

MEDIA RELEASE

Children from all over Kosovo get together to celebrate Children's Day 2010

Prishtinë/Pristina, 30 May 2010 – As part of ongoing efforts to give children a voice in society and to promote peace and tolerance among children and communities in Kosovo, and preceding other celebrations marking the Children's Day (1 June), UNICEF and partners World Vision and Sport Sans Frontières organised a series of arts and sports activities for several hundred children from all communities.

Today's events were planned to take place in different locations in Mitrovica/a south and north, but unfortunately due to security concerns, UNICEF had to relocate the event to an alternative location outside Mitrovica/a, to a place called Koshtova. Activities were designed to help children from all communities to express their aspirations for the future and to interact with others. As such, the event, highlighted that all children share the same rights and that all communities have the obligation to work towards fulfilling the rights of children from all backgrounds. The children expressed during the event that they all share common aspirations in terms of education, health, friendship, peace and a safe and healthy environment. They urged adults to bear their best interest in mind and to find practical solutions that have a positive impact on their lives.

"Children have a lot to say and they have a right to be heard; it is our responsibility to listen and give them opportunities to interact with their peers from all communities" said Ms. Alyssa Milano, dedicated advocate for children and UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador visiting Kosovo on the occasion of Children's Day 2010.

This message is reinforced by children themselves, as Kids for Peace Clubs across Kosovo have also sent a powerful statement: "Children all over the world should be able to live without violence and to have hope for a better future. We represent the future of Kosovo, and our desire is to live in a place where people tolerate differences and respect each other. With the support of adults, let our ideas and our voices be heard."

Eleven years after the conflict, and despite some progress, ethnic divisions still hamper the interaction between different communities in the Kosovo society and a high degree of mistrust among Kosovo's ethnic groups remains palpable as it was witnessed today in Mitrovica/a. In this context, continued social tensions inhibit children and youth of different ethnic communities from communicating with each other. Thus, considering that more than 50 percent of Kosovo population is under the age of 25, it appears evident that sustainable peace is unattainable without the participation of children and young people and that there is urgent need to overcome ethnic divisions and build capacity for conflict resolution amongst children and youth.

UNICEF expresses its strong regret that today's event s with children could not take place on both parts of Mitrovica/a town as it had been planned. UNICEF urges local authorities, decision makers and communities to consider first and foremost the best interest of the child and their right to participate

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meaningfully in public life at all times. UNICEF believes that children are powerful agents for change and that each generation is a chance for a new and different beginning.

UNICEF would like to thank World Vision's "Kids for Peace" and Sports Sans Frontières clubs for supporting today's event and giving children from all communities the opportunity to get together and celebrate.

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