FOREWORD

One cannot begin without mentioning the catastrophic impact of the tsunami, which has taken over 150,000 lives and devastated the livelihoods of millions in the countries surrounding the Indian Ocean. The solidarity expressed by the international community has been extraordinary, evident through the generous donations of the general public, the private sector and governments. The response to the tsunami crisis is a clear statement of what humanity can achieve when the world comes together with a common vision. A common vision shared by UNICEF.

UNICEF fully supported the 2005 Consolidated Appeal (CAP) launched in November 2004 by the United Nations in favour of 14 countries and regions affected by severe humanitarian crises.

This Humanitarian Action Report 2005 is UNICEF’s own appeal for women and children, not only in the 14 CAP situations, but also in 19 other countries where children face conflicts, post-conflict situations, natural disasters, deep consequences of HIV/AIDS epidemics and many other threats to their survival and well-being.

Because we have been present for many years in most developing countries, governments facing crisis situations often call first on UNICEF’s experience and expertise in emergency operations. Governments know that UNICEF is committed to assisting children by protecting their rights and helping to meet their basic needs wherever they are in the world. They also know that UNICEF will continue working with national authorities for children long after the emergency, when media and other attention has faded away.

UNICEF not only brings children ‘back to school’ or ‘back to vaccination’ but also makes sure that sustainable systems for children’s education and vaccination (to give just two examples) will remain in place and are developed over the long term.

Children can never wait. Even a short crisis can have deep effects on them. Health and nutrition in the early years are crucial to the physical and intellectual development of every human being – along with education and psychosocial support to help them lead fulfilled lives.

The lives of millions of children and women are at stake in all parts of the world. Children of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Colombia, children night-commuting in Northern Uganda, village children affected by conflict in Nepal, children in devastated villages in the Pool region in Congo, children orphaned by conflict and now street children of Bangui… the examples go on and on.

As they struggle to survive, I therefore ask all of you to help us increase our support to these children in emergencies. They do not deserve to be forgotten.

Thank you.

Carol Bellamy
Executive Director
INTRODUCTION

The 2005 United Nations Consolidated Appeal (CAP) was launched in November of 2004, requesting support for humanitarian assistance worldwide. UNICEF was an active participant in this process, having worked in close collaboration with our partners to ensure that the special needs of children and women – so vulnerable in times of crisis – were reflected in the appeal. As of end November 2004, a total of US$ 241,291,421 had been received – less than 60 per cent of the funds required – in response to the UNICEF segment of the previous CAP. Consequently, many vital needs remain unmet, and much remains to be done to ensure that live-saving assistance reaches all children in need, everywhere, including those caught in emergencies left out of the media spotlight.

In the meantime, the tsunami disaster has claimed more than 150,000 lives and caused widespread infrastructural damage and destruction in several countries around the Indian Ocean, and shifted the world’s attention from other critical emergencies such as Darfur. The tsunami crisis was of an unprecedented scale and therefore warrants the international community’s aid and assistance. We must not forget, however, the daily fate of millions of people, especially children and women, caught in conflict, drought and extreme poverty.

It is for this reason that UNICEF has prepared the 2005 Humanitarian Action Report. Providing a supplement to the CAP, the report presents a broader and more detailed picture of our humanitarian work on behalf of children in emergencies worldwide. It outlines UNICEF activities in seven regional offices and 33 countries – including 21 countries not covered by the CAP.

For its activities in 2005, UNICEF is requesting a total amount of US$ 762,953,813. This figure reflects the magnitude of the task ahead, and the sheer scope of the humanitarian crises we face today. With the generous support of donors, UNICEF works to shield children from the terrible harm inflicted by these crises, assisting and protecting them so they can grow, learn and live in dignity.

UNICEF has always worked in emergencies, both natural and man-made. Originally called the United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund, the organisation was created to provide humanitarian assistance to children living in a world shattered by the Second World War. Much has changed since then, but UNICEF’s fundamental mission has not. Though emergencies grow increasingly complex, their impacts ever more devastating, UNICEF remains dedicated to providing life-saving assistance to children affected by disasters, and to protecting their rights in any circumstances, no matter how difficult. In health and nutrition, water and sanitation, protection, education and HIV/AIDS, UNICEF’s Core Corporate Commitments to Children in Emergencies are more than a mission statement – they are a humanitarian imperative.

To meet this imperative, UNICEF works in collaboration with local and international partners, including governments, UN agencies, and civil society. These partnerships are crucial to ensuring comprehensive and effective delivery of humanitarian assistance. They also permit the diverse array of programmes necessary to address the full spectrum of children’s rights, a fact which is especially important in emergencies, when these rights are most under threat.

