

**UNICEF Executive Board
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**Tenth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family (IYF):
The Challenges to Families with Children and the UNICEF Action Plan for 2004
Background Paper for the oral report**

1. UNICEF recognizes that the best environment for raising children is within a strong, loving, supportive family. UNICEF believes that fulfilling the rights of children and women is essential to a strong family. This means making major progress in:

- (a) Gender equality;
- (b) Responsible parenthood
- (c) Shared parenting
- (d) Support for women's rights.

Children's rights and challenges for the family

2. Although some families have escaped from economic poverty over the last decade, millions of families and their children still live in poverty, and the disparities between rich and poor appear to be increasing in many instances. Lifting children out of economic and social poverty permanently will depend making faster and more effective progress in meeting and sustaining the targets of the Millennium Development Goals.

3. It is tragic and heartbreaking that the pace and number of children separated from their families and unaccompanied by parents, due to a variety of tragedies, such as war, have become more serious over the last decade. For example,

(a) Over 1 million children have been orphaned or separated from their families as a direct result of war. The security, psychosocial, economic, cultural effects on families are traumatic and gargantuan. It is a particularly enormous problems for children and their families in a number of African countries as well as elsewhere;

(b) In Central and Eastern Europe, the number of children being raised in institutional settings now exceeds 2 million, due in part to the stress of economic transition and its destructive impact on families;

(c) The HIV/AIDS pandemic has already decimated the lives of some 13 million children who have lost at least one parent. Over 14 per cent of these children are under five years of age. Many are now being raised by their grandparents and other relatives, including older siblings;

(d) Serious economic decline and harsh economic transitions have put enormous stress on families in a number of countries in such regions as Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia, Africa and Eastern and Central Europe.

4. Violations against the rights of children and their families, in particular trafficking of children, commercial sexual and labour exploitation of children and women, and forcing children into combatant roles appear to be on the increase in a number of countries.

Highlights of the UNICEF action plan for IYF in 2004

5. Pursuant to the objectives of the tenth anniversary of IYF and in coordination with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the UNICEF action plan aims to:

(a) Strengthen the family-focused perspective in relevant UNICEF policy and programmes for and with children;

(b) Contribute to the preparation of the Secretary-General's reports with a focus on family issues and their impact on children in the context of implementation and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits;

(c) Participate in the regional preparatory conference in Benin and the International Conference on the IYF.

6. Key challenges related to children and strengthening of the family inherent in the UNICEF medium-term strategic plan are:

(a) Reaching the most needy families-they are most often "outside of the system";

(b) Raising the low status of women and girls in many families;

(c) Increasing the low coverage and going to wide scale coverage with needy families;

(d) Enhancing the role of men in family life and care of children;

(e) Improved emergency early warning systems and earlier, more appropriate programme actions for children and their families in unfolding complex emergencies.

7. Some examples of strengthened UNICEF partnership initiatives in 2004 related to strengthening the family are:

(a) The organization of a consultation on the importance of the family to the rights of children;

(b) Underscoring the importance of the family in the Common Country Assessment and United Nations Development Assistance Framework through UNICEF participation in the United Nations country team;

(c) Support to all UNICEF staff associations in their efforts to support the families of staff members, for example in handling stress in professional and personal life and prevention and care for those affected by HIV/AIDS;

(d) Policy and programme research and evaluation, e.g., a United Nations study on violence against children in partnership with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the World Health Organization.