

GLOBAL PRIORITIES CAMPAIGN

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17 October, 2005

On behalf of UNICEF, I would like to welcome the Global Priorities Campaign to UNICEF House. We at UNICEF are honored to host the official launch of the Global Priorities Campaign and we commend the U.S. Fund for UNICEF for its ongoing support for the development of the Campaign.

Today is the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. Following the Millennium Summit, this is an opportune moment for us to take the momentum forward in meeting the Millennium Development Goals. Poverty has a multitude of faces and in all its aspects, it challenges children's lives – their survival, development and protection. The Global Priorities Campaign has a vital contribution to make to international advocacy for children. It brings the moral authority and energy of religions around the world to the global effort to generate the political will and the resources needed to make this a world truly fit for all children.

The Global Priorities Campaign seeks to mobilize religious-based communities throughout the world to bring about changes in national and global budget priorities in favor of eradicating poverty and meeting human needs. While the Campaign supports all the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, we at UNICEF are especially encouraged that the Campaign is focusing its attention on Millennium Development Goal 4: to reduce child mortality by two-thirds between 1990 and 2015. As UNICEF Executive Director Ann Veneman noted in the "Progress for Children" report: "Children are at the heart of the Millennium Development Goals, for they are the most vulnerable in society and their needs are often the greatest. Achieving the Goals will mean a better future for children and a more secure world in which they will live."

Today around 29,000 children under five years die everyday from easily preventable causes – malaria, diarrhoea, measles, acute respiratory diseases. Over 16% of children under five lack adequate nutrition. While vaccines have saved the lives of millions of children over the last three decades, over 27 million children below the age of one and 40 million pregnant women worldwide still do not receive routine immunizations. As a result, vaccine-preventable diseases are estimated to cause more than 2 million deaths every year, including 1.4 million deaths of children under five.

These data underscore the challenges the world faces to implement the Millennium Development Goal relating to child survival. Preventing children from dying unnecessarily must become a global priority. Such deaths sting the conscience of humanity.

The religions of the world call upon all human beings to care for one another, especially for the most vulnerable among us, such as children. It is fitting, then, that those who are stirred by religious beliefs have joined to form the Global Priorities Campaign. The Campaign's "Statement of Principles" declares: "Though our beliefs and traditions may differ, we share common values and commitments to justice, peace and human security." UNICEF greatly values our partnership with religious leaders and their communities in our advocacy and actions on child rights. Together we have achieved tremendous progress in ensuring children's survival, development and protection. When I was in West Africa, religious leaders and their communities were key partners in our immunization campaigns – even in times of war and instability such as in Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of Congo, among other places. As the Campaign's supporters note, saving the lives of vulnerable children is at the heart of the "–common values and commitments"– of all our religions.

The challenge, of course, is to translate concern into action. Through the launch of the Global Priorities Campaign, religious organizations around the world will be seeking new investments in child health and child survival. In seeking to generate the resources needed to implement MGD 4 and other Millennium Development Goals, the Campaign notes the significant growth of military expenditures around the world and calls upon all nations to restrain such spending in favor of the fulfillment of basic human needs. Even just a small fraction of the \$1 trillion the world spends on arms could save the lives of millions of children in jeopardy.

As other great global movements attest, the involvement of those with religious commitment can make a difference in improving the human condition – and they have done so. To implement the Millennium Development Goals, global decision makers need to hear from those whose consciences demand action to make this a better world, particularly for children.

Those motivated by profound spiritual belief are called in their traditions to "speak truth to power." Their voices raised on behalf of the needs of children offer encouragement that the world's aspirations for child survival can, indeed, become reality. So on behalf of children all over the world, UNICEF salutes the Global Priorities Campaign as its supporters implement plans to mobilize both political willpower and global resources to save and to improve children's lives everywhere.