

## THE FAM-FIGO 1<sup>st</sup> TOUCH FOOTBALL PROGRAM LAUNCH IN SUPPORT OF UNITE FOR CHILDREN, UNITE AGAINST AIDS

Petaling Jaya, Malaysia • Sunday, 7 January 2007

### REMARKS

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Young Footballers

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen,

During the 90-minutes of a football game, some 400 young people aged 15 to 24 years old around the world will be infected with HIV, some 100 children under the age of 15 will die of AIDS, and another 400 will lose their parents to AIDS.

Twenty five years into this epidemic, the world is waking up to the reality that children and young people are the missing face of HIV/AIDS. The disease is robbing tens of millions of children of their childhood and threatening their future prospects. Of the 40.3 million people alive today with HIV infection, at least a third are young people under the age of 25. Half of all new infections occur in young people. And by 2010, that number is expected to more than double.

In Malaysia, new infections are doubling every three years with an average of 17 people testing HIV-positive daily. Of the 74,000 people infected in Malaysia, almost forty per cent occur in people below the age of 29.

A lack of knowledge about HIV is one of the main reasons for the rapid spread of the epidemic and its related stigma and discrimination. Cultural sensitivities often prevent an open discussion on the subject. Silence, ignorance and complacency are the biggest obstacles in the fight to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

## Helping Children and Young People Take Control of the Lives

Teenage years and the transition to adulthood is a very taxing period for our young. These are years of discovery, emerging feelings, exploration of new behaviours and relationships. It is a time when young people feel they need to test their boundaries to determine who they are and what they can do. They go through physical, emotional and psychological changes which come along with a range of problems. They are faced with peer pressures and influences. Expectations are “imposed” upon them and on their part, young people have a need for acceptance by family, peers and society.

Establishing healthy behaviour patterns during this time is critical to keeping our young people safe and a lot easier than having to change risky behaviour later on. Appropriate guidance and communication are vital during this period to assist our young make independent and correct decisions in life.

UNICEF has learnt from our experiences around the world that we can help children take control of their lives by providing them with the knowledge, skills and space to cope with the pains of growing up. We know that :

- Children and young people need to build their skills and confidence to keep them safe from HIV infection.
- They need opportunities to talk about their problems with honesty and without fear of recrimination.
- They need safe spaces to meet and socialize with their peers.

Football we have learnt is one of the answers. Played by hundreds of millions of children around the world, football has the power to capture the imagination and interest of children and is a powerful tool outside the classroom in facilitating these three principles.

## Taking HIV Education to the Football Field

Simply put, football provides an important diversion to young people in an otherwise challenging period of growing up.

It helps young people fill free time in a productive way and gives them a sense of normalcy. The game equips young people with the right skills to cope with the challenges of life. It's a way to promote a peaceful approach to conflict resolution. It's a tool for wooing a young body away from the lures of drugs, unsafe sex, or violence. It's a way to help ensure that young people grow up healthy, fit and full of self-esteem. And, what's more, it's a manifestation of the right to play that the Convention on the Rights of the Child includes as one of the fundamental rights of all children.

In recognition of its power, UNICEF is working with FIFA as well as professional football clubs to use football as a tool to educate young people about HIV/AIDS and to prevent its spread. UNICEF is supporting a variety of football programs aimed at HIV/AIDS education.

- In Kenya and Ethiopia for example, we use football as a tool to communicate vital messages on HIV/AIDS prevention to young men and boys. At half-time, the adolescent boys are invited by youth leaders to discuss HIV/AIDS prevention. Since some of the adolescents do not even go to school, this program provides them with potentially life-saving information.
- In Honduras, UNICEF works with the Ministry of Health to conduct theatrical presentations during half times at football matches to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS. The actors play an exhibition football match and use the game to illustrate how HIV passes from one person to another and what people can do to protect themselves.
- In Malaysia, UNICEF partnered the 3R TV hosts in 2006 to organize Malaysia's largest ever all-women's futsal tournament that also educated and informed girls and women about HIV/AIDS and health issues.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Responding to the needs of children and young people affected by HIV/AIDS entails the protection of their basic rights and the assurance of the fulfillment of these rights as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. An exercise of this nature requires joint action to ensure sustainable solutions to the problems faced by children.

The "*Unite for Children, Unite against AIDS*" Campaign launched by UNICEF and UNAIDS in 2005 provides a platform for such partnerships so that we may collectively advance action for all children and young people affected and infected with HIV and AIDS. Football clubs such as Manchester United in UK and Barcelona in Spain have formed major alliances with UNICEF in support of the Campaign and its goals.

I am pleased that today, UNICEF forms another football alliance on a country level that will champion the principles of *Unite for Children, Unite against AIDS* and promote leadership, healthy living and HIV awareness amongst young girls and boys in the Klang Valley. I thank the Football Association of Malaysia and Figo for their commitment and partnership in support of the global campaign on children and AIDS through the First Touch Football Program for Children.

On behalf of UNICEF, I invite all of you to join in partnership to create a healthy Malaysia for the young people of today, the future generation and the leaders of tomorrow. Let us Unite for children and Unite against AIDS.

Thank you.