

25th May 2010, New York – UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake and other child-rights advocates came together at UNICEF headquarters in New York this morning, calling for all countries to take extra steps aimed at protecting children from violence and exploitation.

Ten years ago, the UN General Assembly adopted two Optional Protocols supplementing the wide-ranging human rights protections of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, or CRC. The protocols offer additional protection for children who are vulnerable to armed conflict, or to being sold or exploited for purposes of prostitution or pornography

Today's UNICEF House panel was organized to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Optional Protocols and to launch a campaign for their worldwide ratification and implementation by 2012.

'A promise to children'

The protocols, said Mr. Lake, "are more than dry words on a piece of paper. They represent a promise to the most vulnerable children around the world, children who were born into the most extreme forms of poverty and despair.

"For 10 years, the Optional Protocols have greatly strengthened our ability to honour that promise," he added. "But to achieve their full intent, we have to have a global call to action – a campaign to inspire greater co-operation and support among states, international agencies and the whole of civil society. The time has come to make clear that the Optional Protocols are morally mandatory."

To date, fully two-thirds of the world's nations have ratified the protocols. Nonetheless, UN leaders and advocates are pushing for a stronger moral consensus. They are optimistic that, with strong political will, it can be achieved.

Push for global ratification

Secretary-General Ban said the world was moving in the right direction to protect children affected by armed conflict. He urged all UN Member States to ratify the Optional Protocols within the next two years.

“On this 10th anniversary, let us remember that each child has the right to grow up free of fear and exploitation,” said Mr. Ban. “Conscience demands nothing less. There is a global chorus demanding protection for all children.”

Although accurate figures are hard to obtain, studies have placed the number of children trafficked across international borders annually at 1.2 million. Many of those trafficked both within and across borders are forced into prostitution.

About 1 billion children live in countries or territories affected by armed conflict, and as many as 250,000 young people remain associated with armed groups or armed forces around the globe.

From dream to reality

“I am hopeful that we will celebrate, very soon, a new era for the millions of children we have failed to protect so far,” said Marta Santos Pais, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children.

Radhika Coomaraswamy, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, urged the world to take a united stand supporting the rights of children affected by conflict.

Already, she noted, some nations have adopted a policy barring children under the age of 18 from service in the armed forces. Meanwhile, the International Criminal Court in The Hague is helping to ensure that violators of child rights do not do act with impunity.

“I predict that in 25 years' time, there will be no child soldiers anywhere in the world,” Ms. Coomaraswamy told the audience and fellow panellists at UNICEF House. “I ask you to help me to make that dream a reality.”

Source: [UNICEF](#)