

## MEDIA RELEASE

### HELPLINE AND REFERRAL SERVICE FOR CHILDREN EXPANDED THROUGH CHILDLINE-UNICEF COLLABORATION

**POS, TRINIDAD, September 20<sup>th</sup> 2007 UNICEF** -- Local NGO, ChildLine and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) **hosted** an official Launch of the Expansion of ChildLine's Services on Wednesday September 12, 2007, Festival Ballroom, Crowne Plaza Hotel. The Launch focused on children and adolescents and highlighted significant developments within ChildLine such as its extended hours and improved services to address the continuing concerns and issues children and adolescents face in Trinidad and Tobago.

ChildLine offers the only child-focused free and confidential telephone hotline for vulnerable and at risk children and adolescents or those who simply need a listening ear. With the support of UNICEF in August 2007, ChildLine has expanded its services from 8 hours to 16 hours per day, including weekends and public holidays. UNICEF's funding also allows children in Trinidad and Tobago to have improved access to counseling with the recruitment of full time specialized staff to manage and coordinate the NGO's activities, including psychosocial counseling and referrals to appropriate services when necessary.

Approximately 200 persons attending the gala event including Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs, Hon. Joan Yuille-Williams and Minister of Social Development, Hon. Anthony Roberts. Some fifty primary and secondary school children from both Trinidad and Tobago were also present at the Launch to ensure that the true beneficiaries of this UNICEF/ChildLine partnership are aware of the services offered.

According to ChildLine during 2005 and 2006, the organization received a total of 5,170 calls from vulnerable and at risk children and adolescents throughout the country. Of the total number of calls received, 2,043 calls related to issues of family, partners and friends while some 414 calls were on issues of gender based violence, rape, incest, domestic violence, and unplanned pregnancies.

The Expansion of ChildLine's Services with UNICEF support is a major initiative to address the needs of these vulnerable and at risk children and adolescent callers and to positively impact upon their lives. UNICEF recognizes that nurturing and caring for children are the cornerstones of human progress and upholds the Convention of the Rights of the Child while working towards the realization of the rights of children. To this end, UNICEF's Country Programme focus is to ensure the engagement of key stakeholders including Government Ministries and Agencies to protect all children from abuse and violence.

Johannes Wedenig, UNICEF Representative for Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname and Guyana, in delivering his presentation at the *Launch of the Expansion of ChildLine's Services* reminded the audience that building a world fit for children required the action and commitment from everyone: civil society, Faith Based Organizations, Non Government Organizations, UNICEF and UN agencies, members of the diplomatic corps, private sector, media as well as the Government. He called on all to build a solid partnership.

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Senator, the Honourable Joan Yuille-Williams delivered the feature address and in a tangible demonstration of the Ministry's continued commitment to ChildLine's work, promised a donation of a vehicle to ChildLine for use in the deliver of the services. *"As a Government, we have a responsibility to the children of this nation, to protect them from all forms of abuse, whether it is perpetrated in public or in a private space. We are bound by our commitment to several international agreements, to ensure that children rights are met and in a satisfactory manner. We are also bound by the principles of our own Constitution and our Vision 2020 goals to protect our children. What is now required is translating words into action... and today's exercise is certainly a step in the right direction"*, the Minister stated.

Minister Anthony Roberts also recognized ChildLine's invaluable services to the children of T&T. *"I wish to once again applaud the officers and staff of ChildLine for your dedicated service to the children of Trinidad and Tobago. Yours is not an easy task, to gain the trust of persons who may have been violated by individuals who are supposed to protect them. You offer solace to children, at perhaps their darkest hour and I commend you on your commitment"*, Minister Roberts said.

Ms. Mary Moonan, the coordinator for ChildLine highlighted the issues and challenges faced by ChildLine on a daily basis while reiterating their commitment to making a difference in the lives of Trinidadian children. Also speaking on the occasion were Diana Mahabir-Wyatt, former Senator and Chairperson of the Coalition Against Domestic Violence and ChildLine; Steve Williams, Director of Student Services, Ministry of Education; Ms. Barbara Stewart, Division of Education, Sport and Youth Affairs, Tobago House of Assembly and Ms. Camille Salandy, Head of Corporate Communications and Public Affairs, TSTT.

### *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, es, foundations*

