

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

# United Nations Country Team (UNCT)

Welcome Address at

**A Special Lecture:**

## **Convention on the Rights Of the Child – Challenges Ahead**

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Professor Jaap E. Doek, Chairman, United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child,

Ms Gaye Phillips, Representative of United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Malaysia,

Ms. Caroline Verma, OIC of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Malaysia,

Excellencies, Colleagues, and Members of the Media,

Selamat petang dan salam sejahtera kepada semua para hadirin sekalian.

On behalf of the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) of Malaysia, it gives me great pleasure to warmly welcome you all to this evening's special lecture on the Convention on the Rights of the Child – Challenges Ahead.

Thank you all for taking time off from your busy schedules to be with us. I want to especially thank Professor Jaap E. Doek for graciously agreeing to deliver today's lecture. Professor Doek has worked tirelessly throughout his career to champion the promotion and protection of human rights, in particular the rights of all children. His presence here serves as an inspiration for us all.

I would also like to thank my colleagues in the UNCT of Malaysia, especially Ms Gaye Phillips of UNICEF for taking the lead in organizing this event and for helping to make this lecture a reality. Promoting the right to development for all, tops the agenda of all the UN agencies working here in Malaysia.

Distinguished guests

Human Rights Day is observed by the international community every year on 10 December. It commemorates the day in 1948 when the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This year, the theme is "Fighting Poverty: A Matter of Obligation, Not Charity."

UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, in his statement for this year's Human Rights Day, observed that: "Today, development, security and human rights go hand in hand; no one of them can advance very far without the other two. Indeed, anyone who speaks forcefully for human rights but does nothing about human security and human development – or vice versa – undermines both his credibility and his cause."

Global economic growth has never been as rapid as in the last five years, and yet the distance between the poorest nations and the richest is widening. Inequalities within nations are also increasing almost everywhere. In too many countries, rising national GDP has failed to 'lift all boats;' many prosper, but too many others are left in extreme poverty. It is clear that economic growth alone does not guarantee wider human development.

It is within this context that we need to implement the values enshrined in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and reiterated so compellingly in the internationally agreed Millennium Declaration, to make globalization a more equitable and inclusive process that fortifies human security rather than undermines it. A great challenge is the need to address

the un-equalizing nature of current global growth if we are to reduce poverty, enhance human security and achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Poverty and social inequality persist because many people lack their universally-guaranteed human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Universal Declaration emphasized that human rights are inherent to all people. Freedom from poverty is a basic human right and tackling poverty should, therefore, be addressed as a basic human right, not as an act of charity.

Unfortunately people whose rights are denied are more likely to be poor. The poor, especially children and women, cannot enjoy their rights to education, health and housing, simply because they cannot afford them. And poverty affects all human rights. For example, if the poor cannot enjoy their right to basic education, this limits their opportunities throughout life, and restricts their public participation, thereby curtailing their ability to influence policies affecting themselves.

Distinguished guests

The UNCT is pleased to note that Malaysia has made remarkable development progress over the past three and a half decades or so, especially in terms of reducing poverty. Malaysia has achieved seven out of the eight MDGs – halting and reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS however, remains elusive.

But while Malaysia has made tremendous progress in reducing absolute poverty, there are still about 1.2 million Malaysians living below the national poverty line. The bulk of these live in rural areas, and among the poorest are the indigenous communities in East Malaysia who even face challenges in accessing basic health and education services.

Distinguished guests

The task of ensuring that human rights is not just a luxury for those who can afford it lies in your hands. The voice of civil society needs to be heard, in helping to ensure that the real risks of poverty, particularly in the area of human rights are not ignored. In this task, the UN needs influential people like yourselves to hold world leaders and the United Nations to account.

I would like to conclude by once again expressing my warm appreciation to our distinguished guest, Professor Jaap E. Doek for accepting the UNCT's invitation to deliver today's special lecture, which we are all much looking forward to hearing.

Thank you.