State of the World s Children 2006
Malaysian Launch

Thursday, 6 April 2006 ð Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

WELCOME REMARKS

Ms. Gaye Phillips
UNICEF Representative, Malaysia
UNICEF Special Representative, Singapore & Brunei

Her Excellency Datin Paduka Seri Rosmah Mansor
Wife of the Deputy Prime Minister

Ms. Anupama Rao Singh
UNICEF Regional Director for East Asia and the Pacific

Distinguished Guests

Members of the Media,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the Malaysian launch of UNICEFôs flagship report ñThe State of the Worldôs Childrenòfor 2006.

A special welcome to our Patron for this evening, Her Excellency Datin Paduka Seri Rosmah Mansor. Your presence here this evening is recognition of the importance of mobilising all parts of society in ensuring that the protection of childhood for children should always be the number one priority in all agendas for all people.

I am also honoured to have with us this evening our Regional Director for East Asia and Pacific, Ms. Anupama Rao Singh who is on her first official visit to Malaysia.

A warm welcome also to all the women here this evening. As wives and mothers, as caregivers and professionals, each of you are dedicated in your own respective fields, to support the needs of children in Malaysia. I am honoured that each of you can join us this evening.

Our thanks also go to Celina Khor and Kartini Kamalul Ariffin, our Goodwill Ambassadors for Malaysia, for kindly emceeing the Malaysian Launch of this Report.

I would also like to thank our media friends for making time to share in this very important event with us. The media, as we all know, plays a vital role in raising awareness of global issues. More importantly, the media plays a tremendous and very critical role in shaping children's lives. I am confident that through your support and attention to the wellbeing of children, most if not all the burning problems facing our children today, can be resolved.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

REVISITING OUR COMMITMENTS TO CHILDREN

In recent years, the international community has made important advances in defining the rights of the child. An important step was the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. This was followed by the World Summit for Children in 1990 and the United Nations Special Session on Children in 2002. All governments, with the exception of two, have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. No other international Convention is supported by such wide ratification and support.

Yet, there remains a large gap between the commitments made to children and their implementation. Millions of children around the world make their way through life impoverished, abandoned, uneducated, malnourished, discriminated against, neglected and vulnerable. For them, life is a daily struggle to survive.

The State of the World's Children 2006: Excluded and Invisible is a sweeping assessment of these children, whose rights to a safe and healthy childhood are exceptionally difficult to protect. These children are growing up beyond the reach of development campaigns and are often invisible in everything from public debate and legislation, to statistics and news stories.

Without focused attention, millions of these children will remain trapped and forgotten in childhoods of neglect and abuse, with devastating consequences for their long-term well-being and the development of nations. UNICEF's SOWC 2006 report argues that any society with an interest in the welfare of its children and its own future must not allow this to happen.

Key to ensuring that no child is invisible is to stop thinking that children's rights and needs can be addressed within policies targeted at adults or other vulnerable groups. We have to stop basing children's policies on those of parents, adults or families, in the mistaken assumption that policies that are good for adults will necessarily be good for children. In fact, children's and adults' interests and rights are not always identical; they are frequently different and occasionally conflict.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

MEETING OUR COMMITMENTS TO CHILDREN

The State of the World's Children argues that the world must go beyond current development efforts to ensure that the most vulnerable children are not left behind. Every nation on earth has agreed to the Millennium Development Goals, six out of eight which are related to investment in children. All of these tell us one thing, something we all understand: there is no better way to change the world than with children, there is no better return on investment for any country, in the medium and long run, than investing in children.

Perhaps investing in children is a hard sell, but I don't think so. It just takes the right leaders to sell it. Leaders who understand the aspirations we all share, who grasp both the fears and joys within our memories, who can sell us faith in our own dreams. We believe those leaders must come from all sectors, - from government, academic, business, civil society and media.

In the end, it's about quality leadership. That's what we at UNICEF believe. Provide every child a loving environment, fortify each child's health, give every child a quality basic education, and allow every child to grow to adulthood in dignity. If we have leaders who do only these few things we will have radically changed our world.

Malaysia is lucky to have so many women who are dedicated and commited to doing all that they can to ensure that no child is left behind. One such person who UNICEF is proud to acknowledge this evening for contributions to maternal and child health is Dato' Dr. Narimah Awin, Director of the Family Health Development Division in the Ministry of Health. Dr. Narimah has worked tirelessly to improve the quality of health for women and children, regardless of whether they are in urban areas or in the remote rural areas like the jungles of Sarawak. Thank you Dr. Narimah for your fortitude, your insights and most importantly, your commitment to children.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before I conclude, please allow me to once again express my gratitude to Her Excellency Datin Paduka Seri Rosmah Mansor for her leadership around early childhood development. Experience has taught us that a failure to invest in early childhood development can have long-term social consequences and that investing in early childhood programmes is one of the best ways of having an impact on a wide range of social issues. Thank you Your Excellency.

I hope you enjoy your evening with us. Thank you.