

## PRESS RELEASE

# National WASH Movement kicks-off throughout Ethiopia

**November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2004 - ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia** – Acknowledging that water and hygiene go hand-in-hand, The WASH Movement in Ethiopia will be launched today in Meskel Square. The movement will be the flagship of action for behaviour change and hopes to create awareness among teachers, children and their parents about hygiene, water, sanitation and health, using hand-washing as a key step to reducing mortality and morbidity.

The WASH Movement which is a coalition of key government ministries, NGO's, the private sector, faith based organizations and UN Agencies, recognizes that everyone has a right to the highest quality of health and environmental sanitation. Under the umbrella of this year's motto "Your Health is in your Hands", the launch will spotlight proper hand washing using soap or ash at critical times like before eating or preparing food and after using the toilet..

In Ethiopia, over half a million children under the age of five die every year from diarrhoea. This means that for every five children born, one will die from diarrhoea before they reach their fifth birthday. Proper hand washing can reduce this and save thousands of lives each year.

"Clean hands are the single most important factor in preventing the spread of disease" said Bjorn Ljungqvist, UNICEF's Country Representative. "The simple habit of hand washing can help reduce the numbers of preventable diseases related to poor sanitation. Hygiene cannot improve unless all individuals are educated about key practices such as hand washing, and are encouraged to make informed choices about their own behaviour."

The WASH movement which will be launched in 11 Regions started in May 2004 when a group of organizations and government departments met to discuss the possibility of this large social mobilization event. Interest was high from all sectors – Government, NGO's, FBO's and the private sector. Initial discussions concluded that in order to have impact and avoid message overload the movement would focus on a single topic each year and could commit itself to being a multi-year process.

"Access to clean water and sanitation facilities is necessary for the health of the population but will only contribute to reducing levels of disease if people are aware of hygienic practices." said Helen Pankhurst from Water Aid.

Initial private sector donations from First Indo, Helena and Unilever will ensure that over 100,000 bars of soap will be distributed throughout the country. These will be a vital component of the WASH kits and it is hoped that through an intensive campaign additional donations of soap shall be received.

Working closely with government and critical partners, like the media, to develop enabling environments at community, district and national levels, the WASH movement combines a holistic approach to healthcare, education, community development and water/sanitation.

WASH also contributes to the UN Millennium Development Goals by aiming to reduce the mortality of young children, decrease the spread of disease and by bringing together business, NGO's, governments and communities to improve the lives of people in the developing world.