



## UNICEF welcomes Rwanda's campaign to eliminate HIV transmission from mother to child

**BUGESERA, Rwanda, 13 May 2011** – UNICEF welcomed the announcement yesterday of a national campaign to eliminate the vertical transmission of HIV from mother to child in Rwanda and confirmed its commitment to support the government in ensuring that all women in need will be reached with a new, more efficacious HIV regimen by 2015. The campaign was launched on Thursday by Rwanda's First Lady, Mrs. Jeannette Kagame, in the presence of the Minister of Health and other government officials, UNICEF's Regional Director for Eastern and South Africa, Elhadj As Sy, representatives of the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and other bilateral partners as well as the President of the Elizabeth Glazer Pediatric AIDS Foundation.

UNICEF is co-championing the call for the elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV by 2015. During the ceremony, UNICEF Regional Director As Sy said he was confident that Rwanda can meet its goal of reducing the transmission rate among children born to women living with HIV to less than 2 per cent. "In order to achieve this goal, we have to make sure that all pregnant women with HIV can participate in prevention programmes, including adolescent girls and those living in remote areas. UNICEF stands ready to support the government in identifying the gaps in access and in removing bottlenecks that prevent women from making use of the existing life-saving services."

As part of the elimination campaign, Rwanda plans to ensure that all HIV positive women receive the most efficacious ARV regimens through expanded coverage of quality services. Furthermore, the government wants to make sure that pregnant women access health services earlier, that HIV incidence among women of reproductive age is reduced, that comprehensive knowledge on HIV prevention is increased and that all women have access to family planning. Rwanda has a birth rate of 2.8 per cent with a fertility rate of 5.3 per cent. It is also Africa's most densely populated country.

The campaign will strengthen the links between MCH and HIV programmes and further enhance the already high involvement of male partners in prevention and testing programmes. Rwanda has had great success in involving women's partners in its national PMTCT (Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission) programme, particularly in fighting stigma and discrimination.

Although Rwanda has one of the lowest HIV prevalence rates amongst pregnant women in Eastern and Southern Africa – currently standing at a national average of 4.3 per cent - rates in the capital Kigali are much higher (between 16 and 34 per cent). More than 20,000 children below the age of 15 live with HIV in Rwanda. Over 90 per cent have been infected through vertical transmission. HIV positive women can transmit HIV to their children during pregnancy, delivery or breastfeeding. Without intervention, the risk of transmission is more than 30 per cent.

The Government of Rwanda, through the support of international partners, including UNICEF, has been able to significantly increase the provision of PMTCT services. Currently, 82 per cent of all health facilities in the country offer these services, up from 42 per cent in 2005. This has contributed to lowering the 9-month transmission rate amongst children born to HIV positive mother within the National PMTCT programme to 7 per cent. Experts estimate that 6,300 children would get HIV each year in Rwanda if PMTCT interventions did not exist. Eliminating the vertical transmission of HIV will keep Rwanda on track to meet the health-related Millennium Development Goals.

### About UNICEF:

UNICEF is on the ground in over 150 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. For more information about UNICEF and its work visit: [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org).