

Media Advisory No. 2

First Arab African Forum to discuss Sexual Exploitation of Children begins Wednesday 24 October Three Studies shed light on the situation in Arab and African countries

(Rabat, Thursday, 18 October, 2001) For the first time, Arab and African countries meet to discuss the issue of sexual exploitation of children and formulate common regional strategies. This will take place at *The Arab African Forum Against Sexual Exploitation of Children*, in Rabat 24-26 October 2001.

Through plenary sessions and working groups, the Forum will discuss the issue of sexual exploitation of children, in light of the six themes to be address during the *2nd World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children*, to be held in Yokohama, Japan, 17-20 December, 2001, with a special focus in this Forum on the types of constraints peculiar to Arab and African countries. The six themes of the 2nd World Congress are: 1) Who is “the sex exploiter?” 2) Child Pornography; 3) An important partner: the private sector; 4) Legal frameworks and action against CSEC; 5) Trafficking of children for sexual exploitation; and 6) Progress and problems: action since the first *World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation*, which took place in Stockholm, 1996.

Three regional studies have been conducted to shed light on the situation in Arab and African countries. These studies will serve as springboards for work during the Forum.

In Eastern and Southern Africa, the study shows that one of the major factors fuelling sexual exploitation in the region is the high and increasing numbers of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS, who are forced into the streets and into child labour, including sex work.

A study examining the situation in 20 Arab countries in the Middle East and North Africa shows that children are exposed to different forms of exploitation, including: intra-familial violence and sexual abuses, genital mutilations of girls, the premature marriage of young girls, and the conscription of child-soldiers. The situation analysis also shows that, despite child protection efforts, there is an absence of national plans of action against sexual exploitation of children, due to cultural resistance and the absence of a full understanding of the problem.

So, far, some 35 Arab and African countries are expected to take part in the Forum. The estimated 200 participants will include representatives of Arab and African countries, as well as ECPAT International (End Child Prostitution, Pornography And Trafficking of Children), the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF, civil society organizations, the media, and young people involved in prevention of the sexual exploitation of children in their countries.

This Forum -- hosted by the Government of Morocco, and supported by UNICEF Morocco Country Office, in cooperation with three UICEF Regional Offices (the Middle East and North Africa, Eastern and Southern Africa, and West and Central Africa) -- is one of a series of regional consultations being held in preparations for the *2nd World Congress*. The Forum will be held under the Patronage of Her Royal Highness Princess Lalla Meriem of Morocco, and the presidency of the Moroccan Minister in Charge of Wome’s Affairs.

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