

## MEDIA RELEASE

### Vulnerable Children to benefit from Legal Aid

**Georgetown, Guyana, September 24, 2007, UNICEF --** The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport in collaboration with the Georgetown Legal Aid Clinic and UNICEF has launched the Children's Legal Aid pilot project, providing adequate legal protection for vulnerable children who come into conflict with the law.

The project which was officially inaugurated during a simple ceremony at Le Meridien Pegasus Hotel is expected to run for a one-year period and then an evaluation would be done to measure its success.

Speaking at the launch of the project, UNICEF representative (Guyana, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago) Johannes Wedenig, said this new facility is expected to provide legal advice and services for juveniles and their parents. He noted that with the launch of the service the rights of children would not be overlooked as they pass through the judicial system.

He added that this project will also better clear the way for the reviewing of legislation relating to the rights of children which is an important element of this pilot project.

The UNICEF representative further urged that it is everyone's responsibility, including the courts', to protect the rights of orphans and vulnerable children.

"The police, magistrates, parents and the society overall has an integral role to play in seeing that a child's rights are not violated once they would have passed through the judicial system and more so (to) see that they are reintegrated back into society," Wedenig said.

Meanwhile Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport Dr. Frank Anthony at the launching noted that this service is necessary since in recent times there has been an increase in the number of juveniles passing through the judicial system. Dr. Anthony said this follows the transition period from childhood to adulthood which is compounded by poor economic conditions and dysfunctional families.

To this end, the minister said, the organization involved in this project has recognized all this and will be embarking on a number of projects to find remedies. These include providing safe spaces in communities, and purposeful activities which would include sport and music.

Further, Minister Anthony announced that the ministry would be launching its first ever children's hotline. This would allow children to call a number to seek counselling and make reports about abuse and other issues affecting them.

As the project unfolds, he said, the option of having a juvenile holding centre would be explored instead of placing juvenile delinquents with hardened criminals.

Moreover, he said, his ministry will continue the ongoing works to upgrade the New Opportunity Corps and make it child-friendly.

This legal aid project is one of the most critical developments emerging from the National Consultation in 2006. The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport in 2005 with support from UNICEF conducted a review of the juvenile justice system in Guyana.

Several recommendations followed and the provision of legal aid for children in conflict with the law was one of the more critical ones.

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### *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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