

MEDIA RELEASE

UNICEF congratulates Government, Parliament and people of South Africa on adoption of new Children's Amendment Bill

Cape Town, 6 November... UNICEF South Africa Country Representative Macharia Kamau, today congratulated the Government, Parliament and people of South Africa on the adoption of the Children's Amendment Bill, hailing it as "an innovative and historic piece of legislation that will have significant impact on improving the situation of children in South Africa"

"Although the adoption of the Bill has unfortunately come after an exceptionally long delay, the Bill is a necessary and important contribution to the framework of National legislation and policies affecting children. In this regard, South Africa continues to lead much of the rest of the world in legislative progress and protective laws that safeguard the well-being of children," Mr. Kamau said"

Key Provisions

Among its key provisions, the Bill stipulates that before any child is placed in alternative care, social workers will be required to indicate to South Africa's Children's Court what preventative services were delivered to the children's families. The Bill also provides for the strengthening of protective measures for children living or learning in alternative child or youth care facilities.

"UNICEF especially welcomes the emphasis placed on strengthening families with early support and intervention before matters become so bad that children must be removed from their own families and communities," Mr. Kamau said.

MEDIA RELEASE

UNICEF also welcomed another important proviso of the new legislation which concerns the provision and regulation of early childhood development (ECD) services for very young children and ensures the provision of sufficient child care centres.

Development of human potential from the earliest years has been proven to have serious implications for national development. Legislative focus on giving young children the best start in life in their early years can only have enormous benefits to the entire society, UNICEF said.

A lengthy legislative process ends

The South African Parliament has been involved with the drafting and legislative processes of this landmark children's legislation since 1997. The first half of the Bill, The Children's Act 2005, was signed off by the President earlier this year. In its final form, the Children's Amendment Bill will be called The Children's Act.

Welcoming the long awaited Bill as "another exceptional milestone and imperative step towards realising children's constitutional rights," UNICEF observed that the continued realisation of the rights of children in South Africa was one of the most intractable challenges of the post-apartheid society. The new Children's Bill, if enforced, will undoubtedly go a long way towards the realization of these rights, the children's organization said.

UNICEF has pledged its continued support to the Department of Social Development as it prepares its implementation strategies relating to the Children's Bill.

For further media information, please contact,
Rose September, rseptember@unicef.org +27 79 495 5953; UNICEF Cape Town office: +27(21) 483 8584
Yvonne Duncan, yduncan@unicef.org; mobile +27 82 561 3970, UNICEF Pretoria: +27 12 354 8201