Dear readers!
I invite you to read this summer issue of our newsletter. Summer has started with one of the most significant days for promotion of child’s rights. On 1 June Turkmenistan, as other countries in the region, celebrated the International Child Protection Day!

UNICEF’s approach recognizes that all children are entitled to protection. Child protection issues intersect with every one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – from poverty reduction to getting children into school, from eliminating gender inequality to reducing child mortality. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) outlines the fundamental rights of children, including the right to be protected from economic exploitation and harmful work, from all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse, and from physical or mental violence, as well as ensuring that children will not be separated from their family against their will. These rights are further refined by two Optional Protocols, one on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and the other on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

UNICEF works with the Government of Turkmenistan to build a protective environment for children to help prevent and respond to violence, abuse and exploitation. The work involves such components as strengthening government commitment and capacity to fulfil children’s right to protection; promoting the establishment and enforcement of adequate legislation; developing children’s life skills, knowledge and participation; and building capacity of families and communities to protect children from harmful practices and other risks.

We hope you will find this issue interesting.

Mahboob Shareef
UNICEF Turkmenistan Representative

National Children’s Forum 2007

About two hundred children from all over Turkmenistan gathered in Ashgabat on May 31 for the Third National Children’s Forum to debate, discuss and voice their opinions on matters relating to full realization of child rights. The Forum jointly organized by the United Nation’s Children’s Fund and the Government of Turkmenistan started on the eve of the International Child Protection Day, a date reminding everyone to respect children’s rights and build a humane and just society.

Read about the Children’s Forum on page 2.
“I want our opinions to be heard!” says Maral Kurbandurdyeva, one of the participants to Turkmenistan’s Children’s Forum.

“When politicians make decisions, they should listen to the children first because we have different opinions. Sometimes politicians forget that they were children too,” says Maral. The 17-year-old from Lebap region in eastern Turkmenistan was one of almost 200 children from across the country to take part in the National Children’s Forum organised jointly by the National Youth Organization and UNICEF.

During the two-day forum children aged between 12 and 17 learnt about child participation and child rights.

“We have learnt that children have rights and responsibilities and that all children have equal rights,” says Maral. “For example, children with disabilities have the same rights and should receive the same education as other children. We should also help children with disabilities.”

“I think it would be good if we learnt about rights in school, because all children should know that they have rights,” says Sasha Zasorin, a 15-year-old from Mary province.

“At school we are sometimes asked about our opinions, but the teachers, are not always listening to us,” adds Maral. Both teenagers say they will do their best to share their experiences from the forum with the friends back home and to encourage them to take part in decision-making.

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Both Sasha and Maral have opinions about what is good and what needs to be done about the conditions for children in their country. “For example, it is good that we receive maternity allowances and that orphan children are taken care of. But we should have better school books and it should be easier to study at the university,” says Maral. Sasha thinks it is good that health care is free, but that health care for children should be improved. What both of them really want to see are more courses, activities and summer camps for youngsters.

“This is very important so that children are not being neglected and are not idle,” reflects Sasha.

“It is also important that more jobs are created for young people. Some of my friends do worry about these things, and I think about it sometimes too”.

Sasha and Maral are happy that they now will attend ten years of school after the government recently added a tenth year of basic education. But they are already thinking about further education.

“We have free education which is good, but we also want more books about foreign countries,” says Maral.

“And there should be more support from the state for us to enter university,” according to Sasha.

“We should also have opportunities to study abroad. I would like to see different cultures and it is good to learn more about the world,” adds Maral.

So will the policy makers in Turkmenistan listen to what the children at the forum have to say? The conclusions from the Forum have been consolidated and sent as a letter to the government.

“I really hope they will listen to us and add some of our decisions in the laws of the country,” says Sasha.

Maybe next year the participants at the Forum will celebrate the impact made by Maral, Sasha and their fellow decision-makers!
Child survival messages take to the skies in Turkmenistan

Child survival messages are to be promoted among millions of Turkmenistan Airlines passengers thanks to a new partnership between the air carrier and UNICEF.

Around 1.2 million people who fly on the airline’s domestic flights each year will find publications, video and audio promoting important child well-being messages. The subjects include: immunization, diarrhoea, safe motherhood, exclusive breastfeeding, avian influenza, early childhood development, hygiene, family planning, HIV/AIDS prevention, malaria, and other child health-related matters.

“We believe we can really make a difference by reaching all the parents who regularly fly with Turkmenistan Airlines. This initiative represents an innovative approach to improving the welfare of children in this country,” said UNICEF Representative in Turkmenistan, Mahboob Shareef.

The information will be made available on board all Turkmenistan Airlines flights and in the country’s airport waiting lounges. The aim is to promote good child care practices and ultimately change parent behaviours to improve the well-being of children. The partnership is a collaboration between UNICEF, Turkmenistan Airlines (Turkmenhowayollary), the Ministry of Health and Medical Industry, of Turkmenistan. The collaboration began with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on 20 June 2007 between UNICEF Representative, Mahboob Shareef, the Minister of Health and Medical Industry of Turkmenistan, Ata Serdarov, and Head of Turkmenistan Airlines, Gurbanniyaz Turkishev.

