

Speech by UNICEF Representative in South Africa

First National Training Education in Emergencies

Time: 09h00 to 09h10

Venue: Burgers Park Hotel, Van Der Walt Street, Pretoria

- Officials from South Africa's National and Provincial Departments of Education
- Partner NGO and other implementing partners
- UNICEF regional office staff and UNICEF SACO colleagues
- Dear Partners,

It is a great pleasure for me to be here to take part in the opening of the First National Training in Education in Emergencies. This training aims to better prepare us to assist and support the development of children in emergencies when they need us most.

UNICEF, in keeping with its own mandate and its cooperation and partnership with Governments, has a global commitment to provide guidance and to respond to the need for Education in Emergencies.

One of UNICEF's Core Commitments to Children in Emergencies specifies that access to quality early learning and education for all children in affected communities during an emergency, must be promoted.

Furthermore, this commitment makes clear the importance of placing a specific focus on girls under these circumstances, so that we minimise the potential damage to their development posed by trying circumstances which are difficult for any child but especially so for girls.

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The Education for Emergencies training being launched today, is the first national training ever undertaken on the issue of Education in Emergencies to be held in South Africa. UNICEF is very proud to be a part of this initiative.

During the 2008 Xenophobia attacks, at the height of the crisis approximately 40,000 people were displaced. Among them were children. This traumatic situation, as you are well aware, had a significant and sometimes devastating impact on their education and protection, disrupting their already tenuous access to education and creating fear, in some instances, of resuming education in their once familiar schools and communities.

This situation, provided us with an opportunity to show how a cluster- based education in emergency approach, which brings together UN agencies, NGOs and Government, can best respond to the critical needs of both pre-school and school-going children. The net result is a better, more coordinated effort for children.

UNICEF commends the Department of Education, in particular, the Gauteng and Western Cape provincial departments, which were at the epicenter of this emergency, for the important role they played during the xenophobic crisis.

Our worthy education counterparts took action and immediately teamed up for a stronger collaboration with UNICEF and a variety of organizations to ensure that an appropriate and coordinated response could be effected.

Emergency preparedness is critical – one never knows when an emergency or disaster will strike. What we do know, is that such an eventuality will require a well thought-out and well prepared response, especially as regards children.

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Looking forward, UNICEF is pleased that the Department of Education undertook to organise Education in Emergency training. WE know that this will help prepare national and all provincial departments in future.

More importantly, this essential training will help us ensure that children's right to education, safeguarded by the South African Constitution and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, are protected and promoted, whether under normal circumstances, or in extreme circumstances such as emergencies and disasters.

Lastly, I am pleased to inform you that the UN Country Team in South Africa has established an inter-agency UN Disaster Management Team to ensure timely, effective and coordinated implementation of the United Nations response to national emergency prevention, preparedness and response efforts. The UN is also exploring the possibility of expanding the group to include NGO partners. Education will be one of the clusters or working groups to be established as part of this coordination group.

Thank You.
