

SPEECH BY UNICEF DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Humanitarian Action Report Launch
Riyadh, 11th April 2006

Excellencies, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen, *Assalamuh Aalaykumm*.

On behalf of the UNICEF Executive Director Ms. Ann Veneman, I would like to thank you very much for providing UNICEF this important occasion. I am very pleased to launch the Arabic appeal of UNICEF's Humanitarian Action Report 2006 here in Riyadh. We are here not by coincidence, but because Saudi Arabia is the Kingdom of Humanity and thanks to the much valued partnership with the Saudi Relief Committee who generously offered to host this launch. On this occasion, I would like to express thanks and appreciation to HRH Prince Naif bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud for his commitment and trust in UNICEF.

Natural disasters, humanitarian crises, and poverty shadow the lives of children every day. 2005 was a year of unprecedented emergencies – natural disasters on gigantic scale (tsunami, Pakistan, hurricane Katrina, floods in Central America, hunger in Niger) and of continuing very large-scale relief operations in many parts of the world (Darfur and southern Sudan, Liberia, Afghanistan, Palestine and many others). In addition to UNICEF's daily development work in 155 countries, can you imagine that in 2004, UNICEF responded to 184 emergencies? That's more than an emergency every two days! Most of these emergencies you've never heard much about; they received a local response and struggled to attract attention, funding, and support to help them recover from years of work and development which are lost with each disaster.

Who heard, for instance, that 7,000 children, women and men fled the Central African Republic only a couple of weeks ago for Chad and that 50,000 other people are hiding since in the bush fearing violence?

Against this disturbing context of children's vulnerability in humanitarian situations, UNICEF has launched its Humanitarian Action Report 2006. This is UNICEF's appeal for \$805.8 million dollars for 29 countries and 7 regions needing vital humanitarian support. It is intended to cover assistance to women and children in conflict and post-conflict situations as well as those hit by natural disasters.

Originally called the United Nations Children's International Emergency Fund, the organization was created to provide humanitarian assistance to children living in a world shattered by the Second World War. In 1948, UNICEF provided food and medicine to between 250,000 -330,000 Palestinian women and children - one of the

first operations set up outside Europe. Since then, along with our experience as a development agency, we are proud to say that we are often in a country before, during, and long after an emergency, working with governments, our sister UN agencies, the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement, and in particular local and international NGOs.

2005 was a very busy year for humanitarian agencies. Ladies and gentlemen, last year in 2005, UNICEF received close to 60% of the funds required in emergencies, which was an increase of 19% over 2004. This was a major accomplishment and helped us to make a difference.

In times of humanitarian crises, children are often the most vulnerable. That's why in an emergency UNICEF moves swiftly to immunize children against measles and other killer diseases, to protect children and women from exploitation, abuse and violence, to educate people about HIV/AIDS and provide treatment, and always, always make education a priority, through supplies, through the construction of schools, through the concept of child friendly buildings and curriculum.

In Afghanistan, we provided school materials to almost 5 million children, and vaccinated 5 million children against polio.

In Uganda, even amidst the rise in violence in the North throughout last year, we reached hundreds and thousands of children with education, health and water programmes, as well as shelter for more than 40,000 "night-commuters".

In Occupied Palestinian Territories, more than 650,000 children were immunized in the West Bank, and another 650,000 in Gaza. UNICEF provided emergency health, midwifery and obstetric kits to 1.2 million people while UNICEF assisted some 90,000 students from Grade 6 in 13 districts in the West Bank and Gaza with remedial worksheets. Thanks to the generous contribution of the Saudi Committee for the Relief of Palestinian People last year, through UNICEF you are saving children from death disability due to diseases, giving children and their parents hope, and opening the door to a better future by offering children education- the foundation of any nation – including for the Palestinian people.

These are only a few examples to which we should certainly add the major relief operations led by UNICEF in tsunami-affected countries or in Pakistan, following shock of the earthquake, and we look forward to entering into a partnership with the Saudi Relief Committee in this area as well.

This year we appeal for more than 805 million dollars with which we should be able to contribute to alleviate the suffering of children and women in 29 countries, often forgotten by the international community and the donors. Let me just mention the Democratic Republic of Congo where UNICEF plans to bring assistance to 13 million people living in conflict-affected zones; Haiti, the poorest country of the western hemisphere with only 50% of people having access to water; the nutrition crisis in the Sahel affecting millions and killing more than 250,000 children a year, or Sudan where only 3% of needed funds have been received for the populations of Darfur.

And underfunding or no funding means that key projects and activities are on hold and remain unimplemented with the dramatic consequences of children not being vaccinated, not having access to potable water within an acceptable distance, no school, no psychological support, access to health posts or feeding centres. Sometimes, it means that vital difference life and death.

Finally, I would like to raise the specter of an enormous future emergency – that of the potential pandemic of avian-human influenza. Roughly half the reported cases are children. The UN has appealed for funding and UNICEF has asked for 9 million dollars in urgent support to national and local communications – we must work NOW to stop the deadly bird virus, before it shifts to humans.

So today, I appeal for all your help – to remember that children’s rights are the same in all countries – to good health, to education, to a supportive community and nation.

Ladies and gentleman, given the wide range of problems that confront us, no one single agency will be able to promote child rights. Partnerships with families, communities, governments, civil society and private sector are vital to reach all children. And all of us have a role to play. I would like to specially thank the Saudi Relief Committee for their vision, commitment and partnership for the world’s children.

Today, we have the knowledge, the experience and the technology. What is needed is the political commitment and the resources.

I remember seeing a child die in front of me when I was at a feeding centre in Niger. When I asked the nurse why she was removing the tubes from the baby, she replied: its too late. This has replayed several times in my mind – who was too late? Was I too late? Was the international community too late?

Let us not forget that children often pay the highest toll in emergencies, that children’s futures depend on quick and efficient relief, and that the stability and progress of affected countries ultimately depends on children. For that we need to stand with all partners and with all of you. Lets ensure that a childhood for every child.

Let me end by expressing our deep appreciation for our alliance, under the auspices of HRH Prince Naif, with the Saudi Relief Committee, which in fact represents the people of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. We believe this is forging a new modality of operation built on mutual trust and we want to share through this partnership this Islamic values of tolerance and giving with the rest of the world.

Thank you