

# Count Every Child – global birth registration conference notes



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**Nigel Chapman** (CEO, Plan) welcomed participants to this first global conference on birth registration and today Plan releases its latest Universal Birth Registration (UBR) report. Plan initially started work on birth registration in 1998, and though Plan's global campaign officially ends with this conference, we are committed to continue working on the issue in the countries where we work because 51 million children are currently not registered.

He did not know birth registration was so patchy before joining Plan a few months ago. After raking through the bottom of his cupboard he found his birth certificate. The reason why it has been filed away at the bottom of his cupboard is because we (in developed countries) have so many other forms of identification. However, in many countries this is not the case. Registration at birth is essential to realising the rights of children, their right to protection. Birth certificates can help stop child trafficking, child labour and reunite children with lost families after conflicts and disasters.

So why are there so many problems getting children registered? How has Plan promoted UBR at community level? How did we get governments to deal with the problem and explain to communities the importance of UBR? Plan's innovation has been highlighted in Kenya through partnership with Nokia: text messages were used to register births to central registering offices. Tanzania is another example of innovation, where optical scanning was used to collect population data. To think of travelling 75 kilometres to register the birth of a child is very difficult to conceptualise in the high-tech developed world some of us live in. There are children in our societies that are out of sight, out of mind and totally invisible.

As a result of the campaign, Plan has directly supported the registration of over 40 million children across 32 countries – this is more children than the entire population of Canada! These children now have access to rights. Birth registration is relatively inexpensive but is an essential investment for governments. Plan has helped change the law regarding birth registration in 10 countries helping an estimated 153 million children. Indonesia's registration in some areas has increased from 3% to 72% in two years. This type of work is Plan at its very best! As the new CEO of Plan International this has been very impressive. Plan has intervened to save lives and secure rights. However, this conference is not just to hear about Plan's work, but to take the opportunity to hear from experts in the field of birth registration. The aim of the day is to learn and stimulate action from government donors, NGOs, governments, companies and individuals.

**'Make UBR a Reality' - short film on Plan's UBR campaign**

**Expert Panel 1- Chair, Marie Staunton (National Director, Plan UK)**

Plan UK has 120,000 supporters and leads on work as diverse as gender, disaster reconstruction and the rights of the child. A recent opinion poll asked people in the UK, what is important to break the right of poverty? 71% said education. However, the problem is that in most countries where Plan works, children can't get education without being registered. Plan has helped 40 million children register: how did Plan do this? Here are some answers from Plan colleagues around the world.

**Plan Pakistan – Syed Safdar Reza** (phone and Skype web link, live from Islamabad)

While most offices have been closed because of security threats, Syed came in specially to explain what Plan has been doing with UBR. They have worked with local departments and NGOs including areas where Pakistan is in conflict. Their strategy has focused on initiating and sustaining birth registration. In 2004, Plan was the first NGO working on registering children, including those in remote areas. Many children were not registered which meant there was an extensive backlog. So, Plan partnered with many other organisations to promote birth registration. Plan provided registration forms to teachers to ensure all children entering school were registered. Six months substantial training within communities included translating UBR/UNCRC information into local languages which were then taken to local government offices.

**Q:** Nigel Chapman, how hard is it to work in these areas, given the present situation?

**A:** Of course there are two areas in the extreme north that are very tricky. On the other hand, there are a total of 22 districts/states and work in many of these areas is not so difficult.

### **Plan Indonesia - Reny Rebeka Haning**

Reny is responsible for UBR in Indonesia and is grateful for the opportunity to discuss Indonesian birth registration (this is her first time in the cold weather of the UK). Indonesia is not just a country that was in the line of the tsunami, but a majority Muslim country that stands for democracy. Indonesia has a population of 220 million across 33 provinces. Plan is working in 4 provinces focusing on 9 programme areas. UBR started in 1998 and since then, 281 districts and towns have established birth registration regulations. Before 2006, the legal framework was still using the old discriminatory colonial law.

Birth registration issues in Indonesia include the amount of documentation required for registration, parents having to travel to the city to register their children, and perhaps most importantly, traditional barriers. For example, a mother was not able to register without the formal permission of the father. On the other hand, the dowry is very expensive due to traditional marriage custom - without a formal celebration there can be no formal marriage. If the family has no money, they are not able to afford the ceremony and therefore the children cannot be registered when they marry. Plan's strategy was to focus on policy, raising awareness, building capacity, and scaling up in other Plan programme areas. In 1999, with other children's organisations such as UNICEF, Plan organised a workshop on registering children. As a result, they declared support for the technological infrastructure to support child registration, and to build the capacity of registrars.

In 2001, Plan Indonesia challenged the national birth registration framework, with the support of 17 national organisations, a number of government ministries and local organisations. Working alongside other organisations highlighted weaknesses in the law regarding the civil registration (both births and deaths). Indonesia has made significant achievements, before 2004 3% of children were registered, in 2007 this was up to 72%. The government of Sikka (a region where Plan works) was the model region for the country. They simplified the birth registration process, allowing registration to take place in villages as well as towns and cities. In Sikka, Plan collaborated with religious leaders. In the Western region the population is majority Muslim, however in Sikka the majority is Catholic. The influence of religious leaders is very important in Indonesia. When meeting with religious leaders, Plan would inform them on child rights and birth registration. As a result, they spread the information through Sunday services for Christians and Friday sermons for Muslims.

There was also continuous advocacy work with government staff. An initial issue highlighted was that when there is a new district government, they replace the personnel trained in human rights and birth registration. Therefore, to ensure the correct registration of children, staff within the Sikka district who are trained in human rights and child registration are no longer moved to other areas. Also, anyone who is newly elected has to be trained on human rights and the value of registering children. Religious leaders also play a vital role through the

pre-married consultations where they encourage parents to register their children. Also, midwives are required to write a report on every baby born in the villages. Every month this report is taken to the regional government office. It usually takes more than a month for registration to be completed. Local governments ensured midwives wrote the report while ensuring registration is free for under 18s.

