Excellencies, colleagues and friends:

Good morning and thank you all for being here. This is our first regular session for 2011, and we have a full agenda – not only over the next few days, but in the new year ahead. It is an exciting time, and I am eager to discuss UNICEF’s top priorities in the coming months.

I want to begin by thanking Ambassador Abdul Momen for his service to the Board and for his dedication to UNICEF. I am personally grateful for your advice, counsel and friendship. And on behalf of all of us at UNICEF and the children we serve, I thank you for your leadership.

I would also like to thank our departing Vice Presidents, Ambassador Chitsaka Chipaziwa, Minister Lilián Silveira, the Honourable Mr. Paul Bekken, and all our departing Board members, for your distinguished service.

Of course, we are not saying goodbye to Ambassador – now President – Sanja Stiglic. I congratulate you on your election, and look forward to working closely with you, as we have over the past nine months.
I also congratulate our new Vice Presidents, Ambassador Ali Osman, Minister Peter van der Vliet, Ms. Gillian Joseph, and Ms. Grata Werdaningtyas. And I welcome all the new members of UNICEF’s Executive Board.

Before we continue, I would like to introduce the newest members of UNICEF’s senior management team.

First, it gives me great pleasure and pride to introduce UNICEF’s new Deputy Executive Director, Mr. Martin Mogwanja. Martin most recently served as UNICEF’s representative in Pakistan, where he was also the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator. He steps into the role filled for so long and so well by Mr. Omar Abdi, who has made us all very happy by agreeing to stay on as UNICEF’s Comptroller. Welcome, Martin – and thank you, Omar.

I am also very pleased to introduce Mr. Gordon Alexander, the new Director of the Office of Research; and to announce the selection of our new Director of the Office of Evaluation, Mr. Colin Kirk, and our new Disability Advisor, Ms. Roseangela Berman-Bieler.

These are all key roles, overseeing functions we regard as increasingly critical to UNICEF’s ability to deliver results for children. Please join me in welcoming our new colleagues and wishing them every success.

Finally, I would like to say a few words about someone who requires no introduction. As you may know, this will be the last Executive Board Meeting of my friend, Deputy Executive Director Saad Houry, after a truly extraordinary career at UNICEF.
Reviewing the list of the posts Saad has filled is like reading the UNICEF organizational chart: Deputy Executive Director, Chief of Staff, Country Representative, Deputy Regional Director, Regional Planning Advisor. Over nearly three decades, Saad has done it all, seen it all, and, quite possibly, knows it all. Saad speaks softly, but his words are weighty – and his opinions are invaluable. He is without question one of the most knowledgeable, committed and compassionate advocates for children I have had the pleasure to work with.

We will all miss Saad when he leaves – thankfully, not for a while. No one is quite sure how we will manage another Executive Board Meeting without him. So I ask you to join me now in thanking him for his many years of service – not only to UNICEF, but to the children of the world.

We should begin this new year by briefly reviewing the past year or so. It has been a critical time for children, and a pivotal time for UNICEF, as we have begun to deepen our traditional focus on reaching the most vulnerable.

In 2010, the urgency of that renewed focus was made clear, again and again – most extremely in Haiti and Pakistan, for disadvantaged children in such emergencies are the most vulnerable of the vulnerable, as I saw on my visits to both countries. Though we certainly have made progress – thanks to the heroic efforts of so many Haitians, Pakistanis, and their supporters – much work remains.

All emergencies and crisis situations, wherever they occur and whatever their cause, put children at greater risk of exploitation and abuse. That is one reason why we continue to press for universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, which ban the very worst forms of such exploitation and abuse.
Since we discussed this issue in June, we have made further progress toward universal ratification of the Optional Protocols, with many more nations acceding to, ratifying and signing these critical protections. I want to thank the members who have joined, and renew our call to all member states who have not yet done so.

The past year also brought with it disturbing new evidence of widening gaps between rich and poor children, even in many countries that have made overall progress toward meeting the Millennium Development Goals.

As you may recall from our last meeting, evidence of those growing inequities prompted UNICEF to question the conventional wisdom that it is too costly to reach the hardest to reach children and communities.

We asked ourselves: If the needs are greatest among the most disadvantaged – and new, more efficient strategies and tools exist to reach them – might the undoubted benefits of concentrating on the most vulnerable outweigh the additional costs?

I know many of you were there at our last meeting when we discussed the findings of our study, “Narrowing the Gaps to Meet the Goals,” but to review, the answer is, simply, yes. Focusing on the most disadvantaged is cost-effective… and moves us more quickly to MDG 4 – reducing infant mortality. And the results hold true – in differing measure – in low-income countries with high degrees of deprivation … in middle income countries with less deprivation but significant inequality … and in developing countries like Bangladesh, with high degrees of deprivation but lower inequality.
This was big news – and good news, especially in a time of continued financial constraint. We further discussed our findings at the United Nations Summit on the Millennium Development Goals, where UNICEF hosted a series of events on how an equity-focused approach can achieve greater results for children, women and families.

The reaction to the study has been highly encouraging across the board – among leading experts, our partners in the UN, at the World Bank, our National Committees, our government partners in both donor and programme countries, and within the media, where the idea has generated positive attention.

