

**Statement by Ted Chaiban, UNICEF Representative to Sudan
at a press briefing in Khartoum, 21 December 2008**

Ladies and gentlemen of the press, may I start by thanking you so much for taking the time to join me today for this special press briefing.

As I have said on previous occasions, I consider you – as journalists – to be not only important reporters of the news, but also advocates for social change, especially in relation to promoting and raising awareness of children’s rights in Sudan.

Next month, I will move from Sudan to take up a new post as UNICEF Representative in neighbouring Ethiopia. Today I would like to take the opportunity to look back over my last three years here in Sudan, and highlight to you some of the achievements that have been made for children, and emphasise some of the challenges still facing children.

Under-five mortality rates have fallen since before the signing of the Peace Agreement – from 156 deaths per 1,000 live births to 112. Efforts to attain the Millennium Development Goal of 83 deaths in Southern Sudan, and just 41 in the northern states, have included a massive investment in polio immunization campaigns reaching 9 million children every year, and measles immunization campaigns that have protected more than 8 million children since 2005. Investment in improved water and sanitation, combined with intensified hygiene promotion activities, has seen a 97 per cent reduction in the cases of diarrhoeal disease in the northern states alone in the last year.

In 2007 UNICEF and its partners launched the Sudan Accelerated Child Survival Initiative which brought together a number of these activities, alongside distribution of bed nets to protect against malaria, de-worming activities, the promotion of hand washing and better feeding practices and other health education activities. Since its inception, ACSI has already reached more than 5.5 million children, using a combination of cost-effective, simple health activities linked to enhancing the skills of local health workers, to safeguard children’s long-term health and development.

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School enrolment itself has been another clear “peace dividend” since 2005. UNICEF estimates that today, in all Sudan, more than 5.8 million children are now enrolled in primary schools compared to less than 4 million prior to the CPA – 1.2 million of these are in Southern Sudan where education was severely damaged by the years of conflict. This amounts to a significant increase in enrolment in the northern states, and almost a trebling of enrolment in Southern Sudan.

More than 26,000 teachers have benefited from UNICEF-supported training since 2006 to enable them to deliver a higher standard of education to their students. More than 5,000 classrooms have been repaired or newly built in the same period, increasing access for students and enhancing the learning environment. Important work has been undertaken to strengthen the curriculum, and make it more responsive to children’s needs.

For too long there has been silence on the issue of HIV and AIDS in Sudan, but in the last three years I have noticed a growing acceptance that HIV is a risk faced by all Sudanese, and that there is a need for more information and education on preventing transmission of the virus, and caring for those already affected. In the last year alone more than 10 million people were reached through public information campaigns on the causes of HIV transmissions and methods of protection. For the first time next year, HIV awareness will become an integral part of the national curriculum in schools in the northern states, underlining the importance of educating our young people and helping them to protect themselves.

Across Sudan’s institutions, I have seen a growing recognition of the need to reflect children’s rights in policy and practice. From the recently signed Child Act in Southern Sudan, to last year’s revised Armed Forces Act in the north, from the establishment of Family and Child Protection Units by the Sudanese police in seven states and commitment from the chief of police to have such units in all states in the north, to the launch of a new social worker training programme covering all ten states of Southern Sudan this year, the statutory responsibility for upholding child rights is increasingly evident.

Strengthening this protective environment for children takes time. Too often, not least in periods of post-conflict transition, the focus is on delivering services for children rather than developing the systems and structures that guarantee those services as a basic right. In Sudan, I believe the steps made in the last

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three years to systematically protect children are of great significance and will ensure the focus on child rights at the heart of recovery and development can be further expanded.

Since 2007 UNICEF has been working with both the Government of National Unity and the Government of Southern Sudan, along with other development partners and local communities, to support the Integrated Community Recovery and Development initiative (ICRD) which targets communities with a high level of unmet needs – for example poor access to health, education or water services, or limited productive and livelihood assets – and builds sustainable services and capacity at the grassroots level.

The initiative focuses on the potential for local partners to take a leadership role in community development, through a framework of technical support led by the government at federal and state level to mobilize human and financial resources and oversee the partnerships between different agencies. Since 2007, UNICEF has been supporting this initiative in over 20 communities in both the north and in Southern Sudan – building on an earlier programme of Child Friendly Communities which since 2002 has supported 750 communities in the north of Sudan to develop self-managed projects for women and children.

One common aspect of both these approaches has been encouraging peace-building through development, encouraging communities from different tribal groups to work together to effectively share resources and create common opportunities.

