

# Into the future: Where to from here? <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

- Speech in pdf <sup>[2]</sup>

Excerpts from the speech:

Let me start, if I may, with a number of obvious premises.

Number one: Everybody now understands, I think, and this is an international understanding, it is not merely a Canadian understanding, that early learning and child care fused together is the kind of objective which any civilized society strives for, and that it becomes an indispensable and vital dimension of a child's life, enhancing all of the family characteristics which shore up the child, but profoundly influencing in the most positive imaginable way the opportunities for the child. And our sense of early childhood education and care in the earliest years has, of course, flowed consciously and continuously over the last number of years with the proliferation of studies and thoughtful analyses, and everyone in this room accepts the premise of what early learning and child care can mean.

Number two: The consensus that we now share, I remind you, is rooted internationally. I'm not going to dwell unduly on international themes, but I want to remind you that it is rooted in an international agreement, which undoubtedly Landon Pearson would have referred to, which is the Convention on the Rights of the Child and that goes right back to 1989. The reason that November 20th is International Child's Day is that was the day in 1989 when we had the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. And within one year, we had a sufficient number of country ratifications to make the convention a document with the force of international law. Now I brought the Convention with me because it is a little biblical text which

I cherish, and I want to remind you of the major clauses under Article 18:

"For the purpose of guaranteeing and promoting the rights set forth in the present convention, states parties (that means governments) shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities, and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children."

It goes on:

"Governments shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from child care services and facilities for which they are eligible."

Now, obviously that qualifier of "working parents," were that convention to have come into place today, would have been made more generic, but the fact of the matter is that within the convention, as far back as 1989, and the whole decade of negotiation which preceded it, there was writ large, a commitment to child care and that commitment suffused, clause after clause, of the convention in a whole variety of ways. And everyone, even then, understood that the amalgam, the integration of education and child care, was what we meant by "a system of child care."

Number three: The emphasis on early learning and child care continued irresistibly through to the next major gathering of nations at the second World Summit for Children. The first World Summit for Children had been in September of 1990, when the largest-ever gathering of countries of the world had set a number of targets for the year 2000, and given the imprimatur of legitimacy to the Convention on the Rights of a Child. The second summit was intended to examine how close we had come to those targets. It was delayed because of 9/11 from September 2001 into 2002, but it is fascinating to recognize what the world felt was the important issue for the second summit in 2002.

I was at UNICEF as Director of Programs towards the end of 1999, and before I left, we were discussing the themes for the second summit at that time. And I well remember how we considered all of the protection issues around children which seemed to be so central to their lives. We talked about child soldiers, we talked about child labour, we talked about child sexual exploitation, we talked about disabled children, we talked about street children, and we talked about the whole panoply of vulnerability for groups of children around the world largely unattended to. But when everything was stripped away, the themes on which the summit focused were: #1: early child care and education; #2: basic education, and #3: the integration of the two.

And we chose it because everybody understood, all of the countries around the world and the UNICEF secretariat, that we had dreadfully neglected the preschool years in particular, and that we had never given sufficient attention to early childhood care and development, and that it was time to focus the world on those issues. And they became the sine quo non of the Second International Children's Summit.

Number four: There is yet another, and I will end with this, international development mechanism which lends credence to everything that you are collectively doing, and I don't want to diminish this because you are going to hear it spoken about more and more often as the next number of years pass. And indeed, before I finish I want to suggest a certain approach you might take which is consistent with millennium development goals. In the year 2000, in what was called the Millennium General Assembly of the United Nations, all of the countries came together and decided that the consequences of globalization had been so adverse, despite the assumption that globalization would usher in a kind of celestial global equity around the world. The consequences of globalization had proved so adverse, globalization had demonstrated itself to be so inadequate in facing poverty, conflict, disease, environment, trade, and debt, that something had to be done to chose a set goals and targets which could animate the international community. And so, at that General Assembly, they decided on the millennium development goals for the year 2015. That is the focused year. And it's so fascinating that more than half of those targets which have been accepted now as the millennium development goals, and which, to my surprise, country after country is beginning to address seriously, more than half of those targets speak to the imperatives and the priorities which this remarkable conference embraces.

**Region:** Canada <sup>[3]</sup>

Manitoba <sup>[4]</sup>

**Tags:** advocacy <sup>[5]</sup>

integration <sup>[6]</sup>

children's rights <sup>[7]</sup>

international organizations <sup>[8]</sup>

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