We believe the implications of an equity-focused approach are far-reaching, not only for UNICEF, but also for the United Nations and for human development generally – and not only in health, but potentially also in education, child protection and gender equality.

So, I would like to take a few moments to discuss four broad objectives for the coming year – two external, and two internal – which we believe will help us to realize the full promise of the equity approach … and deliver greater results for the world’s most vulnerable children.

First, we need to seize the moment to build support for the equity approach. That means intensifying our outreach and advocacy with all our partners – globally, at the country level, throughout civil society and within the UN community.
UNICEF’s partnerships are at the heart of all our work. Our partnerships can help us to promote the equity approach – and the equity approach can help us to develop new partnerships, engaging a broader global coalition in the effort to reach the most vulnerable children.

Promoting the equity approach this broadly is a large undertaking – but the time is right. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has made clear that children and women are at the heart of the MDGs – and he has put meeting the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable at the top of his action agenda for 2011 – as well as at the centre of his Global Strategy to Improve Women’s and Children’s Health.

So we intend to make the case and keep on making it. Because if, two years from now, the equity approach is perceived as belonging only to UNICEF, then we will have failed. And we must not fail. Because we cannot deliver alone.

This brings me to the second priority, closely tied to the first: How UNICEF can become an even stronger partner – and a leader – in promoting UN Coherence.

Across the UN, we are all working to better coordinate our efforts. This complex effort serves a powerful purpose: To improve our collective ability to support governments’ efforts to achieve their national goals. And we believe that equity can become a rallying force behind this effort.

Integrated programming leads to integrated action, and in turn, to greater impact. Comparative advantage works to everyone’s advantage – especially the people we serve.
Consider the work around maternal and neonatal mortality – one of the most blatant manifestations of inequity, and a place where we have made the least global progress. Four UN agencies – WHO, UNFPA, UNAIDS, and UNICEF – and the World Bank have joined forces to address this critical challenge. In the past, our individual agencies have worked side by side – for the most part separately – on this problem. But now, we are more closely coordinating our response – working together to identify the greatest needs and the key obstacles, and leveraging our respective strengths and resources to overcome those challenges.

UNICEF brings key capacities to this effort, especially our extensive network of field offices and local partnerships. And we are using this platform to support equity-focused initiatives designed to help the most vulnerable mothers and children, like training more community workers to care for at-risk newborns.

I might note that UNFPA, traditionally the lead on this issue, has embraced this equity-focus, and we welcome their engagement. Executive Director Babatunde Osotimehin was one of the outside experts who reviewed our study last June, and we appreciate his personal commitment to reaching the hardest to reach.

As we work to broaden understanding and support for an equity focus, and to broaden our partnerships as well, we are concentrating also on two internal priorities.
For this is the year of implementation. I have said many times before that in the end, results are all that matters. The equity approach will succeed – or fail – in the field, where the children are. We need to achieve concrete results, and we need to demonstrate them.

This brings me to the first internal objective: Operationalizing the equity approach across our entire organization.

Since we met in September, all UNICEF country programmes have carefully examined their work through the lens of equity. This internal shift affects what we do, how we do it and where we work, so I’d like to take a moment to address some of our efforts in greater detail.

As I do, I want to be clear that in all the activities I am describing, we are working to support our sovereign government partners. Our job is to advocate and promote the policies and actions we believe will have the greatest impact on the most vulnerable children; but our government partners are fundamentally responsible for making them real. This is not only a matter of philosophy, it is a practical necessity – and the only way to achieve sustainable results.

First, as I said earlier, our analysis shows that by focusing on the most-deprived areas, we will achieve the greatest results. So we are working to strengthen capacity in the countries with the highest burdens of deprivation – whether low or middle income … wherever the largest pockets of people are being left behind. Among other things, this means increasing senior staff time for priority country support and engaging local expertise in those countries to conduct equity analyses.
Second, we need to strengthen our ability to identify and overcome the bottlenecks that stand between lifesaving services and the communities that need them the most. This means improving the way we disaggregate data so we can see where the greatest needs—and the greatest obstacles—are. We are developing new, more cost-effective ways of helping countries to better map and understand the causes of low coverage for the most marginalized. And we are deepening our engagement with a wide spectrum of experts to further improve our methodology.

Third, since the most disadvantaged children almost always suffer from multiple and interrelated deprivations, our approach to addressing them must be better integrated. This means scaling up efforts to deliver packages of lifesaving interventions—for example, leveraging a measles immunization campaign to distribute bed nets and administer Vitamin A supplements along with the measles vaccine itself.

It also means integrating our teams who manage these efforts—for instance, by reorganizing formerly separate efforts to address maternal to child transmission of HIV, maternal and child health, and tetanus into an integrated team.

We are systematically reviewing all of our flagship programmes to find new opportunities for this kind of convergence—not only in health, but also in education and other key priority areas.

Fourth, we must also improve how services are delivered—finding new ways to overcome financial, social and cultural barriers and strengthening community-based efforts.
This could mean recruiting and training more front-line health workers to treat major childhood illnesses … or investing in innovative ways of keeping children in school … or strengthening procurement and supply systems, to name just a few.

