



Advocacy groups outline priorities for UNGA

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UNITED NATIONS, MediaGlobal News—As diplomats weaved through crowded New York City streets toward United Nations headquarters for the 68th General Assembly (UNGA), executives from Save the Children, the Gates Foundation, and the One Campaign met with members of the press to outline their top priorities for the busy week ahead. All three emphasized countries' quantifiable progress in meeting UN [Millennium Development Goals](#) (MDGs)—reducing poverty, hunger, maternal/child mortality and more. But, they said, additional steps must be taken to diminish suffering and spur development.

[Save the Children's](#) Chief Executive Officer Carolyn Miles kicked off the session by describing significant improvements in maternal and child mortality since the MDGs were set in 1990. The number of children dying each year has been cut in half—from 12 million in 1990 to about 6 million today. But, she said, there are still 18,000 needless deaths a day.

The plight of Syrian children, "one of the worst humanitarian crises, actually, in decades" according to Miles, is a major imperative for Save the Children at UNGA. Nearly 7 million people are in need of assistance, both inside and outside Syria. There are 2 million refugees, of whom 1 million are children. Miles said that desperate people are crossing Syrian borders into Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Turkey at the rate of 5,000 per day. One refugee camp alone is now the fourth largest city in Jordan.

It "really is children who are paying a price," said Miles. Today, Save the Children released a report entitled "[Hunger in a War Zone](#)," that outlines the growing crisis in Syria, especially with respect to severe food shortages causing malnutrition and starvation. During UNGA week, Save the Children will ask for "much more" access to families inside the war-torn country, to deliver food, water, and medical supplies and work to ensure countries follow through on yet unfulfilled commitments for humanitarian assistance.

Educating the public in conjunction with UNGA is also essential. Miles' message: "Regardless of what you think about the political situation, you can do something about the humanitarian situation."

When asked whether chemical warfare within Syria has had a psychological effect on donors, Miles tells **MediaGlobal**: "I think for us it has been part of the challenge. Our position is, that was a horrible thing, and those who did it have to be brought to justice. But in the scheme of things, there are 100,000 people who have been killed in Syria. They've been killed by bombs and bullets and rockets, not by gas. While we have to keep pursuing that particular piece of diplomacy—and we must do that because that's something that the world has agreed should not be done—what we really have to do is address the issues that have killed 100,000 Syrians."

Edith Jibunoh, Director for Multilateral Institutions at the [One Campaign](#), described the "data revolution" that increasingly drives activism in the developing world. According to Jibunoh, meeting MDGs requires public access to facts.

Information as a tool for development will be a running theme for the One Campaign at UNGA. Its "[Factivism](#)" campaign, introduced by U2 lead singer and organization co-founder Bono during a [TED talk](#) last February, fights poverty with evidence-based activism facilitated by innovations in technology. Public participation is key. The One Campaign encourages "ordinary citizens" to take action and "be a part of the solution." For example, people can Google publicly available facts (such as pledges for Syria) on smart phones, then use that data "as a powerful tool" to demand accountability and fight corruption.

The One Campaign intends to bring such stories to the UN, hoping to inspire information dissemination and public involvement. Jibunoh said, "Factivists on the ground" can vividly illustrate "how much work has been done, how much work is left to do, and where you can actually intervene to make a difference."

Also at UNGA, the One Campaign will stress countries' considerable progress and hard work, while at the same time highlighting issues such as "energy poverty" that require increased attention. The world's poor need electricity. When asked how the poor can utilize smart phones in countries with little access to electricity, Jibunoh told **MediaGlobal**, "The electricity problem is a huge one...but what you'll find is innovation takes over. People go to charging stations...[or share] one cell phone in a village. What's interesting is the trend," that illuminates issues requiring mobilization and action.

Mark Suzman, Managing Director of International Policy, Programs & Advocacy at the [Gates Foundation](#), told journalists that while there have been "huge individual successes" in reaching MDGs, such as reductions in child mortality, we still fall short. He noted, "progress hasn't happened by accident," thanks to commitments by many governments and donors, citing Ethiopia, Tanzania, Malawi, and Bangladesh as prime examples. But others lag behind.

The Gates Foundation "wants to make sure messages of hope get through" what can oftentimes be dry UN jargon. Suzman said the "pace of improvement globally" is now three to four times what it was in the nineties, so there is "genuine acceleration." Cost effective, measurable tools and interventions are now known that can breed "dramatic success if implemented," so we "really don't want to take our foot off the gas pedal."

"Discussions going on now [at UNGA] may seem vague or abstract but are actually tremendously important," said Suzman, with real impact on people's lives. The UN "uniquely can do well," because "they provide universal goals, they have some real global legitimacy" and they can provide a "rallying cry."

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Carolyn Miles, CEO of Save the Children, briefs reporters on top priorities for UNGA. Photo credit: MediaGlobal News/Yvonne Bokhour

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