

22/08/2001

15-strong Malaysian team for UN Special Session on Children

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Malaysia will be sending a 15-strong delegation to the three-day United Nations Special Session on Children in New York from Sept 19 to 21.

The delegation will be led by National Unity and Social Development Minister Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman and will include her ministry's officials, and those from the Health and Education ministries.

Also in the delegation will be officials from the Economic Planning Unit in the Prime Minister's Department and non-governmental organisations.

Siti Zaharah said she would be speaking at the session on the challenges faced by the country in empowering children and in instilling positive values for them to become better citizens.

She said as children were an integral part of society, she would also touch on the need to reduce the "gap" between adults and children.

"Many have taken children's issues for granted.

"It's time we all stop talking and take action to address all issues concerning children."

She said the delegation would bring along at least one child to take part in the session, but did not know if the child would get the opportunity to speak.

According to an AFP report, more than 100 children have registered as delegates to a three-day special session.

"Children will literally be rubbing shoulders with presidents and prime ministers," said Carol Bellamy, director of the UN children's fund Unicef.

"This is a radical change for such high-level meetings," she said.

To date, 113 people under the age of 18 have registered to take part in the session, 34 of them as members of government delegations and 79 representing NGOs.

"Several child delegates have already been selected by governments to formally address the General Assembly, a truly historic breakthrough," Bellamy said.

So far 76 heads of state or government have confirmed they will attend the session, which begins on Sept 19 and leads into the annual two-week general debate, the start of the Assembly's working year.

The session will review progress made since the 1990 world summit on children, which set targets for child survival, protection and development.

Presenting a Unicef report in June, Bellamy said a decade of advances in the health and education of children were in danger of being undermined by poverty, war and AIDS.

A General Assembly special session is a formal meeting of delegates from every UN member state dedicated to one specific subject.

On average, the Assembly holds one such session every two years, but the most recent, on HIV/AIDS, was in June this year. The session on children will be the Assembly's 27th.

In Malaysia, as part of the preparation for the special session, the National Unity and Social Development Ministry will launch a campaign called "Say Yes for Children" on Sept 1.

To be launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the campaign would look at ways at creating a conducive and enabling environment for children to grow up in.

The campaign is built on 10 imperative actions and responsibilities

which aim to deliver the clear and unmistakable message that the citizens of the country care about children.

Following the campaign, everyone is expected to keep the promises of making the future better for children.

(END)