Key issues

During emergencies, children are especially vulnerable to disease, malnutrition and violence. In the last decade, more than 2 million children have died as a direct result of armed conflict, and more than three times that number have been permanently disabled or seriously injured. An estimated 20 million children have been forced to flee their homes, and more than 1 million have been orphaned or separated from their families. Some 300,000 child soldiers – boys and girls under the age of 18 – are involved in more than 30 conflicts worldwide. UNICEF focuses on these children and their families – on the essential interventions required for protection, to save lives and to ensure the rights of all children, everywhere.

The chaos and insecurity of war threatens or destroys access to food, shelter, social support and health care, and results in increased vulnerability in communities, especially for children. Measles, diarrhoea, acute respiratory infections, malaria and malnutrition are the major killers of children during humanitarian
crises. Therefore, emergency immunization is one of UNICEF’s priority interventions, along with vitamin A supplementation and therapeutic feeding centres. UNICEF also works to ensure safe supplies of drinking water, and to improve sanitary conditions for communities and the displaced.

When children are uprooted by armed conflict, they are cut off from social support, family and schools. The loss of education robs young people of the stability and security so vital to their healthy development. Rehabilitating schools helps rebuild a protective environment for children by establishing normal routines within communities threatened by violence and war, providing a place for children to learn, play and simply be children. Schools offer a place for adolescents to develop their potential, for example by participating in peace-building efforts, which can help build their self-esteem while supporting community reconciliation. UNICEF-sponsored Back-to-School programmes thus help heal the wounds of war, while providing young people with the vital tools they need to succeed later in life.

Sexual and gender-based violence are a disturbingly common feature of emergencies. In situations of armed conflict, girls and women are routinely targeted in campaigns of sexual violence, including rape, mutilation, prostitution, forced pregnancy and sexual slavery. UNICEF works to protect children and women from gender-based violence, focusing its efforts in three areas: prevention; protection; and recovery and reintegration.

Many humanitarian crises cause the forced displacement of families, with children separated from their caregivers and at grave risk of violence, abuse, abduction and exploitation. A key part of UNICEF’s work in humanitarian crises therefore focuses on child protection, including tracing and reunification programmes for separated children. UNICEF also works to prevent the recruitment of children into armed groups, and to ensure that those who have been recruited can benefit from demobilisation programmes.

Landmines and unexploded ordnance often impede post-conflict development and reconstruction, blocking access to much-needed resources and posing significant risks to refugee and internally displaced children fleeing from conflict or returning home. Mine risk education activities remain the most effective short-term solution to keeping displaced children and women safe.

Emergency conditions, including sexual violence and exploitation, displacement and the presence of armed groups, increase the risk of transmission of HIV/AIDS. UNICEF promotes access to information and basic care for HIV/AIDS to affected communities, including education messages for young people and post-rape and psychosocial health training for community health-care workers.

The impact of UNICEF actions

UNICEF’s work has resulted in significant improvements for children and women affected by natural disasters and complex emergencies worldwide. In India, for example, when monsoon floods in July of 2004 affected almost 10 million people, UNICEF provided urgently-needed supplies such as water-purification tablets, bleaching powder and oral rehydration salts.

In the Darfur region of Sudan, UNICEF has established 127 health clinics, helped to vaccinate more than two million children against measles, and inoculated more than 1 million children against polio. Thirty feeding clinics and 699 classrooms have been set up. Working alongside its partners, UNICEF has provided more than 800,000 people with access to safe water. Several challenges remain to ensure that even minimum basic needs of the children and women are met.

Within 48 hours of the massive earthquake in Bam, Iran, UNICEF was able to deliver two planeloads of essential supplies, including health kits and obstetric kits to help 120,000 people, more than 14,000 blankets, water purification tablets, water tanks, generators and other shelter supplies – a total of 60 tons worth of relief supplies. In the following days, UNICEF further provided 416 School-in-a-Box kits to benefit 33,280 pupils, each kit containing sufficient school materials for 80 students. We also distributed thousands of sets of winter clothing, including sweaters, boots and socks.

In Liberia, UNICEF has been instrumental in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process for children associated with fighting forces. Thus far, more than 1,800 children have benefited from demobilization programmes, and UNICEF hopes to reach thousands more in the coming months. The
Back-to-School campaign has enabled over 600,000 students to return to school, bringing a sense of stability and hope to many urban and rural communities across the country.

Our appeal to our donors

Successes like these are a dramatic illustration of the life-saving interventions donor support allows us to provide. Yet meeting the urgent demands of children and their families has stretched UNICEF resources, both financial and human. A number of high-profile emergencies, such as those in Darfur and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, have seized media attention – often justifiably, as some of these emergencies have witnessed grave and systematic violations of human rights, including the rights of children. Yet away from the glare of the media spotlight, a number of ‘forgotten emergencies’ continue to smoulder unnoticed. UNICEF is committed to assisting and protecting all children, everywhere, including those caught in forgotten crises. Meeting this commitment – and doing so effectively, with high standards of staffing and response – is an enormous challenge, one we cannot meet without the generous support of our donors. The US$ 762.9 million requested here will help us defend the rights of our most vulnerable and precious resource – our children.