

PRESS RELEASE

**Launch of the Innocenti Insight
in collaboration with UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia:
South Asia in Action: Preventing and responding to child
trafficking**

EMBARGO: Wednesday 27 August, 5:00 am GMT (11:00am, KATHMANDU)

Trapped and neglected -- trafficked children in South Asia need the law on their side

KATHMANDU, 27 AUGUST 2008. All too often child victims of sexual exploitation and trafficking are blamed and punished across South Asia, where weak national legislation can lead to further victimization of children, according to a UNICEF report launched today.

The report "South Asia in Action: Preventing and responding to child trafficking" found that laws need to be strengthened to protect children after they have been trafficked, as well as from being trafficked. Child trafficking is a neglected form of human trafficking, as children risk being picked out as undocumented migrants, juvenile delinquents or unaccompanied minors. South Asian children continue to be trafficked for multiple forms of sexual exploitation – including prostitution, sex tourism, child pornography, paedophilia - and labour exploitation in agriculture, factories, domestic servitude and begging, forced marriage, adoption, military recruitment and debt release. There is often a tendency to overlook the trafficking of boys for sexual exploitation.

Although few reliable estimates exist of the true magnitude of the phenomena, trafficking occurs both within and between countries in the region and also from South Asia to other regions including East Asia, Europe and the Gulf States.

The report recognizes that governments in South Asia have developed national plans of action and some have adopted laws that criminalize trafficking in human beings. But the legal framework needs to be strengthened further to protect children from all forms of trafficking and to assist child victims with legal and psychosocial support. Most international and regional standards focus on adults. So far only two countries in South Asia, India and Sri Lanka, have signed the Palermo Protocol, the first legal instrument to provide international definition of trafficking in human beings and specifically addresses children. However, not one South Asian country has ratified the Palermo Protocol.

The judicial process itself also needs to be reformed, according to the report, to make it more child-friendly. Legal remedies, such as witness protection schemes and in camera proceedings, to protect the privacy and psychological well-being of children should be implemented. South Asian children are currently not well informed about the legal process and that can lead to children unexpectedly being criminalized.

Child trafficking across the region is not only committed by organized criminal networks. It may involve friends, relatives and even parents of children.

There are push and pull factors that draw children into being trafficked and poverty is generally recognized as the most visible and widespread cause but, while further research is needed into the root causes, it is well documented that violence and abuse at home and in the community and indeed the lure of a better life means that children and young people can fall prey to traffickers.

The report "South Asia in Action: Preventing and responding to child trafficking", is being launched today as South Asian government and NGO representatives are gathering in Kathmandu to discuss the topic of sexual exploitation of children and adolescents. The South Asia Forum Regional Preparatory Consultation for the World Congress III against sexual exploitation of children and adolescents, due to be held in Rio de Janeiro in November 2008, presents a unique opportunity to reinforce the commitments made by governments in South Asia to ensure protection of children from trafficking and sexual exploitation.

About UNICEF:

UNICEF works 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, safe 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.

NOTE TO THE EDITORS

The Innocenti Insight series is prepared by the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre (IRC) in Florence, Italy. The Centre was established in 1988 to strengthen the research capability of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and to support its advocacy for children worldwide. The Centre helps to identify and research current and future areas of UNICEF's work, and to help facilitate the full implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in both industrialized and developing countries UNICEF IRC publications are contributions to a global debate on child rights issues.

Embargoed media materials and copies of the Innocenti Insight are available from the Centre's Innocenti Newsroom (password protected): <http://www.unicef-icdc.org/presscentre/indexNewsroom.html>

For further information, please contact:

UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia

Sarah Crowe
South Asia Regional Communications Chief
+ 91 11 246 06 247/+ 919910532 314

Jas Kasminski
Communications Officer, Kathmandu
+ 977 1 4417082/ 4419471/4410640 Ext 221
+ 977 98510 40961 mobile

UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence

Salvador Herencia, Chief, Communication and Partnership Unit
+ 39 055 2033 354
+ 39 335 654 9370

Lena Karlsson, Project Officer
+ 39 055 2033 241
+ 39 33 467 05836

Patrizia Faustini, Senior Communication Assistant
+39 055 20 33 253