

PRESS RELEASE

Third Consultative Meeting on Children Previously Involved in Camel Racing In the United Arab Emirates

Abu Dhabi – 23-24 April 2007 – The UAE government (Ministry of Interior) has extended the project agreement “Children Previously Involved in Camel Racing in the United Arab Emirates” with UNICEF Gulf Area Office under the patronage of the Undersecretary of the Minister of Interior H.E. Saif Abdullah Al Shafar. A meeting was held for two days in Abu Dhabi and was inaugurated by HH Shaikh Saif bin Zayed Al Nahyan. It was headed by UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, Dr. Omar Abdi and attended by Ministry officials, senior UNICEF officials and high level representatives from Sudan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Mauritania. The agreement was signed by Major General Saif Abdullah Al Sha’afar from the government of the United Arab Emirates, and by Dr. Ayman Abu Laban, UNICEF Gulf Area Representative.

During the meeting, officials affirmed their historic commitment to ending the use of children as camel jockeys and providing services and compensation to all children formerly involved in camel racing in the UAE. They also admitted that common international effort is the key to protecting those children’s rights, and praised the extension of the UAE-UNICEF agreement on the rehabilitation and repatriation of child camel jockeys.

Dr. Omar Abdi, UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, said “the presence of senior officials of government, NGOs, and UNICEF offices in the concerned countries exemplifies the strong commitment by those partners to the commendable cause of combating child trafficking”.

The programme signed is to take care of child jockeys that were used before in the UAE. The agreement is for two years and it is an extension of an agreement signed between the UAE and UNICEF in 2005 and was for two years,” said Major General Saif Abdullah Al Sha’afar undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior. He added, “a law issued by President His Highness Shaikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan bans camel jockeys less than 18 years old from participating in camel races. The UAE has send around 1,075 child jockeys back home since the agreement was signed with UNICEF in 2005. we are allocating a Dh30 budget to rehabilitate the children through UNICEF. We will ensure them a safe return home, in addition to a safe return of children to schools with quality education”.

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