

Speech to mark the Launching of the State of the World's Children Report, 2006 The Excluded and Invisible Children of the World

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Honorable Minister

Distinguished Guests

Young People

Colleagues in the media

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Today UNICEF launches its State of the World's Children Report 2006 for its 60th Anniversary to bring the world's attention to the plight of **hundreds of millions of excluded and invisible** children the world over

You might ask, "How can there be so many children excluded and invisible?" You must also be asking, "What do you mean by excluded and invisible?" And, "How could this problem have become so important?"

Excluded children include children who for example have no formal identity such as those who lack birth registration, are deprived of parental and family care such as trafficked children, orphans and other vulnerable, children assume adult roles prematurely such as child soldiers, or children who must care for other children as a result of the AIDS pandemic, and are commercially exploited, such as those who are forced into the worst forms of child labour.

Let's consider some of the alarming details -- Every year, globally, 55% of births are unregistered. In Sub Saharan Africa alone 18 million births are unregistered.

In the developing world 143 million are orphans. In 2003 alone 16 million children were orphaned – AIDS orphans include 15 million children. In Ethiopia there is much work to be done. A joint national survey in 2004 identified the overall number of Ethiopian orphans to be an estimated 4.6 million, or 13% of all the children in Ethiopia which will rise to 14.8% of all children by 2010. In absolute terms, this is the largest number of orphans in any country in the world. About 800,000 to 1.2 million (according to

MOLSA 2004; according to NPA on Sex, Abuse and Exploitation 2005) were estimated to have been orphaned by HIV and AIDS. This number is expected to continue to grow,

Globally, Street children are estimated globally to be in the tens of millions. Current estimates put the number of detained children globally to be approximately 1 million. The last overall study of street children in Ethiopia in 1991 estimated that there were some 100,000 street children in the country. In 1996, UNICEF estimated that there were about 150,000 children on the street and that they were increasing by as many as 5,000 a year.

Globally, Child soldier estimates are currently one quarter of a million.

One in three girls in the developing world is married before 18. In the poorest countries, the ratio rises to one in every two girls.

For hazardous labour an estimated 171 million children are involved globally – 73 million are under the age of 73 million.

The consequences of these alarming figures is child misery beyond imagination, wide-scale exploitation of the those who are most vulnerable and the entrenchment of poverty and under development – a social time bomb and a shameful stain on the moral fiber of our society.

Invisible and excluded children become prime targets for exploitation, abuse, manipulation and psychological and physical violence.

You might ask, "What are the root causes of exclusion and subsequent invisibility?"

The reasons are well known.

Chief amongst these reasons is DISCRIMINATION due to gender, ethnicity and disability. Lets us consider just one of these – gender and its impact on Education – globally for every 100 boys in primary school 117 girls miss out largely due to gender discrimination. More than 40 countries have failed to meet the Millennium Development Goal of gender parity in primary education by 2005.

POVERTY is another basic cause – children in the poorest countries face far higher risks of death, illness and malnutrition. For example 1 in every 3 infants – 42 million children – is moderately or severely underweight.

Another reason is the INCOME INEQUALITY in countries across the developing world children from the poorest households are at least twice as likely to die before the age of five.

A further reason is HIV/AIDS – every minute a child under the age of 15 dies because of AIDS, 15 million children have already lost one or both parents to AIDS.

ARMED CONFLICT is another important cause – nine of the 12 countries where 1 in 5 children dies before the age of 5 have suffered a major armed conflict in the last 5 years – the chaos of armed conflict disrupts child survival and well being interrupting access to vital services, education and health.

How can we meet our commitments to children and overturn this tide of global shame.

Systems to **research, monitor and report** on the nature and extent of child abuse -- Ethiopia is about to launch a new system of statistical reporting called ETHIOINFO. UNICEF has its partners have undertaken a VOICES of Youth campaign to give prominent visibility to young people especially Orphans and Vulnerable Children and what they aspire to. In Ethiopia monitoring systems must be strengthened.

Legislation that is first created and then enforced - will go a long way to giving children at birth a legitimate identity and to providing protection from abuses and exploitation. UNICEF and its partners in Ethiopia have made vigorous efforts and noted significant success in creating appropriate legislation for child and women protection. But much crucial work is needed in the area of Birth Registration – a major root cause of vulnerability and invisibility. Donors must recognize the need for support to legislative and other crucial foundation building in Ethiopia.

Financing and Capacity-Building can be the major determinant in helping us meet our commitments – Ethiopia will have received over \$ 100 million for support to children from UNICEF in 2005 approximately, a five fold increase in resources. Child focused budgets combined with strengthening of institutions that serve children will deliver results.

Finally,

Many of the solutions for children are already known and proven. What is needed is for us as a global community to say, "Enough is enough". Governments, communities, families must do more to prevent abuse and exploitation from happening in the first place and then must act to protect children who fall victim. Laws must hold perpetrators to account. Attitudes and practices that are harmful to children must be challenged and children must have access to information and life skills including a VOICE to be heard so that they too can play a part in protecting themselves and developing a better society.

I commend the Report to you and urge you all to expand and strengthen efforts to develop a comprehensive and effective protective environment for children, the world over and in Ethiopia in particular.