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Millions of vulnerable children at risk as governments fail to renew pledges to protect their rights

Child rights organisations express outrage at global inaction as the UN marks the 30th anniversary of the most widely ratified international human rights treaty

(London): The lives of millions of vulnerable children are at risk because the majority of the world's nations have failed to renew their commitment to children's rights, six leading international child rights organisations have warned.

The agencies, represented by a coalition – **Joining Forces** – expressed dismay that only a handful of countries have made concrete commitments to advance children's rights to mark the 30th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on 20 November.

Less than half of all countries have so far adopted the “*For every child, every right*” [global pledge](#) to redouble action for children, at the invitation of UNICEF and the United Nations.

Worse still, less than 50 countries have submitted national pledges and almost none of the countries with the highest rates of child poverty and deprivation have made any commitments.

“There are millions of children who have been left behind,” said Meg Gardinier, secretary general of ChildFund Alliance and chair of Joining Forces. “For all we have achieved since 1989, their suffering is a grave breach of the promises made to children 30 years ago. It is imperative that states work with renewed vigour and urgency to realize the rights of all children.”

The six agencies urged governments to make specific policy commitments for children or pledge increased investments in areas such as education, health or social protection.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most widely ratified international human rights treaty in history. It has prompted substantial investment in children's health, education and safety and the adoption of laws and policies that recognise the rights of children, particularly in areas where they are vulnerable, including labour exploitation, corporal punishment, alternative care and forced and early marriage.

However, the coalition expressed grave concern that despite extraordinary advances in the last three decades, the lives of too many children remain blighted.

Andrew Morley, President and Chief Executive Officer of World Vision International, said: “Shocking numbers continue to die from preventable causes, with millions more missing school or facing heart-breaking abuse. An estimated 12 million girls under 18 are married each year. I recently met an 8-year-old girl in East Africa who had been subjected to FGM and forced marriage. Her childhood was stolen and her future devastated. We cannot stand by and allow this atrocity to keep happening.”

The Joining Forces report: [A Second Revolution: 30 Years of Child Rights, and the Unfinished Agenda](#), showed commitments made three decades ago to protect the rights of

children remain unfulfilled for millions. Violence still affects countless children. Discrimination based on age, gender, disability, sexual orientation and religion harms children worldwide.

Key factors include a lack of investment in critically important services. Most countries fall well short of spending the 5-6% of GDP needed to ensure universal coverage of essential health care. And foreign aid, which many lower income countries rely on, is falling short in areas such as health and education.

Another factor, the report said, is the lack of quality data. Governments tend to rely on data that reflects national averages, making it difficult to identify the needs of specific children and to monitor progress. Comprehensive data collection and disaggregation of data by gender, age, disability and locality, are increasingly important as rights violations disproportionately affect disadvantaged children.

Existing statistics show that poverty is still the single greatest determinant of outcomes for a child. Children in the poorest 20% of households are 40% more likely than average to die before their fifth birthday. Young children in the poorest families, as well as in rural and remote areas, are 2 to 3 times more likely to suffer stunted physical growth. And children worldwide are twice as likely as adults to live in extreme poverty.

Editor's note:

Joining Forces is an alliance of six leading international NGOs working with and for children under the age of 18 to secure their rights and end violence against them.

The alliance comprises ChildFund Alliance, Plan International, Save the Children International, SOS Children's Villages International, Terre des Hommes International Federation and World Vision International.

An Executive Summary of The Second Revolution is available [here](#). For in depth understanding of how failure to fulfil rights most affects marginalised children read the policy brief "Delivering Progress for the Most Excluded Children." It lays out the critical steps needed to realise the rights of the most vulnerable. The first of a series of policy briefs, it is available at www.child-rights-now.org/most-excluded-children.

Visit child-rights-now.org for more information.