

**Address by the Honourable Kim Beazley AC
Governor of Western Australia**

Save the Children Centenary Year Event

Monday, 26th August 2019

Thank you for the invitation to join you this morning in this important milestone year for Save the Children. Thank you, too, for your warm welcome to country, Glenda.

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet – the Whadjuk Noongar people – and pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging.

I am certain that all of us here are of the same mind when we speak of the most vulnerable people on the planet. The millions of children who right now – and every second – are suffering appalling atrocities and deprivations due to ongoing global wars and conflicts.

The consequences are devastating. Lives obliterated, families torn apart, childhoods lost forever, innocence stained and happiness stolen by death and pain. The world's young witnessing things no child should.

Put bluntly, we could be tempted to say that the estimated 420 million children (or nearly one fifth of children worldwide) living in a conflict zone today is a dreadful testament to our species' cruelty. But that would be too simplistic.

At play is a deeply complex labyrinth of social, economic and political structures and pressures that manipulate and set the global paradigm, and consequently the outcomes for all those millions of children.

The shape of global politics and governance of the world's peoples is undergoing what I see as a problem in that human rights are slowly falling off the map. It seems to have disappeared from our consciousness.

No-one thinks about the consequences of war for civilians, they do not care that children are suffering. In fact, groups like Al-Qaeda in Yemen for example like the suffering. They equate it with power because it debilitates the population and gives them avenues of embedding and enmeshing themselves into target local communities and groups. As well, we have seen in Syria a generation of children growing up and being raised amid death and war for the past nine years. With their childhoods robbed, the side effects of such violence and trauma are likely to last a lifetime.

Refugee camps offer little hope or respite. Just last month it was reported that refugees, including thousands of children, are facing a humanitarian crisis in the Rukban Syrian refugee camp close to the border with Jordan. Media have reported that thousands of people appear to be fleeing to government-controlled areas to avoid the brutal desert heat and starvation. Food supplies are critically low and drinking water scarce, with the last United Nations' food aid reportedly delivered in February.

You can see the problems manifesting in these supposedly 'temporary' camps – just like another, the Zaatari camp in Jordan, also near the Syrian border. In April it was home to an estimated 80,000 refugees, 40 per cent of them under the age of 11. They become long-term camps without facilities and opportunities for people to live normal lives or for children to go to school.

We debate refugee issues here and we are a generous home for a substantial number each year. What a great thing it would be if we could be a mobiliser of world effort for those in camps in Jordan and the Jordanian/Syrian border. Jordan cannot carry them and aid is too small and too slow. They have a great sense of responsibility because of Arab ethics and tribal loyalty. They have to handle it but they can't. We need to get the globe to acknowledge this and fix it. The Syrian Government want and seeks to exacerbate suffering.

Our aid agencies are overrun and we do not want this to be a source of instability in itself.

In the Yemen war, latest figures from the United Nations show that in the past year almost one child a day has been killed in violent attacks. It is a dreadful fact that 70 years after the creation of the Geneva Conventions which seek to protect civilians in and around war zones, Yemeni children continue to find themselves in the firing line.

There is serious aid required for health and education because tens of thousands of children are being raised with no chance.

My view that human rights are slowly falling off the map is underscored by the fact that international law is being undermined. Liberal internationalist principles are receding from saliency with order itself under siege.

We find ourselves at this time grappling with this troubling scenario. A scenario reinforced by the World Justice Project's Rule of Law Index for 2019 (released in February this year) that shows a continuing negative slide worldwide toward weaker rule of law.

In a sign suggesting a rising authoritarianism, checks and constraints on government powers declined in more countries than any other index factor in the past year, and for the second year in a row.

(The World Justice Project's (WJP) index measures rule of law adherence in 126 countries and jurisdictions worldwide. Australia dropped a ranking to 11th place, with Denmark at the top followed by Norway and Finland ranking second and third. Venezuela came in last)

The WJP's executive director, Elizabeth Andersen, described this slide in rule of law as "deeply concerning". I agree with her.

This is why the incredible work of Save the Children continues to be – after 10 decades sadly – more and more relevant right across the world.

