

## World Not Doing Nearly Enough to Protect Children Affected by AIDS

*Third Global Partners Forum Focuses on Protection, HIV Prevention, Treatment, Care*

**London, Feb 9 2006-** The global response to children affected by HIV and AIDS does not come close to matching the enormity of their rapidly expanding plight. By 2010 an estimated 18 million children in sub-Saharan Africa alone will be orphaned by the disease. Children living with sick and dying parents remain extremely vulnerable, and an estimated 4 million infected children do not have access to appropriate treatments.

This year's Global Partners Forum, hosted by UNICEF and the UK Department for International Development (DFID), has brought together high level representatives from 90 international organisations, NGOs and governments in an effort to ramp up practical responses to the suffering of millions of children caught in the AIDS pandemic.

"Children are missing from the world's response to the global AIDS pandemic," said UNICEF Executive Director Ann M. Veneman. "Less than 10 per cent of the children who have been orphaned or made vulnerable by AIDS receive public support or services."

This year's forum will focus on ways to:

- Strengthen the capacity of families to protect and care for orphans and other children made vulnerable by HIV.
- Mobilize community-based responses to support affected families.
- Ensure equal and full access to education.
- Guarantee universal access to HIV prevention, treatment and care.

The forum will underline that communities and families should be the primary beneficiaries of an increased global AIDS response. A mix of economic assistance should be provided including direct cash grants for affected families, small loans and funds to pay community outreach workers.

"This is a crucial time in our global efforts to tackle HIV and AIDS- and a time to turn commitments into action," said UK International Development Minister Gareth Thomas. "We must ensure that the needs of children are central to this and ensure that communities can fulfill their potential."

Care and support for vulnerable children should not be limited to their material needs. More effort is required to provide orphans and other children traumatized by AIDS with counseling and psychosocial support. To date, non-governmental and faith-based organizations as well as community groups have pioneered assistance to children and communities. Funds are needed to expand proven responses from pilot interventions to nationally scaled programmes.

## Improving Access to Education

Education is one of the most important weapons against the spread of AIDS. The evidence for this is growing: in countries with severe epidemics, young people with higher levels of education are more likely to use condoms and less likely to engage in casual sex than less-educated peers. Educated children are also more likely to escape the poverty trap that ensnares orphans and children forced to take care of sick or dying parents.

However school fees remain a powerful barrier to educational access for the very children most at risk in many countries affected by AIDS. Ending school fees at the primary level is an essential step to achieving universal education. It can only be sustained if the international community increases funding to governments making the bold move to abolish school fees. With the abolition of primary school fees in Kenya, for instance, 1.3 million new pupils have poured into class rooms.

Ensuring that girls get equal access to education is also vital, especially as girls are disproportionately affected by HIV and AIDS. The UK government is a key partner in the United Nations Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI), a UNICEF-led effort to narrow the gender gap in education.

In addition, this year's forum will focus on steps to ensure that children come as close as possible to gaining universal access to appropriate treatment and care by 2010; to prevent the spread of the disease among adolescents and young people; and to stop the transmission of the virus from mothers to their babies.

"Twenty five years into the epidemic, considerable progress has been made in mobilizing the world against AIDS," said Dr Peter Piot, Executive Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). "But when it comes to accessing HIV prevention and treatment services, children and young people continue to be left behind. If we are to break the cycle of HIV infection, children and young people must know how to protect themselves from HIV."

## Legislative Protection

The forum will also examine ways to:

- Advocate for changes in law and policies governing the protection of vulnerable children.
- Raise awareness and reduce stigma for children affected by AIDS.

Improving systems of birth and death registration would have a positive impact. Currently it is difficult for children to obtain official records proving that they are orphans, which would make them eligible for such benefits as food aid or free medical care.

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Background:

The Global Partners Forum was established in 2003 to give momentum to fulfilling global commitments for children affected by HIV and AIDS laid out in the United Nations General Assembly 2001 Declaration of Commitments on HIV/AIDS and the Millennium Development Goals.

In October 2005, UNICEF, UNAIDS and other partners launched the UNITE FOR CHILDREN , UNITE AGAINST AIDS Campaign pushing for a faster response to achieve these global commitments around children and AIDS.