

**SPEECH OF  
HON. VIRGINIA FOXX  
OF NORTH CAROLINA  
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 23, 2008**

Ms. FOXX. Madam Speaker, April 23rd of every year is celebrated in Turkey as National Sovereignty and Children's Day. The genesis of these celebrations is this date in 1920. On April 23, 1920 during Turkey's War of Independence, the Grand National Assembly met in Ankara to lay the foundation for modern parliamentary democracy in the form of an emerging liberal and secular Republic.

Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder and later the first President of the Republic of Turkey, designated April 23 as National Sovereignty and Children's Day, in recognition of the importance of children to the country's future. This was the first time that a world leader designated a day for children.

In Turkey this day is recognized as an official public holiday. Schools participate in week-long ceremonies marked by performances by children in large stadiums that draw the attention of the entire nation. On this day children also send their own "representatives" to replace state officials and high ranking bureaucrats in their offices. The President, the Prime Minister, the Cabinet Ministers, and provincial governors all turn over their positions to children's representatives. This symbolic gesture is intended to show children that they are the future leaders of Turkey and to remind current leaders that they are serving these children and the nation that they will inherit. These children, in turn, sign executive orders relating to educational and environmental policies. Children also replace the parliamentarians in the Grand National Assembly and hold a special session to discuss children's issues.

It is inspiring to know that this tradition of celebrating children's day has been adopted internationally. World Children's Day was the idea of two classmates, Funda Karagozler and Engin Ustundag (9 and 11 years old) from Ataturk School in New York. In April 1986, in response to an assignment to comment on the nationally celebrated Children's Day in Turkey, these two friends wrote a letter addressed to the "Kids of the World", inviting them to come together with the common objective of peace and friendship.

The school principal was so impressed with the letter that she sent it to UNICEF, a United Nations body dedicated to children's issues. Through UNICEF's assistance, a copy of the letter was sent to the permanent missions of the United Nations. The response was overwhelming. Everyone wanted to participate. On April 27, 1986, the UN General Assembly was opened to children for the first celebration of World Children's Day. Later that same year, the World Children's Day Foundation (WCDF) was established to oversee World Children's Day activities. In addition to the annual celebration in New York, WCDF sponsored programs and community service projects in 140 countries around the world.

The program's goals were: (1) To equip children to make a difference in their own lives and the future of their communities and nations; (2) To bring children of different nationalities, races, religions, and socio-economic backgrounds together and to show them that, in spite of these factors, all people have much in common; (3) To establish the Fourth Sunday in April as the internationally celebrated World Children's Day to recognize the capability and potential of children everywhere to shape the future.

More than 5,300 children from 140 countries have participated in World Children's Day celebrations in the UN General Assembly. About four million children have participated in WCDF community service projects around the world. These projects have touched millions of lives worldwide.

I stand to commemorate this important date dedicated to the children of the world and remember its origins in Turkey in 1920.