

STATEMENT BY UNICEF OFFICER-IN-CHARGE ABDELMAJID TIBOUTI

Dr. Bulti Gutema, Head of the Children, Youth and Family Welfare Department of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs,

Honoured guests, colleagues, the media and teenage participants,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you, especially all of you teenagers, to the second meeting of the Ethiopian Teenagers' Forum.

I am pleased to see that this youth-driven initiative has given priority to the issue of street children, a subject that is of grave concern to us at UNICEF, as well as to all our partners and colleagues working for the welfare of children in Ethiopia. Street children live on the margins of society and ensuring that their rights and basic needs are met remains a major challenge for us all. We adults can learn from your fresh perspective. We will follow your discussions and deliberations, and we are certainly looking forward to hearing your recommendations at the end of today's meeting.

UNICEF is committed to the objectives of the Global Movement for Children, which stresses working for and with children and youth. This forum is a tangible example of how youth can make a difference. A plan of action as follow-

up to the UN Special Session is underway here in Ethiopia by MOLSA, UNICEF, the Save the Children Alliance and other partners. Children and youth will be part of that consultative process, and I believe it is worth exploring ways in which your initiative here can become part of that larger process.

The issue of street children is a very timely subject. As you are all aware, Ethiopia is at present confronting a major humanitarian crisis as a result of the drought. UNICEF is working alongside the Government, our sister UN agencies, NGOs and the international donor community to provide the assistance that affected communities require to survive. During previous crises, entire communities have abandoned their drought-affected homes in search of relief assistance. Mothers and children are particularly vulnerable in such circumstances. Family bonds can disintegrate and children may end up living on the streets. This forum can make a difference in coming up with viable solutions to stem the number of young people who are forced on to the streets. Together we can work to protect these vulnerable women and children so that they will have an alternative means of survival.

Good luck to you today, and we look forward to seeing the results of your deliberations.