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## **Africa's children deserve more protective environments, UNICEF says**



Somali children displaced by conflict

16 June 2011 –

African governments need to provide “more protective environments” to keep children safe and free from harm and exploitation, the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) urged today.

Marking the annual Day of the African Child, UNICEF issued a [statement](#) calling on “governments to strengthen support systems, which provide the basis for a more protective environment in families and communities to keep children safe and strengthen families through the provision of basic social, health and education services.”

“Thousands of children in Africa are experiencing violence, exploitation and abuse on a daily basis. The situation is especially stark for children living and working on the streets,” UNICEF said.

“These children have already been forced from the protection of their homes, only to be subjected to even greater risks on the streets,” said Anthony Lake, UNICEF Executive Director. “On the Day of the African Child – and every day – we must do all we can to address the reasons why so many children are separated from their families, and invest in new efforts to protect them, no matter where they live.”

Widespread poverty, conflicts, HIV/AIDS, climate change and violence in the home are forcing more and more children to live and work on the streets, exposed to harm and exploitation, UNICEF said. Many others end up in less visible exploitative situations, working in households, on farms, in mines or even in armed groups.

In sub-Saharan Africa, about 50 million children have lost one or both parents, almost 15 million of them due to AIDS. Some are forced to grow up on their own, with limited or no support from adult caretakers. Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rates of child labour in the world with more than one third of children aged five to 14 engaged in the hardest forms of labour, UNICEF said.

“The issue of children working and living on the streets in African towns and cities is only the visible face of large-scale violations of rights,” said Agnès Kabore Ouattara, Chairperson of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

“It is a consequence of socio-economic factors such as poverty, demographic explosion, rural-urban migration, political crises, as well as inter-personal problems such as violence and rejection at home in dysfunctional families.”

The Day of the African Child commemorates a 1976 march in Soweto, South Africa, when thousands of local children demonstrated against the inferior quality of their education and demanded the right to be taught in their own language. Hundreds of boys and girls were shot and in the two weeks of protests that followed more than 100 people were killed.

Noting that this year’s theme is “All Together for Urgent Actions in Favour of Street Children,” Marta Santos Pais, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, said in a [press statement](#): “Let us take action and make a real difference in the life of children living and working in the streets.”

“Let us promote, in all African countries, the adoption of legislation banning all forms of violence against children, and abolishing any status offences and criminalization of survival behaviour, such as begging, truancy or vagrancy,” she said. “Let us make widely available and well publicized, safe, child sensitive and confidential counselling, reporting and complaint mechanisms to address incidents of violence, to reach out and support child victims in the streets.

“Let us develop robust and well-resourced child protection systems, supporting families in their critical child rearing role, and fighting impunity for the harm children may suffer.”

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