

MEDIA RELEASE

Rock family brings cheer to Diepsloot children

Pretoria, December 21, 2005 – When Hollywood actor and comedian, Chris Rock chose South Africa for a short family vacation with his wife, Malaak Compton-Rock and their two children, they decided to set aside a bit of time to meet impoverished children to learn about the impact of HIV and AIDS crisis on their communities in and around Johannesburg.

UNICEF South Africa and partners Hope World Wide hosted the famous actor on a day trip to Diepsloot, a densely-populated shantytown, where rows of shacks made from corrugated iron, wood and flimsy plastic sheets line dusty streets along Johannesburg's northern edge.

The informal settlement, established in 1993 when “squatters” began to build makeshift homes on unoccupied land, lies midway between Pretoria and Johannesburg, two of the country's most prosperous cities, yet people here are constantly in search of homes. For many of those who settled here, this community represented a new and hopeful start. Since then, it has increased rapidly in size as new residents and squatters pour in from other locations due to its convenient site.

The scorching Johannesburg sun was no deterrent to the children who eagerly awaited the arrival of the famous guests and the UNICEF team, headed by Country Representative, Macharia Kamau. The children at the Diepsloot Child Centre formed a long queue and guard of honour just to shake hands with the honoured guest sing songs of welcome, while others played games, snacked on fruit and played some more.

The Diepsloot Centre, the movie star's first stop, provides a safe space for over 300 children and young to participate in activities ranging from peer counselling to pre-school school games. UNICEF partner, Hope World Wide, an international non-governmental organisation, has played a vital role in the operation of the centre which thrives on donations from private individuals and companies. Their team of community-based social workers provides support to the children, like 9 year-old Wendy Ndebele, and many other orphans who live in Granny-headed households, having lost their parents to HIV and AIDS.

A highlight of the day was the brief community walkabout and visits to two households, accompanied by Dr. Mark Ottenweller, head of Hope Worldwide and his team. The Rock family was warmly welcomed by the families and listened closely as members shared their personal stories of survival under the twin scourges of HIV and AIDS and poverty, gaining some insight into the plight of the more than 1 million orphans lining in South Africa today in the process.

But perhaps, it was the Rock children who had the most fun, quickly making friends and gleefully joining their Mom in handing out gifts to the smaller children at the community centre and in the homes of the poor families they met and so openly embraced.

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