



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Joint Press Release

Pretoria, 19 November 2009

.../for immediate release

Recognising the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

On 20 November 2009, the international community will celebrate the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This international Convention, signed by 193 countries including South Africa and the 27 Member States of the European Union, was adopted on 20 November 1989 and sets out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of children to guide the position of global efforts in dealing with child rights.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child spells out the basic human rights that children everywhere should enjoy, including the right to survival; the right to develop to the fullest; the right to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and the right to participate fully in family, cultural and social life. The Convention protects children's rights by setting standards in health care; education; and legal, civil and social services. Over the past 20 years, the Convention has inspired changes in laws to better protect children and adolescents in countries across all regions.

Victim Empowerment – Protecting Children, Supporting Government

While millions of children worldwide are subjected to violence, exploitation and abuse, work is being done to overcome these social malaises. In South Africa for instance, the work of the Department of Social Development (DSD), the European Union (EU) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is closely related to protecting vulnerable groups, including children, from violence, exploitation and abuse. The partnership, through the EU-funded R210 million **Support to South Africa's Victim Empowerment Programme (VEP)**, aims to curb and reverse the trend of violent crime against women and children.

It builds on South Africa's commendable child protection legislation which can be found in Article 28 of the South African Constitution, the Children's Act, the Sexual Offences Act, and the Child Justice Act. This legislation provides critical impetus to the fight against child abuse.

However, despite progressive legislation, much remains to be done. For instance, the South African Police Service (SAPS) reports that of the 55,000 *reported* rapes in 2005/2006, 40% were against children – which points to more than 60 child rapes per day.

While the VEP works towards assisting victims of crime on a number of levels including capacity development, training and support, a core area within the programme is to promote communities to provide safe environments within which children can develop. This echoes the UN Convention which calls on countries to ensure the protection of children in order to provide them with a secure upbringing.

Through EU funding, approximately R4 million in grants has been made available to ten civil society organisations dealing exclusively with children's issues. Focusing on schools, families and communities, these CSOs provide prevention and awareness raising programmes designed to educate children and adults on the dangers of child abuse. The project also supports diverse child protection activities, including several local 24-hour child help lines that are available to support children experiencing violence in the home, school or community, as well as counselling and therapy for children in need.

For more information please call: Kevin Town (UNODC): +27(0)12-342-2424
Frank Oberholzer (EU): +27(0)12-452-5261

Background: Launched in 2008, the ***Support to South Africa's Victim Empowerment Programme*** is a joint initiative between UNODC Southern Africa and DSD, funded by the EU. The project was developed to facilitate the establishment and integration of interdepartmental/inter-sectoral programmes and policies for the support, protection and empowerment of victims of crime and violence, particularly with regards to women and children. The VEP objective is to contribute to building safe and peaceful communities, strengthening the human rights culture and providing more effective, multi-sectoral, coordinated responses victims of crime and trauma.