

**UNICEF Executive Board  
First Regular Session 2004  
19-23 and 26 January 2004  
Item 5 of the agenda**

**Oral report on the global challenge of child trafficking:  
background paper**

1. Trafficking of children both within and between countries is a shocking violation of the rights of the child. No country or region is immune, and an estimated 1.2 million children are trafficked every year, for sexual and labour exploitation, illegal adoption, child soldiering and other forms of exploitation. Human trafficking is estimated to generate \$12 billion per year.
2. Child trafficking and other child protection issues are also major impediments to national efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, and a vastly accelerated global effort on child trafficking – with an emphasis on prevention - is urgently needed.

**Key topics for discussion by the Executive Board**

**Advocacy and policy issues**

3. Despite increased public awareness of the problem, Governments and the general public still do not give sufficient attention to child trafficking as a human rights violation. Trafficked children are the victims of crime, but also are too often stigmatized as criminals themselves, both socially and by national authorities. In some countries, the strong international legal standards against trafficking may not be expressed in national laws. Where national anti-trafficking laws exist, traffickers may nonetheless enjoy impunity due to lax law enforcement.
4. The challenge is for countries: (a) to make the best interests of the child central to national and international anti-trafficking policies, and to actions to remove trafficking victims from exploitation; and (b) to provide these children with sensitive and effective care and reintegration in a family and community setting.
5. There are many reasons for the modest impact of anti-trafficking programmes to date. Trafficking is usually illegal, and undertaken clandestinely. Cultural taboos further limit the scope for addressing child trafficking from a human rights perspective.
6. The challenge is for national Governments, in partnership with civil society, to break the silence around child trafficking at national, provincial and community levels. Where this has happened, it has stimulated positive and appropriate initiatives to eliminate child trafficking through national legislation, redesigned or new programmes of cooperation, and community engagement in prevention and reintegration and care.

7. Action against child trafficking requires courageous and committed national leadership, and a recognition that underlying factors of poverty and conflict exacerbate the problem. Often, national frameworks for the Millennium Development Goals, including poverty reduction, do not adequately address the vulnerability of economically and socially poor families and their children to trafficking and other child protection problems. This merits greater attention from national policy makers as well as international organizations. It is also increasingly apparent that armed conflict helps child trafficking flourish, stoking and fueling both supply and demand. Conflicts heighten the vulnerability of children and families, cause breakdowns in traditional protective mechanisms and customs, and create new exploitative demands. The disruption also provides a cover for human trafficking.

### **Major challenges to UNICEF advocacy and programmes**

8. UNICEF efforts at country level to contribute to national development priorities for and with children need to be more effective in generating sustained national attention to child trafficking, notably through the preparation by the United Nation country team, in collaboration with national authorities, of the Common Country Assessment and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework.

9. The United Nations Development Group has adopted a harmonized approach to human rights-based programming, and its use in UNICEF country programmes of cooperation with partners is still in its early stages. Well-planned country and regional experience exchanges and strategic evaluations can pave the way for more rapid and effective human rights-based approaches to programming. Where indicated, cross-border and regional cooperation to eliminate child trafficking should be accelerated.

10. More investment in strengthening prevention efforts at the family, community, local and national levels is also needed. These include universal access to birth registration so that each child has a legal identity, helping to prevent passport fraud and creating a record of a child's existence.