

FOOTBALL TO PROMOTE CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN COTE D'IVOIRE

UNICEF Signed new deal with the Scouts Association and the Ivorian Football Federation (IFF) to promote birth registration and protect vulnerable children from HIV/AIDS and all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation.

Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 18 January 2010 — The Memorandum of understanding signed last Friday between UNICEF, the Scouts Association and the Ivorian Football Federation launched the implementation of the Sports for Development project in Côte d'Ivoire funded by Football Australia, The International Olympic Committee and the Japanese Government.

The signature ceremony is the result of long negotiations to find the most appropriate coordination mechanisms between partners. The project provides a package of interventions that include birth registration, improved access to individual and group psychosocial support, educational support and medical care. Access to information, services strengthening and community protection mechanisms supported by the project will raise the level of prevention and protection of children against all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation. Advocacy and awareness raising activities will be combined with community mobilization, strengthening of the legal framework and building up of national capacities.

"The organization of this new football initiative couldn't arrive at a better time for the promotion of children's rights as the whole African continent is submerged in the Africa Cup of Nations where Côte d'Ivoire's football team 'The Elephants' are also playing" noted Maarit Hirvonen, UNICEF Côte d'Ivoire Country Representative.

"Sports and particularly football is very important for the physical and mental development of people and children that is why the IFF is very interested in this project as it will bring back the joy to these children said Gonké Tia Martin, Project Coordinator at the IFF."

"Sports such as football unites and provides an opportunity to reach out to a large number of people on key issues in the localities we will be working" remarked the Scouts Association representative of Côte d'Ivoire said Kouamé Serge-Sylvain, Scouts project Coordinator.

UNICEF and its partners will take advantage of the momentum created around the football to reach out to millions of viewers with messages on birth registration, HIV/AIDS and violence, abuse and all forms of exploitation.

'Birth certificate is a certificate for life'

In Côte d'Ivoire one child out of two does not have a birth certificate, which denies a child's most basic right to identity and hinders access to education. While the majority of children succeed in entering primary school many are prevented from completing this first phase. The presentation of a birth certificate is mandatory to entering the secondary level.

Children without an identity are exposed to HIV and all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation. 4,000 children who were not registered at birth will benefit a birth registration. Opinion leaders as well as administrative, municipal, religious and custom authorities and media practitioners will be sensitized on the importance of registration, HIV and all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation. UNICEF and partners will train 132 community relays in the regions of Zanzan, Denguelé, Montagnes and Moyen-Cavally on birth registration procedures.

'Learning to play together'

320 boys and girls will participate in 32 football matches starting February 2010 in the regions of Zanzan and Denguele in Northwest of Côte d'Ivoire. Selected children between ages 07 to 17 will learn the basics of football techniques by the Ivorian Football Federation coaches. The children will also learn how to protect themselves and will be provided with information on services available in Côte d'Ivoire on HIV and on all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation.

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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