

**Remarks by June Kunugi,  
UNICEF Representative to Gulf Countries,  
at the  
Regional Workshop on Child-Friendly Budgeting  
Bahrain, 30 May 2006**

Your Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies & Gentlemen,

*Assalamuh aalaykum.* On behalf of the United Nations Children's Fund, I would like to congratulate the members of the Parliamentary Ad Hoc Committee on Women and Children of the Kingdom of Bahrain for your initiative to hold a workshop on Child-Friendly Budgeting. We also warmly thank you for the request to organize this in collaboration with UNICEF.

This will be a historical, ground-breaking gathering, as it is the first time in this region that such a meeting will be convened on this topic.

The Kingdom of Bahrain has been a pioneer in other major movements for children, notably in adopting and committing to realize the standards and principles set by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which the Kingdom ratified in 1992, one of the earlier countries to do so in the world.

The initiative to hold a workshop on child-friendly budgeting is truly visionary. It is most fitting and appropriate that this gathering was organized by this Special Committee for Children and Women, as I believe that this is one of only two countries in this sub-region where the parliament actually has the authority and power to approve the budget.

Furthermore, you have an increasingly active civil society in Bahrain, and there are many examples in other regions of the world such as in Latin America and in Asia where civil society organizations as well as the private sector are working hand-in-hand to ensure that budgets are child-friendly.

Another reason why this initiative is so important, is that there are multiple, linked benefits to greater involvement in budgetary processes. By enhancing the quality of reviews, encouraging substantive discussions and debate on issues concerning children and women, and inviting greater participation in these processes, you will sharpen the focus of programmes; increase efficiency in spending, and increase societal ownership and engagement in programmes benefiting children and women.

The initiative is also very timely, in that it seems that all Gulf countries are starting to conduct in-depth reviews of their social policy strategies, systems and structure. While other industrialized countries finance social programmes through various taxation schemes in addition to federal budget allocations, Gulf countries have traditionally and generously funded social services from national budgets, and integrated subsidies in a number of other areas. As these systems evolve, and privatization as well as adjustment to market rates are considered, careful studies and planning will need to be undertaken to ensure that there continue to be strong social support systems, and safety nets if needed for vulnerable groups

including children whose well-being is very sensitive to shocks and crises including at the household level.

As the first country in this region to embark upon a child-friendly budgeting process, we at UNICEF hope that other countries will soon follow and learn from your example.

I am very grateful to my colleagues Jay Chaubey and Dr. Mohammed Cisse—from our UNICEF Headquarters and Regional Office respectively—for their participation and expert inputs into the proceedings. Their presence here shows the priority accorded by UNICEF to this initiative, and is also a demonstration of the technical support and advice we can give, as well as our ability to share examples from other regions that you may find useful in developing your own strategies and action plans in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

As you may be aware, we have submitted a proposal for a three-year country programme of co-operation between the Kingdom of Bahrain and UNICEF, and have had consultations with a range of sectoral partners, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and some representatives of civil society with the kind co-ordination of the Ministry of Social Development. We very much hope that this programme will receive the necessary approval and funding, so that we may engage in future joint activities such as this workshop, and many others that would support the work of the Government of Bahrain and its partners in fulfilling their obligations towards children and families.

We thank you again for this opportunity to strengthen our partnership and join efforts so that our common goals for children and women may be realized. I particularly want to acknowledge and pay tribute to the determination of H.E. Dr. Fawzieh Al Saleh and H.E. Alice Samman for their leadership role in bringing us all together and making this workshop happen. We wish you all success in this important gathering and its follow-up.