Plan also works in the region of Kebumen and has established a good partnership with the post office. People would go to the post office to send registration cards. Therefore the post office supported birth registration and enabled a system of birth registration to work effectively. There was also close collaboration with government and education offices. Plan provided the software in the civil registration office so that the data could be correctly recorded. Plan's excellent work was highlighted when the local government gave Plan Kebumen an award for all they have done. Kebumen registered 100,000 children through the post and mobile technology.

**Q:** Marie Staunton, if child registration systems are simplified, it allows the system to function during periods of conflict. Working with religious leaders, community leaders and children's groups to promote birth registration has been demonstrated to be very effective. What was the role of the children's groups? On the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of child rights it is importance to have children participating in any process.

**A:** Children have a special role in policy and advocacy because we don't see children as objects but subjects of development. Firstly, we train staff and we drive programmes forward, but we do allow children to speak about their experience regarding birth registration and human rights. Therefore they can speak to their staff about how important their registration is, and the benefit it has had on them. The government also allocated a great deal of budget towards children.

**Q:** This question is regarding the traditional aspect of birth registration where children were not registered as a result of non-registered marriages. What role did the religious leaders play in dealing with this problem?

**A:** The religious leaders had a very active role. They worked within families and communities to reduce the cost of the dowry and the ceremony – two issues which stop mothers registering their children. The religious leaders can legitimise marriages, which the communities then agree on, even if the couple do not have the money to make a traditional ceremony. Every Sunday, the religious leaders encourage communities to reduce the price of the dowry. This has been very effective.

**Q:** Could you explain the roles of the post office and midwives in different situations? For example, in the post office is there a specific person who deals with birth registration or can anyone working there do it?

**A:** Regarding the post offices, there are 200 workers, but only a few will go to civil offices to register births. Only midwives are able to record births. In the Western region, midwives do not like to live in the villages, therefore the only way that they can see the child (and register the child) is a result of using a motorcycle. They also know the address of the parents which helps speed up the birth registration process. An example from Sikka: out of 160 midwives, they all act as birth registrars. Therefore there is no specific role relating to birth registration – they are all in support.

**Q:** Judge Joyce Aluoch (International Criminal Court), regarding the change of law in 2006, are the previous project examples a result of Plan's own initiative or is it a part of the law? It seems the literacy rate in Indonesia is very high which makes it a lot easier. What are the main conditions of the law? Does the law have penalties - most laws have penalties - and therefore most laws persuade people?

**A:** The local administration agreed birth registration for children under 60 days old. This was important because before the enactment of the law, you were not able to just go and register

because the former law was unjust: if someone was a Christian but not high social class they would not be given the right to be an Indonesian national. Also, before the law, if you were married to a foreigner and you had a child, the child had to be given permission to stay in Indonesia. As a result, the child may be separated from their mother. Therefore, it was very important to implement the law to create equality. Regarding the penalties, if the child is not registered after 60 days, they will get a letter to go to the local court office. It is still difficult for many people to go to court; therefore this is a deterrent.

**Q:** What are the motivations and incentives for post offices and midwives to implement birth registration?

**A:** The government has distributed executive orders to encourage post offices and midwives to adopt birth registration. It has been very important to have local government input. As a result, Plan has lobbied local governments to issue executive orders and use budgets to support midwives and post offices.

**Q:** Bruce Yeager (Plan), traditional barriers are often very sensitive issues. Therefore, has working with traditional leaders been difficult?

**A:** It has been both easy and difficult. For example, with Catholics and Protestants, we know that they both use the same Bible and therefore can encourage the leaders to see the good points in the Bible: Jesus wants us to register the children! But things are not changed in just one night. Plan worked with traditional leaders for 3 years to highlight the value of registering children, after which they started to encourage registration. Plan also encouraged children into the advocacy campaign who can then spread information regarding child registration to their parents.

**Q:** Simon Szreter (Cambridge University), wants to know if Mr Sosimus Mitang, the Mayor of Sikka (who had accompanied Reny Rebeka Haning to the conference), thinks other mayors within Indonesia would adopt the system which Sikka has used, and if so what are the motivations to do so?

**A:** In relation to child rights, the mayor views birth registration as an important aspect of development training. Therefore he has encouraged the local governments to provide budgets for birth registration. He has encouraged other mayors to campaign for birth registration with Plan because the districts can also benefit from better service planning as a result of accurate birth registration data.

### **Plan Paraguay - Belinda Portillo**

Latin America is not the poorest region, but it is the region where you find the greatest inequality. The most vulnerable people are indigenous and African background communities, and migrants. In 2006 there was the first regional conference on birth registration, which committed all Latin American states to full registration by 2015. They also agreed that the registration of children is a protective tool against child exploitation and child labour. The main barrier to birth registration is a lack of political will and a lack of social awareness. In reality, the main barriers are still in place, and legislation has not been adapted sufficiently to face Latin America's birth registration issues. For example there are gender issues as many women are separated but not legally divorced. Therefore when they have a child with a new partner they cannot register it. Despite the problems, there have been achievements; registering children is now on the public agenda which demonstrates that people are learning.

The Paraguay experience – before the campaign, 15% of children did not have any registration, 70% of under-5s were not registered, with the main barrier being the cost of registration. Also, birth certificates had to be issued by hospitals. Plan has started to work with the mass media to highlight the process required to comply. Plan has also started training people who are working in the system. 40% of children are not born in hospitals leaving them with no access to birth certificates; these children are more vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking. Plan only used to work on registering births in one department of a hospital, but

now it has been adopted by the ministry of health and will be implemented throughout the national system. Training midwives on the value of birth registration is also relatively cost effective. Paraguay has been used as a new model, highlighting the lack of rural state services. At a rural level there is only access to schools, not hospitals and other state services. Therefore Plan Paraguay decided to work at the school level. The success of the model is being able to intervene at a local level. This allows many partners, ministries and children to be brought together.

