

## A special gift for children in Iran: kindness, care and attention

A young boy, his face painted as Spiderman, darts down the corridor, running past a 6-year old girl – perhaps his sister – who shows off her fairy wings, giggling happily. Standing at the far end of a long table, their painting teacher has little time to cast them even the most furtive look – she is beleaguered by several dozens of other children who cannot wait for their turn to change their looks.

It is Children's Week in Iran, and for seven days the Artists' Forum in the centre of Tehran is the most popular spot to be, for children and adults alike. Celebrated under the theme "A World Fit for Children – A World Free of Violence", the 2007 Children's Week is UNICEF's biggest media campaign of the year, and the first of its kind in Iran.

### Using the arts to target a new audience

Focusing on the prevention of violence against children, the campaign connects directly to a five-year project undertaken by UNICEF and the Iranian Government to prevent child abuse and promote better parenting skills. The events at the Artists' Forum, meant to bring children and adults together to spend more time with each other, are the centrepiece of the campaign, and include children's movies, book reading by celebrities, concerts and theatre shows.

But the interactive events for parents and children and the memory-telling by celebrities are clearly the best-visited parts of the campaign.

"Sometimes we need to become children ourselves to understand," a father says, standing with his seven-year old son outside the Artists' Forum. "It's been a long time since I have played like this, it's wonderful!" he exclaims. Maybe you should run a survey to see how many parents have experienced a similar feeling."

A father carrying his three-year old daughter on his shoulders, points to the Farsi version of the Global UN Study on Violence against Children and asks if it contains any recommendations on how to prevent child abuse. A volunteer gives him a copy of the child-friendly version and shows him the pages with concrete activities. He nods and pockets it.



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After the make-up session. Face-painting and mask-making were the most popular activities at the Children's Week celebrations in Tehran's Artists' Forum.

### Events calendar

- 20 November: 18th anniversary of the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child
- 1 December: World AIDS Day
- 9 December: International Children's Day of Broadcasting
- 10 December: Human Rights Day

### Contact information

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## Garnering support from Iran's religious leadership

The cultural week, however, is only one of several initiatives by UNICEF and many of its partners to bring the issue of violence against children into the spotlight in Iran. Another important element is a new booklet on violence-free education and disciplining of children that has been put together and will be published in late autumn 2007. It is the result of months of dialogue with and research by some of the country's most eminent religious leaders, who have given their explicit support to UNICEF's goal to prevent child abuse.

Grand Ayatollahs Sanei and Ardebili, as well as Ayatollahs Bojnourdi, Mohaghegh Damad, Marashi, and Hashemi Rafsanjani – Head of the State Expediency Council and also newly-elect President of the Assembly of Experts – are the representatives of Iran's Shi'ite clergy that have contributed to the publication.

Given the weight their views carry in the Shi'ite world, it can be expected that the booklet will yield considerable influence in the community of believers within Iran and beyond. This was also the first time that two high-level Grand Ayatollahs sent out a message on the occasion of Children's Day and thus to advocate for child rights.

Some other activities took place more quietly, which is not to say without noise. Ear-splitting screams and cheers greeted Christian Salazar, UNICEF's Rep-



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Before breaking the fast with his guests, Ayatollah Rafsanjani hands out presents to the visiting children and congratulates them for Children's Day.

resentative in Iran, as he walked onto a make-shift stage to perform some popular guitar pieces for several hundreds of youth in Tehran's Juvenile Correctional and Rehabilitation Centre on the evening of Children's Day, 8 October.

"Traditionally, Children's Day in Iran is an occasion to give children presents and some special attention," Mr Salazar said after the performance. "However, we wanted to convey the message that there are very special gifts every child can receive on any day of the year: kindness, care and attention."

See full story at [www.unicef.org/iran](http://www.unicef.org/iran)

## World Breastfeeding Week:

### Reducing infant mortality through breastfeeding

From 1 to 7 August, breastfeeding was again in the focus of health officials and UNICEF alike. On the occasion of World Breastfeeding Week, UNICEF Iran called for renewed efforts to ensure breastfeeding within the first hour of birth, as it is "the first and most vital step towards reducing infant and under-five mortality".

UNICEF estimates that exclusive breastfeeding to the age of six months could prevent the deaths of 1.3 million children worldwide under the age of five each year. In Iran, more than half of all babies are weaned of exclusive breastfeeding before the age of four months.

"The pattern of early weaning is observed with equal frequency in rural and urban areas all over Iran," UNICEF Iran said in a statement. "According to data published by the Ministry of Health and Medical Education, although 54 per cent of women in Iran exclusively breastfed their babies for the first four months, this figure declines to 28 per cent when looking at the rate over the first six months."

In Iran, UNICEF supports the Ministry of Health in its breastfeeding advocacy and promotion program. It also assists the Ministry in promoting awareness-raising and training on exclusive breastfeeding for six months and continued semi-exclusive breastfeeding for up to two years in 12 districts of Sistan and Baluchistan, Hormozgan and West Azerbaijan.

The district of Bandar Lengeh in Hormozgan and the district of Chabahar in Sistan and Baluchistan were selected as focus areas for the correct application of Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative standards, which includes counseling sessions for women on safe motherhood activities, giving breastfeeding mothers the information, confidence and skills needed to successfully initiate and continue breastfeeding of their babies.

World Breastfeeding Week is celebrated by UNICEF in more than 120 countries worldwide together with the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action, the World Health Organization and international NGO partners.



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## Refreshing the knowledge: HIV/AIDS prevention through peer education

Peer Education (PE) – the training of young people directly by their friends and colleagues rather than through a third person or an institution – is one of the pillars of the joint UNICEF-Ministry of Health community-based HIV/AIDS prevention project. From 4 to 6 September, a new group of project team members participated in a workshop on this educational technique, which focused on:

- acquiring basic skills on PE
- increasing their knowledge on the PE concept;
- sensitizing them on gender issues and values in the context of PE;
- assisting them to share their experiences and knowledge in this field.

