Nueva York, 10 de septiembre de 2020

Excellencies, Members of the Bureau, Members of the Executive Board and Observers,

On behalf of the Government of Colombia, I would like to express our gratitude for the consideration and approval of our Country Program Document at this Session.

This document reflects the close coordination between the government of Colombia and UNICEF, and the hard work and vision of our teams and their leaders.

We are very pleased with the results obtained, which are based on the three priorities set in the framework of collaboration with United Nations, namely (i) Peace with Legality, (ii) Migration, and (iii) Catalytic SDGs.

The Program is aligned with our National Development Plan, UNICEF’s Strategic Plan, and international conventions.

In this sense, I would like to thank all the people who worked on this CPD, and reiterate our unwavering commitment to continue benefiting the children and young people in Colombia.

They are the present and future of our nation.

Madam Chair,

This roundtable on education takes place in a very particular moment. The pandemic Covid-19 has unveiled flaws and raised key questions on the access and quality of education.

For the Government of Colombia this issue is a priority.

Education is a fundamental human right. We need to assure its provision for all. No one can be left behind.
Therefore, we have developed the **Sectorial Education Plan 2018 – 2022** that seeks the well-being of students, their access to education, the comprehensive development of early childhood, the improvement of quality, the strengthening of rural programs, the development of family and school, the modernization of the system, among others.

¿Why we are making such emphasis on this topic?¿

We do believe that education is a powerful tool for greater social inclusion, equity and productivity.

It is the pathway to construct a more peaceful and sustainable society.

Without it, we cannot fight poverty and climate change. Without it, the achievements of the Sustainable Goals become a fiction.

Madam Chair,

Let me now make some reflections about education in my region.

Based on the recent studies of CAF - Development Bank of Latin America, there are some key findings that I would like to share with you:

- Access to basic education has increased, but significant deficits remain. For instance, 70% of 3-year-olds do not have access to early childhood education.
- Differences in access to education are mainly related to income level.
- Students in Latin America are learning much less than their peers in Europe and Asia.
- There is a disconnect between the skills formed in the educational system and those demanded by the labor market.
- The fiscal effort in education increased in most Latin American countries but the region is below the OECD.

Based on this scenario, there are 5 messages to convey:

1. Education is fundamental to growth, social well-being and individual progress.
2. Latin America must increase access to early education and ensure the completion of secondary education, especially for the lower-income population.
3. Latin America must raise the quality of education, with an emphasis on equity.
4. Latin American youth need to acquire the skills and competencies demanded by the labor market.
5. Latin America not only needs to invest more, it must also do better.

To conclude, I would like to make a question and inspiring you with a quote.

**Question:** In which areas do you think that UNICEF can have a greater impact on education in the region? How can Colombia help you?

**Quote:** In words of Nelson Mandela: “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world”.

Thank you very much / Muchas gracias.