

“Drugs are not child’s play,” UN campaign warns

“There are few things more troubling than the sight of young children suffering from substance abuse,” said Antonio Maria Costa, Executive Director of the United Nations *Office on Drugs and Crime* (UNODC). “We need to keep children and drugs apart, and to teach young people that drugs are not child’s play.”

To mark the June 26 International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, UNODC has launched a campaign on the theme “Drugs are not child’s play”. The campaign is designed to inform young people and those who have a role in shaping their lives – parents, teachers and community leaders – about the dangers of drugs, and how to keep children away from them.

“Young people are eager to learn, and they can be easily influenced,” said Mr. Costa. “They therefore need to learn at an early age the right lessons about drugs before getting into trouble – if not, the consequences can be devastating.”

The campaign provides information to teachers and children on living without drugs. It stresses the need to help street children who are vulnerable to substance abuse and violence, and to support kids who are neglected or abused by drug-addicted parents, or who have lost their parents to drug trafficking or abuse.

“We need to encourage supportive parents, efficient teachers, social workers and society at large to give child confidence and self-esteem, and educate them about the effects drugs have on families and communities,” said Mr Costa. “Children need the confidence and the information to make the right choices.”

The UN drugs chief pointed to sport as good way of teaching healthy life skills to young people: “We want kids to be shooting hoops on the basketball court, not shooting heroin in a back alley,” he added.

Studies show that people who start smoking cigarettes or drinking alcohol at a young age are much more likely to experiment with illegal drugs than people who do not smoke or drink. “Society has a responsibility to protect children from drugs,” said Costa. “Let’s keep the gate to substance abuse firmly shut.”