



PRESS RELEASE

Ministers from Islamic countries take strong stand in favour of children

Rabat Declaration on the Child signals commitment to children in the drive for Islamic solidarity

RABAT, 8 November 2005 – On issuing a Declaration calling for an end to harmful traditional practices, elimination of gender disparity in education and urgent action to address the unacceptably high rates of child and maternal mortality in some Islamic countries, the more than 200 participants of *The First Islamic Ministerial Conference on the Child* hailed the meeting as a major success and a ground-breaking initiative for the Islamic world.

The historic two-day Conference, convened in the Kingdom of Morocco and co-organized by the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), UNICEF and the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), was attended by Ministers from nearly 50 Islamic countries and representatives of more than 20 international, Arab and Islamic organisations.

"The Conference and its outcomes come at a particularly important time for the Islamic world," said OIC Secretary-General Dr. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu. "As the OIC works to re-focus our efforts on practical actions that will bring real and lasting benefits to Member States and the broader Muslim Ummah, nothing could be more strategic that to unite around the rights and well-being of children."

The event was organised in response to a special resolution on "Child Care and Protection in the Islamic World" passed unanimously by OIC Member States at the 2003 OIC Summit in Malaysia. The final Declaration will be submitted to the next meeting of OIC Foreign Ministers and the next Islamic Summit, for adoption and support.

OIC Member States account for a quarter of the world's 2.3 billion children - in nations spanning Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Enabling these children to live and thrive and to reach their full potential, while respecting and nurturing Islamic values, including tolerance, solidarity, and protection of the vulnerable, is critical not only for the future of their countries but for the entire world.

In Islamic countries, around 4.3 million children under five die each year from preventable disease and malnutrition. About 6 million children under five suffer from malnutrition, about 23 per cent of the total population have no access to safe drinking water, and 45 per cent lack adequate sanitation. Children in sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, are facing a life-threatening crisis as a consequence of armed conflict, HIV/AIDS and poverty.

"UNICEF is privileged to have been part of the dynamic process that has led to such a strong Declaration - a Declaration that addresses head-on all of the major challenges confronting children in OIC countries and does so in a way that calls for action to be supported by ever

greater Islamic solidarity,” said UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Rima Salah, who headed the UNICEF delegation to the Ministerial Conference. “We look forward to continuing this important work with our valued partners – the OIC and ISESCO.”

The Conference was characterized by frank and open discussions, with participants sharing successful experiences in overcoming difficult challenges, including many of the harmful traditional practices that are often falsely associated with Islam, such as child marriage, female genital mutilation/cutting and gender discrimination in education. Participants expressed a shared sense of alarm over the dire situation for children in many Islamic countries and the need for an urgent collective response commensurate with the challenges.

There was broad agreement among participants that active partnerships among OIC governments, as well as with regional and international financial institutions, civil society and the private sector, are essential to provide the necessary funding and technical expertise to make a meaningful difference for children in OIC Member States. The importance of ensuring that assistance between and among OIC countries is targeted on the needs of children was also a common theme.

“The tremendous success of this Conference reaffirms the central value of children in Islamic culture and demonstrates to the international community the determination of the Islamic Ummah to build a just, peaceful and prosperous world by investing in its children,” said Dr. Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri, Director-General of ISESCO.

About The Organisation of the Islamic Conference

The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) is the world’s second largest inter-governmental organization after the United Nations, with 57 Member States and four Observer States. Under its charter, the OIC aims at promoting Islamic solidarity and co-operation among its Member and Observer States in the political, economic, social, cultural, humanitarian, scientific and related spheres. The OIC has observer status at the United Nations, on a reciprocal basis, and it co-operates with the United Nations in all areas of concern, including support to the Governments of Member States in their efforts to promote the economic and social development of their countries and peoples.

About the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

The Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) is a specialized inter-governmental organization established in May 1982. The Organization aims to strengthen and promote cooperation among Member States in the fields of education, science, culture and communication. It also seeks to develop applied sciences and use of advanced technology within the framework of Islamic values and ideals; consolidate understanding among Muslim peoples and contribute to the achievement of world peace and security, particularly through education, science, culture and communications.

About UNICEF

For nearly 60 years UNICEF has been the world’s leader for children, working on the ground in 157 countries to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world’s largest provider of vaccines for poor countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, quality basic education for all boys and girls, access to clean water and sanitation, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of governments, businesses, foundations and individuals.

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Notes to broadcasters:

Footage is available from Video on Demand at www.unicef.org