Former South Africa President Nelson Mandela and child rights champion Graca Machel last week proposed an ambitious new global partnership for children and pledged to play a direct and personal role in urging other leaders to join them.

With UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy by their side, Mandela and Machel announced plans to build a partnership of global leaders who would be at the vanguard of a "bold new movement to turn the world around for millions of children."

"Over the next few months we will be personally calling upon leaders from all sectors to work with us to find solutions to the major problems faced by children and adolescents," Mandela said.

"We are not seeking and will not accept vague promises," Mandela added.

"Our purpose is to get specific commitments from these leaders and specific results. We will challenge enlightened government leaders to join us and turn their words into deeds. We will ask innovators in the business world to put their unique abilities to work for children. We will call upon leaders in academia, the media, and other sectors to join with us to ensure that the world honours its obligation to children," he said.

"One of the first challenges we will be tackling will be the effects of armed conflict on children. Together with the Canadian Government and UNICEF we will be bringing together, for the first time, world leaders in September in Winnipeg, to ensure that as leaders we take action to protect children from violations of their rights in conflict," said Machel, author of a landmark United Nations study on children in conflict.

"We want a world in which children survive and develop in a caring environment free of abuse and exploitation, a world that offers every child a quality basic education, and a world in which adolescents are no longer invisible but in which they are invited, instead, to participate in shaping their own futures," said Machel.

Bellamy said the involvement of Nelson Mandela and Graca Machel would be a source of inspiration to other leaders. "Together they have the power to pull people from a wide range of backgrounds, people who are willing to push beyond the traditional boundaries of what societies do for children," she said.
Mandela and Machel insisted that, with committed leadership, major advancements for children could be made within a single generation, adding that such advancements are the right of every child.

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