While we invest in peacebuilding in these communities, we remain aware that for some communities in Sudan, peace seems a long way away. In Darfur, UNICEF has maintained its presence, and its support to children, amidst increasingly difficult and dangerous conditions for the humanitarian community and the population it serves. We estimate that 2.3 million children are affected by the conflict – nearly 700,000 have been born and grown up knowing nothing but war.

Under incredibly difficult circumstances, the response of the humanitarian community has undoubtedly saved millions of lives. Under-five mortality rates in Darfur have fallen consistently since the height of the crisis in 2004. Even faced by a particularly difficult hunger gap this year, acute malnutrition rates amongst children appear to be no worse than at the same period in 2007. More of the conflict-affected

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population has access to clean water than ever before – there has not been a reported case of acute watery diarrhoea or cholera in the three Darfur states since 2006. Overall primary school enrolment has risen every year since 2004.

Much of this has been the result of the combined efforts of humanitarian agencies, international and national – the same agencies that, this year alone, have suffered more than 200 attacks against their vehicles, staff or compounds, and which have seen eleven of their colleagues killed while serving the people of Darfur. Exacerbated by these challenges and ongoing difficulties with access, the underlying problems facing children in Darfur will only be resolved when sustainable peace comes to the three states.

Given the scale of humanitarian operation, we would expect to see malnutrition rates to be lower than they are – but mass displacement, irregular coverage of feeding programmes and the strain placed on families' coping mechanisms continue to weaken children.

Despite the efforts of humanitarian actors, the volatile and tense environment of the camps for the internally displaced population is no place for families to bring up their children, at risk of violence and other threats to their safety. Outbreak of fighting, and fresh displacements have meant that many children cannot be reached with vital services.

In short, despite the good work being done by humanitarians, Darfur remains a dangerous and unhealthy place for a child to grow up in.

The situation in Darfur remains just one of the challenges for children that we have not yet met.

We must do more to strengthen routine immunization programmes in Southern Sudan. This year, less than 15 per cent of children under the age of one received routine against diphtheria, whooping cough and tetanus – the benchmark for measuring routine child health care coverage. This is not enough, and undermines all the other improvements we are seeing in the health sector, such as the high rates of polio immunization and vitamin A supplementation. To respond, we must concentrate investments in primary health care systems, and the technical skills of health workers at the community level, such as the investments we are now seeing through the Accelerated Child Survival Initiative.

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There remains a chronic shortage of adequate sanitation across Sudan, which threatens the health of large sections of the population – while in 2006 and 2007 nearly a million people benefited from improved sanitation with UNICEF’s support, and this year 170,000 additional people had access for the first time to such sanitation facilities, this is not enough and we must take the issue of sanitation and improved household hygiene more seriously.

While the increasing demand for primary education is to be welcomed, we must not forget that these same children will hopefully want to move on to secondary schooling in the years to come. I am not convinced that we have in place a secondary level of education that can fully meet the expectations of these children and their families – in terms of physical access and the required number of teachers to support learning. Specifically in the north, we recommend a revision of the curriculum to allow a focus on better quality and the building a generation of young citizens that reflects the diversity of Sudan, and capitalizes on the opportunities that the CPA has created for them.

Regardless of these challenges, my period in office as UNICEF Representative in Sudan has allowed me to witness some remarkable changes for children. Having worked before in Sudan during the 1990s, it has been an honour to serve again here in the immediate years after the signing of the CPA, and to be part of a real moment of history.

While we are aware that there will be challenges in the years ahead, there are also unique opportunities during this period to do the best for children, to continue putting their needs first and to ensure that the CPA itself remains at the core of Sudan’s development – and that every child, not least those in Darfur, reaps the benefits of peace. The CPA provides the best real chance of a better, brighter future for Sudan’s children, and it has been a privilege to work in support of it.

Personally I have been immensely proud to have helped steer UNICEF through these momentous years, and enabled UNICEF and its partners to deliver life-changing services for children. Sometimes we have succeeded in our aims, sometimes we have fallen short of our goals – but at all times, we have put the best interests of children first.

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I leave Sudan knowing that – despite the remaining challenges – the lives of many children have improved over the last three years. We owe this in particular to the incredible strength, resilience and dedication shown by so many Sudanese that I have had the pleasure to meet and work with – in government, in the humanitarian and development community, amongst my own staff, and in the villages that I have visited frequently during my time as UNICEF Representative. It is these people who give me the greatest confidence for the future of Sudan, and its children.

I also know that UNICEF will continue to work for those who have yet to see the dividends of peace; the child out of school, the family displaced from its home, the mother with no access to health care, the child without a safe home environment, the girl threatened by abuse or violence, the adolescent at risk from HIV and AIDS.

These are the children for whom we will always speak up, the children to whom we all have a responsibility to protect.

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