School-based birth registration builds awareness which allows the main barriers to registration to be identified. A census regarding child registration, or a lack of registration, is carried out by teachers and therefore does not require additional costs. Once the census was achieved, the process of registration started in schools. After further meetings, officials started the birth registration procedure which was then transferred to the municipalities. There are many benefits to this model, including establishing links between duty bearers. It also ensures communities have essential services within their villages. This method is low cost and transfers national capacity to local areas. This should help Paraguay achieve the 2015 MDGs. It is also important for Plan and all agencies to carry out their commitments. Through inter-agency support we can locate human resources at a regional and local level to challenge governments. We need to work with governments to strengthen protection systems in order to ensure that they are complementing other child rights. It is necessary to have a database of best practices and if possible, online. We need to use a uniformed method of registration. We need to compare the expected number of births with the actual number of births registered. It is also very important to have a regional agenda to ensure legal and policy standardisation. In Latin America there are three countries on target to meeting MDG goal on registering children: Argentina, Chile and Cuba – therefore why don't we learn from them?

**Q:** Catherine Klirodotakau (ChildHope UK), why are the African communities marginalised from the registration process?

**A:** The main barriers to African communities include the distance people live away from registration offices, poverty and a lack of information. They are not aware of their rights or the procedures which allows them to demand such rights from their government.

**Q:** Professor Brad Blitz (Kingston University), a question regarding the value added of registering children. What are the secondary benefits of the birth registration? On p26. of the 'Count Every Child' report, Plan outlines a number of secondary benefits of registering children, including benefits of methodology. Are there specific examples related to government changes?

**A:** Previously, 70% of children were not registered, after 2 years this figure has dropped by 10%. This is not a Plan statistic, this is a government statistic. Also, it is not only children who are not registered and are therefore lacking an identity, but also adults. As a result we have also ensured that the number of adults being registered has also increased. In Paraguay the key example is the involvement of the state. The new government is much more closely aligned with child rights, therefore they are now working with the necessary partners to ensure child rights. Plan is now working more closely with government bodies.

**Q:** A question to the panel, what are the other development benefits of UBR?

**A:** (Plan Indonesia) Registering children has been very beneficial for the government. In Sikka child registration has been combined with other activities. As a result of registration they are able to monitor what the state has achieved and areas which need further consideration: one major problem is high mortality rates.

**Q:** Francine Beleyi (Embassy of Togo), does not understand the school-based programme, is it focused on the children who are outside of school?

**A:** Schools are where rural populations meet and get together. Community life is centred in the school; hence they use the school as a centre for UBR. In the communities, teachers are the

leaders and they are therefore using them to promote birth registration. Plan is working with small rural communities with a maximum of 200 people. Therefore the key is to get the correct information to these people. It includes both children who go and children who don't go to school.

**Q:** Emma Aston (World Vision), you said there is a difficulty in registering children who are not in the formal state structure: women who aren't officially divorced. Therefore is there work going on that ensures that registering births is not restricted?

**A:** The government has recently changed the law allowing registration from a document issued by midwives. Paraguay has realised that although Christian marriage is forever, in reality this is not always the case.

**Q:** Is there a correct estimation of birth registration numbers?

**A:** The method has been to measure the number of registrations in one year. But, how do you correctly measure that number? We need to measure either the registration of children under 1 or under 5, which can be compared across countries. To date this has not occurred.

**Q:** M. Sheik Mohamed Addulkadir (Punchad), the emphasis has been on the government, but what about the responsibility of the population?

**A:** Yes it is the responsibility of the population, but it is also the responsibility of the government to develop the correct framework.

### **Plan Burkina Faso – Paul Doygbe**

The causes of children not registering are political constraints supported by limited human and material capacity in government offices. The process of registering a child after two months is complicated, while before this time period it is relatively straight forward. However, this conflicts with a traditional belief in Burkina Faso that a child should not be given a name before a certain period of time – which can be longer than two months. Burkina Faso's birth registration campaign started in 2004. There has been a focus on broadcasting the campaign with the involvement of children through the programme *Kids Wave*. There has also been a television debate on UBR since Plan has started to implement birth registration programmes. Plan has worked alongside governors of some of the thirteen regions including an emperor of a region where the birth registration problem is particularly bad. Plan has also organised mass campaigns developing partnerships on a local level. It has been very important to involve local community volunteers in the campaigns. Plan has enabled 6,000 volunteers from 2,000 villages and has also provided computers and other equipment to enable effective volunteering.

Plan has been able to multiply the benefits of registering births through a programme which provides mosquito nets to children who have been registered in their first two months. UBR has been promoted through FESPACO – a week long film festival in Burkina Faso. Volunteers have received training from prefects, mayors and nurses who teach them how to retrieve data from villages, as well as how to prevent malaria and use bed nets. Volunteers have also been provided with a register of children up to 18 years old. Significant attention has been paid to the quality of registration documents. It is very important to provide the highest quality information to strengthen advocacy. The key outcome of this has been at a political level which has enabled free registration for all children. This is a direct result of advocating with specific ministers. For the first time the government has given sufficient budget to ensure all children can be registered. The certificate process has also been homogenised throughout Burkina Faso. \$9 million has been spent to register 5 million children, which, despite being a relatively small amount of money, has been very effective. Among other things, children's birth registration has helped reduce malaria. Stimulating volunteering at a local level is also helping social mobilisation. Due to the local government ministry's autonomy regarding their budget to implement policy, Plan has been advocating for support at community level.

**Q:** Judge Joyce Aluoch, likes the strategy of maintaining political pressure, using the First Lady and therefore always having the ear of the Prime Minister. There are a lot of women giving birth at home, in Burkina are there traditional birth attendants and do you use them to register births? You did not speak a great deal about traditions, but I know they exist in Africa, how do you deal with them?

**A:** The traditional birth attendants are involved in volunteering. Therefore they receive training. The traditional practice regarding children not being given a name before a certain period of time has been factored into some programmes. People have been encouraged to register before two months otherwise the process becomes a lot more difficult.

**Q:** Klodiana Thartori (Save the Children Albania), she expressed concern over the process of identifying children. How do we know who the children are that are not identified?

**A:** Registration is taken at school but there are also volunteers at community level recording data from young people aged 0 – 18. They work closely with communities to record all children.

**A:** Paraguay – they support identification using schools for registration where they can identify children from the community.

**A:** Indonesia – before implementing the registration process, they carry out an identification process. They work together with district level governments, schools, and churches to ensure they know everyone.

