

High-Level Event on the Prevention of Violence Against Children and Its Place in the Post-2015 Agenda

Galvanized by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and lessons learned over the past 25 years there has been an enormous amount of work undertaken and achievements made in the area of child protection over the last 10 years. Many groups are coalescing to augment the profile of child protection globally. Therefore it was timely to bring these groups together with UNICEF to advocate for the inclusion of child protection in the post-2015 agenda.

Understanding that although violence is a critical impediment to development, this concept was largely absent from the formulation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Recognizing the critical historical conjuncture of the formulation of the post-2015 development agenda, the Government of Canada and the Government of Liberia co-hosted a **High-Level Event on the Prevention of Violence Against Children and Its Place in the Post-2015 Agenda**. This meeting, which certainly constituted a significant step in the process to formulate the next generation of development goals, took place on March 25, 2013, at the Danny Kaye Visitors Center at UNICEF Headquarters in New York City.

Leveraging the current momentum on child protection, the event aimed to raise the profile of children's rights and of the impact of violence against children, and highlight the importance of including global commitments to prevent and address violence in the post-2015 agenda.

The event was co-chaired by Hon. Julia Duncan-Cassell, Minister of Gender and Development of the Republic of Liberia, and by Ms Margaret Biggs, President of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).



Hon. Julia Duncan-Cassell, Minister of Gender and Development, Republic of Liberia
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Opening the meeting, **Minister Duncan-Cassell** remarked on the seriousness of several issues affecting children around the world –such as child soldiers, early marriage, sexual abuse and violence against children–, and called for a global coalition on child protection. “When we leave this room today,” she said, “we ask that UNICEF and the UN, with international non-governmental organizations and governments, take the lead in putting the issue of children first.”

In turn, **President Biggs** highlighted the progress and successes achieved by the concerted efforts and focused attention of the international community, through the MDGs. However, she remarked, while the Millennium Declaration recognized the importance of children and called for the full implementation of the CRC, child protection was not included in the current goals or in the post-2015 thematic consultations. “This meeting today is an important opportunity call for the safety and security of children and youth to be explicitly addressed in the post-2015 development framework. Momentum is building around the world to see child protection addressed in the next set of goals,” she said. “And only a global commitment can put this issue front and centre on the global agenda.”



President Margaret Biggs, Canadian International Development Agency.
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A high-level panel, moderated by H. E. Ms Signe Burgstaller, Deputy Permanent Representative of Sweden to the United Nations, then addressed an audience of over 100 people, which included representatives from over 40 Governments, and from several UN entities, civil society organizations – including the major child-focused NGOs–, donors and founders.

Deputy Executive Director **Martin Mogwanja**, from UNICEF, touched on some of the successes of the MDGs, as a global call to action, but also recognized the new and unfinished business that the new generation of development goals will need to take into account. He recalled the 2006 UN Study on Violence Against Children as a milestone, and recognized successful efforts in the fulfilment of the human rights of children thanks to increasing evidence of the magnitude of the problem and of effective ways of tackling it. “Children must not just survive and enrol in a school,” Mr Mogwanja emphasized. “It is also critical to ensure that children can grow, thrive and engage as active citizens in their families and communities through every stage of their lives, free from violence and the fear of it.”



Mr. Martin Mogwanja, Ms. Marta Santos Pais, Ms. Corinne Woods, Dr. Neil Boothby, H. E. Ms. Signe Burgstaller, Mr. Jim Emerson (from left to right).
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The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, **Marta Santos Pais**, remarked that countries affected by violence tend to lag behind in achieving the MDGs. “For children, violence goes hand in hand with deprivation, high risks of poor health, poor school performance and long-term welfare dependency,” she noted. “Placing children protection from violence in the post-2015 agenda is therefore a human rights imperative and a question of good governance and good economics.”

Corinne Woods, Global Director of the UN Millennium Campaign (UNMC), remarked on the importance of this being an open and transparent process; one in which citizens from all walks of life engage and actively participate. She emphasized the importance of children, as crucial stakeholders, and mentioned some of the avenues through which their voices can reach decision-makers. “Child participation is costly and time consuming, but it is also invaluable. Surveys are good, but we need a

deeper understanding of children’s aspirations and needs, especially through qualitative, in-depth studies,” she said.

Neil Boothby, United States Government Special Adviser and Senior Coordinator on Children in Adversity at USAID, referred to the recently launched States international assistance policy for children in adversity, which reflects the aspirations of seven US Government agencies that collectively provide about \$3 billion per year towards these concerns. Dr Boothby stated: “Within this policy framework, we are committed to working with other government and UN and civil society actors to ensure that a post-2015 framework clearly accounts for the needs and rights of children within the broader contexts of addressing inequity and reducing poverty.”

As a member of the friends of child protection group, **Ambassador Burgstaller** highlighted the obligation of Governments to protect children from violence, as per Article 19 of the CRC, and the role that children play in building a flourishing and peaceful future. “We, Governments of the world, have a legally binding obligation to address and eliminate the widespread prevalence and incidence of violence against children,” she stated. “We need to develop strong leadership and work together with United Nations and other relevant actors and be prepared to invest financial resources to be able to take strong actions to protect our children from violence.” Ambassador Burgstaller concluded her remarks by underscoring the importance of prevention through robust legal frameworks, reliable data and awareness-raising, among other important mechanisms.

Jim Emerson, Secretary General of ChildFund Alliance, read a joint statement from the major child-focused NGOs supporting the explicit mention of violence against and exploitation of children in the post-2015 development agenda, and suggesting a list of targets covering several issues of the child protection agenda. This statement was co-signed by (in alphabetical order) ChildFund Alliance, Family for Every Child, Plan International, Save the Children, and World Vision International. Emerson also stated that the ChildFund Alliance had come together for a joint global advocacy campaign focused on the post-2015 process with the aim of ensuring that children are free from violence and exploitation.

To end, President Biggs summed up the proceedings in five key points:

- There needs to be an explicit inclusion of child protection in the post-2015 development agenda. To do this, we need to make sure that we think of the whole child over his or her entire life cycle. This is not just the right thing to do; it is the smart thing to do.
- We have the foundations and frameworks in place. We have the evidence of the magnitude and implications of violence and exploitation against children, and the evidence of what works to address it. We know what to do.
- We need to build momentum and partnerships, but we also need leadership that will galvanize action.
- The reason why the MDGs worked is because they were clear and measurable goals, and because they were about people. While this is difficult to achieve, we need to have goals and indicators to measure progress.
- We need to listen to children. We need to engage them and give them voice and agency, so that they can bring their stories to bear. That is what will convince citizens and decision-makers in countries and organizations.