



With breaking stories and
newswire products from

UN NEWS CENTRE



Education key to fighting HIV pandemic, UNICEF chief stresses on visit to Lesotho



Veneman greets young girl at UNICEF-supported shelter for children affected by HIV/AIDS [File Photo]

9 April 2010 – The outgoing head of the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) has wrapped up a two-day visit to the African nation of Lesotho, which has the world’s third highest prevalence of HIV infection, by stressing that education must be central to all efforts to combat the spread of AIDS.

Ann M. Veneman visited health-care programmes and witnessed first-hand the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Lesotho, where the disease has caused the average life expectancy to decline to around 40 years old.

The Executive Director of UNICEF also met with senior Government officials, including King Letsie III and the Prime Minister, Pakalitha Mosisili.

“Lesotho has a high number of orphans and vulnerable children, many of whom have lost one or both parents to AIDS,” [said](#) Ms. Veneman, adding that UNICEF was working closely with its humanitarian partners and the Government to ensure that the country’s children can receive basic health-care services and education.

She said that education is critical to fighting HIV/AIDS – “the people of Lesotho, especially the youth, must understand how to prevent the spread of AIDS” – and welcomed the Government’s focus on prevention programmes.

“Significant progress has been made in addressing the HIV and AIDS pandemic, especially in preventing mother-to-child transmission. Over 60 per cent of pregnant

women in Lesotho are receiving life-saving drugs to reduce the likelihood of newborn infections.”

During her talks with the King, Ms. Veneman also discussed food insecurity, economic development and the overall situation of children in Lesotho, a tiny, mountainous country that is entirely landlocked by South Africa.

At the end of this month Ms. Veneman will step down as UNICEF’s Executive Director, to be succeeded by Anthony Lake of the United States.

News Tracker: past stories on this issue

Change in drug treatment reduces HIV infection in newborn babies – UN-backed study