



## PRESS RELEASE

### Ministers from Islamic countries convene for landmark meeting on children

*The First Islamic Ministerial Conference on the Child will focus on urgent actions to address poverty, disease and lack of access to education and protection*

**RABAT, 7 November 2005** – Senior representatives of almost 50 Islamic countries and nearly 20 international organizations have convened for a landmark meeting intended to make a real and lasting difference for more than a quarter of the world's children, who are disproportionately burdened by poverty, malnutrition and disease.

*The First Islamic Ministerial Conference on the Child*, which opened today in Rabat, Kingdom of Morocco, reflects the recognition by leaders of Islamic governments that the challenges facing the children in their countries demand their urgent attention and a special focus. It also signals the renewed commitment on the part of these leaders to strengthen their co-operation on behalf of children.

The three-day meeting has been co-organized by the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), UNICEF and the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), in response to a special resolution on "Child Care and Protection in the Islamic World" passed unanimously by OIC Member States at the 2003 OIC Summit in Malaysia.

"OIC countries are building upon the strength of Islamic traditions — self-help, solidarity and protection of the vulnerable — to reaffirm their commitments to children," said OIC Secretary-General Dr. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu. "We hope this ground-breaking conference will result in concrete recommendations that will strengthen the ability of OIC member countries to improve the lives of individual children and, at the same time, fulfil our commitments to international conventions and to achieving the Millennium Development Goals."

OIC Member States account for a quarter of the world's 2.3 billion children - in nations spanning Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Meeting the needs and guaranteeing the rights of children in Islamic countries will in large part determine the success of overall efforts to combat poverty, accelerate human development and promote global peace and security.

World leaders have expressed strong support for the conference, including United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan. "I can think of no better focus for Islamic solidarity than the welfare of children, and I congratulate the OIC, ISESCO and UNICEF on this important initiative," he said.

In OIC countries, around 4.3 million children under five die each year from preventable disease and malnutrition – over 60 per cent of them before reaching their first birthday. About 6 million children under five suffer from malnutrition in the form of stunting, with low height for their age. About 23 percent of the total population have no access to safe drinking water, and 45 per

cent lack adequate sanitation. Children in sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, are facing a deadly combination of armed conflict, HIV/AIDS and poverty.

“There are many noteworthy examples of progress for children in Islamic countries, but the situation for a disproportionate number of them continues to be a cause for grave concern,” said UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Rima Salah, who is heading the UNICEF delegation to the meeting.

Active partnerships among OIC governments, as well as with regional and international financial institutions, civil society and the private sector, will be essential to provide the necessary funding and technical expertise to make a real difference for children. The flow of development assistance must be increased significantly, with the wealthier OIC countries demonstrating solidarity with the poorer, and channelling their support more deliberately towards the needs of children.

The more than 200 participants at the conference will focus on issues specific to OIC member countries under four major themes: health and HIV/AIDS; quality education and culture; protection against abuse, exploitation and violence; and mobilising resources. Participants will reflect on how Islamic countries have been striving to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, as well as on challenges, best practices and strengthening cooperation to accelerate progress for children. Recommendations from the conference will be submitted to the next sessions of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers and the next Islamic Summit for their adoption and support.

“By ensuring the well-being and unleashing the potential of the 600 million children in Islamic countries, we will make a major contribution to peace, prosperity and progress for generations to come,” said Dr. Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri, Director-General of ISESCO. “We are confident that the momentum demonstrated here in Rabat will result in a new determination and a new sense of urgency to address the remaining challenges.”

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### **About The Organisation of the Islamic Conference**

The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) is the world’s second largest inter-governmental organization after the United Nations, with 57 Member States and four Observer States. Under its charter, the OIC aims at promoting Islamic solidarity and co-operation among its Member and Observer States in the political, economic, social, cultural, humanitarian, scientific and related spheres. The OIC has observer status at the United Nations, on a reciprocal basis, and it co-operates with the United Nations in all areas of concern, including support to the Governments of Member States in their efforts to promote the economic and social development of their countries and peoples.

### **About the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization**

The Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) is a specialized inter-governmental organization established in May 1982. The Organization aims to strengthen and promote cooperation among Member States in the fields of education, science, culture and communication. It also seeks to develop applied sciences and use of advanced technology within the framework of Islamic values and ideals; consolidate understanding among Muslim peoples and contribute to the achievement of world peace and security, particularly through education, science, culture and communications.

### **About UNICEF**

For nearly 60 years UNICEF has been the world’s leader for children, working on the ground in

157 countries to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for poor countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, quality basic education for all boys and girls, access to clean water and sanitation, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of governments, businesses, foundations and individuals.

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**Note to Broadcasters - footage is available from Video on Demand at [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)**