

Foreword

Message from Mrs Graça Machel, Chair of the Board, Children's Institute

I am privileged to launch the first *South African Child Gauge* – a publication which will provide an annual report on progress towards meeting our national obligations to children.

The past decade has been witness to many actions on behalf of South Africa's children, in policy, law and programming. Yet in the same period, one child under the age of a year dies every ten minutes from causes which could have been prevented by known and tested measures such as immunisation, access to clean water, and prevention of mother-to-child transmission of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus. While such statistics help to measure the scale and depth of children's problems, they nevertheless hide the vast numbers of children whose deaths go unrecorded, who never get to health care, and who go to bed hungry at night. And among these numbers are boys and girls who have names, faces, families, and very different experiences. The *South African Child Gauge* illustrates the situation of children with numbers, but also tells stories of their lives, their circumstances, and the tremendous changes which children face. It also reflects the remarkable achievements for children in ten short years in South Africa. I commend the Children's Institute at the University of Cape Town for launching this important report at this time, and for promising to produce this every year from now on.

With so many South Africans, I share a tradition where children are not only regarded as our future, but especially as our present. And so I believe that it is our responsibility to ensure that children are given futures worth having, but also to make sure that they have quality lives right now. This will mean that government should strive to fulfil its obligations to children and allocate more resources to their care. It will mean that civil society organisations, communities, families and all adults should nurture and protect them. And it will mean that those who have the power to make decisions about children's



lives should listen to them, take their stories seriously, and act in whatever ways they can.

Through my work with children in armed conflict, I have learnt that despite the brutality shown towards them and the failure of adults to nurture and protect them, children are both our reason to eliminate the worst circumstances which stand in the way of their rights, and our best hope of succeeding in that charge. In short,

advocacy for children is a strong force which can unify us across the country, the continent and the globe.

This has been demonstrated effectively in the *South African Child Gauge 2005*, which represents a collaborative effort on the part of the Children's Institute to provide a snap-shot of children in South Africa, with special emphasis on children in the context of HIV/AIDS. Using the strength of the Children's Institute's academic base, the *South African Child Gauge* makes an important contribution to the discourse and action for implementing child rights in South Africa, and internationally. Most importantly, monitoring the promises made to improve the lives of children is a vital advocacy tool for advancing child rights. With the launch of the *South African Child Gauge*, the Children's Institute is making an important contribution to South Africa, and also to the larger global movement to protect and promote the rights of children.

To the Children's Institute – I extend my congratulations; and to those who read the *South African Child Gauge* – I offer my challenge that when you read this report, you consider what you can do to make a difference in the lives of our children, no matter how large or how small.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which reads "Machel". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.