

## MEDIA RELEASE

### THREE MILLION BABIES BORN IN ETHIOPIA EACH YEAR GO THROUGH LIFE WITHOUT AN OFFICIAL IDENTITY

#### *WORKSHOP CALLS FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF BIRTH, DEATH, MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE REGISTRATION SYSTEM*

**ADDIS ABABA, 14 April, 2008** – A consultative workshop, organized by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and the Ministry of Women's Affairs with the support of UNICEF, called for the establishment of a national vital events registration system this year as part of the celebration of the new Ethiopian Millennium.

At present there is no legal system in place to register vital events such as births, deaths, marriage and divorce in Ethiopia.

As a result, close to 3 million babies born in Ethiopia each year go throughout life without an official identity.

H.E. Fantaye Gezahegn, Deputy Chairperson of the Legal and Administrative Standing Committee of the House of Peoples' Representatives, called on all federal and regional government institutions and non-governmental organizations to join hands in efforts underway to establish birth, death, marriage and divorce registration systems in the country.

Vital event records are instrumental in realizing and safeguarding the rights and privileges of children, women and the general public as enshrined in the Constitution of the country.

"The provision of legal birth and marriage registration certificates is critical for the protection of young women from the deeply-rooted problem of early marriage and related problem of fistula," said H.E. Ubah Mohammed, State Minister of the Ministry on Women's Affairs.

Proper implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which has been ratified by Ethiopia, is being compromised by the absence of a universal vital registration system.

"Ethiopia is the only large African country with no law that demands for the registration of vital events," said Bjorn Ljungqvist, UNICEF Representative in Ethiopia. "Every year, nearly 3 million babies are born but unregistered and hence cannot claim 'the membership card' that is the birth certificate. "These children are deprived of their basic rights, and with no documentary evidence to prove how old they are – or even who they are – they are likely to join the millions facing discrimination and the lack of access to basic services such as health and education."

UNICEF reiterated its commitment to support the country's efforts to establish a birth and other vital events registration system.

The Consultative Workshop, which was attended by the Excellencies of the Members of the House of Peoples' Representatives, representatives from federal ministries and agencies, regions, UN agencies, non-governmental organizations and research institutions that have prime responsibility in establishing vital events registration system in the country, endorsed a ten point resolution supporting past initiatives and issues to be addressed in future endeavors.

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