Argentine soccer star joins team of UNICEF Goodwill Ambassadors

UNICEF announces Lionel Messi as new Goodwill Ambassador

11 March 2010 – The United Nations Children's Fund (**UNICEF**) today unveiled Argentine soccer genius Lionel Messi as its newest Goodwill Ambassador at a ceremony in Barcelona, where he plays club football.

The FC Barçelona forward and current FIFA World Player of the Year will work with UNICEF on a series of events to highlight the challenges faced by vulnerable children around the world and supporting children's rights, the agency said.

"It is a pleasure to welcome Lionel Messi as a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador," said the agency's Executive Director Ann M. Veneman. "He is a football superstar who can help shine a spotlight on the most vulnerable and invisible children."

While his accomplishments as a player are well known to football fans, UNICEF said it is his determination to use his fame to help children that has led to his appointment, especially through his foundation which supports access for at-risk youth to education and health care in Argentina.

"Football has given me a lot of joy and opportunities and I feel grateful to UNICEF for this chance to give support to children," said Mr. Messi. "I hope that in my role as a global Goodwill Ambassador for UNICEF I will be able to support children who need our help."

The appointment of Mr. Messi is the latest development in the collaboration between FC Barçelona, the current European champions, and UNICEF, which already includes the emblazoning of the agency's logo on the team's shirt and club support for UNICEF programmes in Africa.

Mr. Messi, who won an Olympic gold medal in Beijing as part of the Argentine team, joins a star-studded line-up of UNICEF Goodwill Ambassadors along with fellow footballer David Beckham, actor Orlando Bloom, musician Shakira Mebarak, and Queen Rania Al-Abdullah of Jordan.