

## PRESS RELEASE

### SAUDI ARABIA AND YEMEN MEET TO TACKLE TRAFFICKING OF THOUSANDS OF YEMENI CHILDREN

RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA, 7 JUNE 2006—Following a series of historic agreements and commitments strengthening ties between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Republic of Yemen, a first-ever consultation bringing together key officials from the two countries was convened by UNICEF to tackle the trafficking of thousands of Yemeni children to the Kingdom every year for various forms of exploitation including street selling and begging.

Close to 25 participants attended, including officials from Ministries of Social Affairs, Interior, Defense, Foreign Affairs, national councils and commissions for children, civil society organizations, academic institutions, and UNICEF, which had representatives from the Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa; Yemen country office, and the Gulf Area Office based in Riyadh.

The head of the Yemeni delegation, Staff Brigadier General Kasem Al Falah, said "This meeting reflects the concern and the commitment of the senior officials of the two countries to tackle child trafficking as a strategic matter affecting all of society".

Lt. Dr. Mohammed Hassan Al Sarra from Naif Arab University for Security Sciences underlined the connection between child trafficking and the security of society as a whole; other participants also confirmed that the problems requires urgent attention otherwise the numbers would increase. Officials estimate that there are around 24,000 children involved in street selling and begging in Saudi Arabia, coming from 18 different countries.

The need for co-ordination was stressed by many participants, including Mr. Mohammed A. Qudairi, Assistant of the National Committee for Childhood of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, who said, "We need not only to have better co-ordination mechanisms internally and also between the two countries."

"We were very pleased and privileged to support this initiative, which we hope will be the beginning of strengthened collaboration and greater results for children", said June Kunugi, UNICEF Representative for Gulf Countries. "UNICEF has been involved in this issue since 2004, having commissioned a rapid assessment on the phenomenon of street selling and begging in Saudi Arabia; piloted interventions for children removed from the street in partnership with Al Bir Society of Jeddah; jointly held the region's first workshop on child trafficking with Naif Arab University for Security Sciences, and initiated a study on processes related to children victims of trafficking."

The meeting concluded with participants agreeing on a set of next steps and recommendations on the way forward, including the need to enhance co-operation, increase action-oriented research and piloting of interventions; develop national strategic plans countering child trafficking, support the role of civil society organizations; strengthen legal measures against trafficking, and to request the technical support of international organizations including UNICEF. They also stressed that the best interests of the child should be paramount, particularly in the case of trafficked children, who experience violations of their rights on a daily basis.

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