

Message from the Secretary-General of the United Nations

Eliminating gender discrimination and empowering women are among the paramount challenges facing the world today. When women are healthy, educated and free to take the opportunities life affords them, children thrive and countries flourish, reaping a double dividend for women and children.



In the 27 years since the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, much has been done to advance the progress of women. But we have fallen far short of what we need to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Until there is gender equality, there can be no sustainable development. It is impossible to realize our goals while discriminating against half the human race.

As study after study has taught us, there is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women. No other policy is as likely to raise economic productivity or to reduce child and maternal mortality. No other policy is as sure to improve nutrition and promote health, including the prevention of HIV/AIDS. No other policy is as powerful in increasing the chances of education for the next generation. That is why discrimination against women of all ages deprives the world's children – all of them, not just the half who are girls – of the chance to reach their potential. This is an issue that goes to the heart of UNICEF's mission: protecting the rights of all children.

In my 10 years as Secretary-General, I have been proud to add my voice to UNICEF's in calling on the world to pay more attention to children's lives, needs and rights. Among the many issues UNICEF has addressed over the past decade, none is more central to its mandate than the rights of women.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'K. Annan'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Kofi A. Annan
Secretary-General of the United Nations