However, we cannot lose hope. This sentiment was underscored by the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres earlier this year (February 25, 2019) when he told the Human Rights Council that people's rights were under fire 'in many parts of the globe'. Despite this, he insisted that he was not losing hope thanks to the progress made by powerful grassroots movements for social justice.

Save the Children is one of those powerful entities. Its remarkable 100 year history that we celebrate today is driven by the vision of its two founders – sisters who simply and courageously wanted to improve the lives of children. That vision and compassion still drives Save the Children today. It is at the heart of the astonishing work it does for children everywhere, including in Australia.

I am going to leave the specifics of that history and breadth of work to Save the Children's CEO, Paul Ronalds. I would, however, like to acknowledge the ubiquitous character of Save the Children: Every day for the past 100 years its efforts and contributions to children and families everywhere have gone above and beyond.

It is important for me as Governor to also acknowledge the work that Save the Children does closer to home, here in Western Australia.

While we are free of civil conflict and war, there are still children in our communities with pressing needs and who continue to be vulnerable.

I am aware of this in my role as Patron of a number of health and education initiatives for young people, including the Dr Tracy Westerman Aboriginal Psychology Scholarship Program, the Clontarf Foundation, Scouts and Awards WA. All are having a profound effect on the social and emotional wellbeing and learning outcomes of participating children. These organisations work hard to make a difference in the knowledge that every child has the right to a healthy, educated and safe future.

With exactly the same motivation, Save the Children has been operating in Western Australia since its first sub branch was formed in Greenmount in 1952. Today, with the support of more than 100 staff and 700 fantastic volunteers, Save the Children makes a significant impact on the lives of thousands of children and their families – from east and west Kimberley, to the Pilbara, and Perth metropolitan area.

I am aware that it is committed to creating possibilities for children to have happy and safe childhoods by supporting families and tackling issues at a community level. This is a very effective approach – it employs local people with local knowledge. Save the Children knows from experience that by working with families, and from within communities, it can have immediate and long-lasting impacts.

Much of the work is focused on early childhood development, parenting and family support, and youth engagement, with an evidenced-based approach to program and community development.

A special mention here to the WA team who last week won the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety's annual Resources Sector Awards for Excellence, for the Woombooriny Amboon Angarriya Partnership Initiative (WAAPI) for its unique Aboriginal-led, community driven approach to improving the lives of Aboriginal children in the Dampier Peninsula. Congratulations.

Save the Children relies on both government and non-government funding to provide these quality programs. This includes grants, corporate support, trusts and foundations, fundraising and general donations. Last year, branches raised around \$335,000.

One of the major events that many of us look forward to each year is the University of Western Australia's Save the Children branch book sale. Last year it raised \$200,000. Just last week it ran

its 55th annual sale, which is a great achievement and a credit to all those volunteers who assist. This is the activity with which I am most familiar. I have twice had to clear out my library – going to and returning from the USA. On both occasions Save the Children's sale has been a great benefit.

As Patron of Volunteering WA, I have had the privilege to meet many fellow Western Australians who selflessly open their hearts to others without expecting reward. I commend the efforts of those wonderful volunteers who commit to Save the Children and its invaluable community work. I hope more people, including young people, will be encouraged to join and boost its volunteer ranks. I know this is becoming harder – not just for Save the Children but for all volunteer organisations in our ageing demographic.

It is why it is essential we work together in what can seem a colossal task of ridding the world of child poverty, death and disadvantage. Our collective efforts do produce the power to achieve change for many hundreds of thousands of children's lives. We can take heart in that.

Your contributions and generosity as members of our State's philanthropic and business community make a huge impact. I would like to acknowledge and thank you all for everything you do, especially for the children. Without your generosity and continued advocacy for Save the Children, its work would be much more challenging and very much less effective.

This event celebrates your dedicated support to work with Save the Children to provide long-term relief and care for children here, and in conflict zones elsewhere in the world.

It also highlights the 'Stop the War on Children' campaign calling on the international community to protect those 420 million children currently living in areas affected by conflict.

There are many conscious-grabbing moments that we have witnessed in recent years that highlight the need for this campaign. It is, as I have said, up to all of us, as groups, movements, nations, and individuals to help.

Congratulations to Save the Children for all its good and great work. It has served the world's families and children for 100 years. That is a very inspiring legacy; one that brings hope and protection to children's lives everywhere.