

## PRESS RELEASE

### **Child Protection Week 2009: UNICEF helps strengthen government efforts to highlight role of communities in South Africa's protecting children**

**Pretoria, 24 May 2009...**UNICEF has joined the National Department of Social Development and other partners in using the opportunity of the Child Protection Week from 25-29 May 2009, to intensify public focus on the issue of child protection and to promote the role of communities in providing safe and protective environments in which children can grow up to their fullest potential.

South Africa's National Child Protection Committee has adopted a five-year theme: "Caring Communities Protect Children" as the theme for the week.

Protecting children from all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been ratified by 193 countries, including South Africa. Under the standards of international law, the Convention establishes that children have the right to special protection measures and assistance and that States Parties must ensure that they have access to education and health care, grow up in an environment of happiness love and understanding and are informed about and participate in achieving their rights. Two optional protocols restrict the movement of children in armed conflict and prohibit the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

#### **Comprehensive legislative reform in South Africa**

South Africa's legislation to protect children is exemplary. Article 28 of the Constitution specifically affirms children's rights to protection from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation, and from exploitative labour practices. And three pieces of recent legislative reform, namely the Children's Act, the Sexual Offences Act, and the newly adopted Child Justice Act, give effect to these rights in a comprehensive manner.

Still, violations to a child's right to protection occur here every day, and in every country, sometimes on a massive scale, UNICEF says. Further, children subjected to violence exploitation and abuse are at risk of death, poor physical and mental health, HIV/AIDS infection, educational problems, displacement, homelessness, vagrancy, and poor parenting skills in later life .

"There is no question that children in South Africa are too often exposed to high levels of violence, abuse and exploitation, including sexual violence, which brings with it a host of other ills such as exposure to HIV and AIDS, said Aida Girma, UNICEF South Africa Representative. "We do know that much of this abuse takes place right there in the home where children should be safest. What's more, it is those cases that are among the most under reported, as abused children are often too young or too scared to undertake reporting of their abuse to the authorities."

In South Africa, the extent and range of violence against children varies from the banal – some 57% of parents reportedly inflict corporal punishment against their children, about a third of whom mete out severe physical punishment with the use of implements – to the shocking: forty percent of the 55,000 reported rapes in 2005/2006 were against children, according to the South African Police Services (SAPS). This amounts to more than 60 children raped a day.

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### **Raising public awareness and mobilising action to protect children**

For its part, UNICEF will partner with the Department of Social Development in supporting the five-year theme for Child Protection Week, via a mass media public awareness campaign, followed by a series of social mobilisation and child participation activities in partnership with local authorities, community leaders and other stakeholders to highlight prevention of abuse and exploitation of children. It will kickoff on 25 May and continue through to 2010 with additional elements, including expanded sport for development initiatives.

Recognizing the possibility of child exploitation and trafficking that may be associated with upcoming major global sporting events, special emphasis will be placed on targeted messaging aimed at preventing child abuse in the period up to and during the World Cup tournament.

“The message that we would like to convey to the public, is that the responsibility to protect children does not rest with the country’s formal protection services alone. Rather, it is everyone’s responsibility. Parents, families and communities, neighbours, local leaders, teachers, police officers, health care workers can all play an essential part in ensuring that children are safe and protected in the environments where they live play and go to school”, said Stephen Blight, Chief of Child Protection at UNICEF South Africa.

### **A full Schedule of Media Activities**

With an estimated 10-million radio sets in South Africa and the power to reach millions of listeners in rural and urban communities, UNICEF’s media activities during the week will be mostly concentrated on two highly rated outlets in commercial radio (KAYA FM) and public service radio (SAFM).

Highlights of the week’s activities include live, prime time talk show appearance on the John Perlman Show on KAYA-FM, 25 May. UNICEF, government and civil society experts will examine critical child protection issues including child exploitation and reporting

On 28 May, UNICEF Representative Aida Girma will be a guest speaker at the Open Day scheduled as part of the International Social Services Conference in Cape Town. Ms. Girma’s speech will look at the recent situation of increased numbers of unaccompanied migrant children in South Africa, and the support provided by UNICEF.

On 30 May, a round table discussion, in which children will share their views and experiences and propose solutions, will be aired on a special child protection week segment on the “INTUNE” show, 12:00 -13:00, broadcast on SAFM.

UNICEF has also mobilized its network of celebrity advocates to talk about child protection to their young fans, providing helpful tips to alert young people to the risks of sexual abuse; advise on how the law protects children from exploitation; offer guidance on what children and young people can do to protect themselves; and give information on how to report suspected child abuse and exploitation.

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### Achieving Millennium Development Goals

Protection of children responds to several Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to which South Africa is committed. UNICEF's child protection work aims to help achieve those goals by raising public awareness and strengthening national capacity to prevent and respond violence against vulnerable and marginalized children and women, migrant populations and detainees.

Child Protection Week also provides the opportunity to heighten awareness of the rights of foreign migrant children in South Africa. Thousands have crossed South Africa's borders over the last year unaccompanied by their families or other caregivers, and are in extreme situations of vulnerability.

The right of these children to access national care and protection systems is unequivocal in South African legislation. Yet many foreign migrant children continue to face discrimination from even from some elements of the social work profession. They are denied access to public services, and face illegal detention and deportation. Undocumented and deeply distrustful of authorities, they are highly exposed to violence, abuse and exploitation.

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**Please visit the UNICEF South Africa website:** <http://www.unicef.org/southafrica> for links to information resources and Child Protection Week such as:

- FIFA 2010 World Cup Research Project, [http://www.hsrc.ac.za/Research Programme-Page-80.phtml](http://www.hsrc.ac.za/Research_Programme-Page-80.phtml)
- *Rapid assessment of impact of 2010 FIFA World Cup on the abuse, exploitation and trafficking of children* (Cape Town, South Africa: Molo Songololo, 2008)
- *World Report on Violence Against Children*, <http://www.violencestudy.org/r229>
- *Trafficking in Human Beings and the 2006 World Cup in Germany* (Geneva: International Organization for Migration, 2007)
- *Faster, Higher, Stronger: Preventing Human Trafficking at the 2010 Olympics*. (Calgary, Canada: The Future Group, 2007)
- *For Better Implementation of Migrant Children's Rights in South Africa*, (Palmary, Ingrid, PhD: Forced Migration Studies Programme, UNICEF South Africa 2009)

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