

HIGH MORTALITY AND MALNUTRITION AFFECT MUSLIM CHILDREN MOST SAYS UN CHILDREN'S AGENCY

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Islamic States account for the world's highest child mortality rates, where 60 percent of children who die from disease and malnutrition never make it to their first birthday, according to a joint report released today by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Active partnerships among members to solve the problems affecting children in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) States, and help from the wealthier members "coming to the aid of the poorer," are therefore, desperately needed, it said.

"We are extremely encouraged by the vision and leadership being shown by the OIC and the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) in mobilising Islamic countries to accelerate progress for children," said <" http://www.unicef.org/media/media_28329.html">UNICEF Executive Director Ann M. Veneman. "UNICEF shares their commitment and stands ready to work with them to ensure that their actions have practical impact and generate concrete results for children," she added.

Over 4.3 million Muslim children worldwide under the age of five die every year, many will never attend primary school, and over one third suffer from persistent malnutrition, said the report, which will serve as a basis for discussions in the upcoming Ministerial meetings regarding Muslim children to be held in Morocco in November. In all, OIC Member States account for a quarter of the world's 2.3 billion children, in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

Children who live in Islamic sub-Saharan Africa suffer from the most severe deprivations, and child mortality rates in the region are more than double the world average. Many OIC countries have some of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world: in Afghanistan, one in six pregnancies results in death. In African OIC Member States, there is one death for every 15 pregnancies, though globally, the average is one in 74.

Primary school attendance is very low in OIC nations, with more than half the adult population illiterate, and sometimes 70 percent of women unable to read and write.

"Much progress has been made," said Director-General of ISESCO, Dr. Abdulaziz Othman Altwaljri. "Investing in children and putting them at the centre of development strategies are the most effective ways to eliminate poverty and meet global development targets," he added.

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