

## PRESS RELEASE

UNICEF launches *The State of the World's Children 2006*

### **Hundreds of millions of children victims of abuse, exploitation and discrimination, says UNICEF report**

RIYADH, 14 Dec.—Even though the world economy is expanding and steady progress is being made in development sectors, still 1 in every 6 children dies before the age of five years old. Throughout the world it is often the poorest and the most vulnerable children, who are in greatest need of protection and support, who are out of the reach of basic services and the most forgotten and invisible.

The situation in the Middle East and North Africa shows uneven progress, with some countries suffering from instability, conflict and weak governance, which create challenges in the delivery of services to families in children. However, even in some of the richest countries including in the Gulf region, there are “invisible” children due to social stigma, discrimination, a lack of capacity and targeted support, and often inadequate attention and priority. Examples of such children include children with disabilities, children affected by HIV/AIDS, children in conflict with the law, working children, street children, and children of some minority or non-indigenous populations.

The Arab Summit support to the 2005-2015 Regional Plan of Action for Children motivated several countries to draft National Plans to meet the promises made at the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children in 2002. Egypt and Morocco have adopted new legislation to increase protection for children and women, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has started a process preparing national strategies for childhood and child protection.

“The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has achieved remarkable progress in child survival,” said June Kunugi, UNICEF Representative in the Gulf. “The under-five mortality rate in 1960 was 250 deaths for every thousand live births; last year it was down to 27. This was done through investment in the health infrastructure and programmes including immunization which UNICEF supported early on; our partnership with the Kingdom started in 1961.”

She also highlighted the increasing support the Kingdom is providing to excluded and vulnerable children, saying “We applaud the Kingdom and its citizens under the leadership of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz in addressing the priority needs and rights of children. Earlier this year UNICEF signed an agreement with the Saudi Committee for the Relief of Palestinian people for \$3.6 million for immunization and education for Palestinian children, and \$500,000 was also received for polio immunization in Yemen. We hope for the strengthening of our partnership so that further progress may be made.”

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