

PRESS RELEASE

Call for Child-Friendly Budgeting from Sub-Regional Workshop organized by Bahrain Parliament and UNICEF

MANAMA, BAHRAIN 31 May 2006—A two-day Gulf sub-regional workshop on Child-Friendly Budgeting jointly organized by the Ad-Hoc Committee on Women and Children of the Kingdom of Bahrain Parliament and UNICEF concluded with participants calling for the adoption of child-friendly budgeting, and recommending that the process be supported by resources and mechanisms including a social observatory, an office of a national Social Policy Advisor, a secretariat, and international co-operation.

"Our initiative was based on both international commitments such as the joint Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)-UNICEF initiative to promote Child-Friendly Budgets, as well as a response to calls from civil society for additional resources for programmes supporting children," said H.E. Dr. Fouziah Al Saleh, Head of the Ad-Hoc Committee for Children and Women. "We wanted to learn more about how to review budget allocations for children, and help develop policy options for better utilization of available resources."

The President of the Shuura Council, H.E. Dr. Faisal Al Moussawi, attended the first morning. The Kingdom of Bahrain is one of two Gulf countries where parliament approves the state budget; the workshop was timely as parliamentarians are about to begin reviewing the state budget 2007-08.

Around 45 participants attended—key actors involved in the budget-making process or in the management and implementation of programmes for children, including parliamentarians; senior officials from the Ministries of Finance, Education, Health, Social Development, Interior, and Municipalities; representatives of civil society; academic experts including from the University of Bahrain, and UNICEF. Experts from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Sultanate of Oman also attended.

"As UNICEF, we were very pleased to support this initiative and brought senior advisors from our Headquarters and Regional Office who could provide technical expertise and child-friendly budget experiences from other regions," said June Kunugi, UNICEF Representative for Gulf countries. "It was an excellent learning and partnership-building opportunity—we saw just how powerful a tool child-friendly budgeting can be, as it helps to sharpen the focus of programmes, increase efficiency in spending, and increase participation and ownership, all leading to better and more results for children."

This was the first-ever child-friendly budgeting workshop held in the Middle East and North Africa region, following commitments made at the Arab-African Finance Ministers Conference in 2001 in Marrakech. Presentations included an analysis of child-focused expenditures from the Bahrain state budgets 1998-2005, and a case study on the ten-year National Strategy for Children by the National Council for Family Affairs of Jordan.

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