
2024: A Difficult Year in a More Hostile World for Boys and Girls

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It might seem like just another headline, but it shakes to the core: “Children in Gaza trapped in a nightmare that gets worse every day.” He is one of the many who daily report on the catastrophic situation suffered by the few infants who survive a massacre that seems to be endless.

This is also confirmed by the general director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Catherine Russell, who has said that the children of Gaza are trapped in a nightmare that worsens with each passing day and not only because of the bombs, permanent destruction and the inevitable loss of life at every moment, but because “the lives of minors are increasingly in danger due to preventable diseases and the lack of food and water.”

According to a statement from the world entity reviewed by the Prensa Latina agency, cases of diarrhea in children under five years old increased from 48 000 to 71 000 in just one week starting December 17, which is equivalent to 3 200 new per day.

It's also estimated that there have been more than 600 attacks that have impacted hospitals and other vital medical infrastructure in the region since last October 7.

If we only thought for a moment about this situation, it would be enough for 2024 to open its doors in a truly complex, turbulent, and unsafe world for infants, “increasingly more hostile,” as UNICEF described it after recognizing that a quarter of the world's minors today live in war zones or are fleeing from them.

And the fact is that, the conflicts in regions like Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ukraine, and Yemen, which unleashed waves of rights violations and suffering, others were added in 2023 in countries like Sudan, with the largest children displacement crisis in the world and Gaza, considered the most dangerous place on the planet for children, with almost six thousand boys and girls dead in less than three months.

The UNICEF official recalled that behind each of these figures there's a story of unimaginable childhood suffering, of rights violated and denied and that “the pain of these boys and girls is an accusation against a world that has not

protected them from the dangers of war.

Other devastating crises such as the floods in Libya or the earthquakes in Afghanistan and Morocco, disease outbreaks such as the cholera epidemic in Haiti and situations of food insecurity such as that experienced in the Horn of Africa, have also marked the lives of people of all ages and in particular, little ones.

“Each of them has the potential to amplify the effects of the others and cause increasingly worse disasters,” considered Russell, who also recalled that the number of boys and girls living in conditions of multidimensional poverty increased a 15% until reaching 1.2 billion in just the last three years.

“These are dark times, especially for children, times that have led to hope being scarce among many of us,” she warned.

UNICEF's year-end report specifies that nearly 14,000 children under five die every day from largely avoidable causes, such as diarrheal diseases and malaria, making the organization's work more urgent and necessary than ever, which has had a great impact – for example – on the reduction of child malnutrition at a global scale.

In this scenario, some lights emerged: Child immunization rates reached four million more boys and girls in 2023 than in 2021 and almost universal access to primary schooling was attained. More than 23 million people had access to clean water and some 27 million boys and girls were vaccinated against measles thanks to the efforts of the United Nations Children's Fund.

For Catherine Russell, this will be another difficult year, with more difficulties ahead and we'll have to “choose to make bold commitments and decisive measures to keep children safe”, including investing more in the systems and services required so that our infants grow and develop healthily.

Translated by Amilkal Labañino / CubaSí Translation Staff
