

PRESS RELEASE

UNICEF EXECUTIVE BOARD DELEGATION VISITS SEVERE ACUTE MALNUTRITION CENTRES IN SNNPR

ADDIS ABABA, 22 April 2005 - A UNICEF-supported therapeutic feeding centre in Boricha woreda some 400 kms. south of Addis Ababa was the first field stop this past Tuesday for the seven members of the UNICEF Executive Board here in Ethiopia on a five-day official visit (17-22 April 2005). Over 130 children with severe acute malnutrition have been admitted to the two therapeutic feeding centres in Boricha woreda -- Derara and Yirba Health Centres -- in the past month.

Boricha (in the Southern Nationalities, Nations and People's Region -- SNNPR) is one of the more than 25 malnutrition "hotspots" currently identified by the Government and UNICEF in almost every region of the country where food insecurity and very limited access to safe water is threatening child survival.

One of the worst-affected areas in the 2003 food crisis in the south, Boricha is believed to have some 3,000 acutely malnourished children. In addition to those children with severe acute malnutrition being cared for as inpatients at the Derara Health Centre (and another in Yirba), nearly 400 children have been treated for malnutrition in seven outpatient treatment sites in Boricha as of mid-April.

The risk of higher numbers of children becoming severely malnourished is being reduced through the new creative joint UNICEF/WFP-supported initiative called the Enhanced Outreach Strategy. It monitors the health and nutritional status of nearly 7 million children around the country and is identifying the children in drought-prone areas of the country in need of supplementary feeding.

The current crisis (two months old) has been precipitated by failed rains, delays in the start of the Government's Productive Safety Net Programme, chronic water shortages and falling cash crop prices.

The UNICEF visitors met and spoke with staff members, mothers, fathers and some of the young patients at the Derara Centre, where children, many of them critically ill on arrival, are first stabilized and then closely followed medically and nutritionally, weighed, measured and given six enriched feedings a day. A child may remain at the Centre for two weeks or longer, depending on his/her condition at admission and the rate of progress.

Speaking on behalf of his colleagues as the team leader of the UNICEF Executive Board visit, Ambassador Andrei Dapkiunas, Permanent Representative of Belarus to the United Nations (Belarus is currently Vice President of the UNICEF Executive Board), complimented the effective collaboration between UNICEF/WFP and the Government of Ethiopia through the innovative Enhanced Outreach Strategy and in implementing life-saving measures for critically ill children.

The challenge remains, Mr. Dapkiunas noted, to prevent this human suffering in the first place and only effective long-term development can ensure national food security that will make such crises a thing of the past. Generous donor responses to crises are needed and these need to be matched by generous donor support for long-term development.

The eight-member team, representing all major regions of the world, also visited a school in Kedida Gamela woreda in SNNPR that has chalked up progress in getting more girls into school. In just one year since the

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programme began, good results are being seen, with girls' enrolment shooting up in schools where it is being implemented.

The visitors also cheered with hundreds of children and community members and leaders when water gushed skyward from a new borehole at a school in Shebedino woreda. The drilling rig which sank the borehole (drilling 53 metres in a short half day to reach water) was financed by Dfid (UK) and Development Cooperation of Ireland. The new rig will be drilling wells in areas of SNNPR that face chronic water shortages and the resulting water is expected to vastly improve health and hygiene.

Before returning to Addis Ababa, the UNICEF Executive Board members also visited anti-HIV/AIDS clubs active in the region, learning about their energetic prevention initiatives, their efforts to ensure care for children orphaned by AIDS and their support for income-generating activities among those impoverished by the disease.

The UNICEF Executive Board members visiting Ethiopia are: Ambassador Andrei Dapkiunas, Permanent Representative of Belarus to the UN; Ms. Maya Tanigaki, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan; Ms. Jane Asani-Ndelemani, Mission of Malawi to the UN; Mr. Aung Lynn, Mission of Myanmar to the UN; Ms. Hariette Mingoen, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands; Ms. Beatriz Alfaro, Mission of El Salvador to the UN; Mr. Alireza Javaheri, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sweden; Ms. Kirsi Madi, Deputy Secretary of the Executive Board, represented the UNICEF Secretariat during the visit.

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