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UNICEF CALLS FOR ERADICATION OF COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN

New Report Says Millions of Children are Sexually Exploited

GENEVA / NEW YORK, 12 December 2001 - UNICEF called today for a coordinated global effort to stamp out the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

“Millions of children throughout the world are being bought and sold like chattel and used as sex slaves,” declared UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy. “This is an utterly intolerable violation of children’s rights.”

“Zero tolerance means ending the trafficking of children, their sale and barter and imprisonment and torture,” Bellamy stated. “It means stamping out every horrible facet of the commercial sexual exploitation of children.”

Bellamy’s comments come as UNICEF releases a new report on the commercial sexual exploitation of children, “Profiting from Abuse.” The report details the scope and toll of the problem and includes testimonials from abused and exploited women and children. It is being released in conjunction with the Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, which takes place 17-20 December in Yokohama, Japan. UNICEF is co-sponsoring the Congress with ECPAT International, the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Government of Japan.

The underlying causes of commercial sexual exploitation of children include poverty, gender discrimination, war, organized crime, globalization, greed, traditions and beliefs, family dysfunction, and the drug trade.

Armed conflict creates special risks of sexual violence and exploitation for women and children. Desperation may force women and children into prostitution. Refugees are vulnerable to demands for sex by camp officials, border guards, police officers, and military personnel. In war-torn Colombia and Sierra Leone, girls as young as 12 have been forced to sexually submit themselves to armed soldiers in order to defend their families.

“There are few more shocking violations of children’s rights than sexual abuse and exploitation,” declared Bellamy. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, the landmark UN treaty ratified by 191 nations, states that a child has the right to be free from abuse, to receive an education, and to play — all of which are casualties of exploitation. The damage endures long after the violations: sexually exploited children suffer harm — sexual, physical and emotional — that can last a lifetime or result in their early death.

Commercial sexual exploitation of children and trafficking are two elements of the more pervasive problem of sexual abuse. Victims are at high risk of unwanted pregnancies and of contracting HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. The minority of children who do manage to escape the sex trade face social stigma, family rejection, shame, fear of retribution, and the loss of future economic prospects.

Confronting these forces calls for leadership. Laws are needed to promote children’s well-being and protect them from abuse. These laws must be enforced with tough criminal penalties against abusers. And there must be alternatives that enable children and families to live in dignity.

Education is vital to preventing sexual exploitation of children. It empowers children to protect themselves, and schools can teach children to avoid high-risk situations.

Transnational partnerships are required to tackle this global crime. Important recent treaties include the International Labour Organization Convention 182 passed in 1999 that bans the worst forms of child labour. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, passed in 2000, prohibits the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography.

UNICEF is addressing the underlying causes of child sexual abuse by working to improve access to and quality of education, raising awareness, and advocating for children's rights. UNICEF supports programmes that help communities become the first line of protection for children, and is also advocating strengthened legislation and legal enforcement to stop the commercial sex trade of children. In Cambodia, a UNICEF-supported programme rescued 148 victims from brothels, and 260 at-risk street children received recovery services and reintegration assistance. In Albania, UNICEF works with a local non-governmental organization that runs reintegration classes for street children, 80 per cent of whom have been exploited in Greece or Italy.

In Kenya, an NGO named SOLWODI (Solidarity with Women in Distress) uses peer educators to reach women and girls at risk of being drawn into the sex trade, and offers them counselling, home visits and education on issues such as HIV/AIDS, drug abuse, women's rights, and vocational skills.

Commercial sexual exploitation of children is a clandestine scourge, so accurate statistics are hard to come by. Because children are frequently shuttled through underground networks of traffickers, most sexual exploitation of children never comes to the attention of government authorities. In many countries, it is not even recognized as a problem. Nevertheless, it is estimated that approximately one million children (mainly girls) enter the multi-billion dollar commercial sex trade every year. As the following estimates reveal, this is a global issue:

Children and women subjected to commercial sexual exploitation:

100,000 in the Philippines
400,000 in India
100,000 in Taiwan
200,000 in Thailand
244,000-325,000 in the United States
100,000 in Brazil
35,000 in West Africa
175,000 in Eastern & Central Europe

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For further information on the Yokohama Congress, preparatory consultations, and story/interview opportunities, contact Congress Media Advisor June Kane on:

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For Yokohama press accreditation: <http://www.focalpointngo.org/yokohama/pressinfo/accreditation.htm>

For Broadcasters: A new B-roll videotape is available that highlights the commercial sexual exploitation of children and various programmes to prevent it. This 38-minute B-roll includes strong material filmed recently in Albania, the Philippines, Sierra Leone, India and Nicaragua. To preview scripts and sequences or to order a tape please visit: <http://www.unicef.org/broadcast/brolls/csec/>