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The young have right to clean environment

P. Sharmini

If everyone does not bother to take care of the environment, children could become sick and we wouldn't be happy.

- 12-year-old S. Arunadevi

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon.- Every child deserves a clean and unpolluted environment.

"Protect the Earth for Children" is one of the 10 imperative actions in the "Say Yes for Children" campaign led by the Global Movement for Children, a world-wide organisation.

The campaign calls for urgent steps by all levels of society, including Governments, society and the private sector, to assure the well-being and security of future generations by safeguarding the environment at global, national and local levels.

Many believe the world belongs to our children and the adults of this generation are its caretakers.

Environmental threats like global warming and water crisis are taking their greatest toll on children. These threats will continue to take their toll for the mistakes of today will continue to haunt the world tomorrow.

The earth's natural resources must be preserved and used wisely to ensure our children's rights to a healthy environment. By speaking up and changing how resources are used, our children's world can be protected.

More than one billion people lack access to clean water, and more than two billion do not have access to decent toilets.

Another of the 10 imperative actions is the right to a compulsory and free primary education of good quality. Children are born into the world eager to learn. However, not all have access to education.

More than 110 million school-age children worldwide, mostly girls, do not go to school and millions more are receiving poor quality education.

The reasons for this are either there is no money, or the school is too far away, or the children are working to support their families.

A basic education is every child's fundamental right. Children without money are entitled to an education. Girls are entitled to an education.

This also includes children who must work, children of ethnic minorities, children with disabilities, and children affected by violence, conflict, or HIV/AIDS.

We must work to make basic education available to all children.

This can be done by eliminating gender discrimination, and schools must become places where all children, boys and girls alike, feel safe and encouraged.

More schools must be built, especially in rural and remote areas to ensure that all children will be able to attend.

Provisions must be made for continuity in education so that children in areas ravaged by crisis, violence and instability can also continue to learn.

The other eight imperative actions in the campaign are "Leave No Child Out", "Put Children First", "Care for Every Child", "Fight HIV/AIDS", "Stop Harming and Exploiting Children", "Listen to Children", "Protect Children from War" and "Fight Poverty: Invest in Children".

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will launch Malaysia's own "Say Yes for Children" campaign on Sept 1, organised by the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development.