

Canadian children celebrate national UNICEF day

Last Updated: Tuesday, October 31, 2006 | 12:39 PM ET

[CBC News](#)

School children across Canada celebrated national UNICEF day on Tuesday, marking the end of an ambitious fundraising campaign.

This year, the United Nations Children's Fund asked children to take on a more active fundraising role, and abandoned its old money box campaign.

So 10-year-old Bilaal Rajan was at Toronto's Sheppard subway station to tell commuters about children in Malawi.

"There are children in Malawi who need our help and they need our help now," Bilaal, UNICEF Canada's national child ambassador, told CBC.

Bilaal said the campaign has shown children how they can become more involved.

"We really wanted to create a fundraising experience and an educational experience that was more meaningful for kids so they really understood what the contributions they were raising would do to support their peers in developing countries," Melissa Judd, UNICEF's manager of school and youth events, told CBC News Online.

Other UNICEF programs include a workplace costume challenge for adults and an online fundraising program.

Judd said the campaign, which wraps up Halloween day, has been tremendously successful, with children demonstrating great initiative.

"We've seen incredibly innovative and fun fundraising activities taking place across the country, from a UNICEF camp in Winnipeg, to an art gala run by kids in Calgary to a walk in Vancouver. We even had a group of Grade 1s baking and selling dog biscuits in Quebec," she said.

"Kids have really rallied behind the program and have done some excellent activities," said Judd.

This year, UNICEF Canada is directing half of the funds raised to Nelson Mandela's Schools for Africa program that provides funds for classroom construction, teacher training and school materials in Malawi, Rwanda, Mozambique, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Angola.

Bilal visited Malawi recently, and said he saw terrible conditions schools there.

"[It] was just devastating. There were three children to one desk — if there were any desks at all. Most classes were held outside whether it was raining and cold or sunny and hot," he said.

The rest of the funds raised will be used to support health, education and child protection programs in other areas of the world.

Ben Mulroney, UNICEF's Canada Ambassador, celebrated the end of the campaign on Parliament Hill along with UNICEF Canada president Nigel Fisher. Aside from its \$5.7-million target, the organization aimed to foster a sense of global community and responsibility, Fisher said.

"Children have been more fully engaged as global citizens through the new Trick-or-Treat for UNICEF campaign as they learn about global issues from their teachers and from UNICEF Canada's national team of dynamic speakers who visited Canadian classrooms during the month of October," Fisher said in a release.

The tradition of Halloween fundraising began in Philadelphia in 1950, when a small Sunday school class raised \$17 and sent the money to UNICEF.

Other groups informally followed suit in Canada and the United States and in 1955, the movement was formalized with a UNICEF trick-or-treat campaign.

Over the years, Canadians have raised \$91 million as part of the Halloween box program.