

Statement from UNICEF

Delivered by Anthony Lake, Executive Director

Millions of children depend on our pledges today. And we know who most of them are.

They are the poorest children ... living in the most isolated places ... suffering from exclusion and discrimination ... often struggling to grow in the midst of conflict or humanitarian catastrophe. In fact, over 40% of children out of school live in conflict-affected countries.

So many denials of these children's rights ... so many threats to their ability to survive and thrive.

But progress is possible -- even in the midst of conflict, disaster and political turmoil.

We see it in Haiti, where a global effort to rebuild schools, train teachers and provide supplies is restoring a sense of hope for Haiti's children.

We see it in Liberia and Zimbabwe -- where innovative financing helped 3.4 million more children attend school in 2010.

And we see it in Afghanistan.

Ten years ago, fewer than 1 million children were enrolled in primary school there. Today, some 5 million are enrolled, with some 7.3 million in all grades.

But more than 4 million children are still out of school in Afghanistan, and the majority -- 60% -- are girls.

Carol Bellamy recognized in 2003 that our success in Afghanistan depended on reaching girls. It is true today.

Not only because educated girls are more likely to earn a fair wage as adults ... have healthier children ... and send those children to school.

But also because Afghanistan's future depends on investing in the potential of all its citizens. Indeed, no country has ever become strong and remained so, without such investments.

We pledge to do our part, around the world, to help families afford their children's education . . . to address the overwhelming shortage of qualified teachers . . . to overcome the cultural barriers that keep children out of school . . . to demand that schools remain safe havens of learning even during conflicts.

As we all pledge today to increase our support for education, let us also pledge to focus those investments on reaching the children who need us most. For their futures -- and the strength of their societies -- depend on it.