

MEDIA RELEASE

Indian cricketers go to bat for children orphaned by AIDS in Durban

Durban, August 20, 2005: Joining hands in a unique partnership with UNICEF, Ravi Shastri, former Indian cricketer and Goodwill Ambassador for UNICEF India, and Indian cricketers playing in the Afro – Asia Cup matches in South Africa, found a new cause to bat for—children orphaned and affected by HIV/AIDS.

At a private pre-match encounter at Kingsmead, Durban, Anil Kumble, Virender Sehwag and Ravi, met with a group of orphaned and vulnerable children from a local children's home to learn about some of the problems children like these face on a daily basis.

South Africa and India, two great cricketing nations, are the countries with the largest number of HIV cases in the world. India currently has 5.1 million HIV positive people and South Africa 5.4 million.

“Every one needs a caring home and a loving family, more so the child orphaned or affected by HIV/AIDS,” said Ravi Shastri. “It is not in rigid institutions, but in compassionate homes that children will survive and thrive. The best gift to a child whose parents have tested positive is to ensure that his or her parents continue to live”, he added.

Shastri expressed concern about the spread of AIDS. “Everyone has the power to prevent HIV. We can also prevent stigma and let orphaned and affected children live a normal life by batting, bowling and fielding like any other child,” he said.

Referring to the situation of orphaned and vulnerable children both in India and South Africa, Anil Kumble said:

“Our compassion must be real. Compassion becomes real when we can ensure each of the affected children, their basic rights, food, health, education and above all medicines at a price that they can afford. He urged all people to unite in this endeavour. If nations and continents can come together as they did in this tournament, we individuals can come together for the love and protection all affected children. “

The children tied the red friendship band, known in India as ‘Suraksha Bandhan’ or protection bands on the wrists of the players who reciprocated the gesture to pledge their support together for the cause of HIV/AIDS.

In South Africa it is estimated that 1.1 million children have lost their parents to AIDS. Without urgent, collective action, millions more children will face enormous risks in their struggle to stay alive.

This latest UNICEF initiative with cricketers comes in the wake of earlier programmes about Polio Eradication and 'Fair Play for Girls' to promote Girls Education.

About UNICEF

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 AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments.

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