



Convention on the Rights of the Child

The child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality, and as far as possible the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents. (Article 7)

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of health care in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, access to health care services, including those related to family planning. States Parties shall ensure to women appropriate services in connection with pregnancy, confinement and the post-natal period, granting free services where necessary, as well as adequate nutrition during pregnancy and lactation. (Article 12)

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

Eliminate discrimination against girls in health and nutrition. (Section L.5)

The Right to Health and the Girl Child

In the Millennium Declaration adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2000, world leaders committed unprecedented efforts and resources to meeting the needs of those living in conditions of poverty. World leaders promised to halve extreme poverty; to halt the spread of HIV/AIDS; to provide universal primary education; to improve maternal health and cut child mortality; to increase transparency and democratic decision-making—all by the year 2015. The Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals, which flow from it, reaffirm States' responsibility to ensure the health and welfare of children, previously stipulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and to provide a universal blueprint for the guarantee of those rights.

Facts to Consider

- Escalating violence perpetrated on children threatens children's health and well-being. In 2002, UNICEF reported that, "violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation threaten children throughout their life."
- The World Health Organization (WHO) reported that girls are at the highest risk of infanticide, sexual abuse, neglect and being forced into prostitution.
- Cultural practices, such as son preference, threaten the development of the full potential of girl children.
- Girls are more vulnerable than boys to the consequences of unprotected and premature sexual relations and often face pressure to engage in such sexual activity.
- In its *2002 World Report on Violence and Health*, WHO pointed to the devastating effects sexual violence and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/ AIDS, have on children's health. Still, HIV/AIDS is only one among many contagious diseases that place the girl child's life at risk.

Actions to Ensure Girls' Health

- Every girl should be treated with dignity and respect and be registered at birth, "without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status" (Convention on the Rights of the Child, Articles 2).
- Special attention needs to be paid to the physical, psychological and social transition of girls from adolescence to adulthood.
- Breaking the cycles of poverty, violence, discrimination and impaired human development, requires a comprehensive approach to girls' health.

A World Fit for Children

Children must get the best possible start in life. Their survival, protection, growth and development in good health and with proper nutrition is the essential foundation of human development. We will make concerted efforts to fight infectious diseases, tackle major causes of malnutrition and nurture children in a safe environment that enables them to be physically healthy, mentally alert, emotionally secure, socially competent and able to learn. (Declaration, 7.4)

MDGS

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and the empowerment of women

Goal 4: Reduce child mortality

Goal 5: Improve maternal health

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

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- The girl child's health status is generational in nature and impact. Her own health is dependent on her mother's health and it also predicts her children's health. Thus, it is imperative to ensure that every pregnancy is wanted and accompanied by primary family education at all ages and levels, and that every birth is safe and carried out in the presence of a skilled birth attendant.
- Reducing children's mortality rates requires a multi-pronged approach. Primary family education and services must include vaccination for preventable childhood diseases; the promotion of breastfeeding practices; appropriate nutrition; and the provision of access to clean water.
- The escalating violence perpetrated on children requires particular attention. Governments, non-governmental organizations, UN agencies, businesses and local communities must work to protect every child so that all children can grow up free from violence, exploitation, abuse and discrimination.
- It is essential that governments provide appropriate educational guidance about a variety of contagious diseases which threaten children. Additional measures such as, providing quick oral HIV screening tests and supplying anti-malaria sleeping nets, can enable children to thrive in a disease-free environment.
- Special attention should be given to the girl child and to the elimination of discriminatory cultural attitudes and practices that make her more susceptible to disease.

Source and Resources

- UN Doc. A/Conf. 32/8, cited in Steven D. Jamar, *The International Human Right to Health*, 22 S.U.L REV. 1, 2 (Fall 1994).
- United Nations Children's Fund (2002). UNICEF's Priorities for Children 2002-2005, New York.
- World Health Organization (2002). *World Report on Violence and Health: Summary*, Geneva, Switzerland, (p. 4).
- United Nations Children's Fund (2002), UNICEF's Priorities for Children 2002-2005, New York.
- Friedman, S. A.. (n.d.). *Keeping Promises to Girls: Following Up on the UN Special Session for Children* [Brochure]. NGO Committee on UNICEF/ Working Groups on Girls.
- *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, Fourth World Conference on Women, 15 September 1995, A/CONF.177/20 (1995) and A/CONF.177/20/Add.1 (1995), especially Section L.
- For WHO activities visit: http://www.eho.int/violence_injury_prevention/ (under "Injury Prevention Collaborative Activities).
- For UNICEF issues on violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation threatening children, see UNICEF's Priorities for Children 2002 – 2005 – website: www.unicef.org.
- For further information on Girls and HIV/ AIDS, see in particular, UNICEF's *Unite for Children, Unite against AIDS* (2005), <http://www.unicef.org/uniteforchildren/index.html>.

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