

COMUNICADO DE PRENSA

UNICEF GEARS UP RELIEF EFFORTS TO EARTHQUAKE-STRUCK HAITI

Panama City, Panama, 12 January 2010 – Despite heavy damages to its own offices in Port-au-Prince UNICEF is ready to provide immediate support to the victims of the unfolding humanitarian crisis following the earthquake that hit Haiti today.

In coordination with all other UN agencies present on the ground, UNICEF will provide supplies to allow access to adequate sanitation, safe water and basic health care.

UNICEF is also preparing materials and staff so that children, tremendously vulnerable during natural catastrophes, are protected. UNICEF materials and advisors will assist so that children are able to continue learning and studying, and be provided safe recreation areas while their caretakers turn to rebuilding their lives.

The situation of children and women in Haiti was already one of great vulnerability before the earthquake hit the island. Haiti is one of the poorest countries on earth – it ranks 148 out of 179 countries on UNDP's Human Development Index, and is struggling to recover from years of violence, insecurity and instability and has a long history of being struck by one natural disaster after another.

Haiti's income distribution is highly skewed, with only one in every 50 Haitians holding a steady, wage-earning job. Access to services is highly unequal: the poorer the child is, the less likely he or she is to have access to basic rights. Far too many Haitian children and women are engaged in a struggle for their right to basic necessities like adequate nutrition, clean water, education and protection from violence.

Haiti also has the second-highest population density in the western hemisphere. Four out of every ten children live in homes with mud floors or in severely overcrowded conditions, with more than five people living in each room. With an estimated 46% of the population currently under the age of 18, the struggle of Haitian children reverberates throughout society, and one that is bound to have serious consequences far into the future.

The effects of this latest natural catastrophe following a severe Hurricane season in 2008 from which the country is still struggling to recover are set to be devastating.

With so many people living at such close quarters – and with access to clean water and sanitary conditions severely compromised even in the best of times – vulnerability to the spread of life-threatening waterborne diseases can skyrocket when a natural disaster strikes, as can difficulties in delivering much needed food, medical supplies and protection services. Children, as is too often the case, are most likely to suffer the consequences.

For more information:

Tamar Hahn, Communication Specialist,

Tel + 507 301 7485

E-mail: thahn@unicef.org

Website: www.unicef.org/lac

Acerca de UNICEF

UNICEF trabaja sobre el terreno en más de 150 países y territorios para ayudar a garantizar a los niños y las niñas el derecho a sobrevivir y a desarrollarse desde la primera infancia hasta la adolescencia. UNICEF es el mayor proveedor de vacunas para los países en desarrollo, trabaja para mejorar la salud y la nutrición de la infancia; el abastecimiento de agua y saneamiento de calidad; la educación básica de calidad para todos los niños y niñas y la protección de los niños y las niñas contra la violencia, la explotación y el VIH/SIDA.