

MEDIA RELEASE

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Prishtine/Pristina

JUVENILE CRIME IN KOSOVO ON THE RISE

PRISTINA, 04 2008 – Declaring “Justice for Children,” UNICEF and partners today launch a report about juvenile crime and children in the justice system. A Kosovo-wide campaign is also launched to educate the general public on the rights of children who come into conflict with the law.

The report reveals that juvenile crime in Kosovo is significantly higher than in some countries of the western Balkans but is relatively lower than juvenile crime in western European countries. However, according to the police records, the number of juveniles suspected of crimes has doubled from 2005 - 2007. Data from the same source show that from 2005-2006, the number of children suspected of crimes was 2,369, while from 2006-2007 it rose to 4,300.

Adolescents in Kosovo do not often commit serious crimes. Serious violent offences make up less than 2 % of crimes committed by juveniles. A significant proportion of the crimes juveniles are suspected of are public disorder offenses. Almost one third of crimes committed by juveniles are minor property offences. In Prizren and Prishtine/Pristina, unauthorized control, possession or use of a weapon are among the top five offenses committed by juveniles.

This is the first report that looks also at the way children are treated by police and the justice system once they have been suspected or have committed a crime. Kosovo has an advanced law based on children’s rights, but protection of children has not fully become a reality for children who end up in the justice system. The system does not yet adequately promote rehabilitation of children, despite the modern provisions stated in the law.

Mr. Rexhep Haxhimusa, the President of the Supreme Court and Kosovo Judicial Council says: *We have made a significant progress since the Juvenile Justice Code was promulgated in 2004. However, we have still a way to go in order to be fully satisfied with the way we treat children in the justice system. Therefore, we are committed to commence with the reforms and the recommendations of this report will inform our actions in the future. We will make sure that each Court in Kosovo considers children’s best interest and gives them a chance to become good and responsible citizens.*

Kosovo juvenile justice system is trying to help children in conflict with the law to get back on track. A 20 years old girl from Vushtri/Vucitrn was 17 when she committed a crime. Instead of sending her to jail, the judge sent her to perform community service in a library, in order to repay her debt to society. Her words reveal how this service not only changed her behavior but gave her hope for a better future.

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I hope I will gain practical working skills for my future. This sentence has had a very positive influence on me. I have gained working skills, reading skills, I learned how to love children. I also think I have fulfilled an obligation towards the society.

UNICEF Head of Office, Mr. Robert Fuderich says: *The report clearly reveals that juvenile crime in Kosovo is an issue that needs commitment and action. It is the responsibility of parents, teachers and community as a whole to prevent children from getting into conflict with the law. However, when children do break the law, they have rights. Justice, police, social welfare and education officials need to work together to ensure that children get a second chance. Children should not be behind bars. They should be in school and be given every opportunity to choose their future.*

UNICEF in partnership with the Kosovo justice authorities, Terre des homes and the Human Rights Centre, managed by the European Commission, run a two year programme to develop a modern juvenile justice system based on European standards. This model gives practical tools and guidelines for professionals in order to help children who have been involved in criminal activities change their behaviour by reintegrating them back into school and the community.

For further information: Arbena Kuriu, Communications Officer, tel. +381 38 249 230/231/232, mob. +377 44 261 779. e-mail: akuriu@unicef.org