups. These Programmes also explained how governments would collect information and monitor different things that affect the well being of children. This collection and monitoring would help them to build on and develop programmes to deal with any problems that come up.



4. The Mid Decade Review

➤ REVIEW PROCESSES ARE LIKE A 'REPORT CARD' FOR GOVERNMENTS

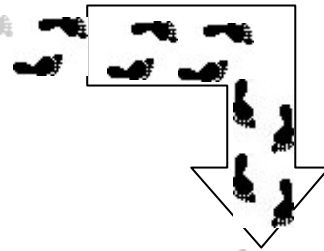
In February 1996 countries were asked to submit a report detailing the progress they had made so far in achieving the goals and promises they had made at the World Summit for Children. Part of the reason for this was that many of the promises made at the 1990 World Summit for Children were already meant to have been fulfilled by 1995. These short 5 year promises were suppose to make it easier to fulfil the promises for the year 2000. By 1996 a few things had improved BUT, a lot of work still needed to be done. All the people and governments involved were asked to increase their efforts and remember their promises.



5. The 'End-Decade Review' Processes

At the end of 10 years, each government was expected to give a full report detailing their achievements and failures over the last 10 years. Governments were not the only groups to contribute to the reports. In some cases non governmental organizations, civil society organizations, religious groups, the media, children and young people and others would also contribute to the details of the report.

The results of these end-decade reviews and the results for the world as a whole - the achievements and failures - can be found in the UN Secretary General's Report, "We the Children".



6. The 3 Prepcoms

To get ready for the Special Session on Children in September 2001, preparations needed to be made. In the months leading up to the Special Session on Children there were 3 meetings of the Preparatory Committee or 'Prepcoms'. These meetings were all held in New York City at the United Nations building. Their dates were:

- The 1st Prepcom - May 2000
- The 2nd Prepcom - January 2001
- The 3rd Prepcom - June 2001

The main purpose of the Prepcoms was to look back on the successes and failures of the past 10 years, to begin drafts and discussions about future promises and to plan for the UN Special Session on Children.

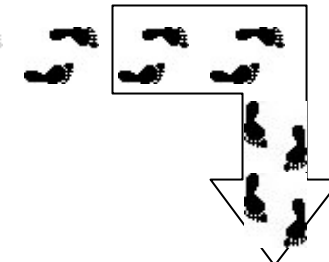
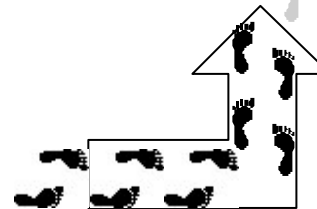
7. Regional Processes

There were regional preparatory meetings held throughout the years 2000 and 2001. These meetings were an opportunity for people to gather and discuss issues specific to their regions. The main topics of discussions at these meetings were:

- A review of the achievements and failures since 1990
- Preparations for the 2001 Special Session on Children
- An opportunity to look forward and think about new commitments

Five major regional meetings were held:

1. The 5th Ministerial Meeting on Children and Social Policy in the Americas
Kingston, Jamaica October, - 2000
2. The South Asia High Level Meeting on Investing in Children
Kathmandu, Nepal May, - 2001
3. The 5th East Asia and Pacific Ministerial Consultation
Beijing, China - May, 2001
4. The Berlin Intergovernmental Conference for Children in Europe and Central Asia
Berlin, Germany - May, 2001
5. Pan- African Forum on the Future of Children
Cairo, Egypt - May, 2001



8. The United Nations Special Session on Children

10 years have come and gone since the 1990 World Summit on Children. It is now time for governments to think about their new promises for the next 10 - 15 years.

The Special Session on Children will be held in May 2002. Governments will be the main participants but many other organizations and people will be included, such as, non-governmental organizations, children's advocates and children themselves. It will give the world a chance to see how children's lives have improved over the past 10 years and what still needs to be accomplished for the future. It will also be an opportunity to improve the way the world views and treats young people.

