

**Remarks of Ann M. Veneman, Executive Director, UNICEF
Launch of "Investing in the Children of the Islamic World" Report
21 September 2005 • New York, NY (Perm. Mission of Malaysia)**

Good afternoon. Thank you for that kind introduction.

Your Excellency Mr. Foreign Minister, Secretary-General, Excellencies, Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

My thanks to the Government of Malaysia for hosting this meeting. Malaysia's continuing support for this important initiative - in its capacity as Chairman of the Summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference - is invaluable in bringing focused attention to the situation of children in the Islamic world and in galvanizing efforts to address their needs.

There are many inspiring examples of achievements for children among the members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference all of which support critical Millennium Development Goals including:

- The strides made by Malaysia to develop a primary health care system on a par with those in many industrialized countries
- Turkey's success in reducing under-five mortality
- Mozambique's efforts to tackle the scourge of malaria
- And the progress in Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Indonesia, Nigeria, Tunisia and Uganda to prevent loss of intellectual capacity in millions of children by introducing iodized salt.

A number of Organization of the Islamic Conference countries have succeeded in narrowing the gender gap in education.

In fact, girls outnumber boys in primary school in some countries ... and Bangladesh, after a period of remarkable progress, is set to achieve gender parity in education by the end of this year.

In all three of the Organization of the Islamic Conference's sub-regions, efforts are underway to counter the inhuman practice of child trafficking ... including child trafficking for sexual purposes.

Many Organization of the Islamic Conference governments stand out as examples in the fight against HIV/AIDS including some where rates of infection are still low, but where the leadership has recognized the need to break the silence.

For example, recently, I visited a mosque in China. It was encouraging to see firsthand an Imam, lecturing on what the disease is and how it is spread to a group that included young men and young women.

Members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference have strengthened legal protections for children by embracing international standards ... and even more importantly, by reforming their domestic laws relating to children.

The report we are launching today provides many specific examples of achievements.

The conference for which the Organization of the Islamic Conference ... the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and UNICEF are preparing in November is an important opportunity for ministers with responsibility for children to share their positive experiences ... and learn from one another.

At the same time, even a quick review of this report reveals that much remains to be done and that the situation for children continues to be a cause for grave concern in many Organization of the Islamic Conference countries.

We hope that our joint efforts in the cause of Islamic children will result in a new determination and a new sense of urgency to address the remaining challenges.

Above all, we hope that the spirit of Islamic solidarity will result in ever greater collaboration including technical and financial assistance among Organization of the Islamic Conference member states and Islamic philanthropic and financial institutions.

The collaboration underpinning this report has been excellent and provides a solid platform of mutual understanding, trust and shared commitment upon which to continue building our partnership.

UNICEF looks forward with great expectation to what we will be able to achieve together for children.

In many ways, the timing of today's launch could not be better. Just last week, world leaders, including the leaders of the Islamic world, renewed their commitment to the Millennium Development Goals and to creating a peaceful, prosperous and just world ... in which all children can develop to their full potential.

I am pleased to report that, while they were in New York, I had the privilege to meet with at least ten leaders of Organization of the Islamic Conference member states and I look forward to meeting many more during my future country visits.

Last week, we also joined in launching a major initiative on maternal, newborn and child health.

A little more than one month from now, UNICEF, UNAIDS and a powerful alliance of inter-governmental, NGO and other partners will launch a major global campaign on children and AIDS.

And preparations are also underway for a new, collaborative effort to fight the specter of child hunger.

I very much hope that the renewed commitment expressed by world leaders last week and the energy unleashed by these three child-focused campaigns will complement your own determination to build a better world for children of Islam and for us all.

Thank you very much.

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