ADDRESS BY CAROL BELLAMY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND

TO THE EUROPEAN MEETING OF MINISTERS FOR CHILDREN'S AFFAIRS

Brussels - 9 November 2001

Mr. President, Excellencies, Friends, Dear Children:

I am very pleased to join you for this vitally important meeting. We are gathered at a time of great uncertainty. The terrorist attacks of September 11th have transformed international relations as governments seek appropriate responses both to the attacks - and to the heightened sense of vulnerability they have created. At the same time, they have triggered an economic and social chain reaction that is darkening the future for untold millions of people, many of them already desperately vulnerable - and not only in Afghanistan but around the world.

But the terrorist attacks have done something else: they have brought the international community together as never before - and underlined the overarching importance of collective action in confronting new threats.

Indeed, as Secretary-General Kofi Annan put it, there is every reason to hope that the unity born of the events of September 11th will rally the international community to the defense of the most basic of human rights - the right of all people to live in peace and security.

Mr. President, I can think of no more eloquent affirmation of that hope than the announcement that the work of the Secretary-General and the United Nations itself had earned them this year's Nobel Peace Prize.

It is a reminder that the ideal of a just and peaceful world, sustained by international cooperation, remains a beacon of hope 56 years after it was proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations.

It is a vision rooted in compassion and a profound sense of responsibility to our fellow human beings - and it begins with children and the realisation of their rights. Each of us has the power to help build that world - and make it a place where every child can grow to adulthood in health, peace and dignity.

That is the premise behind the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children, which was to have opened in New York on September 19th with some 80 heads of State and Government in attendance. Its postponement was a difficult pill to swallow. But through it all, UNICEF and its partners - among whom we are proud to count the members of this assembly - have kept faith in the knowledge that together, we can change the world with children.

That is why the drive for child rights has never faltered - and with your help, substantively as well as financially, we will accelerate that drive when the Special Session on Children finally convenes in May.

Mr. President, it was more than a decade ago, at the World Summit for Children, that the largest gathering of heads of State and Government ever assembled made a solemn promise - to advance the cause of humanity by giving every child a better future.
In so doing, they acknowledged that the well-being of children requires political action at the highest level - and, they said, "we are determined to take that action."

Because of political action at the highest level, the world has witnessed gains for children in the fight against preventable diseases and malnutrition, in increased access to education, in the promotion of breast-feeding and early childhood care and development, and in access to safe water.

Because of political action at the highest level, the Convention on the Rights of the Child is now the most widely ratified human rights instrument in history.

Because of political action at the highest level, we have seen changes in national law and public policy that have set the stage for improving the lives of children the world over.

And we have seen the cause of children come of age at the Millennium Summit, which strongly reaffirmed the need for breakthrough progress toward such goals as reduction of maternal and under-5 mortality, increases in primary school enrolment, and the imperative of mounting effective worldwide campaigns against HIV/AIDS, malaria and other major infectious diseases.

Mr. President, all of this constitutes remarkable progress, literally unimaginable half a century ago. And none of it would have come to pass without the vital partnerships that have developed between governments, donors, international institutions and diverse elements of civil society, including children and families, non-governmental organisations, the private sector and the business community, and religious and grassroots groups.

Yet for all the many millions of young lives that have been saved, and for all the lives that have been bettered, it is clear that overall gains have fallen far short of the national commitments and international obligations that grew out of the World Summit.

Excellencies, the completion of that legacy is largely in your hands. Your leadership is vital if we are to realise the remaining goals for child survival and development that were set at the World Summit - and mobilise a global alliance dedicated to achieving a breakthrough in human development based on specific actions for children.