

## MEDIA RELEASE

### Ethiopian President and Olympic stars launch orphans campaign

The President of Ethiopia, His Excellency Girma Wolde-Giorgis, today urged people to put on their running shoes to take part in the biggest ever campaign for Ethiopia's six million orphans.

The President shared a stage with Olympic running stars Haile Gebreselassie and Tirunesh Dibaba to launch the 2006 DREAM CAMPAIGN for Ethiopia's most vulnerable children.

The campaign is organized by UNICEF, Ethiopia's Ministry of Women's Affairs and other members of Ethiopia's National Task Force on Orphans and Vulnerable Children\*.

The campaign aims to:

- Raise 1 million birr for projects that support Ethiopia's growing numbers of orphans by the end of 2006.
- Get people to sponsor teams of orphans and vulnerable children to run in the Toyota Great Ethiopian Run on November 25
- Encourage teams of runners to form Dream Teams in the Great Ethiopian Run to raise money for key projects
- Organize a string of events through 2006 and 2007 to raise the alarm about the state of Ethiopia's orphans

"The plight of these highly vulnerable children has been overlooked for long enough," said Bjorn Ljungqvist, UNICEF's country representative in Ethiopia.

"Every birr raised in this campaign will go towards programmes that will make a real difference in their lives. It is easy to be overwhelmed by the huge numbers involved. But the only way things are going to change is if we all get involved."

Mr Ljungqvist said the 1 million birr appeal was only one part of UNICEF's plans for Ethiopia's orphans and vulnerable children.

"At the moment UNICEF Ethiopia is supporting 240,000 orphans in Ethiopia through micro credit schemes that help families look after orphans in the community.

"If we are going to reach all 6 million orphans in the same way, we are going to have to raise an extra US\$12 million per year for the next five years."

More than 744,000 of Ethiopia's six million orphans have been orphaned by HIV/AIDS. These huge numbers are overwhelming extended families and communities who struggle to help where they can.

As a result, many orphans do not go to school. Large numbers are forced to live on the street. They get caught up child labour, take on the drudgery of domestic chores and the dangers of sex work.

Many of them have to become the heads of their own households, taking the place of their dead parents. These youngsters often sacrifice their own careers and educations to guarantee a better future for their younger siblings. There are significant numbers living with some kind of disability.

The 2006 Dream Campaign forms part of UNICEF's global UNITE FOR CHILDREN UNITE AGAINST AIDS campaign – a worldwide push that focuses on the impact of Aids on children.

\* The Task Force for Orphans and Vulnerable Children is led by the Ethiopian Ministry of Women's Affairs and includes a range of organizations including, Save The Children USA, USAID, UNAIDS, UNICEF, Hope for Children, the Ethiopian Inter-Faith Forum for Development, the Christian Relief & Development Association, Federal HAPCO, the Hope for African Children Initiative, WorldVision and the Ministries of Youth & Sport, Justice and Education.

In 1998, an Interagency Task Team comprising UNICEF, WHO, UNAIDS and UNFPA initiated pilot projects to demonstrate the feasibility of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT) programmes in 11 high-burden countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America. Since then significant progress has been made. Over 100 countries have implemented PMTCT programmes, 16 of which offer services nationwide.

However most of the worst affected countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, continue to suffer from extremely low rates of service coverage. Of the 11 original pilot countries, only Botswana has achieved national coverage with at least fifty per cent of HIV positive pregnant women receiving services by the end of 2004.

The biggest challenges to expanding PMTCT services in resource poor settings are weak health systems and a shortage of health care workers and supplies. In addition, communities have not been adequately involved in supporting programme implementation.

Funding for AIDS from donor governments has increased significantly in recent years. However children have yet to receive their fair share. One key recommendation to donor governments will be to earmark AIDS funding specifically for programmes aimed at children. Following the meeting, technical assistance will be provided to governments to formulate national plans of action. Governments will be encouraged to integrate PMTCT programmes into routine family and child health services.

Expanding access to PMTCT services is one of the four pillars of the “Unite for Children, Unite against AIDS” campaign, launched by UNICEF, UNAIDS and partners on October 25<sup>th</sup>, with the ultimate goal of an HIV free generation. Progress on the other pillars- primary prevention, pediatric treatment and protection of children affected by AIDS- are also vital to reverse the impact of the disease.

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