



## Juvenile Justice Comes Center-Stage at MENA Workshop

*UN meeting focuses on how children are treated by national justice systems*

AMMAN, 13 May 2009 – UNICEF and the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime today concluded a workshop on the role of accurate data in ensuring that children's rights are respected under juvenile justice systems.

"Children who come into conflict with the law have the same rights as all other children and these rights must be respected," said Trish Hiddleston, UNICEF Child Protection Advisor for the Middle East and North Africa. "The way children are treated by national justice systems and security institutions is not just integral to the achievement of the rule of law. It is also an indication of how much children's rights are fulfilled."

Held under the patronage of Jordan Ministry of Justice, the four-day event brought together more than 55 government officials from eight countries in the region: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, the occupied Palestinian territory, Sudan and Yemen.

The event sought to ensure better protection of children going to justice system by:

- Increasing knowledge amongst key juvenile justice decision-makers of the indicators used by UNODC and UNICEF, their value and use;
- Increasing countries' capacity to identify and assess the strengths and weaknesses of current data collection by police, courts and places of detention;
- Increasing inter-ministerial cooperation; and
- Developing national plans to improve information systems for indicator measurement.

"Building national data collection and information systems helps adapting policy to reality and making justice more effective and humane, by reducing delays and risks of children being "lost in the system," said Anna Giudice Saget, UNODC officer responsible for juvenile justice. "The ultimate objective is to protect children from maltreatment and prevent them from getting involved in crime."

Programmes addressing the issue of justice for children should be guided by a set of principles including the need to ensure that the best interests of the child is given primary consideration; that all children are treated fairly and equally, without discrimination; that they are protected from abuse, exploitation and violence; and that they are treated with dignity and compassion.

During the workshop, facilitated by experts from UNICEF and UNODC, participants reviewed case studies, analysed juvenile justice systems in their own countries, and learned about juvenile justice tools and indicators developed globally.

They also visited a juvenile office at a police station and a juvenile court in Amman.

"We hope that delegations will go back to their respective countries of origin with a plan to strengthen national information systems thus contributing to the achievement of the rule of law and the realization of children's rights," Hiddleston said.

## **Background**

**The Inter -Agency Panel on Juvenile Justice ( IPJJ)**, of which UNICEF and UNODC are members, endorsed 15 indicators for measuring and presenting specific information about children in conflict with the law. Some of these indicators include: children in detention, child deaths in detention, separation from adults, contacts with parents and family, aftercare, regular independent inspections, complaints mechanism, and prevention. The Interagency Panel on Juvenile Justice is a group mandated by United Nations Economic and Social Council resolution 1997/30 and 2007/23 to coordinate “technical advice and assistance in juvenile justice.” It is composed of seven United Nations bodies including UNICEF and UNODC and seven non-governmental organizations .

## **About UNICEF**

UNICEF is on the ground in over 150 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world’s largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments.

## **About UNODC:**

UNODC - a global leader in the fight against illicit drugs and international crime - operates in all regions of the world through a network of 23 field offices. UNODC assists States in developing strategies to reform all aspects of their criminal justice systems, with particular emphasis on assisting vulnerable groups particularly women and children. Through its field office network, UNODC has developed projects in the areas of juvenile justice, penal reform and support to victims.

In the area of Juvenile justice, UNODC, as the custodian on UN standards and norms on crime prevention and criminal justice, supports countries in bringing national juvenile justice systems in harmony with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Standards and Norms in Juvenile Justice. UNODC has provided long-term sustainable technical assistance to build national capacity in the area of justice for children including in the MENA region – in Lebanon, Jordan, and Egypt. UNODC relies on voluntary contributions, mainly from Governments.

## **For further information, please contact:**

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