

**REMARKS AT THE LAUNCHING OF THE PUBLICATION
CHILDREN AND THE MEDIA – A HANDBOOK FOR JOURNALISTS
TUESDAY, JULY 31ST 2007.**

**First Lady Mrs. Jagdeo
Members of Youth Media,
Editors and all other special invitees
Members of the media
Partners and Colleagues**

Happy Emancipation:

As always I am happy to be here this morning to remind you of the story of UNICEF, the story of childhood lost and reclaimed, nurtured and protected. It is the story of how much good we as human beings can do when we unite to protect the rights of your youngest and most vulnerable citizens – the children. We often speak at length about the roles of the family, civil society, politicians and sometimes the media, but today I'd like to briefly concentrate on an area that is always of high importance, our children, their rights and the media.

A casual glance at the printed media here presents various images of children – the abused child, the successful child, the athletic and happy child even the mal-nurished, neglected and abandoned child. But that's all we do – report their circumstances.

A recent survey of media trends in Guyana conducted by UNICEF last year concluded that the media were not conscious of children, and that they had no voice in this area. Further the report suggested that the way in which the media represents, or even ignores children, can influence decisions taken on their behalf and how the rest of society regards.

We know that kids everywhere love the media, but do the media love them? We're not sure. This is precisely why they are now demanding something more, something better than what they are getting.

Children and adolescents may suffer harm because they have less power and access to resources than adults. If we are to improve the lives of our children and adolescents it is necessary to find out about their circumstances, their needs and the services they require to meet those needs. Anyone who gathers this kind of information in order to develop and evaluate appropriate

responses to the needs of children must maintain high ethical standards in order to protect and respect them.

This is where you media managers, as part of the media, play an extremely critical role. Working ethically with children and adolescents to recognize and respond to their needs requires you to seek out and include the views of children as part of the broader participatory process, and, often times in the rush to “make the news”, reporters and researchers fail to apply basic ethical principles, thus placing their subjects in more harmful situations.

Observing ethical standards is important for all information gathering that involves people. However, extra precautions are needed to protect young people, who are especially vulnerable to exploitation, abuse and other harmful outcomes of the information gathering process.

It is for this reason that I feel this publication is now critical to the growing need for practical guidance on collecting information from and about young people, and you the editors and managers need to help us reinforce this.

“Children and the Media – A handbook for Journalists” aims to provide guidance through a set of ethical issues that require consideration when dealing with children and young people. It is a methodological handbook describing approaches to working with children and adolescents and also provides a summary of the articles in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

And so it is very heartening to have you – specifically editors and media managers here today, joining us in the constant quest to help our children grow and reach their full potential. Let me now say that for many years we have been contributing to rewarding journalists who have reached professional standards when reporting on children’s issues through the PAHO/WHO Media Awards. In addition to this, very soon we at UNICEF will be introducing an annual award scheme for journalists who are consistently producing materials, both printed and electronic, exhibiting elements of responsible and ethical reporting on children. This will carry very strict guidelines and extremely beneficial and attractive prizes. In fact in another few weeks we will be launching a media watch group to monitor reporting trends on children.

And it is here that I would like to applaud the efforts of the young people in the Youth Media Guyana Group, who have come together with support from National Communications Network, the National Commission on the Rights of the Child and UNICEF to create a platform from which children's voices can be heard. They are still young, just two months old, but have been doing good with the production of a monthly 11 minutes newscast, which they hope to expand into print very soon. I urge you to keep up the good work.

My appeal is therefore for you as editors, media managers, reporters, all, to use the handbook and other resources mentioned within. Be very vigilant in recognizing and advising on reports that flow along ethical lines. And as we each take our copy today, remember the most important principle is always to put the best interest of the child first by promoting and protecting their well being. I urge you to use it and use it well.

Thank you.

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