

MADAGASCAR PRESS RELEASE

For the first time ever, media professionals in Madagascar come together to construct a code for ethical reporting on children's issues

UNICEF congratulates initiative

We, Media Professionals from Madagascar, hereby state the following:

... The dignity and rights of every child are to be respected in every circumstance...

Antananarivo, November 20, 2004 On the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the signing of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, professionals from TV, radio and the print media in Madagascar, gathered together, after two days of intense discussions, to sign a code of professional conduct related to reporting on child rights issues.

"I was aware of child rights issues," said one of the Editor's in Chief present at the seminar, "but I did not realize that we, the media have a responsibility in promoting the realization of child rights in general and through our reports in particular. "

"I never thought of feature stories, either in the audiovisual media or the written press in terms of the impact that they may have on the respect or dignity of a child, his or her future, or even in terms of what would be in the child's best interests. I think of headlines and what sells ... now I will think twice." she emphasized.

The three day seminar, held just outside of Antananarivo, the nation's capital, was organized by UNICEF with the support and facilitation of Mediawise, a noted international training agency for journalists based in the United Kingdom. In addition, to discussing questions of ethics, the seminar also introduced participants to techniques and tools for better reporting.

"You have incredible power and with that power comes great responsibility," said Barbara Bentein the agency's Representative, while addressing the journalists in her closing remarks. "Thank you for your efforts in constructing a code that is without precedent in Madagascar. I hope, in its light, you will continue to keep us all on our toes in terms of our collective responsibility to the Convention on the Rights of the Child." she added.

In addition to the development of the code, one of the main highlights of the three day seminar was a session introduced by eight young people, aged 10-14, who have started their own newspapers in four different provinces of the country. Not only have these children succeeded in writing articles about issues that concern them, but they have also, with the support of UNICEF, conducted a mini-monitoring exercise on the portrayal of children's issues in the print media.

"Most of the articles we have read about children, show us as delinquents, beggars, or victims," said Toki, aged 15 from Majunga, one of Madagascar's six provinces. "For once we would like to see a program or read an article that shows us as more than victims or trouble makers – perhaps that even just shows as how we are -- normal."

YOUNG REPORTERS SPEAK OUT!

You don't think that we read the paper, but we do however, there is nothing much in your papers about us children ... only politics and economics .. and when you do talk about us, we are portrayed delinquents, beggars or victims ...

I have read many articles about the measles vaccination campaign ... but not once did I see a reference to how we as children felt about getting the injection .. or even what we think about measles!

You always have articles on how the completion rate for high school exams has dropped – as if this is always our fault – did you ever consider that maybe the teacher was lazy and never taught us anything???

How about producing broadcasts or writing positive, hopeful and uplifting articles about us?

UNICEF intends to follow up this seminar with provincial trainings to broaden the discussion on the way reporting on child rights is conducted.