

PRESS RELEASE

First Arab Regional Workshop on Combating Child Trafficking Calls for Development of National Plans of Action

Riyadh, 25 February 2006—The first-ever workshop on combating child trafficking in the Arab region, jointly organized in Riyadh by the Naif Arab University for Security Sciences and the UNICEF Gulf Area Office, concluded last week with participants calling for the development of National Plans of Action; the criminalization of trafficking in children; regional co-operation and networking; support for capacity development; and for partnership with UNICEF and other international partners in the response.

“This was a landmark gathering,” said June Kunugi, UNICEF Representative for Gulf countries, “We congratulate and thank Naif University and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for hosting this first Arab regional workshop on such an important topic. It was a valuable opportunity to gain technical knowledge on the problem, share country experiences, and collectively commit to co-operation and follow-up action, so that the rights of children, especially those who need special protection and support as a result of trafficking, may be fulfilled.”

Participants included government officers from Ministries of Interior, Justice, Social Affairs, municipal governments, as well as representatives of civil society organizations, and came from nine countries: Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Yemen, Lebanon, Egypt, and Jordan.

Fourteen international experts from Saudi Arabia, Ireland, Czech Republic, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Sudan, Egypt, and Syria lead the debate on the various dimensions of the child trafficking problematic: definitions and frameworks; international experiences and lessons learned from Europe, Asia and Africa; the protection of child victims; prevention of trafficking; the prosecution of traffickers; international co-operation; the structures necessary for referral, coordination, and implementation; and a model national plan of action for combating trafficking in children in Arab countries.

The renowned Sheikh Dr. Hamza al Fì`er, one of the sheikhs of the Holy Mosque in Makkah al Mukarramah and a professor of Sharia in Um al Qura University, delivered a keynote presentation in which he outlined Islam’s deterrent sanctions against trafficking in children.

A second keynote presentation was delivered by Professor Ali Ibrahim al Namla, the former Minister of Labor and Social Affairs in Saudi Arabia, in which he outlined the trafficking in persons situation in Saudi Arabia and proposed directions for action and prevention.

The workshop received the full support and facilitation by the University President Professor Abdul Aziz al Ghamidi Hamza and his staff and university faculty.

Co-operation between UNICEF and Saudi Arabia for addressing child trafficking and exploitation started in the year 2004 when the UNICEF Representative visited His Royal Highness, Prince Abdul Majiid Bin Abdul Aziz, the Emir of the Region of Makkah al Mukarramah; His Royal Highness requested UNICEF to provide technical support in providing better protection for children involved in street selling and begging.

UNICEF subsequently provided financial and technical support to a local organization, *Jamiyyat al Bir al Khayriyya* in Jeddah, for the implementation of a project aimed at: undertaking an assessment of the situation of children victims of exploitation in the sphere of street selling and begging; developing staff technical capacity; facilitating exchanges with countries of origin; and providing protection services for the children in the shelter managed by *al Bir al Khayriyyah*, which so far has received over 3,000 children and repatriated 2,076, mainly to Yemen, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Niger among other countries. UNICEF is also engaged in co-operation with the Ministry of Social Affairs, civil society organizations, and academic institutions such as Naif University.

International organizations estimate that around 1.2 million children are victims of trafficking, which is a global problem, affecting both industrialized and developing countries. Children may be trafficked for a wide range of purposes, including for use in conflict; forced labour including domestic work; sexual exploitation; organ transfer and adoption.

UNICEF globally is funded entirely from voluntary contributions and currently works in close to 160 countries, areas and territories in support of children's rights to health, education, protection and equality.

* * * *

For more information please contact:

Esmail Ibrahim
Programme Co-ordinator
UNICEF Gulf Area Office
Tel.: (+966-1) 4881705 / 15 / 25 Ext. 101
Fax: (+966-1) 4881736
GSM: (+966-50) 4148473
E-mail: eibrahim@unicef.org
Web: www.unicef.org