

**Statement given by the Representative of  
UNICEF Gulf Area Office, Mr. Stefan Toma  
Experts Meeting on Child Abuse  
Riyadh, 13-14 April 2004**

Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to the Experts Meeting on Child Abuse.

Before we start, listen to these words - ABUSE, EXPLOITATION & VIOLENCE,. It is difficult to imagine that you can associate these words with children, but it happens, and in all societies. Think about them again – abuse, exploitation, violence. How can they apply to our children?

So we are here today to learn about this phenomenon and to see what role we can each play to help protect children.

Child Protection is one of five priorities for UNICEF and throughout the world we have been speaking out to ensure the protection of children from abuse, exploitation, and violence (physical, sexual, and psychological).

UNICEF can provide knowledge, expertise, and experience gained in more than 150 countries in the world over; and, in partnership with other actors in Saudi Arabia, we will cooperate to address this problem.

The further development of a protective environment (*al biiaa al aamina or al waaqiya*) for all children in Saudi Arabia is key to response to child abuse.

Already, Saudi Arabia has made some major steps to ensure such a protective environment. For instance:

The Government has shown its commitment by signing and ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Two reports have been submitted to the International Committee on the Rights of the Child and the third is under preparation. The Convention gives us the framework for all activities related to the protection of children against abuse, exploitation, and violence.

We are also witnessing several examples of open discussion of the problem: this meeting, along with report it will generate, offers good examples. There is also the study by the Centre for Crime Elimination and the doctoral dissertation by Munira bint Abdul Rahman Bin Abdalla Al Saud on the characteristics and causes of child abuse in Riyadh area, and others.

I should also mention that during my recent visit to Jeddah, I became witness to the commendable efforts by a national non-governmental organization for the protection and support for non-Saudi child victims of abuse.

More can be done to prevent abuse through further research and analysis, information campaigns targeting families and children, and monitoring by the state and by civil society organizations of the potential risks endangering children.

It is with great pleasure that we are gathered here and I invite you all to participate and decide together what the next steps should be to ensure that your child and all children that touch you are free from such treatment.