

Check against delivery

## **Goals for Girls**

**Press Conference 7 September 2007**

**Remarks by Mr. Richard Bridle**

**Deputy Regional Director**

**UNICEF Regional Office for East Asia and the Pacific**

This is a great opportunity to highlight UNICEF's long-standing global partnership with FIFA. Our relationship goes back to 2001. Together we have used the power of football – undeniably the world's most popular sport – to help prevent children from being recruited as child soldiers, inform them about the dangers of HIV and AIDS, and protect them from violence and exploitation.

I am very pleased to announce today that UNICEF and FIFA are joining efforts again to promote the rights of children. Together we are launching Goals for Girls! – a global campaign to help promote education, gender equality and the rights of women and girls.

I am also very glad that the launch of this global campaign is being held in China – a country that has made remarkable progress in improving the situation of women and girls over the past decades.

Women's football sends out a strong message that barriers can be broken and gender stereotypes can be overcome. Nowhere can this message be stronger than in China, a country that is home to 20 per cent of the world's female population.

Goals for Girls! seeks to use FIFA Women's World Cup as a platform to reinforce this key message and take it to the broad audience of fans who will be following the games worldwide.

The campaign highlights the need for all children worldwide to have access to quality basic education. Every child has the right to education. Without education, children – particularly girls - are more vulnerable to poverty, hunger, violence, abuse, exploitation, trafficking and HIV/AIDS – a legacy that may well be passed on to their own children.

On the other hand, a girl who has an education is more likely to contribute fully to political, social and economic life and grow up to be a mother whose own children are more likely to survive, be better nourished and go to school themselves. She will be more productive and better paid in the workplace. In her home and community, she will be better able to protect herself and her children.

This makes it all the more worrying that, of the 115 million children worldwide who do not attend school, more than half are girls.

Goals for Girls! promotes the 'child-friendly school' model as an effective way to get more children into school and to improve their learning. In a child-friendly school, children feel safe, receive health and nutrition services, and learn essential life skills. These schools are inclusive and gender-sensitive, offering children quality education in a safe environment, even in emergency situations.

Let me now come to China. China has made impressive progress in the eradication of illiteracy, especially female illiteracy, a goal it is promoting by requiring that all children – both girls and boys – stay in school for a minimum of nine years. To this end, the Government has begun eliminating school fees and providing free textbooks, an example we would commend to other governments around the world.

The Government of China is also promoting Child-Friendly Schools, with assistance from UNICEF. Child-friendly schools improve education quality, make learning a joyful experience for both girls and boys, promote gender equality, and encourage the active participation of children, including in sports and play.

But challenges still remain, particularly in changing the attitudes and practices of families. Because families attach much more importance to boys' education, girls are more likely to drop out of school. The preference of families for boys is also seen in the sex ratio at birth: currently, 119 boys are born for every 100 girls. So the campaign to promote the rights of girls is also relevant here and families need to be made aware of and fully understand the innate value of girls.

Last, in closing, let me highlight why this global partnership between FIFA and UNICEF is so appropriate. Sports not only satisfies a fundamental right for all children to play, it also teaches them self-esteem, team work, fair play, respect for others, conflict-resolution and tolerance, and fosters healthy physical development. In short, sport is a fundamental component of children's development.

May every goal scored in this FIFA Women's World Cup be a Goal for Girls!