**Q:** Kate Lorpanda (International HIV/AIDS Alliance), the process is good for children and parents, however she is concerned about children living outside of family life: foster care children, street children. Also how do you incorporate children whose parents are not registered?

**A:** For children living on the street they are working with associations/NGOs to try and provide support to children. From there they try to identify them with their family and get them registered. Hence, Plan takes its support to the NGOs.

**A:** Paraguay – They have worked closely with governments to change the law so that street children and children with no parents can be registered with two witnesses.

**A:** Indonesia – There is a problem for children in special protection and street children because they can't get registered – but they are trying to diversify the process to incorporate all children who need registering.

**Summary Expert Panel 1** – Marie Staunton – we have learnt about UBR in conflict, through rural communities, through schools and through volunteers. Thanks to presenters and for audiences' questions.

### **Expert Panel 2 – Chair Joanne Dunn, UNICEF – Senior Protection Advisor**

UNICEF has been working very well with Plan for many years. Birth registration is a key human right and fundamental to protection and access to justice. Their most recent work has been integrating the process of registering children with health services and since 2006 registration has been included with education. They have also made efforts to ensure that birth registration includes access to maternal health. UNICEF has worked on social norms with religious leaders and peer group leaders which has been highly effective in highlighting the importance of birth registration. But the question remains, is child registration being turned into development? Are children aged five, eight and ten being given the relevant access to care? Introduction to Professor Bhabha.

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### **Key note speech – Professor Jacqueline Bhabha, Harvard University**

The professor expresses her pleasure and honour to be here and her thanks to Nadya Kassam. She is delighted to be taking part in this event which is so rich in detail on what, cynically,

seems a straight forward matter of creating an identity for all children. Plan and Harvard's relationship initially developed as a result of a seminar at Harvard. The seminar was very constructive because she did not realise that children did not have birth registration. This issue has many repercussions across the field. She highlights two issues affecting identity and birth registration. Firstly, the lack of proof of identity. Sometimes this is not a lack of documentation but a lack of official documentation – real or perceived. For this reason, access to birth certificates and passports is an indication of empowerment. Conversely, there can be a reluctance to register or encounter with the state from fear of officials or bureaucrats who may be watching, including a fear of sending children to school. This has been seen with indigenous communities who are suspicious of the state and therefore do not want to be transparent. From her point of view there have been some fascinating issues from the previous panel of experts.

1. The problem of polygamy: wife 2,3,4.

2. The issue of framing: the amount of time to ensure a child survives before naming it.

3. The problems of second partners/husband/wives.

Many people, who are working on the book she is hoping to be printed next year, are indebted to Plan and Interpol. Many of the rights that a state provides are irrelevant if people are invisible. Hence the concepts we have of human rights are worthless if one has no identity. Of course legal identity does not guarantee a good life, but not to have one is serious. There is a lack of capacity to make claim to education and health care, it also disrupts the state's ability to provide and plan for services. Acknowledgements of this dual function have been mentioned already and codified in human rights law and policy. Everyone agrees that children should be registered after birth. Up to one third of children do not have their birth registered. Up to half of states do not have a comprehensive system of birth registration.

Birth registration is often seen to be a problem of the developing world. She acknowledges that the development of the existing economic growth in England was partly due to the fact that there was a comprehensive social security system, which allowed registration and legal verification of identity, kinship and inheritance from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Early modern England recognised the need for a comprehensive registration system that allowed support to be given to individuals. This way, consistency and economic growth could occur. Registration joins citizenship. This is not for individuals to access services, but it is fundamental to citizenship. Across the Atlantic the absence of this system created many problems of abuse of human rights. In 16<sup>th</sup> century England you have access to a safety net but in 19<sup>th</sup> century America you still have problems. In the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century many Chinese citizens went to the US to build infrastructure. In the US whether a child's parents were registered or not, if you are born in the US you were an American citizen. Therefore as immigration continued, Chinese immigration continued. However, the Chinese community was marginalised; therefore Chinese births often went unrecorded. As a result the state couldn't offer them legal citizenship. When children born in America left and then returned to San Francisco, they only had word of mouth to verify they were American citizens. Therefore US immigration services returned the American citizens back to China. Hence the absence of birth registration removed children from their country of birth which separated them from their family.

Undocumented refugees in Ecuador who do not register their children from fear of deportation go through the same issues. Also, people who escape Mexico to Guatemala are often exploited for their labour which means eventually they go to refugee points. However, they are only able to do this if they have the correct documentation. The problem is they can only get this documentation if they stay in refugee camps. Hence their lack of documentation restricts them from the essential building blocks to life; documents are essential to building citizenship. Children are particularly vulnerable to statelessness. This is because they have a particular dependence on the state for services such as health care and education. This is particularly relevant for street children. The bundle of human rights depends on the interchange of rights between children and the state. Unaccompanied child refugees are a

major problem as they often don't have any documents. Many are detained in shelters or homes and many lack the legal identity they need to prove they are entitled to the care they need. There are large numbers of populations who suffer from this situation: children in refugee camps who fled war and have no employment opportunities. Those who are vulnerable to exploitation are those who do not have a legal identity. It is not *just* because they don't have a legal identity, but it is part of a bundle of legal 'rightlessness'. Documents aren't magic wands, but, when there is no documents, it is life threatening.

There are other children who are citizens who do have legal identity but have their rights challenged. One is rural to urban migrants, children who have national identity and migrate to big cities. The most extreme example is contemporary China. Without the correct document they are unable to access services which are entitled to citizens originally from the cities. Many children are unable to go to school because they don't have the correct documentation. There is a great deal of evidence regarding the violations that these children are exposed to. Ultimately they have a complete lack of access to education. Another example of legal residents whose rights are violated is the Roma populations. This problem is faced in our (industrialised) countries. The most obvious example is Italy where there are campaigns to record the fingerprints of all Roma children. There has also been disturbing testimony regarding radical forms of exclusion.

