

# 10.5m young children dying from preventable illnesses

## Health officials call for more resources, especially for immunisation programmes in the poorest countries

**NEW YORK** — More than 10 million children under the age of five will continue to die every year from preventable illnesses unless the world does more to help them, health officials said yesterday, in calling for more resources to fight child mortality.

Around 29,000 children die each day — or 10.5 million a year — without seeing their fifth birthday, says Unicef.

It added that some 94 per cent of the deaths occur in 60 of the world's poorest countries — most from illnesses that modern medicine can easily block.

At the UN Millennium Summit in 2000, all 189 member states at the time committed to the goal of reducing child mortality by two-thirds between 1990 and 2015.

But only seven of the 60 developing countries seem headed towards meeting the goal — Bangladesh, Brazil, Egypt, Indonesia, Mexico, Nepal and the Philippines — while 14 others have seen child mortality rise, according to figures presented at a symposium in New York.

Lack of finances and trained personnel, armed conflicts that ravage developing countries, and the spread of Aids are all factors, noted participants in the meeting, organised by Unicef, Norway and the British medical journal the *Lancet*.

"Each of us here knows the scope of the challenges," Unicef head Ann Veneman said.

Pneumonia is the leading killer, leaving more than two million people dead each year — more than Aids, malaria and measles combined, according to Unicef.

Most deaths can be prevented through vaccination, clean water, vitamin A supplements and improved maternal health, which are often lacking in the world's poorest countries.

"The accident of where children are born determines their chance to survive," Queen Rania of Jordan said.

"How much longer will impoverished parents have to bury the children they love?"

Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg said he recognised the "injustice that all Norwegian infants are immunised, but very few children are in parts of Asia and Africa".

Also among the speakers was a child who beat the odds of surviving in the developing



**WAR TORN:** Sierra Leone has the world's highest child-death ratio. PICTURE / REUTERS

## DYING CHILDREN

Children who die by the age of 5, per 1000 births

**283** Sierra Leone

**3** Singapore

**6** New Zealand

Source: Unicef

world and became a voice for others.

Aminata Palmer, an 11-year-old girl from Sierra Leone — where one out of three children dies before the age of five, in the world's deadliest ratio — spoke about her family's battle with hunger in their war-ravaged land.

She also decried the deaths of children

from illness or starvation amid fighting unleashed "as a consequence of mistakes of adults".

More money and political commitment is needed to extend the reach of existing services to more children, symposium participants said.

The plan to reduce child mortality by 2015 is a "very ambitious task", said Hans Rosling, professor of international health from the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, pointing out that most of the world's healthiest countries have taken much more than the span of a generation to accomplish that.

Sweden — which, with Singapore, has the world's highest child survival rate — was on par with today's Niger in the first half of the 19th century, with about one in every four children dying before the age of five, and has gradually worked its way up to the present level over several generations, Professor Rosling said.

Mr Stoltenberg, whose country has pledged to contribute US\$1.3 billion (\$1.98 billion) to a global immunisation programme by 2015, has called on other nations to join the campaign.

— AP

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