

MEDIA RELEASE

“MOLD OUR CHILDREN - STOP THE VIOLENCE” FIRST LADY OF GUYANA PLEADS AS UNICEF LAUNCHES SECRETARY-GENERAL’S STUDY ON VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

UNICEF, Georgetown – GUYANA, November 21, 2006 -- First Lady of Guyana, and Chairperson of the National Commission on the Rights of the Child, Mrs. Varshnie Jagdeo appealed to parents and guardians to “desist from exposing children to violence in the home and otherwise and to, instead, mold them into well-rounded, educated citizens – so badly needed in the country.” She was speaking at the recent launch of UN Secretary-General’s Study on Violence against Children, which was held at the Le Meridien – Pegasus, on Monday, November 20th 2006.

Mrs. Jagdeo also called on policy makers to take action, adding, “If one child is being abused that is far too much and so we must take action and move on with the children’s Bill,” noting that children’s rights needed to be enforced.

The First Lady added that violence against children was very disturbing to society, and called for action on banning of corporal punishment in schools.

Honourable Minister of Labour, Human Services and Social Security, Ms. Priya Manickchand, while restating Guyana government’s commitment to the welfare and needs of children who are abused, acknowledged that more needs to be done and reminded the gathering that the government alone could not make the changes; there is need for a multi-sectoral approach.

The minister said that her Ministry was addressing the issues affecting children in care institutions with a view towards having them reintegrated into their homes, which she cautioned may have to be restructured because of financial problems experienced by many families.

Ms. Manickchand added that her Ministry and the Ministry of Home Affairs were also addressing the placement of children in penal institutions, noting that a separate holding facility for children would soon be established.

Echoing First Lady’s comments, the Minister called for support to reopen the debate on corporal punishment, noting that this review should be done fairly. She noted that “we must ensure children are treated fairly.”

UNICEF’s Representative – Mr. Johannes Wedenig provided an overview to the Report, and pointed out that over the past few years, the situation of Guyana’s children had been compromised by a number of major problems, such as crime and violence.

He pointed out the extremes which violence can go in Guyana – as children were both perpetrators and criminals, adding “what is so frightening is that what we are seeing and hearing may only be the tip of the iceberg as there is a large degree of under-reporting of various forms of violence, including sexual abuse.”

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Mr. Wedenig re-emphasised the need for the implementation of the New Plan of Action to deal with violence against children, which covers all areas of the rights of the child.

Also included in yesterday's launch was a panel discussion on the thematic areas of the Report. Six presenters gave brief presentations:

- Mr. Brian O' Toole, Child Psychologist and Educator, spoke on the Effects of Violence and Children"
- Ms. Danuta Radzik: Child Rights Activist - "Violence in the home and family";
- Justice Roxanne George gave brief comments on "Care and the Justice System.";
- Ms. Genevieve Whyte- Nedd, Chief Education Officer in the Ministry of Education spoke on "School and Educational Settings";
- Ms. Janelle Leitch – Youth Activist, discussed Violence and the wider community; and
- Mr. Norris Witter: Trade Unionist led the discourse on "Workplace Settings."

The presentations were followed by an interactive dialogue involving school children, panelists, parents and guardians. All groups then reported to the plenary with main recommendations which formed the basis of an Action Plan.

A mini-book exhibition and a dramatic presentation on violence against children completed yesterday's launch.

About the Study

The Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children was commissioned in 2001 by the UN General Assembly. Independent Expert Professor Paulo Sergio Pinheiro lead the Study, in collaboration with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), World Health Organisation (WHO) and UNICEF.

Children and young people were fully involved in contributing to the Study from its beginning. They participated in national and regional consultations, and in some countries held their own youth forums to collect information about violence, discussed the impact it has on their lives and developed recommendations for preventing it and addressing it where it does occur.

The Study recognizes that much violence against children remains hidden and is often socially approved. It combines human rights, public health and child protection perspectives, and focuses on five 'settings' where violence occurs: The Home and Family; Schools and Educational Settings; Institutions (Care and Judicial); the workplace and the community.

Violence against children includes physical violence, psychological violence, discrimination, neglect and maltreatment; it ranges from sexual abuse in the home to corporal and humiliating punishment at school

"Violence has a lasting affect not just on children and their families, but also on communities and nations," says UNICEF Executive Director Ann M. Veneman.

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About UNICEF

UNICEF works with governments, civil society organizations and other partners world-wide and in the Caribbean to advance children's rights to survival, protection, development and participation, and is guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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