Messages to be disseminated by Turkmenistan Airlines will be drawn from the “Facts for Life” book developed by a number of international development agencies, including UNICEF. This is a publication widely used by health workers in Turkmenistan. It is also envisaged that dissemination of messages will go beyond domestic sectors and gradually expand to international flights.

This alliance between UNICEF and Turkmenistan Airlines is an example of how the corporate sector can embrace social responsibility and contribute to the development of a country, and particularly, to improving the well-being of children who represent one third of Turkmenistan’s population.

Turkmenistan children produce One Minutes Jr. videos on child rights

Young people from the National Institute of Culture and the Youth Organization of Turkmenistan used their creativity and artistic skills to produce short video films on children’s rights at the “One Minutes Jr. Video” workshop that was held during the week of 14-18 May in Ashgabat.

Organized by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the Ministry of Culture and TV and Radio Broadcasting of Turkmenistan, the workshop aimed at encouraging youth expression and motivating children to articulate their opinions about their rights, communities, environment, and about life itself. The workshop created an opportunity for young people to speak out and make their voices heard by a broad and diverse audience, and to provide a space for informal learning, innovation and creativity. It also stimulated children’s networking, debate and discussion, and bridged the gap between the media, the arts and young people.

In the course of one week young people developed their own scripts and produced films on child rights in various sites of Ashgabat, including schools, parks, stadiums, markets and other places. Young filmmakers were limited in time as they produced only sixty second long videos but they were not limited in freedom to express their creativity which is a basic right of every child. The ultimate goal of the workshop was to give participants a meaningful experience that their opinions and concerns do matter and that they have a right to voice them.

Twenty short video films on different aspects of children’s rights were the outcome of such an innovative workshop. The films were later launched at the National Children’s Forum dedicated to Child Protection Day and will also be broadcast on national TV. UNICEF organizes “One Minutes Jr. Video” workshops throughout the world in close partnership with the One Minutes Foundation and the European Cultural Foundation. In many parts of the world one minute videos are broadcast on TV and used as a tool for social change.

Visit The One Minutes Jr. website at http://www.theoneminutesjr.org
UNICEF Turkmenistan events and activities

Avian Influenza prevention  The Health Information Centre under the Ministry of Health and Medical Industry of Turkmenistan and UNICEF organized a round table in June on the results of the study on knowledge, attitude and practices on Avian Influenza prevention in Turkmenistan. The results of the study conducted among the schoolchildren and women in Balkan and Akhal velayat and Ashgabat showed that population have a general knowledge on avian flu virus but needs more information on ways of prevention. The participants comprising of various government agencies discussed how to effectively organize social mobilization activities on avian flu prevention among the urban and rural population and how their respective agencies could play an important role in disseminating information to people. UNICEF and the Health Information Centre have produced leaflets and posters on avian flu prevention and hygiene practices. More materials will be produced later this year.

Early Childhood Development A series of trainings on early childhood development and preparedness to school were conducted during the month of June in all five velayats of Turkmenistan. The initiative is supported by the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and Medical Industry and UNICEF. The trainings for family doctors, doctor’s assistants, nurses and kindergarten teachers aimed at improving parenting skills and skills to prepare children for schooling. Participants were given a checklist specifically designed for identifying development scale of children of preschool age. The checklist which serves as ECD standards will be used by health workers and kindergarten teachers from now on. The trainings also served as a good opportunity to launch UNICEF and the Ministry of Education’s landmark publication “Parents’ Guide to Early Childhood Development”. More materials on ECD, such as video films and publications are being developed for population’s use.

HIV/AIDS prevention “Unite for Children, United against AIDS” was the slogan for the country wide series of workshops on effective organization of HIV/AIDS prevention information campaigns. The workshops were organized in May by the Health Information Centre, AIDS Prevention Centre, UNAIDS and UNICEF. The workshops aimed at creating greater awareness among the government agencies regarding the issues surrounding HIV/AIDS. Participants learned about the effective methods of disseminating information on healthy lifestyles to different audiences. Prevention of infection among adolescents and young people, prevention of mother-to-child transmission, provision of paediatric treatment and protection of orphans and vulnerable children affected by AIDS were also discussed as part of the global campaign “Unite for Children, Unite against AIDS”.

Central Asian Education Forum 2007 Turkmenistan participated at the 6th Central Asian Education Forum in Astana on 26-28 June. Forum was hosted with the support from UNICEF and UNESCO. Countries reported on the mid-term evaluation of the 10 years of the implementation of the Education for All (EFA) global programme and discussed further cooperation between the Central Asian countries on education. Delegates assessed the progress achieved in carrying out the tasks and objectives announced at the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000. At the Dakar World Forum participants had pledged to achieve tasks and objectives by 2015 within the framework of the EFA programme. The Education Ministry of Turkmenistan, which hosted and worked on the 2006 forum, officially passed on the Forum flag to the Kazakh Education and Science Ministry to represent the continuity of the mission.