Now that you understand how we got to where we are today, you might have a few questions. This section will try to answer some of your questions.



What Is A Special Session of the UN General Assembly



Every year the UN General Assembly meets on a regular basis to discuss various questions. Sometimes the General Assembly decides to have a 'Special Session' to discuss a particular problem or issue for a few days. Since the United Nations was founded the General Assembly has held over 20 'Special Sessions'. They have looked at issues such as social development, women and disarmament. In June last year the General Assembly held a Special Session to look at how the world should deal with HIV/AIDS. This is the first time in the history of the United Nations that a Special Session on children is being held.



Why Is There A Special Session on Children



As noted earlier, 11 years ago there was a major international meeting on children called the World Summit on Children. It agreed 27 goals that the governments of the world would try and achieve for children. The Special Session on Children is being held to look at what has happened to children since 1990 and to agree what the world wants to do for children over the next ten years.



Who Will Be Going To The Special Session



The Special Session is a meeting of governments who will agree together what they want to do for children. The main people at the Special Session will be government 'delegates'- people who represent their governments. Some of them work in New York for their government and others will have come from the capital of their country, especially for this meeting. Some of these will be heads of state (such as Presidents) but there will also be Prime Ministers, ministers and other politicians. Most of the government delegates however will be civil servants or officials. There will also be many government delegates who will be under 18 years of age!

There will also be many 'delegates' from non-governmental organisations [NGOs] who have come to the Special Session to talk about the situation of the children in their country or to highlight particular issues such as child labour or refugee children. There will be many Under 18s among these delegates too.

There will also be representatives from UN and other international organisations. The largest number will come from UNICEF - the UN Children's Fund- which has done a lot of the work to make the Special Session happen. Others will represent agencies such as the UN organisation looking after refugees or the World Bank (which lends money to poor countries to help them develop).



What Will Be Going On At the Special Session



The main business of the Special Session will be governments talking about what they have done over the last eleven years for children and/or what they think should happen over the next ten years. There will be lots of speeches about this. There will also be 3 'roundtables' where governments will be discussing key issues. Roundtables are not actually round. It is a plenary session with formal presentations, followed by governments reading prepared statements. At the roundtables at this Special Session, each one will have 2 children as speakers.

There will be lots of 'side events' in the UN building and outside it. Some of these will be organised by governments and some by NGOs. They will discuss a wide range of problems and issues that affect children. They are not part of the main business of the meeting but are an opportunity to hear from children and adult 'experts' about what should be done for children.



What Are The Main Documents Being Discussed



There are two main documents being discussed at the Special Session.

The first is the report called 'We the Children' which has been written by the head of the UN, Secretary General Kofi Annan. This is a long report that looks at what has happened to children over the last ten years. Its main conclusion is that the governments did not keep most of the promises they made to children in 1990 because they did not invest enough money in children (e.g. in schools or clean water supplies). In addition, the rich countries did not give enough help to poorer countries to help them achieve the goals. However, lots of good things did happen and many more children are alive today because of the efforts that governments made.

A child friendly Summary of this report is included in this information kit.

The other main document at the Special Session is called 'A World Fit for Children'. This document is also known as the Outcome Document. This document has been discussed by governments at the UN over the last nine months and contains the promises that governments will make to children for the next 10 years. The document says that there are four key issues facing children that need to be looked at - health, education, HIV/AIDS and the protection of children from violence, abuse and exploitation. When the Special Session is over the 'Plan of Action' in this document will guide what governments do for children.

A child friendly version of the document, 'A World Fit for Children' is also included in this information kit.



What Will Happen After the Special Session



The governments will return home and begin to work out how they can begin to succeed in achieving the promises they have made to children. By the end of next year each government will have to develop a 'National Programme of Action' [NPA] to help achieve the goals set out in the Outcome Document. Children and NGOs should be involved in trying to help reach the goals and in making sure that the governments do their best to keep their promises. Governments will have to make regular reports on how well they are doing.