

Speech by
His Excellency the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior
Major General Saif Abdullah Alshaafar
at the Co-ordination & Review Meeting of the UAE-UNICEF Project
Supporting Children Formerly Involved in Camel Racing
Abu Dhabi, 19 September 2006

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

Your honour, the UNICEF Representatives,
The Representatives of the concerned countries
Ladies and Gentlemen, of experience and specialization ...

First, on behalf of the Lt. General, His Highness Sheikh Saif bin Zayed Al Nahyan, I have the honour to welcome you at this consultation meeting in order to evaluate the first stage of the programme "sending the jockey children back to their home countries, and rehabilitation them". I as well, would like to convey to you the greetings and many thanks of His Highness the Minister of Interior for the fruitful and constructive cooperation he felt by the interested parties of this programme.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The United Arab Emirates denounces the crime of trafficking in persons, and it is always committed to combating such crime, and to protect the victims of such kind of crime. The UAE government has adopted many steps to promote its efforts in controlling and combating this crime of all forms.

The Ministry of Interior works constantly with other governmental bodies in order to enhance cooperation and promote the combating campaigns at both the local and international levels, and to cooperate with other countries of experience in such domain to utilize such experience.

In the field of incriminating of such phenomena, the country's constitution prohibits slavery against any person. This country, through its legislation, has a leading role among Arab countries in prohibiting slavery and the acts of trafficking in persons. It also imposes severe punishment.

Our dignified guests ...

As we mentioned in our recent meetings, the camel races are part of the national heritage of the UAE. They were restricted to the UAE nationals. In order to maintain this heritage, the camel races were developed and valuable awards were dedicated in this regard. Therefore, some camel owners resorted to have the help of the families residing in the country or inviting them from abroad so as to participate in these races.

However, because some people abused this sport and children were exposed to danger, a union was established to regulate practicing these races and to specify the necessary rules for the participants.

In line with the international agreements, specially those related to the rules of recruiting children, and what has recently been confirmed by the ILO that the practicing of camel races is considered dangerous, the State President, His Highness Sheikh Khaleefa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, God Save him, has enacted a law that regulated the camel races and prohibits recruiting children of the age less than 18 years. The law includes penal proceedings against whomsoever violate such rule. The Ministry of Interior has been charged to ensure applying this law; to bring any one who contravenes it for prosecution and to take the appropriate steps of protecting children and sending them back to their countries.

In order to achieve this purpose in an organized manner that ensures the interest of the children and they are not exploited by other countries, we had to utilize international experience of the countries concerned in this matter and with which we will cooperate. Accordingly, an agreement of cooperation between the United Arab Emirates and UNICEF on May 8th 2005 in order to trace the jockeys and have them in records to send them back to their countries where they will be integrated in their societies and rehabilitated them socially, psychologically and educationally. Furthermore, a national commission has been formed in our country to combat the trafficking in persons crime, including the child abuse. This commission reports directly to the Minister of Interior's office. It is currently working in issuing a law of combating all forms of trafficking in person. It imposes strict penalties against the offenders of such crimes and against anyone contributing to them.

Today, we are having this meeting to discuss together the achievements made during the first state of the programme, and to emphasize that the United Arab Emirates has complied with procedures required by it. Such procedures include establishing centers for housing and counting the children in the country pending sending them to their countries, with keeping a record for each child as per the international standards and rules specified by UNICEF.

The camel-race follow-up section will keep supervising the control over the camel race tracks in the country in order to ensure compliance with the law and regulations.

We kindly ask UNICEF and the concerned bodies in the countries of origin that have been chosen by the organization to fulfill the task required by them in the next stage of the programme as provided for in the cooperation agreement.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I assure you of the concern of His Highness, the State President; His Highness the Vice-President and the Rulers of the Emirates, the members of the Supreme Council, in protecting children and seeking their welfare in accordance with the country's constitution and national legislation.

I also emphasize the constant follow-up by the General, His Highness Muhammad Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Deputy Supreme Command of the Armed Forces, who made available all the necessary requirements to make this programme successful, and the complete and constant supervision of the Lt. General His Highness Saif Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Minister of Interior.

God's Peace, Mercy and Blessings be placed upon you.