

Children : Our Best Investment

by Supachai na Pombej

No country and no government in the world has yet the resources to abolish poverty and injustice overnight but at least it can start with the children. On January 9 opened the 9-day Children's Fair in the capital city of Dacca. Understandably, the Government fully realises the importance of the nation's young citizens and their eventual contribution in the years to come....

"WHY children? Because it is the first responsibility of human society," claims a well-respected senior journalist in Dacca, adding "we naturally have to meet the needs of our children." Apparently, the way to guarantee future chaos and upheaval is to ignore children and neglect them and the way to guarantee future progress and advancement is to help them grow up well-educated, trained, healthy and happy.

"If we want to solve the world's many problems," asserts a senior UN official, at the UN Headquarters in New York, "it is essential to put first things first."

Meanwhile, many conscious citizens raise this question: Isn't it time for the world to eliminate the two greatest threats to its children—war and poverty? In fact, both could be eliminated if we would change our attitudes about how to protect our countries, and spend our resources, money and energy on providing essential services for children instead of on weapons of death.

President Justice Abdus Sattar, a firm believer in the endeavour of improving the lot of children always advocates the causes for needy children. During his recent visit, Prince Talal Bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud, Special Envoy for UNICEF, timely assured the President and Government officials with these words, "I will do my best to improve the conditions of children and mothers in this country."

"First, we must give all children the protection and preparation they need because the nation's and the world's future is literally in their hands," comments Mr Uffe Konig the Representative of United Nations Children's Fund in Bangladesh. A few years ago Miss Gabriela Mistral the Latin American Nobel Prize-winning poet from Chile said, "The child did not ask to be born, and

pleads with no other argument than his poor body which reveals undernourishment, and unhealthy environment, and poverty...." The famous poet also added "We all are guilty of many mistakes and many sins but our worst crime is abandonment of the child, neglect of life's source".

Assuming that it took you about six seconds to read this last paragraph, while you were reading it twelve children were born in the world's developing countries.

Let us move fifteen years into the future and see what is likely to happen to those twelve: Two died in early childhood. Of the surviving ten, five never

who are somewhat prepared for life, work and pursuit of happiness?

Let me remind you that this is not simply "someone else's problem."

All children—together—will form the nation and the world of tomorrow. What happens to children in one country will sooner or later affect the lives of all people everywhere in our increasingly interdependent world.

There are, as you are aware, more than 1,300 million children in the developing nations today. Each of them has a right to a tomorrow—a tomorrow that will inevitably be

the Year has placed an important responsibility on the Fund.

Today, UNICEF is still broadening its co-operation with developing countries to include more attention to child development and children with special problems—the handicapped. Other follow-up measures of the IYC aim to maintain the wider global perspective regarding children, to highlight children's needs and problems common to both developing and industrialized countries, and to focus on policies and programmes to address these effectively.

"Our organization for its part, commits itself to continue its efforts for children now, to work the governments and



went to school. Of the five who did only completed the primary school grades.

So two dead. Eight with little or no schooling. All have known serious disease. All have gone through hunger and several will suffer all their lives from the results of inadequate food.

This is the global picture. Only two of the original twelve have been trained for anything more than menial tasks. The rest unfortunately will be condemned for life to hard labour at the lowest level of poverty.

This is another question we should all try to answer. Must twelve children, each one full of newborn promise, dwindle into just two young people

shaped today.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has been universally identified with the unqualified success of the International Year of the Child (IYC). But the overwhelming response to the year should be seen as the first essential step towards achieving its objectives of long-range, sustained activities benefiting children at the community, national and international levels.

The October 1979 General Assembly Resolution which designated UNICEF as the lead agency of the United Nations system responsible for co-ordinating the development aspects of the follow-up activities of

communities to pioneer new ways of increasing the ratio between resources available and improvements possible," explains Mr. James P. Grant, UNICEF's Executive Director, continuing, "to share that experience with all who work towards that goal to campaign for the redistribution of resources both within and between nations in order to meet the needs of the poorest people and to help their children to lead a fuller life...."

Why children? Because they are our future and investment in them is the best thing anybody can do in his or her life-time.