Some more points. The wise thing about Plan's campaign is its simplicity. Anyone can go onto their website or read through the report and understand the problem that is being talked about. Ultimately, anyone who encounters this problem can understand the problem. But since we are specialists here, there are a couple of questions. It is sometimes claimed that there are alternatives to UBR. There are systems of family books, informal systems of baptismal certificates which function as informal proof of identities. Therefore how legitimate is it that we demand a complete overhaul of a system that may be working very well? There is a dramatic mismatch between needs and resources. Therefore to what extent is the 'one-size fits all' approach suitable: is there not a more flexible pragmatic approach? She raises this because it is an issue, and there are problems with it. There are problems with informality but informality can be a curse and a blessing - we are a long way off a system for the proof of legal identity, and there are problems. For example, many countries don't have the resources for creative advocacy.

Also, what is the relationship between the individual and the state? To what extent do we increase the transparency of a person to our peril? This is not questioning legal identities and access to resources, but about making transparency on behalf of the state when developing ID systems. For example we need to ensure there is never a threat of children being drawn into cruel wars or genocide. To what extent is this a worry? If it is a worry, what do we do about it? Do we just make sure that there is a legal identity and we have the correct checks and balances to make sure that states are benign? Or do we have to think in a more complex way regarding transparency and protection, and if we do have to do that how do we do that? If we are worried about this, the best thing is to stick with paper certificates. For example, electronic resources means you can just press Roma and get all the Roma kids on the screen - is that sensible? She raises these questions because there is so much consensus that there needs to be questions. There are still some serious questions!

**Q:** Simon Szreter, it's not that Plan is being criticised, but there are questions to be asked. While there is a belief in identity as a system of protection, how do we protect that system of protection? Really serious thought needs to be given to this. What medium is best? Other issues include, what type of information should be on this registration form. Only safe principles can be on there, nothing to do with ethnicity or religion. Also the question of ownership of information - the state's legal system provides authentication, but should the state own the system?

**Q:** Ben Sullivan (KE software), his organisation develops birth registration software. Regardless of what type of system you use, you will get a compromise regarding which people can access information and data. Anyone looking into a system should always look at what other systems are around. KE software have been developing birth registration systems over the last 20 years, and the system can monitor how information is stored or changed. There can be external validation, so data and information systems can be managed off-site. Regardless of what system you look at, you need to look at how the information is managed. It's not just how information is captured, but how it is validated.

**A:** Both great contributions, highlighting a need to consider what is captured and how. What do you think about the minimum data entry? From a rights front, there is currently a big discussion about what information should be captured regarding adoption and the relevant level of knowledge gathered about a child's birth parents. One argument is that no adoptions should be allowed without access to their birth parent's information. Although this is not directly related to birth registration, we are talking about mechanisms of rights, and methods of achieving parallel tracks.

**Q:** Ben Sullivan, what has been seen in North America and Australasia is by keeping genealogy records there has been a chance to make money as a result of being able to enhance certain research. Hence there is historical purposes and benefits from data collections.

### **ECPAT - Christine Beddoe, Director, ECPAT UK**

Christine is an advisor to the UK government and works on child trafficking within the UK. Birth registration is an issue in the developing and developed world. She thanked Plan, and feels it is a very important conference in a very important week as a result of the anniversary of the Convention of the Rights of the Child. Although we celebrate this week, we have to remember why children are still living on the margins. We are currently in a wealthy area of London, but here in the local borough of Westminster children have been trafficked for exploitation and criminal activity. Child trafficking is not something that is out there, it is very much here.

ECPAT has been working on trafficking, and has been working in alliances to conduct research. She aims to bring the voice of young people to the conference. She previously took children who were trafficked - all young people aged 15-18 - to meet Members of Parliament. One of the Members of Parliament said, "So you used your passport to come in, what did the boarder agencies say?" A young lady replied, "First of all, it wasn't our passport, where would we get a passport? We were all street kids." The MP then replied "oh, so it was someone else's passport, but your photo?" To which the young lady replied, "yes it was someone else's passport, but no it wasn't my photo." The point is that it is easy to get children across borders even when we think we have tight controls. Many of the children she comes across have never had their births registered. When trying to prove credibility, it's simply an adult's word against a child's. Much of it is trying to prove a name or a date of birth. If the adult can provide birth certificates or passports and the child can't then the adult will win. The constant battle facing these children is a way of proving their ID. Without registering a child's birth this is almost impossible. This is not just about access to care; it's about access to justice. It is also important for the recovery and reintegration of children into their own communities.

One thing that is important in the UK and EU is age assessments. This is to determine whether asylum seekers are children and young people under 18 or adults who are 18 or older. However, it is often difficult to determine age, especially for anyone between 15 and 18. Many children can't prove their ages, and again it's a child's word against an immigration authority or a local community. Many authorities have judged asylum seekers to be over 18 who are actually under 18, which mean children are lost, with no access to support. They are therefore on a fast track out of the country, and once children have been determined to be over 18 there is little ECPAT can do. There are a lot of challenges to age assessment, especially when they are

fast tracked to get out of the county. Once they have been judged to be an adult, their home countries will not help them either. Once identified as an asylum seeking child, it's a child's word against the adult's and that is a vulnerable position for children to be in. There are many professionals working for children in this area. One example is of a child who has been trafficked since the age of 5, initially domestically, but then once he was 10, he was brought to UK to work as forced labour in a restaurant in London. He was then sold to another restaurant and then moved to another part of the country. The police really wanted to learn where he was from. As a result of being trafficked, he had no education but really wanted to know who his family was. When the police finally determined where the child was from, the policeman went to the Embassy. The Embassy's response was, do you know how many children we have, and you want us to find just one? The point is, often children are trafficked from one place to another and therefore we need to work together to try and solve this problem. Trafficking is also an interdisciplinary issue.

**Q:** Sheik Mohamed Addulkadir, firstly he wanted to say that he has worked with ECPAT and they are doing a great job, but he also wanted to ask, how you can understand the child who is being trafficked?

**Q:** Mark Manly (UNHCR), trafficking and statelessness is interlinked and this situation is being considered by the relevant governing body of the UN who have highlighted the need for cooperation between governments. Have you had any success regarding cooperation between governments? He also questions how to document this process - for children outside of their home countries it would be very difficult to gain knowledge if there is no access to an electronic system.

