



Timor-Leste

Short Story

TIMOR-LESTE'S STREET CHILDREN TO BE GIVEN A NEW CHANCE

13 May 2004

A mobile learning centre will take to the streets of Dili on Monday (17 May 2004) in an attempt to give homeless children a chance of starting a new life.

An 'Activity Bus', colourfully painted by artists from Timor-Leste's *Arte Moris* (meaning Living Art) *Cultural Centre*, will be used as the mobile learning centre to connect with the children and youth at risk. The 'Activity Bus' will also carry a series of educational programmes and activities aimed at parents as well as children and youth at risk.

Funded by UNDP's Civil Society Organization (CSO) project, the United Nations Volunteers programme, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and CARE, the mobile learning centre will be managed by the Forum Comunicacoes Juventude Oratorio (Youth Communications Forum), Timor-Leste's only non-governmental organization working with children and youth at risk on the streets of Dili.

In the last two years, the Forum Comunicacoes Juventude Oratorio (FCJ) has provided outreach support to approximately 200 children working and sleeping on the streets of Dili. FCJ also provides shelter to many of the children, most of them boys.

FCJ's main focus is to protect children and youth at risk from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

"Through the mobile learning centre, we hope children can get the confidence and skills to return to school and gain better support from their families," said Mr Cipriano Oliveira, Director of FCJ.

According to Mr Jose Belo, an Assistant Programme Coordinator of UNDP's CSO project, it is essential that the mobile learning centre targets families because some parents are sending their children onto the streets to sell goods rather than encouraging them to go to school.

"Often children do not have family support and hopefully by using the 'Activity Bus' we will be able to gain the attention of many of these vulnerable individuals and offer them new hope and a new way of life," said Mr Belo.

The 'Activity Bus' will also work to inform and connect Dili's at risk youth population with possible employment opportunities by providing them with roving workshops, mobile career assessments and a technical resource library in an attempt to provide them with different possibilities of livelihood in Timor-Leste.

Some of the workshops will also focus on issues such as HIV/AIDS and rights awareness.