Joint statement
Second Regular Session 2020 of the UNICEF Executive Board

Agenda Item 9 – Evaluation of the UNICEF contribution to education in humanitarian situations (5 min.)

Thank you Madame President. I am delivering this statement on behalf of Australia, Austria, Canada, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, the Republic of Moldova, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States of America and my own country Denmark.

UNICEF is a key partner in promoting education in emergencies and protracted crises. We welcome the evaluation’s conclusions, which confirm that UNICEF has successfully raised the importance of education as a core component of humanitarian responses globally. Furthermore, we appreciate that UNICEF has provided fast support to countries affected by the COVID-19 pandemic through its largest education response ever.

We expect UNICEF to strengthen its work in preparedness, resilience and recovery of education systems, as well as in protracted crises on the humanitarian-development nexus.

The evaluation highlights gaps in the targeting and prioritization of the most vulnerable children, including girls and children with disabilities. 129 million girls were out of school before COVID-19. The pandemic has exacerbated the situation, increasing the risk of widening the gender gap in education, while leaving girls vulnerable to gender-based violence, abuse and early marriage.

We welcome the management’s response and the increased focus on girls and children with disabilities and wish to emphasize the importance of promoting gender equality and disability inclusion in – and through – education.

The evaluation report also points to insufficient capacities of staff, partners and UNICEF management with regard to education in emergencies. Another area of concern is the lack of clarity of roles between HQ, regional offices and country offices, resulting in weak coordination across different organizational levels. Education is a long-term investment and key to strengthening resilience, notably at sub-national levels. We strongly emphasize the need for internal and external capacity development, coordination, ownership and localization as well as system strengthening measures.

The evaluation report states that health and nutrition is not well integrated into UNICEF’s education response in emergencies and that UNICEF has no systematic approach to multi-sectoral programming. COVID-19 has made it clear that nutrition, health and wash activities should be an integral part of education response. Strengthening integrated, multi-sectoral programming is, in our view, crucial across UNICEF’s spectrum of engagement. The current Strategic Plan has made UNICEF’s commitment to integrated programming explicit with its approach of overarching goal areas, integrating several outcome areas. The evaluation shows that there is a need to intensify efforts in this regard. UNICEF should strengthen and systematize multi-sectoral programming and internal coherence between sectors. This holds true with regard to the development of the new Strategic Plan 2022-2025, but it is also a prime task for improving the way UNICEF plans and
implements programmes on the ground, giving different sectoral teams the time and capacities to come together at different stages of programming cycles. We would welcome to hear from UNICEF on lessons learned and best practices in this regard.

We encourage UNICEF to continue its strong cooperation and alignment with other relevant actors such as UNESCO, UNHCR, GPE or ECW. For example through high-level representation in steering committees of the funds. We thank UNICEF for hosting the Education Cannot Wait Fund – the key global fund for education in emergencies and protracted crises. Together with Education Cannot Wait, the Global Partnership for Education and others, UNICEF has contributed to including education in crisis response, enabling continuity of learning in challenging situations.

We welcome the session today with UNICEF and UNHCR on their cooperation for refugee children and their host communities, including efforts to provide quality education to all.

Finally, we want to emphasize that as for refugee children and youth, inclusion in national education systems should be prioritized wherever possible, also with regard to distance learning programmes such as the Learning Passport.

Thank you.