62nd SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Statement by

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the Follow-up to the Outcome of the
Special Session on Children

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Mr. President,

At the outset, allow me to congratulate you on your able stewardship of this Assembly, and thank you for convening this important meeting. It is an honour for me to represent my government at this High Level session, along with Maya Flomboim and Shai Zavdi, who are here representing all the children of Israel.

Israel is proud to participate in this session as a follow-up to the Special Session on Children. My delegation wishes to extend congratulations to Ms. Ann M. Veneman, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), to the Secretary-General, and to all the relevant United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations for their important work on behalf of the children of the world.

Normally, when various representatives and delegations come to the General Assembly, the dividing lines that separate them are the borders between countries and between nations.

Today, at this special assembly, the distinction needs to be different. All of us – the world of adults without differentiation by religion, nationality, race or gender, need to stand together to make the world a better place for our children – all children of the world. We must speak with one voice in condemnation of such immoral practices as child labour, the recruitment of child soldiers, and other forms of violence, abuse and exploitation. Israel is committed to these objectives, and it is in this vein that we welcomed the outcome document of the Special Session in 2002.

Mr. President,

Israel's strong commitment to children's rights can be seen in its accession in 1990 to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was reaffirmed in our signing, in November 2001, of the two Optional Protocols to the Convention – on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the prohibition of the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. The first Optional Protocol has already been ratified, and we are in the advanced stage of ratifying the second.

Beyond the regular activities for children carried out by government offices, municipalities, and NGO's in Israel, I wish to refer to a number of innovative, unique, and pioneering programmes.

The Ombudsman for Children and Youth serves as an advocate for all children across the nation, fielding 10,000 inquiries each year regarding all aspects of life, and employs professionals representing all groups in the population.

The Children's Rights Mobile Unit provides creative and enjoyable educational programs to teach children's rights and responsibilities to elementary school-age children around the country.

The State of the Child in Israel, a comprehensive statistical abstract published annually, reviews all aspects and dimensions regarding the state of the child in Israel.

Furthermore, I am proud to note that since 2000, Israel has prohibited the use of corporal punishment both at home and in school, a policy that meets the CRC requirements, and that unfortunately fewer than 20 nations have adopted to date.

Though we are certain that many other countries have made positive advancements for children and their rights since the last assembly in 2002, we must remember that much more remains to be done. Declarations about the future cannot replace action today. We must not ignore the children's present, as stated so well by Janusz Korczak, the well-known Polish-Jewish children's author, pediatrician, and child pedagogue, and a true pioneer of children's rights, who called children: (quote) "individuals who are people – not people-to-be, not people of tomorrow, but people now, right now – today" (end quote).

Mr. President,

The growth and plague of global terrorism has led to the rise of a number of interrelated dangers, prominent among them the blurring of the distinction between combatants and civilians, in contravention of international law. Most reprehensible is that terrorists deliberately target civilians, and in many of these cases children are the primary victims.

As children, by nature, are prone to easy injury, in body, mind, and soul, their recruitment for armed conflict – and in our region by terrorist groups – is cause for great alarm and concern. Similarly, exposure of children to violence and hateful rhetoric, through school textbooks and media, should be combated with quality education and a commitment to end incitement and recruitment of children for violence.

Mr. President,

Surely, there is no monopoly on suffering. In the conflict in our region, Israeli and Palestinian children have both suffered unjustly, and it is the obligation of all parties to respect their rights and adhere to the rule of law.

The life of every child, no matter his or her nationality, is precious. Hence, it is the responsibility of the nations of the region to ensure for them a prosperous, safe, and nurturing present and future. There is no interest of higher importance. Indeed, the protection of children is a cause that can even bring us together, and heal the rifts in our region.

In just one example of how the welfare of children crosses political boundaries, three Israeli doctors recently traveled to Jordan on behalf of Save a Child's Heart – an Israeli humanitarian organization – to treat Iraqi children. The organization has treated more than 1,700 children, including many Arabs, Palestinians, Jordanians and Iraqis.

Mr. President,

In closing, I wish to share with the delegations here today a formula whose results I have seen during my time as Director of Israel's National Council for the Child:

When we skimp on education – we pay in ignorance.
When we skimp on health – we pay in sickness.
When we skimp on safety – we pay in accidents.
When we skimp on welfare – we pay in distress.
When we skimp on reducing gaps – we pay in polarization.
When we skimp on prevention – we pay in delinquency.
When we skimp on treatment – we pay in violence.
When we skimp on early childhood – we pay twice with youth in distress.
When we skimp on social workers – we pay in policemen.
When we skimp on preventative medicine – we pay in hospitals.

It is our actions that directly impact the environment our children live in. Our decisions and choices can pave the way for peril or for peace. It is the road we take that determines their fate. Thus, it remains our primary responsibility to protect and promote their rights, in order that every child can live free from fear and have equal opportunities to prosper and flourish.

Thank You.