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**United Nations Country Team for Somalia**

**PRESS RELEASE**

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**SOMALIA LAUNCHES AIDS COMMISSION IN  
THE SOUTH/CENTRAL REGIONS**

**Baidoa, South Somalia, Tuesday 14 March 2006** - The Somali Transitional Federal Government today launched the South Central AIDS Commission (SCAC) in Baidoa, south Somalia, where the Extraordinary Session of the Somali Transitional Federal Parliament is currently taking place.

The establishment of the Somaliland AIDS Commission and the Puntland AIDS Commission in 2005 and now the SCAC means that the HIV/AIDS response is a Somali-based one, involving all sectors of the population – civil society, private sector, religious leaders and local authorities. The SCAC will coordinate AIDS activities in 15 regions of central south Somalia.

Prime Minister Ali Mohamed Gedi said, “We recognize that HIV/AIDS can derail our efforts to harness our human resources for the reconstruction of our country. Somalis everywhere must be educated on how to protect themselves from the virus, but even more importantly, we must support our brothers and sisters who already are infected so that they are cared for and are not marginalized.”

The three Commissions will now be able to work towards a coordinated HIV/AIDS response, with an integrated prevention, treatment, care and support plan, as well as a single monitoring and evaluation framework. This will also facilitate resource mobilization and most effective use of current resources from the Global Fund on HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria (GFATM), UN, DFID and other donor resources.

In the Somali context, UNICEF is the principle recipient of GFATM funds which aim to set up and enhance management structures for coordination, monitoring and evaluation; reduce the transmission of HIV/AIDS through preventative services and ensures that people living with HIV/AIDS and their families have access to high quality, affordable care and support services.

UNICEF Representative Mr Christian Balslev-Olesen added that “This is an opportunity for all of us to work together to stop and even reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS among Somali men, women and children. We cannot fail in this or else the consequences will be devastating, as we have seen in other parts of the world. The Global Fund is a tool to facilitate this, but the Somali people and we as partners must put effective systems in place.”

In recognition of the particular vulnerability of children, the UN Campaign to *Unite for Children, Unite Against AIDS* together with efforts to ensure Universal Access to prevention treatment care and support, seeks to ensure that children and young people have access to correct information, skills and services to prevent infection and provide treatment, care and support for those in need.

UNAIDS Country Coordinator Mr Leo Kenny explained: "The HIV/AIDS response is a long term commitment, and this is why it is important to protect the children. Primary prevention, prevention of mother-to-child transmission, paediatric treatment and protection, care and support to children all ensure that the next generation of Somalis can make informed choices from an early age and protect themselves."

Also in attendance was UNDP Country Director and UN HIV/AIDS Theme Group Chair, Mr Elballa Hagona who emphasized the need for an all-inclusive approach to the response: "The leadership demonstrated by President Abdullahi Yusuf in addressing HIV/AIDS even before the establishment of the Transitional Federal Institutions is to be commended. It is important that there is a multi-sectoral response to HIV/AIDS that includes the civil society and particularly the religious leaders who have an immense responsibility in providing guidance on the care and support of those that are infected."

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**Notes:**

The results of the WHO 2004 sero-prevalence survey showed a mean HIV prevalence of 0.9% in Somaliland, Puntland and the south/central regions of Somalia. These data indicate that the Somalis are approaching a generalized HIV epidemic. HIV prevalence varied in the different areas: 1.4% in Somaliland, 1% in Puntland and 0.6% in the central south. The data was collected from surveys of ante-natal and blood donor service providers. Experience from sub-Saharan countries shows that when the rate of HIV exceeds 1% it could be doubled or tripled in 2-3 years.