

MEDIA RELEASE

South Africa launches Unite for Children, Unite against Aids campaign

Johannesburg, 14 July 2006 – Amidst festivities on the third day of a national conference on orphans and vulnerable children, South African Minister of Social Development, Dr. Zola Skweyiya, last night launched “Unite for Children – Unite against AIDS” campaign to underscore the urgency of the issues and draw much needed attention, commitment and resources to reduce the impact of the epidemic on the nation’s children.

Urging a new energy in the country’s fight against the impact of HIV and AIDS on children, the Minister said the launch and the conference, at which 90 children gave personal testimonies about their lives, presented an opportunity to promote policy coordination and service delivery for the children affected by HIV and AIDS. He reiterated the Government’s commitment to partnership with UNICEF and called on delegates to step up action to support orphans and vulnerable children.

UNICEF Country Representative Macharia Kamau congratulated South Africa on its courage and unshakeable commitment to justice which, he said, occupies a special place in the heart of Africa and the world. “Whilst its challenges are enormous, South Africa has shown unabashed commitment to the cause of children, championing exemplary legislation in the Children’s Bill and changing the lives of some 7 million vulnerable children through its social security system,” Mr. Kamau said.

He congratulated the Government on the new Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative (ASGISA) which has placed children prominently on the nation’s economic development agenda. In a country where HIV and AIDS is redefining childhoods – UNICEF works with the Departments of Health and Social Development and other partners to respond to areas of greatest need for children in health education and social protection.

However, much remains to be done to beat the scourge of HIV and AIDS which threatens the very nature of childhood. For example, preventing the spread of HV infection, keeping parents alive and providing access to treatment and care for infants to ensure their survival, all core pillars of the global campaign, require accelerated and focused action.

In the area of paediatric treatment, some 100,000 infants need paediatric care, yet only 20,000 are getting such care. “It is inexcusable that children should die as a result lack of access to care. We need to move these numbers up”, Mr. Kamau said.

He also stressed the need to protect mothers and called on men, “the core drivers of HIV in the world” to take on the responsibility to stop transmission and protect and help prevent women and children from becoming infected.”

Some five hundred Government delegates, including Provincial Ministers, parliamentarians and others from neighbouring SADC countries, representatives of civil society filled the halls at the four-

day conference, along with partners from the private sector, traditional leadership and key bilateral donors, USAID, the French Embassy and DFID.

The conference was organised by National Action Committee for Children affected by HIV and AIDS (NACCA), led by the Department of Social Development, 11 to 14 July in Midrand, near Johannesburg, South Africa. It was the second such gathering in the country after a groundbreaking first conference on children and HIV and AIDS held with UNICEF support in 2002.

end