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## **Children Must Be Safe During Gaza Withdrawal**

### **Protecting Palestinian and Israeli Children is 'Priority Number One'**

NEW YORK (12 August 2005) -- UNICEF today urged that children be kept out of harm's way during the planned withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and parts of the northern West Bank.

"Palestinian and Israeli children have suffered terribly over recent years as a result of this conflict," UNICEF Executive Director Ann M. Veneman said Friday. "Next week's events offer new hope for peace, and it's critical to ensure the safety of the children in the region."

Along with the entire UN system, UNICEF expressed a hope that the withdrawal that is set to begin next week would occur smoothly and peacefully.

If the disengagement does not proceed peacefully, children could be in particular danger, said Veneman, noting that children under 18 make up about half of the Palestinian population and that there are also hundreds of children among the Israeli settlers.

UNICEF has pre-positioned emergency supplies to take care of the potential health, education, water and sanitation needs of children and women. UNICEF has also supported additional training for emergency health workers and has ensured increased availability of psychological assistance for children.

UNICEF also has been working with communities, schools and the local media to educate children on how to protect themselves from the dangers of unexploded ordnance in areas being vacated.

Since the current conflict began five years ago, children have paid a heavy and disproportionate price. Between September 2000 and July 31, 2005, 829 children under the age of 18 have been killed in the conflict.

"Keeping all children safe should be priority number one," Veneman said.

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