Handwashing one of most effective ways to prevent disease in Central African Republic

BANGUI, 15 October 2012 – On Global Handwashing Day, UNICEF emphasizes the fact that the very simple act of washing hands with soap and water is one the most effective methods of preventing disease. At the launch ceremony attended by representatives of the Central African government and the UN country team, UNICEF of Chief Child Survival and Development Pierre Signe said, “Washing hands with soap has the potential to reduce 50% of deaths due to diarrhoea and 25% of deaths due respiratory infections, thus having the potential to save more lives than any vaccine or medical treatment in existence.”

The latest child mortality figures released by UNICEF show that almost 2,000 children die each day from diarrhoeal diseases, 90% of which is due to a lack of safe water, sanitation and basic hygiene. Speaking to the Millennium Development Goal to reduce child mortality, the Minister of Energy and Hydraulics highlighted the importance of reaching out to communities, “Our goals are for all Central Africans to understand the importance of proper handwashing [...] with these simple practices lives can be saved”. As diarrhoeal diseases are primarily faecal-oral, one of the simplest and most inexpensive barriers to infection is handwashing with soap at critical times, such as after using the bathroom and before eating.

The morning’s ceremony kicks off a week of activities taking place schools and communities in Bangui, Bambari, Bossangoa, Mbaiki, and Bouar spreading the message to children through proper handwashing demonstrations and soap distributions. “These activities are particularly targeted at schools because children, more than any other group are disproportionately affected by fatal diarrheal and respiratory diseases. In their openness to new ideas, children are also ideally positioned to be effective agents of behaviour change in their homes, schools and communities,” added Signe.

This year’s Handwashing Day is being celebrated in conjunction with United Nations Week marking the 67th anniversary of the UN and honours the CAR-UN cooperation, which the theme is “Food security and nutrition for all Central Africans is possible!”

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About Global Handwashing Day:
Global Handwashing Day is celebrated on October 15. The Global Public-Private Partnership for Handwashing with Soap initiated Global Handwashing Day in 2008, and it is endorsed by governments, international institutions, civil society organisations, NGOs, private companies and individuals around the globe. Visit [www.globalhandwashingday.org](http://www.globalhandwashingday.org)

About UNICEF
UNICEF works in 190 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)

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