

MEDIA RELEASE

ONE MILLION ETHIOPIAN CHILDREN WILL WASH THEIR HANDS WITH SOAP ON GLOBAL HANDWASHING DAY

Addis Ababa, 14 October 2008 – One Million Ethiopian children will join their peers in over 60 other countries worldwide in a challenge to have the largest number of school children wash their hands with soap on the occasion of the first ever Global Hand Washing Day, on 15 October 2008. Global Handwashing Day aims to promote hand washing with soap as an important hygienic practice that reduces– by two thirds – the prevalence of diarrhoeal diseases and pneumonia (respiratory illnesses) that affect and in many cases kill millions of children. Every year diarrhoeal disease and pneumonia together kill almost 4 million children under the age of five in developing countries.

Handwashing with soap plays an important role to reach the Millennium Development Goals related to health improvements, education, the reduction of poverty and child mortality, as well as access to and effective use of water supply and sanitation services as agreed by UN member countries at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in September 2002. Stepping up investment in hand washing will be crucial to meet the child health targets set by the UN and adopted by countries..

Global Hand Washing Day is also an important event to raise the profile of the International Year of Sanitation (IYS) which is being observed worldwide throughout 2008. Globally, it is estimated that 2.6 billion people do not have access to sanitation. In Ethiopia, the estimates are roughly 35 million people.

UNICEF believes that children have the potential to be agents of behavioral change in their schools, homes and communities by coupling water and sanitation improvements in schools with hygiene education. Accordingly, the inaugural Global Hand Washing Day is aimed at raising the importance of hand washing with soap through school children as active promoters. Ethiopia is mobilizing close to 5000 schools nationwide to have 1,000,000 children participate in the challenge towards a world record.

On 15 October, a half-day national launching event will kick-off at Maskal square to bring together children and stakeholders from government, public and private sectors; NGOs, the media, school teachers, parents and the diplomatic community to showcase this simple and cost effective hygienic habit for healthy living. There will be Senior officials from Addis Ababa City Council, with the UN Resident Coordinator and high-ranking officials from relevant sector ministries of Education, Health and Water Resources to inaugurate and conduct a symbolic demonstration of proper hand washing with soap.

The GHWD celebration in Ethiopia is being organized by UNICEF and the Ethiopian WASH Movement in partnership with private sector including Star Soap, Roto, Birhane Zeru Luxury and Comfortable Buses, Andnet Trading and Printing, Afritank, Helena and Aquatabs. Globally the inaugural Global Hand washing Day is led by a coalition of public and private partners, who together form the Public-Private Partnership for Hand washing (PPPHW),

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