

World Health Day 2003
Statement co-written by International School students

This year's World Health Day is dedicated to us, the world's children. Thank you for hearing our voice today.

We, the children assembled here, are the lucky ones. For the most part, we are healthy. We have access to clean water. We have food that is plentiful and nutritious. We are fortunate enough to attend schools that are designed to be safe and healthy places in which we can learn. Laws and measures exist to provide protection for us from polluted air and from many hazardous chemicals. We live free from the risk of contracting malaria.

More can be done and we urge each and every one of you to work even harder to ensure that our homes, our schools and our communities are healthy and safe places to live, learn and grow.

But for many children around the world the situation is very different. The very places that should be the safest are those that harbour the greatest threats to our health. Think for a minute. Around a million children die each year from malaria. It is easy to say a million, but hard to imagine. Look around at the faces of the children here today. Every hour of the day, malaria is killing this many children around the world.¹

Now add to that the 1.3 million children who die from diarrhoea. So, every 30 minutes malaria and diarrhoea have decimated the number of children who are here today.

Would all the children stand please.

Most of the children that are suffering today have never heard of World Health Day. It is on behalf of these children, that we speak today.

We are the most vulnerable. We are the ones who suffer the most when our environment is polluted and unsafe. We are the ones who need healthy places to live, learn and play. All of us have the right to grow up in a healthy home, school and community.

Could we ask all of you who are committed to making a difference to children please raise a hand?

We are gathered here today, the 7th of April 2003, to celebrate World Health Day dedicated to Healthy Environments for Children. As we stand, and raise our hands and our voices, let us remember that it is not World Health Day that is important—it is our commitment to make a difference. Our future, and the future of the world,

¹ Assuming approximately 120 children in room. Calculation below for child deaths/hour from malaria and diarrhoea:

1,040,776 child malaria deaths/year + 1,447,111 child diarrhoea deaths (WHR 2001) x 1 year/365 days x 1 day/24 hours = 284 child deaths/hour or 142 child deaths/30minutes

depends on what we do after today, and the action we take in the days, months and years ahead.

Please help us before it is too late.

But help us by holding our hand and working with us. In the words of other children who spoke halfway across the world,

*“Do not walk behind us because we cannot lead,
Do not walk ahead of us because we cannot catch up with you,
Do not walk backwards because we need to walk forward
Please walk with us”*

Together we can – and must – shape the future of life through healthy environments for children.

Thank you.