Statement on behalf of the African Members of the Executive Board of UNICEF

Tuesday, September 8th, 2020

Madam President,

* I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of the African Members of the Executive Board of UNICEF.

* At the outset, allow me to express the support and confidence of my Group in your leadership as you continue to conduct the work of the board in these difficult circumstances.

* We would like to thank UNICEF’s Executive Director, Ms. Henrietta Fore, for her comprehensive opening remarks, and through her, to commend the work done by the organization, under her able leadership, to live up to its mandate of delivering for children everywhere and putting their needs first.

* Also we would like to express our sheer solidarity with the international community on the collective efforts to prevent and stop the spread of the COVID-19 around the world.

Madam President,

* 2020 has been a challenging year for many of us in dealing with COVID-19 and its global impact. Children are not the face of this pandemic. But they risk being among its biggest victims, according to the “Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Children”.

* The adoption of the Agenda 2030 and SDGs brought the promise to foster a better and more sustainable future for all by addressing global challenges we face. Unfortunately, it took the COVID-19 few months to lead numerous African countries well-engaged in the pace to achieving SDGs at the very rough and rugged edge of this pace. It is much easier to follow and run a pace than its edges. However, the African Members of the Executive Board of UNICEF continue to reaffirm their unflinching commitment to achieving the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs as internationally agreed.

* COVID-19 is widening the existing vulnerabilities and inequalities across the globe, with repercussions for years to come. Not only schools around the world closed, and hundreds of millions of children have been out of school facing a number of threats to their safety and well-being, but also households’ incomes have been threatened or lost, and children have been bearing the consequences. The poorest are hardest hit.

* In Africa, the pandemic threatens to reverse the positive results and progress made so far, since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, by years or even decades, with economic aftershocks risking to push an additional 33 million children into poverty according to “Save the Children”.

* Migrant and displaced children are among the most vulnerable. More than 33 million children are living outside of their country of birth, facing numerous challenges, including to access shelter, education, adequate health care, nutrition, clean water and sanitation, to name a few of what they are enduring at these challenging times.

* Across the globe, we are particularly concerned that millions of girls will never be able to return to schools, and that a whole generation will face unprecedented economic challenges. We are
also concerned of the potential surge in child exploitation and abuse, child forced marriage, child labor and child pornography during the lockdowns, as well as of the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on increased risks for outbreaks of preventable diseases.

* That is why; we commend UNICEF’s efforts in adaptation and innovation and support the multi-way response and partnership with sister Agencies, as well as its innovative programs in health care, vaccines and social protection. These joints efforts are saving millions of lives. We agree with Mrs. Fore that there is a need of revolution in learning, education, skills and training to overcome the challenges in these fields. This will allow to keep up with the pace towards their full realization by 2030.

* We cannot afford to do anything less than combining optimism with joint efforts and concrete actions. For this reason, we commend UNICEF’s efforts striving to maintain the continuity of its programs and operations, as it responds to COVID-19, and adapting to the pandemic’s multifaceted impacts.

Madam President,

* The work of UNICEF in Africa remains critical to the welfare of millions of African children. We commend UNICEF’s efforts to support Members States’ development initiatives, in accordance with our Continent’s development priorities and frameworks, which are in line with the “Africa’s 2040 Agenda for Children” and the “2030 Agenda”, particularly in areas of poverty reduction, access to education, basic social services, food security and HIV/AIDS programs.

* Needless to underline, the pandemic came, as the world was already off-track to achieve many of the SDGs, namely the child-focused targets. As we are going through the Decade of Action, we welcome the targets set by UNICEF, using COVID context to make its action more agile, forward-looking, embracing innovation, technology and new approaches to accelerate results.

* We particularly welcome partnerships around GIGA initiative to expand internet access to every child, every community and every school by 2030, to allow for the continuation of connectivity and delivering services to students, and allow those from low-income homes to be digitally included.

* In these tough times and as we entered the decade for action 2020-2030, an unprecedented international mobilization of Financial and Human Resources at a grandest scale and which will largely exceed all records already achieved in the past by the international community will be of great importance to allow Member States, particularly from the African continent, to re-find the pace towards the achievement of the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, and to re-boost the UNICEF’s work on the ground. African Members of the Executive board firmly believe that it is in this sole condition that we can all together overcome the multifaceted impacts of the COVID-19.

* We would like to commend UNICEF efforts in order to make this Agency a safe place for its valuable staff to work; a place where they can feel free from discrimination and racism. In this regard, we welcome the establishement of a internal task team against racism as a contribution from UNICEF to the worldwide protests again anti-black discrimination.

Madam President,

* To conclude, we would like to underline the following three points:

1. **COVID-19 pandemic is a deep and sudden crisis.** The current and coming years will be a crucial test for our able leadership, strong partnerships and positive multilateralism aiming at building a healthy, prosperous, and secure future for the current and coming generations.
2. We would like to reiterate our gratitude to UNICEF staff around the world, keeping up their noble mission despite the current logistical, personal and technological challenges, and seize this opportunity to express our sincere condolences to those who lost their loved ones in Beirut. We would also like to pay special tribute to the teachers, social workers and health workers who continue to provide services to children in particularly challenging circumstances.

3. Last but not least, we would like to reiterate our support to the UNICEF board, to you Madam President and to the Executive Director and her staff. We look forward to continued collaboration for the benefit of the African children and children everywhere.

I THANK YOU FOR YOUR KIND ATTENTION.