



With breaking stories and  
newswire products from

# UN NEWS CENTRE



## Arab forum ends with call for action to protect children's rights – UN



Children in a refugee camp in northern Lebanon

21 December 2010 – A United Nations-backed conference concluded in Morocco today with the adoption of a declaration calling for further action to safeguard children in the Arab world and their rights, including measures to protect them from violence and to end child labour and early marriage.

In the Marrakesh Declaration, participants also called for better data on issues related to the protection of children from violence, exploitation and abuse, according to a [news release](#) issued by the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)), one of the participants at the Fourth High-Level Arab Conference on Children's Rights.

“Across the countries in the region, important achievements have been made with respect to several Millennium Development Goals ([MDGs](#)), including significant reduction in both infant and child mortality and high rates of enrolment and gender parity in primary education,” said Shahida Azfar, UNICEF acting Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

“However, these gains conceal widening gaps between the richest and poorest children, which requires prioritizing the delivery of interventions to children who are the most deprived, who suffer the greatest discrimination and who fall further outside existing safety nets.”

The Declaration also called for the adoption of legislation to protect children from all forms of violence, and measures to end children's exposure to violence through the media.

Countries in the Middle East and North Africa continue to be plagued by violence against children, according to UNICEF.

Some 89 per cent of children in the region are subject to physical or psychological punishment, and 3.5 million women aged between 20 and 24 were married before they turned 18.

In addition, female genital mutilation affects 96 per cent of women in Egypt, 93 per cent in Djibouti and 89 per cent in Sudan.

“Violence takes place in all contexts, including where children are expected to enjoy a secure environment and special protection – in care institutions, in the school and also within the home,” said Marta Santos Pais, the Secretary-General's Special Representative on Violence against Children.

“The protection of children from all forms of violence needs to evolve from being a concern of a few into a priority for all,” added Ms. Santos Pais, who also took part in the three-day meeting, along with government officials and civil society representatives from the Arab world.

News Tracker: past stories on this issue

[Saudi Arabia: UNICEF chief voices concern over eight-year old girl's marriage](#)