

**ADDRESS BY CAROL BELLAMY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND
TO THE HIGH-LEVEL GROUP ON EDUCATION FOR ALL**

Paris – 29 October 2001

Mr. Director-General, Excellencies, Fellow Agency Heads, Colleagues, Friends:
I am delighted to join you for this vitally important meeting.

Eleven years after the World Conference on Education for All – and a year and a half after the World Education Forum in Dakar – we have a unique opportunity to assess how far we have come – and what actions we still must take – to secure the universal right of education for every man, every woman and every child.

So let me begin by thanking the Director-General of UNESCO, Koichiro Matsuura, not only for his role in bringing us together here in Paris, but for maintaining UNESCO's tradition of strong leadership in furthering the goals of the Education for All movement. It is an undertaking in which UNICEF remains a full – and fully committed – partner.

My Friends, we are united in the knowledge that a quality primary education is the right of *all* children – and the obligation of *all* governments, its primacy proclaimed by agreements ranging from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Jomtien Declaration on Education for All.

The 1990 Jomtien Conference was a watershed moment for the international community and its resolve to implement a bold and forward-looking vision – a world where Education for All is transformed from a cherished dream to a living reality.

Last April, at the Dakar Forum, 164 countries agreed to chart a comprehensive new course toward that vision. They called for strong national leadership, strong political commitment, generous financial support – and an all-out attack on poverty, inequality, discrimination and exclusion.

It is an approach that addresses the catastrophic effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on educational systems and other vital institutions.

It stresses the early care and nurturing that children must have if they are to enter school with minds and bodies ready to learn.

And it identifies the overarching importance of girls' education as both a right – and an essential foundation for development.

Mr. Chairman, these are the bedrock foundations for achieving Education for All, which of necessity must begin with the basics: with children who are mentally and physically able to learn, and teachers who are ready and able to teach, in educational environments that are available, affordable, and welcoming to children and to their parents.

Yet years of experience have demonstrated that there is no single solution to increasing access to education and improving its quality – but rather, thousands of proven local and national solutions. And that is why the key to Education for All lies in the tapestry of new partnerships that have begun to come together since Dakar – partnerships

involving all sectors and levels of society, from governments and funding agencies to service providers of every description and civil society in all its diversity – the media, the private sector, church, community and grassroots groups – and families and children themselves.

Within the UN System, we can point with pride to the strong partnerships among our sister agencies, including UNESCO, UNDP, UNFPA and the World Bank – fortified by the active participation of non-governmental organisations and the positive response of the governments.

My Friends, the lynchpin of all our efforts to achieve Education for All, from Jomtien to Dakar to the Millennium Assembly and beyond, is the UN Girls' Education Initiative, which the Secretary-General launched in Dakar in April – and which UNICEF is privileged to serve as lead agency.

For as the Secretary-General reminded us in *We the Peoples*, his groundbreaking Report to the Millennium Assembly, there can be no significant or sustainable transformation in societies – and no substantial or lasting reduction in global poverty – until girls receive the quality basic education they deserve – and take their rightful place as equal partners in development.

The Initiative is an unprecedented 10-year effort by 13 UN entities designed to help governments meet their commitments to provide a quality primary education for girls everywhere. It grows out of the conviction that delay in implementing the Jomtien commitment is no longer tolerable.

Indeed, it is intolerable that over 110 million of the world's children, two-thirds of them girls, are not in school; that of the world's 875 million illiterate adults, two-thirds are women; and that by 2010, half of the world's out-of-school children will be in Africa.

The immediate objective of the Girls' Education Initiative is to close the gender gap in education by 2005 by mobilising partnerships involving governments, voluntary progressive groups and above all, local communities, schools and families.

Mr. Chairman, those partnerships – at the country level and through global advocacy and action – are already beginning to show results, even among the 52 countries where the most urgent efforts at promoting girls' education are needed.

For example, in Bangladesh, a stipend programme has helped achieve gender parity in secondary schools, while in Mali and Mauritania, teacher training and “girl friendly” schools have led to significant increases in female enrolment. In Yemen, more girls are in school because of a teacher-training programme that certified 1,600 women as primary school teachers. And in Benin, mentoring programmes are helping to encourage female enrolment and reduce drop-out rates.

In Egypt, a movement for girls' education overseen by the country's education minister has received the personal backing of the country's First Lady, while meetings of First Spouses in Morocco and African education ministers in Uganda have drawn broad public attention to the importance of girls' education.

At the same time, partnerships for girls' education are bringing about unprecedented changes in the workings of UN agencies, which, like UNICEF and UNESCO, have begun to mainstream gender education into their work.

The UNDP Administrator, Mark Malloch Brown, could not join us today – but UNICEF is gratified to speak on UNDP's behalf, especially in reiterating its view of the

critical role of education, not only as an important dimension of human development, but as a critical element in achieving poverty reduction and gender equality.

