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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 3, 2010

Contact:

Vinicia Mascarenhas, (202) 590-0395 or vinicia.mascarenhas@acf.hhs.gov

PRESS RELEASE: WORKSHOP UNCOVERS GAPS & SOLUTIONS TO CHILDREN'S UNMET LONG-TERM RECOVERY NEEDS FOLLOWING A DISASTER

Washington, D.C. – The National Commission on Children and Disasters held a Long-Term Disaster Recovery Workshop on February 1st in Washington, DC. This day long Workshop was attended by nearly 150 Federal, state, tribal, local, and non-governmental partners seeking to uncover solutions to gaps in the areas of children's access to medical care, the provision of mental health services to children, and barriers to information and data sharing.

Commission Vice-Chairperson Dr. Michael Anderson opened the day's events with remarks which touched upon the importance of the workshop. "The challenges a community faces following a large-scale disaster are numerous and monumental. These challenges are made even greater because disaster plans have been written largely for the immediate response following a disaster," said Vice-Chairperson Anderson, who continued, "Although children make up nearly 25 percent of our population, disaster plans are written largely with able-bodied adults in mind."

A Keynote speech was delivered by U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Deputy Secretary Ron Sims who discussed the importance of a child's quality of life and the role our government has to play. "All of us have seen the devastation of catastrophic events here in the United States – from Hurricane Andrew to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita." Deputy Secretary Sims stated, "The Long-term Disaster Recovery Working Group was formed by President Obama because of the need for the Federal government to take a more holistic approach to providing recovery support to communities devastated by disasters. We must be inclusive. We must ensure that all people, regardless of race, financial means, religious beliefs, or zip code – have the means to withstand and rebuild their lives following a disaster."

The workshop concluded with a plenary session which reported out findings from three break-out sessions and discussed strategies which the Commission will incorporate into its next report to President Obama and Congress in October 2010.

"Communities are further burdened by disaster assistance programs that are designed to address short-term needs; which means the money runs out, well before the needs subside," said Vice-Chairperson Anderson. "Time and time again, experience has shown us that disaster planning must go far beyond the first days, weeks or months of an event. Recovery takes years. Long-term recovery isn't just about rebuilding roads and bridges, it's about restoring lives."

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