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**United Nations Children's Fund**

Executive Board

**Annual session 2005**

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Item 8 of the provisional agenda\*

**Child protection: oral report**

**Background note**

1. Child protection is a serious issue in every country of the world. Major child protection problems involve sexual abuse and exploitation, including in armed conflict and humanitarian settings; trafficking; the use of children as soldiers; harmful practices, including female genital mutilation/ cutting and child marriage; and the situation of children who are not in the care of their families, are institutionalized or are in conflict with the law.
2. Previous discussions of the Executive Board on child protection (on children and armed conflict, during the annual session of 2003, and child trafficking, during the first regular session of 2004) and the mid-term review of the medium-term strategic plan (MTSP) for 2002-2005 at the second regular session in September 2004, emphasized that preventing and addressing violence, abuse, and exploitation are an integral part of, and represent an important UNICEF contribution to, the fulfilment of children's rights, the Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals, and at the same time respond to the protection concerns articulated by the 2002 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children.
3. While the range of child protection issues – from the impact of armed conflict to child marriage – is vast, the issues encompassed are often closely interrelated. The focus of UNICEF is shifting from projects for specific groups of affected children to a more comprehensive approach of supporting change in social and institutional environments, where possible. This approach, of strengthening the “protective environment” for children, was introduced in the MTSP for 2002-2005 in the area of child protection. Using this approach, child protection programmes become more strategic and better integrated in all areas of UNICEF work. Often, the protective environment concept also facilitates the engagement of UNICEF with partners who recognize its elements as being relevant and practical in assisting national authorities to plan and implement coherent preventive and corrective actions in child protection.
4. These positive results are reflected in the new country programmes of cooperation approved by the Executive Board in 2004 for the region of Central and Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Baltic States. In addition, several nationally led mid-term reviews in the Middle East and North Africa region evaluated current, and developed new, fully-fledged child protection programmes that reflect the protective environment approach. Most country programmes of cooperation in South Asia have also increased their programmatic responses to child protection, as Governments increasingly acknowledge these issues and the need to address them.

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\* E/ICEF/2005/7 and Corr.1

5. The linkages of children protection with other MTSP priorities help to highlight the importance of child protection to national and international development. For example, preventing and responding to sexual exploitation of children is essential to efforts to prevent HIV/AIDS, and addressing violence in schools is vital for improving school attendance and learning. Through advocacy, UNICEF has emphasized the importance of child protection to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. Programming that links critical issues includes the undertaking of birth registration during immunization campaigns and the training of teachers to address violence in schools. Initial efforts in cross-programme linkages are encouraging and should be expanded.

6. UNICEF faces a number of strategic opportunities and challenges:

- The focus of UNICEF on supporting legislative reform, attitudinal change, the building of institutional capacity among those who work with children, national monitoring and the promotion of open discussion through the media and civil society contributes to national efforts to enhance child protection as a whole. It is timely to review, with partners, the many evaluations of child protection activities that have been undertaken and use the information obtained to identify the evidence base for child protection interventions as well as to pinpoint ways to enhance the capacity of UNICEF. (An exercise to strengthen the child protection response of UNICEF in emergencies is already under way.)
- Clearer evidence showing the effectiveness of child protection interventions will help leverage resources for child protection, in developing and industrialized countries alike, to meet the challenge of taking child protection programming to scale.
- Significantly expanded child protection partnerships at global and regional levels include enhanced partnerships with the Inter-Parliamentary Union and parliamentarians, with major regional inter-governmental organizations, such as the League of Arab States and its Department of the Family, Woman and Child, and with the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the European Union, notably on violence and trafficking. Partnerships with other United Nations agencies include the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the World Food Programme and the United Nations Population Fund in conflict/post conflict and emergency countries, UNIFEM on sexual and gender-based violence, and the United Nations Statistical Division on the development of child protection indicators. In the Eastern and Southern Africa region, UNICEF has partnered with the World Bank on special projects for child disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. The International Labour Organization and the World Bank are key partners in the area of child labour. Many non-governmental organizations are partners at all levels, among them the organizations End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes and the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, in the areas of exploitation and violence.
- Overall experience thus far suggests that the incorporation of child protection into the wider development and humanitarian agenda remains a challenge at the country level. The linkage of the proposed MTSP for 2006-2009 with the Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals encourages more explicit articulation of the relationship between improved child protection and sustainable achievement of the Goals, and the benefits for children.

- The incorporation of child protection indicators in the routine national collection, analysis, and reporting of data, now that many indicators have been identified, will present both an opportunity and a challenge in the coming years.

7. In summary, UNICEF will continue to work towards strengthening national capacity for child protection, to convene partners and provide guidance in joint protection efforts (such as those for the Indian Ocean tsunami relief and reconstruction effort) and to use its global voice to advocate for improved child protection around the world. As UNICEF moves into the next MTSP period, a priority will be to deepen learning around “what works” in child protection and to seek implementation of promising practices on a wider scale.

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