**A:** Regarding good practice for cooperation, one of the challenges is service delivery and is often best suited with a local level organisation in the relevant country. Operational levels don't always exist on a state level. Therefore the NGO world has been trying to operate between operation levels, and good background information and practices that can be scaled up to a higher level. She has seen some success in linking between local government, and state/police factions. Electronic systems would make life easier, but they could be open to manipulation if we are not careful. There are also issues about rights to privacy. This is especially true for children who have been exploited by family members and therefore going back to a family member is not necessarily the best thing for the child.

### **Interpol – Uri Sadeh, Child Protection Unit**

Interpol is an international policing system bringing together 188 states/police forces. The general secretariat is in Lyon and there are international members in each state. There is also an office within the UN. There is a child protection agency which has a sub-directorate and their tasks include coordinating and running training in the field, as well as administrating online expert groups who try to aid each other online. The team's core activities are the creation and development of the child exploitation database. Analysis of this database includes identifying operational tools. Statistics are growing as a result of linking more countries into the system. Interpol also promotes policy development regarding specific issues within their states. Interpol brings together 188 national state chiefs with the aim of promoting best practices in global security. One key area is child trafficking and slavery where they have encouraged police to share information to help victims in the field. Resolutions have added value when coming from governmental structures from within states. Interpol may develop birth registration as it has great relevance to both human rights and law enforcement. Perpetrators would get special treatment if crimes are related to minors, but this is difficult if minors do not have the correct documentation. Birth registration is vital to show that a victim of a sexual crime is a minor. The general resolution is to ensure that birth registration occurs without compromise. Birth registration certificates are breeding documents which allow other documents to be produced from them. However, we need to remember that these documents help produce other illegal/fake documents which can make children very vulnerable.

Registering births can be effective tool to stop criminality when investigating victims. For example, Interpol searched the chat blogs of a prosecuted paedophile to find further victims and abusers related to him. The man had used accounts but did not give a valid email address. However in the blog, investigators noticed the first name of a victim, and also found two images that weren't abusive photos but showed a birthday party with him and a child. The investigators found the date the photo was taken – showing the child's birthday. They then took this information to the registration office and matched the man to the child that proved he had been sexually abusing his daughter. Birth registration is to be done without compromise and Interpol are absolutely behind it.

**Q:** Identification documents varied per capita with Sweden number one and USA two – what are the main reasons behind this variation?

**A:** Variation can be a result of limited access to required databases.

**Q:** Professor Brad Blitz (Kingston University), first question, what actually happens to the photos themselves once they are recovered? Secondly, most of the information/statistical data referred to advanced states, what is the reason for this?

**A:** Second question first: information or statistic data often depends on a country's ability to report back to them. Regarding the first question, once the photos are online you cannot get rid of them, but any photos which are found on a camera are obviously not distributed.

### **International Council of Nursing – Sylvia Denton, ICN Board Member**

Sylvia thanks and congratulates Plan for all their work. She represents the International Council of Nurses. In 2007 the ICN developed a birth registration toolkit which highlights the barriers to registering births. The toolkit aims to raise awareness of birth registration to nurses and midwives to spur on registration. Despite universal ratification of the rights of the child, annually 38% of children are not registered at birth. As a result, children do not get access to education and healthcare and are left vulnerable. The ICN believes children have a right from birth to a name and a nationality. There is indeed a responsibility that nurses share with society to protect vulnerable populations including children. Midwives are professionals attached to children born in rural, urban or home births. Therefore they are well placed to ensure children's first rights. Figures show that children who are delivered by a skilled nurse are more likely to be registered. Nurses and midwives are able to make a real difference in supporting parents to register their children. They are also well placed to advocate for birth registration. Plan has identified a number of activities to promote registration at local, national and international level. Midwives help parents to register and complete registration forms as well as alerting them if there is a penalty for non-registration. At local level, making a difference can raise awareness to governments, build capacity, and ensure participation. At a national level, ICN has been active in an effort to raise the political will of governments to ensure the registration of births. They have helped ensure legislation is matched to local realities, while building trust around the registration process and supporting advocacy efforts. They have attempted to integrate universal birth registration into international health policy, making registration an international requirement.

Their birth registration toolkit has raised the awareness of nurses and midwives to address the issue of registration. The six areas of the toolkit can be used independently or in conjunction with each other. They have developed relevant material and guided best conduct.

1. Key message – develop a clear set of activities to be used. The suggestion is to focus on following key messages by highlighting the disadvantage of millions of children if their births have not been registered. Birth registration is the responsibility of governments. Achieving registration requires coordination at all levels – get organised.
2. Strategies – organise campaigns, raise awareness among members and stakeholders. Package a message that is appropriate to that part of the world by being creative.

3. National Process Progressions - need to develop a process and strategy after determining the scope of non-registration.
4. Simplify Procedures – if birth registration has not been achieved in a country, they may need to lobby or facilitate the procedure.
5. Professional Preparation – midwives are often the largest group providing healthcare to pregnant women; they should therefore ensure that registration is incorporated at birth.
6. Key Resources – gather the key resources to manage the birth registration campaign.

This toolkit is available on the web and can be downloaded from ICN website. An example of this toolkit can be taken from Botswana this August. The purpose was to assess registration while raising awareness among leaders. The toolkit was used in three villages and towns designed to represent the region. There were a total of 60 participants. From those 60, 85% delivered their children at health facilities and 35% were registered. 73% had knowledge of birth registration with barriers to registration identified as fees, communities lacking access to education with no role models regarding birth registration. As a result annual birth registration campaigns were developed in the media, and the fees were removed. A woman in Uganda highlights the value of registration at birth, “I want to protect my children’s inheritance and property. I want them to have what I don’t have – education, and I want them to know who their parents are.”

**Q:** Even when there are systems in place, it seems that there continues to be political restrictions to refugees or discrimination against certain groups regarding asylum?

