

Goodwill towards children is absolutely vital

by Mark Pavilons

As we enter the holiday season, we should talk the talk when it comes to extending goodwill toward others, especially children.

Most of us would agree there's nothing on this planet as beautiful as the wide-eyed wonderment of kids on Christmas. Priceless.

And yet these moments are limited to the western world, developed nations wealthy enough to celebrate the holidays in all of their splendor.

I am reminded of the lyrics from "We Are the World," recorded by United Support of Artists for Africa in 1985. It was written by the legendary Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie.

"We are the world

We are the children

We are the ones who make a brighter day

So, let's start giving

There's a choice we're making

We're saving our own lives

It's true we'll make a better day

Just you and me."

This was a U.S. effort to aid in famine relief, following on the success of "Do They Know It's Christmas?"

The success of this song generated millions for foreign aid and hopefully it reached the needy.

"Do They Know It's Christmas?" was written in 1984 by Bob Geldof and Midge Ure in reaction to the 1983-1985 famine in Ethiopia. It was first recorded in a single day by Band Aid, a supergroup put together by Geldof and Ure and consisting mainly of the biggest British and Irish musical acts at the time.

Again, we are all keenly aware of the holidays, but are they?

"And there won't be snow in Africa this Christmas time

The greatest gift they'll get this year is life

Where nothing ever grows

No rain or rivers flow

Do they know it's Christmas time at all?"

According to a recent report, progress is still needed, even though the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted 30 years ago.

Many of the poorest children have yet to feel the impact, according to 'The Convention on the Rights of the Child at a Crossroads' report.

'There have been impressive gains for children over the past three decades, as more and more are living longer, better and healthier lives. However, the odds continue to be stacked against the poorest and most vulnerable,' said UNICEF executive director Henrietta Fore. 'In addition to the persistent challenges of health, nutrition and education, children today have to contend with new threats like climate change, online abuse and cyberbullying. Only with innovation, new technologies, political will and increased resources will we help translate the vision of the Convention on the Rights of the Child into a reality for all children everywhere.'

Citing progress in child rights over the past three decades, the report notes that the global under-five mortality rate has fallen by about 60 per cent and the proportion of primary-school-aged children not in school decreased from 18 per cent to 8 per cent.

The guiding principles of the CRC 'non-discrimination; the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and the right to protection' have influenced numerous constitutions, laws, policies and practices globally.

However, the report notes this progress has not been even.

In low and middle-income countries, children from the poorest households are twice as likely to die from preventable causes before their fifth birthday than children from the richest households.

According to available data, only half of children from the poorest households in sub-Saharan Africa are vaccinated against measles, compared to 85 per cent of children from the richest households. Measles vaccination coverage has stagnated since 2010, contributing to a resurgence of the deadly disease in many countries. Almost 350,000 cases of measles were recorded in 2018, more than double the total in 2017.

Despite a decline in child marriage rates globally, the poorest girls in some countries are more at risk today than they were in 1989.

Poverty, discrimination and marginalization continue to leave millions of the most disadvantaged children at risk. Armed conflicts, rising xenophobia and the global migration and refugee crisis all have a devastating impact on global progress.

Children are physically, physiologically and epidemiologically most at risk of the impacts of the climate crisis. Rapid changes in climate are spreading disease, increasing the intensity and frequency of extreme weather events, and creating food and water insecurity. Unless urgent action is taken, the worst for many children is yet to come.

I am a father. And I've been privileged to meet and interact with less fortunate children from Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Take it from me, the need is as great as it ever was. I was there to help and deliver aid, albeit for a short time. I would volunteer again in a heartbeat and take my entire family with me.

We are the world, and it's incumbent upon us to share the wealth. Give of yourself this holiday season!

Dec. 3 is designated as 'Giving Tuesday.' Check it out at <https://givingtuesday.ca>