

News Note: Visit of UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador Joel Madden to CAR

“Time for everyone to get serious about clean water”

Bangui 4th November 2008 – For thousands of children living in the Central African Republic, their every day drinking water is a mass killer, said UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador Joel Madden.

Madden, the leader of the rock band Good Charlotte, came to this conclusion after spending a week touring the country with his brother, Benji. The visit, to Bangui’s capital, as well as some of the remotest villages of the country, was organized by UNICEF’s office in CAR and the U.S. Fund for UNICEF.

“To come here and see these children dying just because they don’t have clean water to drink, I can’t accept that,” said Mr. Madden.

Madden was able to speak with numerous children and families whose lives continue to be negatively affected by water tainted by diseases. In Sam Ouandja, a town near the border with the Darfur region of Sudan that’s been attacked by rebels twice in the last year, Madden learned that 47% of children who die there each year succumb to water-related illnesses.

Trying to make water safe for the children and women of the CAR is one of UNICEF’s ongoing goals. In the last year, UNICEF has supported dozens of water projects, including repairing and drilling hundreds of wells for people living in conflict-affected areas. Thanks to these efforts, all prefectures affected by violence in the north of the country have access to UNICEF-sponsored water, sanitation and hygiene programmes. At the same time, many gaps remain at the community level.

“Without access every day to clean water sustainable development is impossible; returning to villages for displaced people is just a dream”, said Mahimbo Mdoe, UNICEF CAR representative. “We are facing a huge infrastructure deficit and we are struggling to get more and more support.”

Though a long-time activist on behalf of children, this was Madden’s first voyage to the CAR and his first mission as a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador. Madden requested to come to bring attention to the plight of this overlooked country where the Under-5 and maternal mortality rates are some of the worst in Africa.

With the Under-5 mortality rate at 176 per 1,000, one in five children do not live to see their fifth birthday. Maternal mortality rate reaches 1,355 per 100,000 and HIV/AIDS prevalence (6.2%) continues to wreak havoc amongst populations, particularly those made vulnerable by chronic poverty and the ongoing conflict.

At the end of the trip Madden called on the government of CAR to spend more on water. He also issued a plea to leaders of the developed nations and their young adults to become more active in helping fund solutions that can end preventable deaths.

“Every day children in CAR are dying from preventable diseases caused by a lack of safe water,” said Joel Madden. “The good news is that we can stop this now.”

About UNICEF

UNICEF is on the ground in 155 countries and territories in order to promote child survival and development. The world’s largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, water and sanitation, universal and equitable education, the protection of children from violence, exploitation and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments.

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