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UNICEF AND UNAIDS APPLAUD MILESTONE IN FORGING COORDINATED GLOBAL RESPONSE TO GROWING CRISIS OF CHILDREN ORPHANED DUE TO AIDS

Major international partners agree to strategic framework for the protection, care and support of orphans and other children made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS

GENEVA, 21 October 2003 – A consensus agreement on how to significantly scale up the global response to the millions of children orphaned and made vulnerable by AIDS marks critical progress, UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy and UNAIDS Chief Peter Piot said today.

The UN agency heads were speaking at a high-level meeting involving key international partners working to address the complex and far-reaching impacts HIV/AIDS is having on millions of children and adolescents orphaned by the disease. Eight out of ten live in sub-Saharan Africa, adding to the millions of children orphaned due to conflicts and other causes. Donors, UN agencies and international non-governmental organizations participated in the two-day talks.

By 2001, 14 million children had lost one or both parents to AIDS, and many millions more were affected. Risk factors such as missed opportunities for education, ill health and abuse and exploitation threaten their most fundamental rights and keep them enmeshed in poverty. The pandemic is deepening poverty in entire communities and societies, with children often being the first to feel the brunt of the deprivation.

“The crisis of orphans and other children made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS is massive, growing and long-term. But two-thirds of countries hard-hit by the disease do not have strategies to ensure the children affected grow up with even the bare minimum of protection and care,” Bellamy said.

Partners expect to discuss new costing estimates for the orphan response. According to UNAIDS, about US$1 billion is required annually to strengthen community-based care of orphans and ensure that they stay in school.

“The number of children orphaned by AIDS is projected to rise to at least 25 million by 2010,” said Dr Piot. “Yet we know how to prevent this and we know how much it will cost. The challenge now is for countries to prioritize the implementation of strategies that keep parents alive, protect children from violence and exploitation, ensure their good health, and keep them in school,” he said.

The strategic framework agreed to by all partners focuses on providing direct support to families and communities, ensuring that children orphaned or affected by AIDS have equal access to essential services, particularly schooling, and to ensure that they live and grow up in protective environments.

"Community groups, particularly religious organizations have been at the heart of the on-the-ground response to date," said James Cairns of the World Conference of Religions for Peace. "The framework recognizes and supports the contributions of people of faith in affected communities working across religious boundaries. It should help us work more closely with other key actors in partnership for the ultimate benefit of these children."

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