**A:** It has been suggested by data that some stigmatisation exists regarding some communities, and even if there are documents that are real, they are not believed. There are examples of the UK Home Office just laughing at some people’s documents. Hence, even when you have an effective mechanism of registration there can be problems. Also, you can have a system which is effective but you still have human error and criminality. This demonstrates a need to ensure accountability. Many refugees have many barriers placed in their way. Therefore we need to go beyond that.

**Q:** Refugees/asylum seekers data is disturbing. Birth registration is a priority but people are concerned in refugee camps highlighting a definite need to prevent statelessness.

**A:** UNHCR has really played a fantastic role in drawing attention to the strength of data – birth registration data has been very useful. However, what about the populations that we don’t know about – we need more data.

**Summary of Expert Panel 2 – Chair Joanne Dunn** – it is clear that there is a need to balance registration and transparency. The debate should look at how birth registration can be used to reduce trafficking.

### **Message from Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu**

Your Excellencies and esteemed guests, I am really very sorry not to be at this most unique event, as prior commitments have kept me physically away from you all. But this does not mean that I am unaware of the vital work that needs to be done to protect our children and ensure their rights by having them registered at birth. There are so many cases around the world where children have been exploited and abused. And it is possible in some cases that a birth certificate – the proof of their identity and existence as future citizens of the world – would have helped to prevent some of this exploitation and abuse.

Since helping Plan to launch the campaign almost 5 years ago, I can see the achievements have been remarkable. From small-scale projects in remote parts of the world, to changes in legislation with the cooperation of enlightened governments – all these initiatives have put some of the most vulnerable children at their heart and made sure they are registered. As you know from Plan’s report, *Count Every Child*, literally millions of children have been registered thanks to the efforts of Plan and all its partners. But of course, still more work needs to be done for future generations – and that is why you have gathered here today. I hope it has been

a challenging yet constructive time. My wish for children all over the world is that you, the delegates at this conference, make a pledge to continue your efforts and work together to achieve universal registration. I urge you all to learn from each other, share your knowledge, your experience and your resources to create ways to register every child and make them count. It is a heavy mandate, but with the calibre of guests in the room, I feel it can be done!

I congratulate Plan for taking the initiative in this vital area of work and hope that today, even though it marks the end of Plan's formal campaign, it will be the start of a new beginning to drive forward birth registration. I personally thank you all for being here today and look forward to hearing your conclusions and recommendations.

### **Closing plenary** chaired by Nigel Chapman

He highlights the fascinating conversation regarding both the practical and philosophical aspects of UBR. What could have been seen to be a simple and practical issue has been shown to be extremely complex. Nigel reads out the following statement of support from the Council of Europe:

Message from the Directorate General of Human Rights and Legal Affairs, Council of Europe

*The Council of Europe has strived for many years to set minimum standards in the field of nationality and has produced a number of legal instruments in the field. Today children are at the centre of our attention: they are seen as subjects possessing their own rights and obligations, rather than mere objects of international law. In this perspective, the Council of Europe is preparing a Recommendation on the nationality of children, which aims at avoiding statelessness of children and facilitating their acquisition of a nationality. Although the right to nationality and to be registered at birth is set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989, a great number of children are not registered which may have consequences for their acquisition of a nationality and put them at risk of being stateless. The need to register the birth of all children born on the territory of a member State of the Council of Europe will thus be clearly spelled out in the recommendation currently prepared and initiatives aiming at securing this registration, as the present Conference, are highly welcome by the Organisation.*

### **Summary of the day – Simon Heap, rapporteur (Plan's Global Research Coordinator)**

His first job at Plan was the development of UBR as a global campaign six years ago. It has been a conference of two halves. The first half presented case studies while the second highlighted the uses and abuses of UBR. We've seen best practices and we mixed the theoretical and the practical, we've seen that registration is a right of a child alongside some of the worries of registering children. Rights and 'rightlessness' is not a straight line to a promised life, we have to fight to realise and protect rights. Therefore we need to constantly bring this to the attention of governments to take this forward. But we need to take this forward as citizens. The mechanics of the process has shown that birth registration needs to be truly free. Registering births needs to be available, and needs to be a service that governments provide. The hard work from partners and interagency cooperation needs to continue. The conference has discussed the work of religious leaders, post office workers, midwives, police, citizens and civil societies, the private sector, and government ministries all working together. Hence this is not just an issue of civil society and government: this is also about the individual child, the individual baby as well as the parents and care givers.

UBR is a very large and expanding field of practice policy and academic enquiry – from the first right of the child, to the nature of birth registration and how we relate to the State. In the report in particular and a little bit today, we had the rights of the child as a focus. We also had registration as a planning tool and a feature of democracy. Therefore what is the motivation? What is the idea behind birth registration? Is it micro and/or macro rights – two very different but often overlapping concepts? We need goals and strategies. Nations are tasked to take this forward; we have to take this forward for our own nations. What are governments' responsibilities? We've had a major debate regarding culture as a barrier – but we need to look

at the opportunities this brings regarding children having names, birth places, and birthdays. This culture cannot be avoided, but we need to think of ways of incorporating it into birth registration. Registering births is part of a wider environment of civil registration. As we get towards the MDGs and 2015, birth registration and death registration will gain greater emphasis.

### **Final questions/comments from delegates**

**Q:** Judge Joyce Aluoch, some general observation – I have been a judge in the ICC from March this year and one area that we did not talk about is the issue of child soldiers. All of the war crime trials in the ICC are from Africa - Uganda, DRC, Central African Republic and to come in the near future, Kenya. She is currently involved in appeal cases, for Central African Republic. She knows that the problem from the first trial going on is the issue of child soldiers, some of these children were never registered at birth and they will be going to court and paraded as witnesses. Obviously, the defence will turn around and say, where is the evidence that this person is a child? We need to step up the birth registration agenda, because in a few years all tribunals will come to an end, and the international court will be the only court of impunity. But, if we scale up we will be on track. It will be seen in the future whether my experience as a national judge in Kenya, will work at an international level.