The workshop also included a practical field work element; on the second night, the participants went to Jamshidieh Park in the North of Tehran to use their newly-acquired skills to educate park visitors about HIV/AIDS.

A total of 28 persons attended the workshop, including colleagues from Khorramabad, Bandar Abbas, Qeshm, Bam, Chabahar, Mashhad and Tehran.

## New UNICEF campaigns combine support for children with effective fundraising



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As part of its "A World Fit for Children – A World Free of Violence" program, UNICEF Iran has started this autumn a customer fundraising cam-

paign with Shahrvand, the biggest company of chain stores in Iran. The three-month-long initiative was launched simultaneously in all 14 branches of Shahrvand in



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Tehran. Cashiers offer all customers paying their bills to join the Shahrvand and UNICEF campaign by donating 1,000 Iranian Rials. If they accept, they will see a thank-you note by Shahrvand and UNICEF on their receipt.

Besides the raising of much-needed funds for child projects in Iran, the campaign aims to increase public awareness and advocate for a change of behavior towards children by parents, teachers and caretakers. This is the first experience of its kind in Iran and after only one month has already made a significant impact with customers and Shahrvand sales staff alike.

This initiative narrowly follows another high-profile one, which took place at a horse-jumping competition held by the International Federation for Equestrian Sports (FEI) in September. A percentage of the ticket sales and the income generated by a raffle were donated to UNICEF Iran to support it in advocating for children's rights.

## New season for UNICEF school briefings starts

With the beginning of the academic year in October, UNICEF Iran is open again for visits from school and student groups. The staff of the Information Resource Centre briefs visitors on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and UNICEF's work in cooperation with the Government to protect and support children in Iran. Since the beginning of these workshops two years ago, more than 2,000 students and pupils have attended the training sessions.



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Those schools and other learning institutions participating in the program can contact Ms. Leila Ensanzadeh, at 021-22594994, ext. 106 for a group visit.

## Monthly lectures on children issues more popular than ever

The capacity of UNICEF's conference room was close to being exhausted in the summer months as three lectures on children's issues drew more visitors than ever from among the community of non-governmental and governmental organizations, academia and the media.

In July, Dr. Hasan Ali Moazenzadegan, Dean of the Law Faculty of Allameh Tabatabaei University, spoke on the "Changes in protective criminal laws on children and adolescents", pointing out the strong and weak points of different laws pertaining to the issue, including the bill that is currently with Parliament for ratification. In the subsequent question and answer session, the more than 60 participants discussed the importance of law enforcement and the time-consuming legislative process in Iran.

"Challenges and opportunities for the implementation of the juvenile justice bill" was the topic of the lecture by Mrs Ghaderi Vaghari, Head of the Juvenile Court Complex, in August. Using her practical experience with law enforcements in courts, she spoke of the lack of facilities and the proper context to implement the bill in Iran.

In September, Mr. Seyed Mohammad Hossein

Javadi, Director General of the Children and Youth Department of the Iran's State Welfare Organization (SWO), talked about the concept of integrated early childhood development in Iran, outlining the various activities undertaken by the SWO in this field. He notably mentioned the establishment of more than 5,000 Rural Child Care Centers throughout the country as a major achievement, in which the support of UNICEF played a crucial role.

## Upcoming lectures

### November:

- "Birth Registration Challenges in Sistan and Baluchistan", by Mr. Alireza Roohani, Director General of the Personal Status Registration Organization of the Sistan and Baluchistan province
- "I.R. Iran's Reservation on the Convention on the Rights of the Child", by Dr. Salazar, Dr. Mehrpour and Dr. Seyed Fatemi.

### December:

- "Girls Education in Iran: Achievements and Impacts", by Ms. Rokhsareh Fazli, Education Expert with the Ministry of Education
- "The role of women in HIV/AIDS prevention", by Dr. Kianoush Kamali and Dr. Hengameh Namdari, Ministry of Health experts, to be held in Mashhad.

## Latest publications

### "What can we religious leaders do in response to HIV/AIDS?"



A new publication by UNICEF, UNAIDS, Ministry of Health and Emam Sadegh University will become available in November. As part of a national awareness-raising campaign and in close collaboration with religious leaders, the book focuses on an Islamic approach to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS.

"What can we religious leaders do in response to HIV/AIDS?" is authored by Dr. Hessamodin Ashena, a member of Imam Sadegh University's scientific board and includes contributions from experts of Mofid University, Qom Scientific School, the Islamic Propaganda Organization and Iran's State Welfare Organization. The Ministry of Health updated all figures and statistics and UNICEF Iran vetted the text to make sure it avoids any stigmatization of discrimination of people living with AIDS.

The 100-page book describes it as a religious duty of every Muslim to obtain information on HIV/AIDS as a behavioral disease that threatens the health of individuals and society, and discusses how the dis-

ease should be viewed in Islam – in other words, not as a divine punishment for the sinful but as a socio-behavioral problem.

A key part of the publication concentrates on recommendations for religious leaders on how to act when confronted with people living with HIV/AIDS. It describes what kinds of social values they need to highlight when explaining how to prevent the spread of the disease in society, and encourages them to promote care and support for their communities.

While the book seems to only target religious leaders, the author explains that it can also be a good reference for all those involved in providing people with services related to social affairs and behavior change, including physicians, social workers, psychologists and the media.

## Other publications

- "Violence Free Child Discipline", booklet. Includes statements by six Ayatollahs on Islamic codes of how to discipline children
- "Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women", booklet

