

## PRESS RELEASE

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### STAKEHOLDERS MEET TO DEVELOP ETHIOPIAN STRATEGY ON OVCs

**ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia** – Key stakeholders representing all eleven regions in Ethiopia have come together to assess the scale and scope of programmes for orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) in Ethiopia, identify key gaps and constraints and develop strategies on scaling up interventions.

“The current interventions for OVCs need to be scaled up to reach greater numbers,” said Dr. Bulti Gutema, Head of the Department of Children and Families at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA). “Orphans and vulnerable children need to become a priority agenda for the nation.”

A rapid OVC assessment, analysis and action planning (RAAAP) process is currently on-going in Ethiopia and in 16 other countries in East and Southern Africa. Here in Ethiopia, the RAAAP taskforce consists of members from MOLSA, the HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Office (HAPCO), WFP, UNAIDS, USAID, Save the Children Alliance, Hope for Children and UNICEF.

“Developing a comprehensive, cohesive strategy on OVCs in Ethiopia is a priority of UNICEF and all our partners,” said Bjorn Ljungqvist, UNICEF Representative. “Together we must mobilise the relevant stakeholders to scale-up action for providing care and support to OVCs throughout the country. This is extremely important as we are facing a situation where, if we fail to act, traditional mechanisms for orphan care will collapse under the pressure of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.”

A Draft National Action Plan for OVCs has been formulated. Key points include:

- Regional data gathering to establish numbers and document the needs of OVCs in the country
- Advocacy and sensitization with federal and regional officials to prioritise OVC access to education, healthcare, shelter, basic needs and counselling support
- Education concerning the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other laws and policies that protect the rights of OVCs
- Improved law enforcement to protect the rights of OVCs
- Strengthened co-ordination and networking at all levels to ensure more OVCs are provided care and support on a broader scale
- Capacity building of community-based organizations such as *idirs* to strengthen community mechanisms for channelling resources and support
- Sharing of best practices of community involvement in caring for OVCs
- Implementation of a monitoring and evaluation framework
- Resource mobilisation to support the Action Plan

Due to HIV/AIDS, the number of orphans globally is increasing. Between 2001 and 2003, the figure of children orphaned due to AIDS rose from 11.5 million to 15 million. The proportion of children who have lost both parents to the disease increased from just under 2 percent in 1990 to 28 percent in 2003. According to international estimates, there were an estimated 3.8 million orphans in Ethiopia in 2001. That figure is expected to rise to 4.4 million by 2005.

“Orphans throughout the country should form associations to advocate for the rights of orphans and vulnerable children, to conduct public education and provide care and support,” said Azmach Hailu, Executive Director of the Tesfa Birhan Orphan Association.