



PRESS RELEASE

AFRICAN GOVERNMENTS URGED TO ADOPT HAGUE CONVENTIONS ON CHILDREN

Pretoria, 23rd February - African Governments urged to adopt Hague Conventions on children

PRETORIA, South Africa, 23 February 2010 - Senior Government officials from 15 States in the Eastern and Southern Africa Region will meet in Pretoria from 23 to 25 February 2010 to determine ways to strengthen cross-border co-operation for the protection of children at risk and better regulate intercountry adoption.

The meeting will focus on the problems resulting from cross-border movements of unaccompanied minors, refugee and displaced children, as well as international abductions and trafficking in children.

According to recent research conducted by UNICEF, South Africa is home to thousands of unaccompanied child migrants, both from neighbouring countries, especially Zimbabwe and from within the country.

Although Governments have ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, many countries have yet to ratify the Hague Conventions pertaining to children, which seek to standardize international law in the best interests of the child and provide a comprehensive legal framework for the cross border movement of children between countries.

The four modern Hague Conventions on children include:

- (1) Hague Convention of 1980 on International Child Abduction;
- (2) Hague Convention of 1993 on Intercountry Adoption;
- (3) Hague Convention of 1996 on the Protection of Children; and
- (4) Hague Convention of 2007 on the International Recovery of Child Support.

“UNICEF is committed to accompany all countries in this region in their efforts to comply with the Hague Conventions on children,” said Mr As Sy, UNICEF Regional Director for Eastern and Southern Africa. “We need to make sure that all children, particularly vulnerable and orphaned children are better protected against the risk of trafficking, abuse and exploitation.”

Delegates will explore how these international conventions can translate into a practical inter-State framework to protect children. So far only Botswana, Burundi, Kenya, Madagascar and South Africa have ratified the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption, and many countries do not have adequate cross border legislation in place.

"When it comes to the cross-frontier protection of children, States cannot go it alone," explains Professor William Duncan, Deputy Secretary General of the Hague Conference on Private International Law. "Close co-operation between child protection bodies and between judges in different countries is essential, and the Hague Children's Conventions make this possible. It is very appropriate that this meeting is taking place on the eve of the Football World Cup, a time at which, with large cross-border movements of people, the risk of child trafficking grows."

On the subject of intercountry adoption, Professor Duncan explained "the importance for African countries to be prepared to deal with the pressures to release more children for adoption abroad. Sometimes intercountry adoption may offer the only chance for a particular child to enjoy the warmth of family life. But often there are solutions through family support or alternative care in accordance with African traditions within the child's home country. It is also essential for countries to co-operate in combating the abuses, including profiteering, which sometimes arise in intercountry adoption."

This meeting, hosted by the Government of South Africa and the Hague Conference on Private International Law, with support from UNICEF, will involve high officials from Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the African Union Committee on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

For more information or to set up an interview, please contact:

Professor William Duncan, Deputy Secretary General, by e-mail at wd@hcch.nl or Mrs Laura Molenaar, Administrative Officer, lm@hcch.nl or Ms Shantha Bloemen, UNICEF Johannesburg, sbloemen@unicef.org, Tel: +27 794955938.

About the Hague Conference

The Hague Conference on Private International Law is an inter-governmental organisation based in the Netherlands working for the harmonisation of rules of private international law. It currently has 69 Members located on every continent and over 130 States party to one or more Hague Conventions. The Hague Conference seeks to build bridges between various legal systems, while respecting their diversity. In doing so it reinforces the legal security of private persons which is essential role in an age of globalisation. For more information see: <www.hcch.net>.

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.