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Barbara Khol

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On Unicef Annual Report

by Barbara Khol

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On Dec. 19 in Brussels, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) released its annual report titled, "The State of the World's Children 1992." According to UNICEF, the report is a "plea, particularly for the inclusion of...voices silenced by poverty and illiteracy" resulting from "malnutrition and preventable disease," by "being born female" and by "death before their lives have begun." UNICEF said, "The principle of 'first call for children' means that protection for the growing bodies and minds of the young ought to have priority in any society's resource allocation, and should become an accepted ethic of a new world order." The report noted that 1 billion people world-wide lack adequate food, potable water, primary health care and basic education. UNICEF blames war and ideological conflict as the principal causes of such shortages. The report said, "For almost half a century, the world has been distracted from [providing basic necessities]...by military conflict and ideological division...War, and the threat of war, have diverted our physical and financial resources, our science and technology, our ingenuity and imagination, and our human capacity and concern." The report emphasizes that with the end of the Cold War, the time has come for governments to commit to "the task of ending absolute poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy, and preventable disease, and to building a new world order which will reflect humankind's highest hopes rather than its darkest fears." Every week, a quarter million children die, and millions are surviving "in the half life of malnutrition and almost permanent illness." Funding for basic needs could be found by shifting spending from high-cost services for the few to low-cost services for the many, and by allocating "a small fraction" of military expenditures to basic human needs. (Basic data from Deutsche Press Agentur, Chinese news service Xinhua, 12/19/91)

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