

## PRESS RELEASE

### UNICEF hails South African Government's decision to accept social grant applications without identity documents

#### **Cites benefits to young child development and to orphaned and vulnerable children**

**Pretoria 3 June, 2008...** Citing strong benefits to the country's most vulnerable poor rural children, UNICEF today welcomed the decision by the Government of South Africa to accept, as of 1 June, social grant applications from eligible applicants who are experiencing difficulty in obtaining official identity documents and birth certificates.

"This decision will greatly benefit the most vulnerable children, some of whom have no birth certificates, have lost their parents and are fending for themselves before they are ever able to obtain that most valuable document that can pave the way to social protection and relief from poverty," said Julianna Lindsey, Deputy Representative at UNICEF South Africa.

#### **Improving survival for thousands of eligible rural poor children**

A poor child in South Africa is half as likely to receive the Child Support Grant (CSG) in his or her first six months of life as s/he is in the second year of life. Until now, difficulties in obtaining birth certificates and ID documents had put a cap on early uptake of the grant.

UNICEF says the Government's decision is therefore critical for the survival of thousands of children living in the poorest and most remote areas of the country, who are eligible to receive the CSG but fail to do so because of the administrative and other delays associated with issuing official documentation in these areas.

It is expected that implementation of the new measure will present operational challenges that should not be under-estimated, UNICEF said. Nonetheless, this new decision will boost the role that the social grant can play in improving children's lives, by addressing one of the main causes of its persistently late uptake.

#### **Mitigating health risks in very young children**

UNICEF further stated that improved access to the child support grant will also play a major role in mitigating the irreversible effects of health risks such as growth faltering, stunting and underweight among very young children in their first three to nine months of life.

“As children move from breast milk to solids these risks become even greater. Access to the child support grant can therefore help play a significant role in securing the physical and cognitive development of young children and the future of their families and communities, around the country” UNICEF said.

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UNICEF is on the ground in over 150 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world’s largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and from HIV and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments.

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