In a letter earlier this month to all Resident Coordinators, the Administrator urged them to devote special attention to the EFA goals, which he termed “crucial to our efforts to help create a world free of poverty and discrimination.” In fact, the Administrator has encouraged Resident Coordinators to provide leadership specifically in support of the Girls’ Education Initiative and other EFA campaigns as they work to integrate education into national development frameworks and poverty reduction strategies.

Other examples of the mainstreaming of gender education by UN agencies include moves by the ILO to address girls’ education in an evaluation of its education activities; a focus by UNHCR on life-skills education for refugee girls, including efforts to improve their safety and security in school; and DESA’s ongoing monitoring of what happens to recommendations on girls’ education after they are adopted by international conferences.

It is also especially significant that the G-8 has agreed to address education, especially for girls, when it convenes its next major meeting in 2002, in Canada.

Mr. Chairman, the only surprise is that these developments are occurring now. For years, in study after study – by the UN, by the World Bank, by academics the world over – girls’ education has been shown to be the single best investment that any society can make. That is because girls’ education provides enormous economic benefits to all countries that invest in it; lessens social burdens on governments; and makes it possible to create larger, better prepared workforces.

You will find all of this explained in a striking new brochure produced jointly by the UN agencies involved in the Girls’ Education Initiative. It is a resource that my UNFPA colleague, Mr. Kunio Waki, will share with you today – and which we invite you to use in supporting this aspect of Education for All.

only education can equip girls with the confidence to make the most of their abilities; that can provide a means for changing attitudes about violence while promoting equality; and that can put young women on a path to economic and social empowerment.

Quality education and basic literacy will also open the doors to information technology and the “new economy” and prevent the “digital divide” from becoming a new gender divide.

But girls’ education is more than a cost-effective investment; more than an economic issue; more than a desirable aspiration that societies should try to provide. Education, particularly girls’ education, is an inalienable human right, guaranteed under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been signed and ratified by every country in the world today save two.

Educated girls grow into educated women – women who are more likely to participate in making decisions that affect their lives and the lives of those they love. They will understand more fully the dangers of the scourge of HIV/AIDS. And they are more likely to be healthy, to have smaller families, and to have healthier and better-educated children.

For all these reasons, Mr. Chairman, girls’ education is crucial to achieving the Education for All goals. But in championing it, we must be mindful of the larger imperative of ensuring that *all* children not only get into school, but stay there, at least to the age of 15, in order to acquire a basic education – and of the need to provide good

quality “second chance” educational opportunities for adolescents and youth who have never been in school.

In doing this, we must focus on the needs of those most disadvantaged and excluded from learning, both in and out of school – not only girls, but working children, children of ethnic minorities, and children affected by violence and conflict, disabilities, and HIV/AIDS. We can achieve this in part through social mobilisation campaigns, national enrolment days, and parent education programmes.

We must also ensure that every school and community has mechanisms in place to seek out and find excluded and at-risk children and get them into school. Where needed, we must develop more flexible, targeted approaches to education for these children. My Friends, Education for All will remain a dream until we address the deep poverty that keeps children out of school and often makes child labour necessary.

Unless the 250 million children presently caught up in child labour are provided with meaningful and affordable educational opportunities of quality equivalent to that provided their more fortunate peers, we are wasting strategic human resources and perpetuating poverty in the next generation.

Mr. Chairman, we live in a world where poverty, inequity, joblessness and social upheaval – including new forms of terrorism – are growing rapidly, in tandem with the devastating spread of HIV/AIDS – and an upsurge in armed conflict that has left 2 million children dead and 6 million wounded in the last decade alone.

It is a world where children under the age of 5 are dying at the rate of more than 10 million a year from preventable causes like diarrhoea, measles, and acute respiratory infections; and where 170 million children are malnourished, often at a cost of developmental handicaps that can last a lifetime.

Yet for all of this, UNICEF is convinced that we stand at the most opportune moment imaginable for reaching the remaining goals that were set at the World Summit for Children more than a decade ago – and for mobilizing a global alliance dedicated to achieving a breakthrough in human development based on specific actions for children.

My Friends, the future is in our hands as never before. That is why, as we renew preparations for the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children, tentatively rescheduled to convene in May, UNICEF and its partners are stepping up the work of mobilising a Global Movement for Children – a worldwide campaign to build a shared sense of responsibility for the well-being of every child on earth.

The Global Movement is about hope rather than despair. It is an opportunity for citizens everywhere to *Say Yes for Children* – to remind the world not only that citizens have obligations to children, but that governments, corporations and civil society organisations of all kinds have obligations as well – and that those obligations must be met.

For in these trying times, let us never forget that in every child who is born, the potentiality of the human race is born again. My Friends, the vision of a better world enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations begins with children and the realisation of their rights. Each of us has the power to help build a world fit for children – and make it a place where every child is educated in ways that promote the full development of the human personality, reinforce a culture of peace, and strengthen respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and ethical values. Let us rededicate ourselves to that noble cause.

Thank you.