Ms. President,

I am delivering this statement on behalf of Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Lithuania, Mexico, the Republic of Moldova, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States and my own country, Germany.

First, we would like to thank former Principal Advisor, Ms. Ursula Wellen, for her strong and innovative efforts to buttress UNICEF’s culture of ethics by increasing the outreach of the ethics office and by strengthening its status as a broadly recognized and important oversight and advisory unit within UNICEF. We look forward to welcoming the new director of the Ethics Office and assure our full support to the Office going forward.

We commend the Ethics Office for its work in 2019 and for further enhancing its ethics outreach, awareness, training and education initiatives. The continued increase in requests to the Ethics Office reflects its important position within UNICEF. We commend UNICEF management for its positive cooperation with the Ethics Office, as laid out in the report with regards to a number of issues. We note with appreciation, among other things, the uptake in requests for standard-setting and policy input, based on a standardized consultation process. We furthermore commend the rapid implementation of recommendations with regard to the financial disclosure programme. We welcome the stronger focus of the programme on seniority and organizational risk by at the same time reducing the number of filers. The achievement of a 100% compliance rate is a laudable success for UNICEF and the Ethics Office.

The close collaboration between the Ethics Office and the newly created roles of the Child Safeguarding Unit, the Senior Coordinator PSEA and the Principal Adviser organizational culture is crucial to effectively address these important areas of work. The Ethics Office point out that all the three roles have some degree of overlap with the Ethics Office, potentially creating duplication as well as confusion for staff and a risk of weakened confidentiality standards. The Audit Advisory Committee to UNICEF has also highlighted this issue in its report. We would therefore like to see UNICEF review its accountability structure, as advised by the Ethics Office and the Audit Advisory Committee, with the aim of clarifying roles and responsibilities. We would welcome more information on which concrete steps are planned in order to address the concerns and avoid the risk of duplication. However, we do not believe it should be a staff members responsibility to understand these distinctions, so would encourage UNICEF to ensure reporting channels reflect this, including a single point through...
which staff can report concerns and guidance on alternative routes in exceptional circumstances.

We commend UNICEF and the Ethics Office for having made collaborative steps towards further strengthening the position and independence of the Office. Higher staff confidence in protection against retaliation, as pointed out by the Independent Task Force, is crucial for ensuring UNICEF has an empowered work force able to uphold UNICEF’s values in the face of misconduct.

With regards to the Ethics Office’s resources, however, we found inconclusive information in the Ethics Office report as well as in the management response. With decision 2019/15, the Board had asked UNICEF and the Ethics Office to conduct and present an assessment. We understand the assessment has been done and would like to hear more on its results as well as UNICEF’s plans on how to respond to them.

Lastly, we would like to point out that a management response ought to address in particular those aspects of a report that point to proposed areas of change and improvement as well as recommendations directed at management. We see room for improvement in this regard.

To conclude, let me thank UNICEF and the UNICEF staff association for making available a summary of the most recent Global Staff Survey, pursuant to Board decisions 2018/11 and 2019/15. We are encouraged to see a high response rate and marked improvements in a range of categories since 2017. We congratulate UNICEF to overall very positive response rates in a number of key areas. UNICEF has been pro-actively engaged over the past years to improve its workplace culture and internal accountability and protection mechanisms. In this light, we have strong confidence that UNICEF management together with the Staff Association and relevant units and roles with the organization will work to address those areas where staff response show a need for improvement.

Thank you.