Fifth, we are monitoring all these new efforts with an internal online tool we call the Equity Tracker, and providing discretionary resources to some country programmes to jumpstart promising innovations.

Finally, as we seek to improve our strategic management of the equity approach, we are working not only to better monitor our activities; but also to better measure the results they achieve.

This is a major challenge for all agencies, because the impact of programmes and projects often takes time to become apparent. But we believe we can cut back on the lag time, devising ways to achieve and evaluate results more quickly.

This will not only help us to improve our management both globally and at the country level, but also enable us to provide the greatest return on investments – making the best and most cost-effective use of the funds which have been entrusted to us.

UNICEF works very well as a decentralized organization – and our country and regional offices’ sense of responsibility to our mission lies at the heart of their efficiency and effectiveness. But we believe that with better and timelier information at the global, strategic level, we can do a better job of managing and supporting our programmes, by identifying areas which need greater support and, possibly, direction.
To that end, we have begun to define key areas in which we believe we can accelerate the speed with which we collect and analyse disaggregated data on results.

This brings me to the second internal goal for the year: Further improving UNICEF’s internal efficiency and management practices.

Our first and most important challenge for the year is the full implementation of VISION – an innovative, web-based system designed to streamline our business transactions and to increase our ability to monitor both management and programme performance across the entire organization.

At the same time, we have made significant progress in preparing UNICEF to be fully IPSAS compliant – and we are in the process of working with our regional and country offices to develop new learning programmes so that all staff will be fully trained in the new system.

Taken together, we believe these improvements will enable us to plan and budget more strategically – and to connect resources with results more directly. Most important, they will increase our ability to improve the support we provide to our country offices. We expect to have fully implemented VISION, and to be fully IPSAS-compliant, by January 2012.

These are our most important internal management goals for the year, but – as you will hear more about this week – we are also pushing ahead on all of our key management priorities, including audit, evaluation, and a review we are conducting of our strategic communications priorities.
In Human Resources, our new e-recruitment system is speeding up the hiring process, and our staff development initiatives continue to work toward greater gender balance and geographic diversity, just as our efforts to streamline staffing for humanitarian action have enabled us to move more quickly in crises.

On Wednesday, we will hold a pledging event, but this morning let me report briefly on our budget projections for the year.

According to the financial plan submitted to the Executive Board in September 2010, UNICEF predicted a decline of approximately 7% in income for 2011. Given that actual 2010 income exceeded planned targets – largely due to income received for the Haiti and Pakistan humanitarian crises – we anticipate that 2011 income will decline slightly in real terms. We are also predicting a decline in regular resource income for 2011, continuing the disturbing trend we saw in 2009 and 2010. So this year, the most pressing issue will be increasing core resources.

With guidance by the Executive Board, UNICEF earlier drew down on cash balances from previous years when income exceeded expenditures. These resources helped us to jump start the equity agenda, among other priorities. But drawing on reserves to meet the income gap is not a sustainable strategy, of course, so we need to increase core resources if we want to deliver on our commitment to achieve results for children.

And next week, at our Global Management Team meeting, we will be discussing possible cost cutting measures, and seeking suggestions for efficiency gains.
As I said a moment ago, results are all that matters – and we are determined not only to achieve them, but to demonstrate how a sharper focus on equity is helping us to do so.

Since I joined UNICEF last year, I have visited eighteen countries – countries in crisis, programme countries and donor countries alike. So far, I have met around two thirds of our country representatives, with plans to meet many more this year.

The people in the field are UNICEF – and I believe this even more strongly today than I did nine months ago, because I have seen them in action. Our primary purpose here at Headquarters in New York is to support their efforts – and I have tried to make my visits count by offering specific support on key priorities.

In Senegal, that meant supporting the effort to increase school enrolment, especially for girls … In China, participating in a high level meeting on the importance of South-South Cooperation to reach the most disadvantaged … In Malawi and Kenya, focusing on the effective elimination of maternal to child transmission of HIV … In Bihar, India, highlighting new outreach efforts to reduce neonatal mortality … And in Angola, which I visited two weeks ago, joining with the Gates Foundation and WHO to reinforce the government’s commitment to stop the polio outbreak there.

In every country I have travelled to, in every community I have visited, I have seen evidence of the difference an equity-approach can make in children’s lives – with the potential to do a great deal more.
So now, we are all the more determined to **do it** – and we need your help.

We know this is going to be a difficult, challenging year – just as every year will be as we approach the 2015 deadline for meeting the Millennium Development Goals … And, I suspect, thereafter. That is why we are working so hard to put the systems in place to help us achieve it. And that is why we are reaching out to all of our partners to join us in this effort.

I cannot thank you enough for the support of the Executive Board, the Bureau and its officers. In the coming year, we look forward to your formal support, to your formal and informal advice – and to your advocacy. For protecting the rights of the most disadvantaged children is our communal duty – and we can only succeed through our collective effort.

So I thank you once again for being here. I am looking forward to our discussions over the next several days, and throughout the year ahead. Thank you.

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