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*MEDIA AND STAKEHOLDER BRIEFING ON A REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S
ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT-BASED CONTRIBUTORY SOCIAL INSURANCE
BENEFITS

6th August 2009 8:45 am Sheraton Hotel, Pretoria

Remarks by Aida Girma, UNICEF Representative in South Africa

Hon. Edna Molewa, Minister of Social Development

Distinguished participants;

Ladies and gentlemen

It is a pleasure for me to be here today to take part in the launch of the joint review carried out by the Department of Social Development and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on **Children's Access to Employment-based Contributory Social Insurance Benefits**. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Honorable Molewa on her recent appointment as Minister of Social Development. UNICEF values the strong partnership it enjoys with the Department of Social Development. We have worked together over a number of years towards overcoming the numerous challenges that children face in the country.

The study which is being launched today assesses the obstacles to accessing the death benefits due to orphans from statutory insurance schemes and pension funds in South Africa.

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The fifteen year review points out that poverty and inequality remain major challenges for the country. While many anti-poverty initiatives have been successfully been mainstreamed into the planning and implementation of government programmes, and are receiving significant budget support, some groups in society, continue to suffer immensely from the lack of support for a decent standard of living. Studies such as the one under review today point to the need to do more for such groups, in particular orphans.

Studies shows an estimated 19 percent of South Africa's child population has lost one or both parents. There are approximately 630,000 double orphans, 500,000 maternal orphans and 2,000,000 paternal orphans.

In many cases, the support these children need to have a strong constitutional basis. These children also deserve to reap either the benefits of insurance that their parents toiled for or that the state has defined as their entitlement. In fact, such children are covered by Article 26 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child, which provides that "States Parties shall recognize for every child the right to benefit from social security, including social insurance, and shall take the necessary measures to achieve the full realization of this right in accordance with their national law".

Notwithstanding legal provisions and norms, the study observes avoidable bottlenecks in children benefiting from what should be theirs. Most claimants must return on multiple occasions to access their benefits. They bear huge amounts of transport and administrative costs due to the heavy load the system places on them. The diversity of procedures in accessing funds can be

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unsettling for poor. Delay is the norm in many instances. Of concern, is the absence of support during the claim-processing period in many programmes, a bottleneck that exposes poor families to all manner of deprivations.

Also, the list of documents required for a claim against a pension fund is considerable. In many instances, this information is available from the employer and it is unjustifiable to require the claimant to provide it merely in order to spare the employer the inconvenience.

Enabling documents continue to play a key role in accessing support for children in South Africa. Birth and death registration has improved significantly over the past years. However, there is evidence to suggest that the relatively high national average rates of birth registration among adults, conceals pockets of poor registration, particularly in rural communities. There are provinces where about a third of children are yet to be registered.

From a human rights perspective, access to a birth certificate is a right. And from the perspective of survival in today's world, a birth certificate is potent instrument for individual and family up-liftment.

In response to these challenges UNICEF welcomes efforts by government to waive conditionalities around enabling documents in accessing grants. This is a logical step in improving access by the poor to government programmes. We however think that a waiver should be seen as a temporary measure. It is our joint responsibility to ensure that every child is issued a birth certificate soon after birth. This is a right as well as an essential commodity for survival and

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progress in today's world. UNICEF looks forward to working with relevant government departments to make this a reality in South Africa.

UNICEF's ongoing collaboration with the Department of Social Development in evaluating the Child Support Grant will shed more light on bottlenecks that characterize access to the social assistance programmes that the government has put in place.

The CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT-BASED CONTRIBUTORY SOCIAL INSURANCE BENEFITS study puts on the table some proposals that will remove the bottlenecks experienced by deprived children accessing employment-based contributory social insurance benefits. These include:

- Ensuring a statutory duty on employers to keep information on dependants,
- Standardizing definitions and procedures across funds,
- Support pending the claim, perhaps through social relief of distress, and
- Ensuring coordinated payments for children and provision for a guardian's oversight, perhaps through the Master of the High Court.

There are several other recommendations in the report. UNICEF hopes that these recommendations will be incorporated in the ongoing reform of the social security system in the country.

UNICEF applauds the laws and programmes that the government has put in place to ensure basic support for deprived children. We must however strengthen the multi-pronged approach that is required to tackle child poverty.

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We must continue to keep a strong eye on removing the causes of deprivation that confront many of our children today. Addressing relentlessly HIV, poverty and insecurity will provide opportunities for many groups of children. As the government has emphasised, providing gainful jobs will enhance the family's capacity to provide for children. Removing operational bottlenecks in accessing social insurance and grants will expand the relief provided by such programmes. Ensuring that every child is registered gives them a life-long opportunity to realize their aspirations.

A child, in legal terms is a minor. A minor has no capacity to seek redress unless assisted by a parent or guardian, or by the state and its partners. This means that a child is likely to fail if state and family guardians do not support them to have access to their entitlements. We trust that all actors in society will do their part to bring an end to child poverty.

I thank you for your attention.