

MEDIA RELEASE

UNICEF and NCRC Foster Ethical Reporting on Children

Georgetown, Guyana, August 2nd 2007 -- UNICEF in collaboration with the National Commission on the Rights of the Child (NCRC) has launched a handbook for local journalist titled “**Children and Media**”, with a strong appeal for media practitioners to be more responsible and ethical when reporting on children.

Launching the publication, First Lady and Chairperson of the NCRC Varshnie Jagdeo, lauded UNICEF’s effort in printing the first of such documentation in Guyana and emphasized its’ importance at this time. She cautioned that while sensationalism sells, it should not be the only thing news editors put on their front pages. "It is disappointing that the local media keep positive news on the inner pages of newspaper and rarely use them as headlines. What matters are the facts and the media have a responsibility to report ethically and from a factual standpoint, yet we get a lot of sensational news." She continued that, “in order for you to report ethically, you have to be ethical.” The First Lady challenged the reporters to use the booklet and use it well and let the new knowledge be reflected in their work.

Speaking to an audience of mainly editors, media managers and reporters, UNICEF's Representative to Guyana Johannes Wedenig, said the media needed to work more ethically with children and seek them out to include their views as part of the broader participatory process. He said the media often rushed to "make the news" and failed to apply basic ethical principles, resulting in the children being placed in more harmful situations.

Mr. Wedenig said the handbook was critical in Guyana at this time in that it catered to the growing need for practical guidance when collecting information from and about young people. He said it described approaches to working with children and adolescents along with a summary of the articles in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The UNICEF Representative pointed out that UNICEF, through the PAHO/WHO Media Awards, has been rewarding journalists who have reached professional standards when reporting on children's issues and added that UNICEF planned to introduce an annual award scheme for journalists who were consistently producing materials exhibiting elements of responsible and ethical reporting on children.

Coming on the heels of a recent UNICEF study on media trends (2006) which revealed that the media was not conscious of children and were rarely presenting their views, the publication also considered children’s perception of the media.

"I think the media can do a lot more work for children in Guyana. While most newspapers have a children's corner with stories and things to colour, the TV and radio do little in terms of educational programmes. Instead of waiting for something bad to happen to a child then print it, they can interview a child each week and write their stories," Cheyanne Forde, a student at Marian Academy opined.

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There was also a fluent and stirring appeal from representatives of Youth Media Guyana, Andrea Bryan and Lomesharshan Lall, for children's issues to be given coverage and prominence in the media.

The handbook is published against the background that issues affecting the quality of life of children are rarely reported in the media.

Accordingly the publication is aimed at promoting accurate balanced and sensitive coverage of issues likely to affect children, and the treatment of children when collecting information. It is designed to provide on the job training for journalists in the mass media who work with, or write on issues affecting children. It focuses particularly on ethical guidelines, interviewing and dealing with children in different circumstances.

About UNICEF

UNICEF is on the ground in 155 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments.

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