

MEDIA RELEASE

CHILDREN SPEAK OUT ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago - UNICEF, May 14, 2008 – Youth voices were heard loudly at the internationally recognized, **Natural Disaster Youth Summit (NDYS) 2008** in collaboration with the International Educational and Resource Network, Trinidad and Tobago Chapter. UNICEF facilitated youth media coverage of the event, in which children from across the region and the globe including Turkey, Japan, Argentina, met to air their views at the NDYS held for the first time in Trinidad and Tobago. The Summit, themed “**Climate Change and Disasters Reduction**” was organized by iEARNtT and attended by over 200 children and adults at the Chaguaramas Convention Centre from April 28-29-30 2008.

Rehanna, 14 from Lakshi Girls’ Hindu College, whose school presented a play on coral reefs, commented on the importance of having a Youth Summit, and why she is engaged, “The temperature in the atmosphere is changing, there are more skin diseases, food prices have gone up all because of the increase in temperature which brings about a huge train reaction. We need to start conserving the things we take for granted and spread the word to other people that they may conserve the environment.”

Children and adult delegates from each country spoke on the effects of climate change and specifically addressed ways of reducing the effects of disasters and disaster management. The meeting, attended by young people from iEARN member countries was called to discuss climate change and disaster reduction strategies that can protect children.

UNICEF provided child-friendly educational material and games on climate change and disaster prevention measures and ensured that children’s views on climate change were documented in the NDYS 2008 through the youth journalists from Trinidad and Tobago and the Backlot who facilitated media coverage of the event, filming and interviewing children and Natural Disaster Youth Ambassadors. Throughout the Youth Summit, child journalists recorded and produced one-minute videos and a 10-minute newscast highlighting key issues on climate change from a child’s perspective. The youth media’s presence was facilitated by UNICEF in an effort to build capacity in the area of youth media in Trinidad and Tobago. The Backlot, a Surinamese non-governmental organization supported youth journalists from Trinidad and Tobago to provide media coverage of the event.

The Summit was also held in support of GLOBAL YOUTH SERVICE DAY, where tribute is paid to youth throughout the world who give of their time in service to their communities, iEARNtT is the National Lead Agency for Global Youth Service Day.

The Summit, organized by iEARNtT, was supported by UNESCO, the NDYS Committee, Ministry of Local Government; Ministry of National Security and the Mayor of Port of Spain’s Office. During the opening ceremony, Ms. Kazuko Okamoto, Executive Chairman of the NDYS, Japan spoke of the genesis of the NDYS after the devastations and sufferings of the 1995 earthquake in Japan. NDYS was started in 2005 on the 10th anniversary of the earthquake and has coordinated two Summits in Japan and one in Taiwan. Trinidad and Tobago is the fourth country to host this Youth Summit, giving children the opportunity to learn about climate change and natural disasters and their impact on society.

In the next decade, up to 175 million children are likely to be affected every year by the kinds of natural disasters brought about by climate change. Hurricanes, floods and the severe effects of natural disasters cause

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loss of life and economic instability in small island states each year. Abraham Fergusson, 16 years, the NDYS Ambassador for Trinidad and Tobago in speaking of his own Trinidad and Tobago Disaster Safety Map Project expounded that “Many factors that exacerbate the impact of natural disasters are easily identifiable and avoidable, including indiscriminate dumping into waterways, improper or illegal land development, and unsustainable agricultural practices. This project, he states, “allows students to learn about disasters and the state of disaster management in their communities. It also empowers them to take measures for mitigation and preparedness.”

At the Summit the youth cited a Declaration: Made Formal by Mayor of Port of Spain:

“That as a Global Village we must resolve to create an awareness to disasters, risk management and the adaptation to global climate change by forging strong ties between youths and professionals and integrating all countries in an international partnership for this common purpose:

One Village, One Effort, THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW!”

The delegates recited the Declaration in English, Spanish, Japanese, Surinamese and Turkish at the Summit.

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About UNICEF

UNICEF is on the ground in 155 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world’s largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments.