

Official Launch of the Enhanced Services of ChildLine
Crowne Plaza, Port of Spain

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Remarks by Johannes Wedenig
UNICEF Representative – Guyana, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago

- Senator the honourable Joan Yuille Williams, Minister of Community Development, Culture & Gender Affairs
- The Honourable Anthony Roberts, Minister of Social Development
- Permanent Secretaries and representative of Ministries and Government Agencies
- Resident Coordinator of the UN, Members of the Diplomatic Corps and UN colleagues
- Representatives of the Business Community
- Civil Society Representatives
- Members of the Media
- Children and Adolescents
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning

Let me first say how pleased I am that you could all be here in support of and in the interest of the children of this beautiful Island – Trinidad and Tobago.

This launch today is a recognition, an appreciation of one of the most important outlets children have to share their concerns, issues, problems with a caring adult. It's a celebration of Child Line with it's motto **We Hear Your Call**. There is someone who will listen to you, Child – Adolescent whatever your concern is.

UNICEF has teamed up with **ChildLine** - the only hotline that offers free, confidential, anonymous and quality counselling and referrals to callers, who need help, information, or simply someone to talk to. Both boys and girls call for all reasons – some of them are as young as 5 years, and in some cases it's adults calling on behalf of children. Some call because they are bored, many more call because they are faced with the dynamics of adolescent years. They call because they want to understand better what is

happening to their bodies. They call because they have fallen in love and don't know how to manage that feeling.

Some call because they have become so desperate, and the only way they think they can solve their problems is by ending their lives. Some call because they have been physically or sexually abused in such cruel severity - they have had to run away, or are left bleeding to death.

All too often, these children have no where to turn. They are abused at home, by members of their immediate family. They are abused in the community, or in their schools or institutions. They are abused by other young persons, or adults, who are supposed to be caring for them, and protecting them.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen - that is when **ChildLine** services become the vital life line, first instance, immediate support for these children – **ChildLine hears their calls** and with this service alone, offers renewed hope, a helping hand, an active listener on the other end of the line.

ChildLine was borne of this necessity. We would prefer that **ChildLine** did not have to exist, or that the **UNICEF/ChildLine** partnership would not have to put so much effort in ensuring that children throughout Trinidad and Tobago are aware and understand how to use this service.

But, unfortunately, that is not the reality that too many of our children face – physical, sexual and emotional violence, abuse, exploitation, discrimination, neglect and abandonment in all spaces of their young lives. We at **UNICEF** are as many of our partners only too well aware of this.

This time last year, I stood before many of you on the occasion of another Launch. The UN Secretary General's Study on Violence Against Children. The Study revealed the fact that violence against children exists in every country of the world, regardless of culture, religion, ethnic group or background they are from. The Study revealed also that violence against children exists regardless of whether a country is rich or poor, well-educated, or developing.

On this occasion, **UNICEF** emphasized that **ALL violence against children is preventable and that NO violence against children is justifiable, neither as a form of discipline or in the guise of tradition.** We reconfirmed the rights that all children have and that **ALL children's rights are applicable to ALL children at ALL times!** As adult citizens, as parents and guardians, as community members, as government civil servants, as civil society organizations and as private companies within the framework of corporate social responsibility we pledged then to do all we can to **END** all violence and support interventions to prevent and respond to children who are exposed to violence and abuse. And the entire UN family promised you that the launch of the study of the Secretary General on violence against child was only a series of activities in our support to Trinidad and to Tobago in its efforts to put an end to violence against children.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen. I stand before you today to say **ChildLine** – with its slogan, **We Hear Your Call** is one such intervention.

But today is more than just about **ChildLine**.

UNICEF has learned that no one service, agency or individual can **Build a World Fit for Children.** To do so, requires the joint collaboration of many - of **all** of you sitting before me. **Building a World Fit for Children'** is not just the responsibility of **ChildLine.** It's not **just** the responsibility of parents and guardians. It's not **just** the people working in Government agencies and institutions. **'Building a World Fit for Children'** requires **action** and **commitment** from everyone. It is a job that needs the **engagement** of a vibrant civil society, Faith Based Organizations, Non-Government Organizations, **UNICEF** and sister UN agencies, members of the diplomatic corps, private sector as well as a proactive and responsive Government. It is also the responsibility of parents and caregivers, teachers, counsellors, social workers, health workers, the judiciary, law enforcement personnel and **everyone** who would have to interact with a child. It also asks children to bear the **responsibilities** of having these **rights** that always come with responsibilities. However, we can only succeed if all of us work in harmony, towards a common goal, of a violent-free, child-friendly environment for **every child and adolescent in Trinidad and Tobago.**

We hope you use this opportunity to interact with each other and strengthen a more broad-based engagement to support the work of **ChildLine**. By inviting children, parents and caregivers, members of the community, civil society and faith based organizations as well as private sector and Government agencies and institutions, **UNICEF** hopes you will take advantage of being in one place, to better understand each other, and to better determine how we can all work together to raise the awareness of children's rights, how to protect and promote them and to realise a **World Fit for Children**.

Honorable Ministers, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, Young People

I am very pleased to offer to you this morning the full support of **UNICEF** in all endeavours to prevent and respond to violence, abuse, exploitation, neglect and abandonment and improve the quality of life of the Children and Adolescents of Trinidad and Tobago. **UNICEF** is currently embarking on developing a new country programme. One that envisions the **realisation of children's rights by fostering an enabling and protective environment for children, reducing children's vulnerability to social risks and enhancing their participation**. The new programme will focus on supporting Government and other child-focused agencies in the areas of:

- public policies and investment reflecting the rights and priorities of children regarding their survival, development, protection and participation
- the protection of children against abuse and violence
- the reduction of HIV among children
- and improving access to early childhood development

To achieve this, **UNICEF** will promote broad-based coalitions and work in close collaboration with its sister UN agencies and all partners. **UNICEF** will seek new and innovative programmes and strategies. We will document and promote best practices and encourage South-South cooperation and exchanges. **UNICEF** will increase its presence in Trinidad and Tobago with a strong team of technical staff to build capacities of rights holders and duty bearers.

We are looking forward to working closely with each and every one of you.

Finally, I wish to pay tribute to all those who have been working long and hard in the often thankless job of listening day and night to children to protect and sometimes save lives. Many of those are in the audience today. And I acknowledge in particular Mrs. Diane Mahabir Wyatt and Mary Moonan, together with all the countless volunteer listeners. These are the backbones of **ChildLine**.

Children someone is there to listen to you, THANK YOU CHILDLINE.

Thank you.