

## MEDIA RELEASE

### UNICEF applauds passing of South Africa's historic Children's Bill

**Pretoria, 15 Feb., 2006** - UNICEF today applauded the Government of South Africa and the National Assembly on the passing of the Children's Bill, after years of deliberation and debate with major stakeholders.

"With the passing of this pioneering and visionary Bill, South Africa has taken an important and hopefully transformative step forward in its action and commitment to the rights of the nation's most important resource, its children," said Macharia Kamau, UNICEF Country Representative.

Noting the legislation's provision to bar anyone that has been found guilty of an offence against children from working with or around children, UNICEF said the organisation was especially pleased with all the Bill's provisions to meet the most urgent needs of vulnerable children and especially in securing their care and protection from abuse and exploitation. "When it comes to the protection of children, this Bill gets it right," he said.

Calling the long awaited Bill "a victory for the right of children to be free to be children and to be protected as they grow up," the UNICEF Representative added, "It fills important legislative gaps and provides a valuable legal backbone for those engaged in the struggle to put children first." The Bill, which stresses the protection of children, addresses issues of female and male circumcision, early marriage, corporal punishment and other potentially harmful cultural practices. UNICEF is urging the Government to adopt a "First Call for Children" in its national budget, as a next step to ensure the effective implementation of the Bill.

UNICEF reiterated its strong support to both Government and civil society partners and communities. The UNICEF response to the new Bill came at a Cape Town reception and children's round table marking the launch of the State of the World's Children 2006 as well as the country office's flagship Annual Report.

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