**Q:** Dr Evelina Martelli (Comunita di Sant Egidio). In 2004 they started birth registration through schools. They ensured registration for adults and children fighting HIV in Africa who now have been given free drug resources. As a result, 9,000 children have been born healthy and all have been registered. They have been working with Plan in Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire and soon Malawi. Today's conference has been helpful and provocative. As professionals it is important to discuss the grassroots questions. Ultimately, it is important to have birth registration, because it highlights other reasons to have registration. From my own experiences I have seen how important and necessary birth registration is. Today I have heard about other experiences regarding the registration of births and I am more convinced that the rights of children are not divisible. We cannot say we promote one right but not the other ones. We see national organisations which are promoting birth rights, but what about children who are not registered. In the Kivu regions of Kenya I have seen 8/9 year olds in prison. I think this is a struggle for me; it is a struggle for my life.

**Q:** Claire Cowley (Plan UK), the conference has demonstrated that this work can be taken forward. We can progress in UBR and there have been a lot of official registrations. After the conference, development organisations need to share experiences between countries to introduce a system of registration and we are going to include some South Pacific states. Ultimately this demonstrates our challenge to work together and share our experience.

**Q:** Anne-Sophie Lois (Plan Geneva), many thanks for the conference and the opportunity to learn about all birth registration experiences and to learn how complex this issue is. My question is what we did not talk about, what are our recommendations? What are our plans, we've had good debate but now we need to plan what we are doing, what are the next steps?

**Q:** Simon Szreter, this has been a landmark event and it is extremely important that this is not a one off. I also think that Desmond Tutu's message was very strong. One idea I have had is regarding the Street Children World Cup as a potential platform for the birth registration issue. Another dimension raised by Dr Bhabha supported by the quote from the Ugandan lady regarding her desire for birth registration to protect her children's residence and property, can be taken back to the citizen registration of England in 1538 by Thomas Cromwell. This was designed to create identity and the Ugandan lady's quote is virtually the opening statement. I think this is important because registration hits all the policy criteria such as planning issues, but it is also very important for economic development and market activities. People cannot grow if they don't have this free transaction of property.

**Q:** Alec Leggat (Salvation Army), the Salvation Army is a global church organisation working in 118 countries. I wanted to answer the question ‘what do we do next?’ We will be actively talking to developing countries to see how we can increase our drive for UBR. We will be working on birth registration with orphans, and all people that we work with. We have a strong commitment to challenge trafficking, there is a DFID funded anti-child trafficking project. It is clear that birth registration has significant potential in tackling that.

**Q:** Kate Lorpenda, we need to challenge stigmatisation, and put down a marker regarding birth registration. For example, in India those who can’t put down their fathers’ name can’t be registered. Also if drug users are known, their families can’t come forward for registration which then restricts a child’s rights including their access to HIV treatment.

**Q8:** Igor Michaleczek (BMWEC), what we need to do is to keep in touch with each other, to share our experience to see if we can change the formation of our information networks.

**Q9:** M Sheik Mohamed Addulkadir, Somalia has been shattered by civil war over the last 20 years – we need the international community’s help and we need human rights and democracy. As Plan is operating in East Africa, what about working in Somalia? There are two regions – semi-autonomous, maybe we can operate in both or through a joint operation? What about Somalia? Not sure if you know the map of Somalia but the North Eastern province of Puntland is a former British protectorate. Since you are in East Africa perhaps you could incorporate Somalia?

**A:** Nigel Chapman, I hear what you’re saying and we can make the same comment about DRC. But Plan is funded 80% on sponsorship, for us to go into a country we have to be assured that we can get sufficient funds to operate in that area. We can’t go in without that and we need to think about safety of our staff. Also, we need to think about the 48 countries we are already in and make sure that we are working hard where we are, rather than over stretching ourselves. But, I hear what you’re saying, and I will go away and think about it. As director of the World Service many listeners come from this region and therefore I am very sympathetic to the problems in that area. I will go away and think about it.

**Q:** Louise Meincke (Consortium for Street Children), apologies for not being here earlier. The report was very interesting and many different groups have been mentioned, but not street children. Therefore, my question is how much have you focused on street children regarding birth registration and how much will they be focused on in the future?

**A:** Nadya Kassam (Plan), the report is only a snapshot of everything that we did. The website is the starting point for more information as we receive it. Bangladesh is a great example of our work with street children where we were able to register 20,000 children from one concerted effort. The morning session also highlighted some other work that we have done with street children around the world.

**Q:** Emma Aston, many thanks. Obviously, with limited time, it is impossible to do everything, but this morning, the range of panellist would have benefited from an Eastern/Southern Africa perspective. In this region there are many strong traditional values and often little written ability within those populations, therefore how is it possible to have those voices recognised?

**Q:** Bill Taylor (De La Rue), to go forward we need to think about standardisation, for example how data is captured in passports. We need a standardisation of birth registration.

### **Nigel Chapman- Final Comments**

Thank you very much for everyone’s contributions, we will be putting up the relevant information and record of the event on the website as soon as we can. There are two or three points to be drawn on. Firstly, the conference has covered a vast subject but there is clear unity of purpose and thinking. Ultimately we can either see this issue as a cup half full or a cup half empty. Half full would be India where birth registration has tripled – but there are still

40% of children not registered. Half full would be the fact that we have taken birth registration figures in Cambodia and Indonesia from 3% to over 70% – but there are still 30% of children not being registered. Hence we need to celebrate the half full cup while being aware of the half empty cup. This is the sort of issue that is in and out of headlines. It is not the same as the global recession for example. But pressure needs to be kept on governments to ensure that governments don't stop the good work. Part of the pressure needs to be on UN agencies because this is not just an NGO issue but work needs to be done within UNICEF. I also want to talk to the academics in the audience, because academic research doesn't get the recognition it deserves. Professor Bhabha's book is going to be good for the future of child rights and registration. However, this also needs to be about us, the NGOs. I'm not going to promise annual conferences, but we need to keep birth registration high up on the agenda of the long list of what we have to do.

I would like to thank the speakers, Plan staff at headquarters and Plan UK. I would like to thank Nadya Kassam and her team of advocates to ensure birth registration continues to get attention. People have come from all over the world to share their experiences. Thanks and I wish you all a safe journey home.

**Craig Dean and Dr Simon**

**Heap**