

## **First Day Hospital for children living with HIV/AIDS opened in Maputo**

**MAPUTO, 24 May 2004** – UNICEF is confident that the opening of the first Paediatric Day Hospital in Mozambique will boost treatment opportunities for children living with HIV/AIDS in the country. “So far, the vast majority of children born with HIV/AIDS in Mozambique have a very short life, which for most of the time is characterized by a sequence of severe diseases. The treatment and the services offered at the Paediatric Day Hospital in Maputo can improve their quality of life and provide much needed support to their parents and other care-takers”, said UNICEF Representative Marie-Pierre Poirier on Monday during the opening ceremony of the Paediatric Day Hospital. It has been established at the Maputo Central Hospital with the support of UNICEF and the French Embassy.

“The Paediatric Day Hospital will facilitate much more integrated support to children living with HIV/AIDS than up to now”, said Ms. Poirier. The Day Hospital is closely linked to the Paediatric Emergency Ward and its laboratories. It has several consulting rooms for medical doctors and a psychologist. “The psychological and moral support to the families is crucial, as they usually live under enormous stress”, said Ms. Poirier.

The Maputo Central Hospital has been offering free consultations for children living with HIV/AIDS for ten years at the regular Paediatric Ward. It has been supported by UNICEF since 2002. With the support of UNICEF, the children have been receiving free prophylaxis and treatment for opportunistic infections, and a fortified nutrition supplement. UNICEF has also been providing IT equipment for data processing and transport for home visits. The purpose of these visits, which are done by a nurse, is to encourage the care-takers of HIV positive children and other family members to comply with the treatment and the nutritional recommendations and to provide psychological support.

The Day Hospital includes a specialized pharmacy, where families can collect free cotrimoxazole prophylaxis against Pneumocystis Carinii Pneumonia and drugs for treatment of opportunistic infections. In addition to this, UNICEF has provided the Day Hospital with equipment and furniture. UNICEF also supported the training of the paediatricians and other health staff, who are working at the Day Hospital. The next step will be supporting the Ministry of Health to develop a Manual on Treatment and Care of HIV positive children which will integrate the experience gained at the Day Hospital. The Day Hospital will also serve as a reference center for the training of paediatricians and other health workers. Financial support provided by UNICEF over the past two years is about 100,000 USD.

The provision of free drugs is essential. “We want to guarantee that children from poor families have equal access to prophylaxis and treatment of opportunistic infections. The next challenge ahead of us will be the provision of free anti-retroviral drugs (ARV), which can prolong the lives of children living with HIV/AIDS dramatically. We hope to be able to start with this programme at the Paediatric Day Hospital in Maputo already this year and expand to other areas of the country later on”, said Ms. Poirier.

So far, 8,000 HIV positive people in Mozambique will be treated with ARV in 2004 – an initiative of the Ministry of Health, which is financed by the Bill Clinton Foundation and the World Bank. ARV treatment for children requires qualified staff to ensure

adequate follow up. Children under 15 kg of weight need to be provided with ARV syrup to ensure proper dosage and avoid toxicity.

Every year, around 30,000 children are born with HIV/AIDS in Mozambique. More than 50 percent of them die within the first year, half of the remainder do not survive the second year. According to estimates, at the moment there are 68,000 children under the age of five living with HIV/AIDS in Mozambique.

While extending its support to treatment programmes for children living with HIV/AIDS, UNICEF will continue supporting programmes of the Ministry of Health aimed at preventing HIV transmission from the mother to the child. UNICEF has cooperated with the Ministry in developing national policy guidelines for the prevention of mother-to-child-transmission (PMTCT). At the moment, UNICEF is supporting such programmes in five sites in Beira (Sofala province) and Chimoio (Manica province). The aim is to expand this support to other sites throughout this year. At the same time, UNICEF wants to ensure that the lives of the mothers participating in PMTCT programmes can be prolonged by providing ARV treatment for them and their partners, as well as for the baby, if they meet the clinical and laboratory criteria.

In addition, UNICEF is focussing on prevention among young people, especially among girls, who are the most vulnerable. In 2003, there were 20 youth-friendly health services operating in Mozambique with the support of UNICEF offering counselling and clinical consultations. UNICEF is also supporting the Ministry of Youth and Sports in the implementation of the Life Skills programme "My future is my choice", which involves young peer educators. Other partners include the Associations of People living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA), who organise education on HIV/AIDS prevention in schools.