

AS PREPARED
Remarks of Ann M. Veneman, Executive Director, UNICEF
UNICEF Executive Board, First Regular Session, Closing Remarks
Thursday, 14 January 2010 • New York, NY

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates. My thanks to the President for skillfully steering this meeting over the past three days and to all the Board members and participants for your vital contribution during this session.

The devastating earthquake in Haiti is a fresh reminder of the important work of UNICEF and its partners in helping to save, protect and improve the lives of the most vulnerable. Our hearts and our thoughts are with the government of Haiti and all the people whose lives have been impacted. They need our collective and continued support.

I want to take this opportunity to personally thank the many Permanent Representatives who took the time to attend the Board meeting this session. I was deeply touched by the generous words of appreciation from so many members of the Board.

Many spoke about our achievements over the last five years, recognizing UNICEF as more results-driven, knowledge based, efficient and effective and well positioned to further the cause of children's rights and accelerate their gains in health, education and protection. Some of you highlighted our added focus on women and girls as drivers for sustainable development by ensuring their access to health care and education and protection from violence and harmful practices including early marriage and female genital cutting. Again, I greatly appreciated these heartfelt statements from so many of you.

I would like to take a few moments to pay tribute to three outstanding members of our senior team who will be retiring at the end of May. All have contributed significantly to the organization and its work.

First, our Comptroller, Ayalew Abai who has so skillfully guided us through our last budget cycle. He has strongly promoted organizational accountability and interagency harmonization. Prior to his appointment as Comptroller, he served as UNICEF's Representative in Nigeria the most populous country in Africa. Ayalew began his career with UNICEF in his native country of Ethiopia in 1980 and has since worked in various positions in Uganda, Kenya, the Gambia and in New York. Ayalew will leave his mark for being a thoughtful and inspiring colleague whose wise counsel and practical approach to problem solving has contributed to many positive changes. We thank you for all your hard work and wish you the best in the years ahead.

We also extend appreciation to Claus Andreasen, who has served as UNICEF's Director of Internal Audit for nearly 10 years. His commitment and hard work has been instrumental in strengthening our audits. He has helped ensure that audits are better used as a management tool and today our audit division and evaluation offices are more closely coordinating their work. In addition, we have established an office of investigation in the audit division. Claus joined UNICEF with impressive credentials having served with the Office of the Auditor General of Denmark and the European Court of Auditors. Claus, we wish you, as they would say in Denmark: "Held og lykke" on the road ahead.

Finally, a huge word of appreciation to Philip O'Brien, Director of Private Fundraising and Partnerships in Geneva. Philip has served in UNICEF for 22 years with passion and commitment. He has shown strong leadership and vision, working closely with the National Committees and the private sector to further UNICEF's mission. Under his tenure he has introduced many important changes that have strengthened and laid the future foundation of the private fundraising and partnership division. Philip began his UNICEF career in 1988 in Bangladesh, and has since served in various key positions in southern Sudan, Geneva and New York. Just prior to his current assignment he was the Regional Director for CEE/CIS. Before joining UNICEF he worked with the international NGO "Concern Worldwide," in places such as Bangladesh and Tanzania. Philip has been one of the longest serving members of our global leadership team always bringing new ideas to the table. Philip, thank you for your dedication, your tremendous work, and for your friendship.

The next colleague, while not retiring, is moving to a new position. Kirsi Madi has been selected as Deputy Regional Director for the CEE/CIS Regional Office in Geneva. As many of you know first-hand, Kirsi brings to UNICEF energy, professionalism and true commitment to further the organization's mission. She has been a tremendous asset to the work of the Executive Board. Before joining UNICEF in 1991, she served in the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Kirsi, my heartfelt thanks for all your impressive work, and my best wishes in your new post.

Having traveled to nearly seventy countries during the past five years, I have seen first-hand how UNICEF is making a real difference in the lives of children. I have witnessed the hardships caused by disease, conflict, violence and natural disasters. That so many children continue to lose their lives needlessly, lack access to basic preventative health care and cannot get a quality education is simply unacceptable. That girls and women continue to suffer the crimes of rape, abuse and trafficking is intolerable. And that children are among those most impacted by humanitarian disasters, climate change and inadequate nutrition is why the world must focus on its collective responsibility to future generations.

I have heard the stories of many of these children through my travels. I have met children whose parents were killed in the genocide in Rwanda. I met a young woman in Kyrgyzstan who was trafficked to Dubai and sold into sexual slavery

when she was just 12 years old. In northern Uganda, I spent time with children who had been abducted from their schools or communities and forced to fight in the rebel armies. I have twice visited the Democratic Republic of Congo where I met with victims of sexual violence in an area where rape is used as a weapon of war. And in Gaza I met children who had seen loved ones killed or homes destroyed and whose drawings depicted the violence they had witnessed.

The faces and stories of these children will remain with me forever and so will my passion for the mission of UNICEF. My sincere thanks to the UNICEF Board, to our talented staff and all the partners around the world whose hard work are helping to save, protect and improve the lives of the world's most vulnerable.

Thank you.
