

Report to IPA: High Level Symposium on Child Survival (MDG 4)

co-hosted by the Prime Minister of Norway and the Executive Director of UNICEF, in cooperation with the Lancet

New York, September 18, 2006

Attended by Jane Schaller, IPA Executive Director and Zulifqar Bhutta, IPA Standing Committee

This meeting was held in the context of the UN General Assembly Meeting, New York, Sep 18, 2006. The purpose of the meeting was to “raise awareness of child survival issues and galvanize action to reduce child mortality by two-thirds in 2015 in line with MDG 4.”

The meeting was attended on behalf of IPA by Jane Schaller, Executive Director; President Adenike Grange was also invited but did not attend. Zulfiqar Bhutta attended and participated in the panel; he was representing the Aga Kahn University, Dept of Pediatrics, as well as his role in the Bellagio working group and his presence on the IPA Standing Committee.

The meeting was attended by about 100 invited participants who were known to be active in the child survival movement. Other than Zulfiqar and Jane, there seemed to be few pediatricians present as such. There were a number of representatives of NGOs and many representatives from the UN system and the world of donors.

The program was divided into two sessions:

The first session consisted of a number of presentations by dignitaries, was moderated by Riz Khan, a television commentator formerly of CNN and now of Aljazeera.

- This session opened with a video narrated by Sir Roger Moore.
- Ann Veneman summarized UNICEF commitment to child survival and MDG 4.
- Jens Soltenberg Prime Minister of Norway, presented a powerful address which is scanned and attached to this report. He announced the commitment of Norway to child survival programs in India and several other large countries yet to be chosen as well as increased support to GAVI.
- Professor Hans Rosling of Karolinska presented amazing “pyrotechnics” of electronics showing the trends in child mortality and child survival dating back a number of decades.
- Queen Rania of Jordan gave a well composed and delivered presentation concerning the importance of children, and made the point strongly that children everywhere have potential that should not be wasted. She commented that future world leaders are born everywhere “not always in a rich place. Every baby may hold a key to the future.”
- President Karzai of Afghanistan gave an off-the-cuff presentation about the importance of child health, the difficulties in places beset by violence, and the grief that child loss causes not only to parents but also a country.
- The President of Madagascar spoke about progress in his country, with attention to immunizations, the use of condoms to prevent HIV, and the commitment to MDG 4. He commented on three initiatives: political commitment to child health, country ownership of child

health (this was a strong statement, essentially saying that people who live in my country need to own the programs for child survival), and the fact that his country would never be satisfied until the whole world was successful.

- An 11-year-old girl from Sierra Leone spoke movingly about the issues in her country, the problems of minimal health expenditures while much was being spent on war, the fact that common diseases are easily preventable and should not be allowed to occur, and made the point that “a sick child can be a good future leader.” She said that children thought that “the survival of children should no longer be open for dialogue.”
- Mark Malloch Brown the point person in the UN for the MDGs, gave a brief but good statement expressing commitment to child survival. He made the interesting comment that when the MDGs and the Millennium Declaration were drafted in 1990-2000, he was not sure which of the MDGs would take the lead, but now it seemed quite plain to him that MDG 4 Child Survival should be the driving force for all of the MDGs. He commented that reducing child mortality was important because it showed sound priorities of a society, sound values of a society, and the ability of a society to deliver relatively simple services.
- Finally, Dr. Tachi Yamada, the new global health director of the Gates Foundation voiced a strong commitment to child survival, saying that MDG 4 was “closest to his heart.” He told of a “burning memory”: when he was a resident, a young mother came to the emergency room clutching an infant to her chest. She was unwilling to give the baby to the doctors, who finally realized that the child was dead. He said that until this day he had actually repressed this memory for 35 years, but it all came back in thinking about child survival. He said “we know what to do and it is not very costly, why are we not making progress,” and that all should be committed to finding ways to make child survival work.
- The session was summed up by the Prime Minister of Norway who commented that this symposium alone would not change the world, but it does present knowledge, provides optimism (the world tends to be too pessimistic but MDG 4 achievement is in fact possible), and increases attention and public debate on these issues. He ended with a touching statement: “Reducing child mortality is a worthy goal. We cannot pursue it half way or part time. That is why I invite everybody here to join this global campaign so that when we reach the twilight of our days, we can lay our ears to the ground and listen to the steps of millions of feet.”

The second session of the meeting consisted of a panel including Richard Horton (Editor of the Lancet), Zulfiqar Bhutta, Julio Frenk (Minister of Health of Mexico), Julian Lob-Levyt (GAVI Executive Director), and Joy Phumaphi (Assistant DG of WHO). This was a question and answer session, moderated by Riz Kahn. It was pointed out that only seven countries are really on track at the present time to achieve to MDG 4. These countries share some common findings: political commitment, strong human resource presence, and stable financing. All of the panelists spoke well. It was of interest to me that whenever substantive information about effective measures to improve child survival was needed, the question went to Zulfiqar Bhutta. Pediatricians do have something to contribute!

The Minister of Health of Mexico, Julio Frenk, also fielded a number of questions. Julien Lob-Levyt commented his concern that there really were no clear financial resources committed to the achievement of MDG 4. Richard Horton ended the session by speaking of child survival in 1628 when John Milton wrote an Elegy on an Infant Dying of a Cough. This poetic elegy comments that this child

was given back to God as a present from this sordid world. Richard Horton commented that children are still dying of coughs and other preventable causes today, and that the sordid world needs to pay more attention.

There was no definite outcome from this meeting other than the objective stated by the Prime Minister of Norway, and a sense of commitment from those present.

Suggestions for IPA:

- Continue to be an active participant in the Countdown to Child Survival process which will meet again about 18 months hence.
- Emphasize our IPA Millennium Declaration and bring it to the attention of our member societies.
- Make child survival and health a major topic at the Athens Congress, and include a workshop on child survival and the IPA Millennium Declaration and the MDGs.

Submitted by Jane Schaller
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