

# Speech

**UNICEF Country Representative, Mr. Jesper Morch**

**Time:** 10:00 AM

**Date:** Wednesday December 10, 2008

**Event:** Global Launch of the World Report on Child Injury Prevention

**Location:** Ho Chi Minh Museum

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**Honorable Mr. Truong Vinh Trong, Deputy Prime Minister**

**Honorable Dr. Nguyen Quoc Trieu, Minister of Health**

**Dr. Aladin Alwan, Assistant Director-General for WHO**

**Distinguished Guests, Friends from the media,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is a great pleasure for me to be here today surrounded by so many of you concerned about the wellbeing of children around the world. I feel honored to represent UNICEF at this global launch of the World Report on Child Injury Prevention and its child friendly version, "Have Fun, Be Safe!". I would like to reinforce the video message from the UNICEF Executive Director Ms Ann Veneman.

## Child injuries – a daily reality

Today, as we meet to launch this very important report, twenty children will die from unintentional injuries in Viet Nam, over 200 children will be admitted to hospitals or remain permanently disabled, while 600 children will need medical care or will miss school because of an injury. And these are figures for just one country.

As you just heard from Ms. Veneman, before we reach the end of today's ceremony, more than 2000 children will have died worldwide.

I join the previous speakers in their conclusion that these figures present a situation that is unacceptable.

Behind the numbers there is always a story. I would like to take you briefly to the Mekong Delta where Nguyen Thi Chung and her family live on the banks of a small river. Two years ago Chung lived through the horrifying experience of almost losing her two-year old daughter. Just a momentary lack of concentration and limited protective measures had nearly caused her daughter to drown in the river just next to their house.

These stories are not unusual, not in Vietnam nor elsewhere in the world, and they do not always end on the same positive note as Chung's tale did.

### Impact on child survival and development

In the report that we so proudly present to you today, we read that unintentional injuries are the leading cause of childhood death after the age of nine. At the same time, in most countries in demographic transition, child injuries are also responsible for 40% of all deaths of children aged 1 to 4. In short, this means that if we aspire to advance the global Child Survival agenda, working towards universal achievement of the Millennium Development Goals on improving child health and development, we need to join hands and make child injury a priority.

The landmark Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by almost all governments around the world, states that all children have a right to a safe environment and to protection from injury and violence. Safeguarding these rights everywhere is not easy, but it can be achieved through concerted action.

For the past few decades UNICEF, WHO and partners have focused their child mortality reduction efforts mainly on the under-fives as this is the age where most deaths occur. The time has come to review and revise this focus. With the number of countries growing where the demographic transition is well underway, the proportion of child injury related-deaths has increased while the proportion due to infectious diseases has decreased.

The implications of this is that unless we broaden our focus and look at the causes of mortality and morbidity among all children as defined by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the development community stands to lose the investment made on younger children - as injuries now account for between 50 to 60 per cent of all deaths among children aged 5 to 17.

And let's remember, these deaths are the tip of the proverbial iceberg. For example, in Asia, where access to hospitalization and care is limited, for every child death due to injury, we count 1.2 permanent disabilities, about 11 cases of hospitalization of 1 day or longer, and close to 35 children who sought care, missed school or work.

## Importance of knowledge and evidence

Launching this report [here](#) today, adding to the body of knowledge and evidence available for our work on child injury prevention at a global scale, is not without significance. I would like to take a moment here to congratulate the Government of Viet Nam for its pioneering work on child injury prevention in this region. Following UNICEF's landmark publication on child injury in 2001, Viet Nam was the first country to conduct a nationwide survey to determine the extent of the problem. This example was followed by several other countries, including China, Thailand, the Philippines, Bangladesh, and more recently, Cambodia and Indonesia.

For all of us to be able to respond effectively, knowledge and evidence have to be at the core of our programming work. In recognition of this, UNICEF entered into partnerships with 7 countries in Asia and The Alliance for Safe Children and conducted community-based surveys to begin to understand the scale and characteristics of child injuries. This provided convincing evidence that injury is a leading contributor to child death and disability, a trend that has not been previously recognized.

## Protecting children

Until recently, child injury was viewed in middle and low income countries as inevitable and as such, something we have to live with. But based on evidence from this and other reports, we know that injuries can be prevented. For example, in OECD countries, injuries among children under 15 fell by half between 1970 and 1995 because of interventions targeted at injury reduction. **In short, child injuries can be prevented, and the cost of doing nothing is unacceptable. We owe it to children to ensure that their rights to safety, health and development are protected and fulfilled.**

When developing interventions that will protect children and prevent child injuries, we also need to consider the role children themselves can play.

UNICEF and WHO are proud to present today the new booklet '*Have Fun, Be Safe*' which provides children aged 7 to 10 with useful tips and life-saving advice about how to protect themselves from accidental injuries. *Have Fun, Be Safe* serves as a companion to the global report and explains to children how injuries happen and how to prevent them.

## Future and next steps

While there is a lot of work to do for us to do today and in the near future, we also need to look at trends over time. The rate of child death from injury in low and middle-income countries today is five times higher than in high-income countries. Ironically, with increasing globalization and accelerating urbanization, especially in low and middle income countries, the child injury situation may get worse over the coming decades unless urgent action is taken now.

While the realization that over half of all child deaths after infancy are due to injury gives great cause for concern, it also gives great hope. The success in child injury prevention in rich countries over the last fifty years shows injuries are clearly preventable. It is now time for policymakers in Asia and indeed in the world at large to make it a 'World Safe for Children'.

UNICEF, in close partnership with the World Health Organization, governments and non-governmental organizations, is looking forward to continuing efforts in the near future to promote best practices in child injury prevention. This includes enacting and enforcing legislation, an area in which Vietnam has been a leader - for example in the enactment and enforcement of compulsory helmet wearing for motorcyclists. More enforcement work may be needed, however, to ensure that children are protected when traveling on motorbikes.

We are also doubling our efforts with families and communities in some countries to create safe homes and community environments, and we are extending this work to other countries where this issue is not yet taken seriously. Finally, we are working with governments and other organizations to develop capacities to address child injury prevention, including strengthening information databases to ensure progressive capturing of all data on child injury-related mortality and morbidity.

The report provides much more useful information relevant for all of us working on child injury, and I hope you will take the time to read it through. But I would like end here by extending our sincere appreciation to the Government of Viet Nam for hosting this launch that will bring the issue of child injury to the attention of a wider audience. I know that together we can build a global movement towards a safe environment for all children.

Thank you.