New UN campaign aims to save over 5 million children from pneumonia deaths

1 November 2009 – The United Nations Children's Fund (**UNICEF**) and World Health Organization (**WHO**) launched a new action plan on Monday to prevent up to 5.3 million children from dying of pneumonia – the biggest child killer worldwide – by 2015.

Although nearly 2 million children die from the disease every year, with nearly all deaths occurring in 68 developing countries, relatively few resources are dedicated to addressing pneumonia.

The Global Action Plan for the prevention and control of Pneumonia (GAPP) seeks to raise awareness of the disease's massive toll, makes recommendations on what needs to be done, and lays out specific goals and targets.

The three-pronged plan calls for:

? protecting all children by providing an environment where they are at low risk of contracting the disease through exclusive breastfeeding for six months, adequate nutrition and reducing indoor air pollution, among other measures

? preventing children from becoming ill through vaccinations against diseases causing pneumonia, such as measles and pertussis and

? treating children who come down with pneumonia with the right care and antibiotics.

WHO Director-General Margaret Chan expressed confidence in the plan, which has a $39 billion price tag, stressing that "if it is applied in every high burden country, we will be able to prevent millions of death."

For her part, UNICEF Executive Director Ann M. Veneman underscored that "effective interventions to reduce deaths caused by pneumonia must be used more widely made more readily available for children at risk."

The GAPP aims to boost coverage of all relevant vaccines and exclusive breastfeeding rates to 90 per cent to reach the goal of slashing child pneumonia deaths by 65 per cent and cutting the number of severe cases by 25 per cent, compared to 2000 levels.

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