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UNICEF México /Maude Guye-Vuille

Mexico

Supporting prompt birth registration of children in Chiapas

Chalam, Chiapas, Mexico – It is early morning in the small town of Chalam in the Chiapas highlands. The central square is filling with the colourful clothes of the Tzotzil peoples. Dozens of families from the surrounding Tzotzil communities are gathering for an important event organized by the Office of the Civil Registrar and the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples. Today, 1,200 persons will be receiving, from one of the *Brigadas del Registro Civi* – Civil Registration Drives, their first birth certificate, most of them children and adolescents, but also their parents and grandparents.

These events, which are supported by UNICEF, are taking place in Chiapas, one five states identified with the lowest levels of birth registration, as well as very high levels of exclusion, in particular in rural and indigenous areas. UNICEF has been working to increase birth registration in Chiapas since 2001, initially through its school inclusion programme – *Todos los niños en la escuela*. It is now building on the lessons learnt to drive new efforts to close gaps in capacity for birth registration in priority municipalities given the potential impact of birth registration on equity for children.



To date, Chiapas has achieved important progress in addressing under and late registration, in particular through the progressive harmonisation of its legal framework, practical initiatives, public policies and necessary investments. Since one of the principle obstacles to birth registration of children is parents' own lack of documentation, the state is facilitating free registration for all, including adults, in the 28 municipalities in the state that have the lowest Human Development Index. In order to address the obstacles to universal birth registration identified across the State of Chiapas, birth registration drives (*Brigadas del Registro Civil*) are being undertaken in 37 priority municipalities with the participation and mobilization of local authorities, Civil Registry offices have been established in 25 hospitals, training is being provided to civil registry officials and health professionals on the importance of birth registration, and information and awareness-raising campaigns are being carried out, with materials being translated into indigenous languages.

More widely, this strategy has focused on improving the legal framework; ensuring that disaggregated information is made available to pinpoint areas of lowest birth registration coverage; mainstreaming the promotion of birth registration in social policies such as health, education and social protection; focussing outreach initiatives and mobile birth registration units, on the most remote rural and indigenous municipalities; building the capacity of registration officials; and developing communication initiatives to inform families of the importance of birth registration and how to access it, with materials and radio spots in indigenous languages.

These efforts have benefitted from the support of local and federal allies, in particular the National Population Register (RENAPO), which is part of the Interior Ministry (SEGOB), the National Statistical Bureau (INEGI), the Indigenous Rights Council, and health, education and social protection sectors, which have made it possible to reach targeted municipalities through federal and state policies and structures. A National Working Group on Birth Registration has proven a key mechanism of strategic cooperation.

At the event in Chalam, Ana is closer to enjoying her right to identity and accessing other of her rights. Ana has never gone to school; she is from a Paraje Alamol, a small locality close to Chalam. She has come to Chalam with Elena, her mother, and Juanita, her toddler sister; they will all three be receiving their birth certificates. Ana is seven years old but it is only now that she will be registered and receive her first birth certificate. She will be attending school next year.