

NEWS NOTE

UNICEF gives international workshop on protection and psychosocial support to children in emergency situations

*Representatives from nine countries come together in Santa Cruz, Bolivia.
Organised by the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean.*

Santa Cruz – July 1st 2008. UNICEF started up a regional workshop yesterday in Santa Cruz to deal with the issues of protection and psychosocial support to children in emergency situations. Government representatives and UNICEF staff from Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, Bolivia, Uruguay, Ecuador, Costa Rica, and Jamaica, as well as from UNICEF's regional office and New York headquarters attended. The aim was to strengthen the capacities of UNICEF's government counterparts and their officials to implement strategies to protect the rights of children and adolescents in situations of emergency.

At the opening of the seminar, Iván Yerovi, Regional Emergencies Specialist from the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean highlighted that "South American countries are facing emergency situations that require coherent and consistent humanitarian response. Strengthening the area of protection will ensure that the people who provide humanitarian aid will have the necessary capacities to prevent situations of exploitation and abuse that violate children's rights."

UNICEF has developed psycho-social assistance programmes as part of its emergency response actions in South America, the best known of which is *Retorno a la Alegría* (Return to Happiness), also known by different names, such as *Un Nuevo Sol para el Bienestar Comunitario* (A New Sun for Community Well-being) in Bolivia. However, the programme works around the same four main strategies all around the world. The first of these is the development and implementation of inter-agency strategies. The second deals with developing psychosocial support capacities. Third is the strengthening of psychosocial assessment and the fourth is that of providing psychological assistance.

The workshop will be led by UNICEF experts Rada Noeva and Amanda Melville, from the New York headquarters, and Rosa Izquierdo, a Spanish expert in psychosocial support. It is being held at the Salón Jazmín at the Hotel Los Tajibos and will last until Wednesday July 2nd.

Child protection in emergency situations

Child protection means action that keeps them safe from violence, exploitation, mistreatment and abandonment. Situations of emergency, both those caused by human beings and those arising from natural disasters, can result in displacement, lack of access to basic humanitarian aid, broken family and social structures, erosion of traditional values systems, violence, poor management of public affairs, absence of responsibility and lack of access to basic social services, all of which lead to seriously unprotected children.

Situations such as these can mean that children are separated from their families or end up as orphans. Sometimes they are kidnapped, they are forced to work for armed groups, are wounded in combat, by landmines or live ammunition. In addition they frequently fall victim to sexual exploitation during and after the conflicts, or are submitted to slavery for military purposes.

Children who are trapped in emergency situations have the same rights as other minors. The Convention on the Rights of the child continues to be fully applicable, even in states of emergency. It can be difficult to detect failures in child protection, and may be necessary to gain full knowledge of the political and cultural context, as well as entering into the broadest dialogue possible with the affected families and communities.

Bolivian experience

In Bolivia, UNICEF carries out the New Sun for Community Well-being programme as a response to the need for protection during emergencies. It began in 2007 when the El Niño phenomenon caused nationwide disasters, and the programme was strengthened this year. It was developed to support children who were affected by floods to recover from their negative experiences through games, recreation and school reinforcement.

The programme is run in coordination with the Departmental Social Services (SEDEGES) and covers five areas: psycho-pedagogical support, open classrooms for parents, the psycho-affective recovery kit, recreation activities, monitoring and evaluation.

The programme was launched in 25 municipalities and 25 communities affected in the Departments of Beni, Pando, Santa Cruz and La Paz.

About UNICEF

UNICEF is on the ground in over 150 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments.

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