Statement of Noma Owens-Ibie  
Chairperson, UNICEF Global Staff Association  
Annual Session of the UNICEF Executive Board  
July 02, 2020

Madam President, your excellencies distinguished Members of the Executive Board, our Executive Director, colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is my pleasure to address you today on behalf of all UNICEF staff. Let me note upfront that this will be an abridged presentation, in line with the recommendations for this virtual meeting.

The newly elected UNICEF Global Staff Association leadership team assumed work in January 2020, with two Vice-Chairpersons released full time to represent staff; for this, we are grateful to senior management. We are proud to collaborate with them on staff matters. We work actively with staff representatives at Regional, Country Office and Zonal Office levels, as well as all Headquarter locations, to provide adequate representation to staff on issues of their welfare.

Despite the global lockdown to curb the spread of COVID-19, staff all over the world have remained dedicated to the UNICEF mandate to deliver results for children and women. I thank Member States for their strong support and their appreciation of the work of UNICEF staff, who have shown great dedication, resilience and motivation to continue to deliver during the global COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

In the last few months, we have been engaging directly with staff in all office locations, through the Country Office and Regional Office Staff Associations. This process has enabled us to learn from our colleagues and, bring up staff needs on a real-time basis to management, thereby enabling better support at all levels. We have maintained a consistent and collaborative working
relationship with senior management, the Division of Human Resources and other stakeholders to ensure that the work environment for all staff is conducive and enables the support needed to continue to focus on results for children and women. We have partnered with the Division of Human Resources to refine guidelines on how teleworking modalities should be handled, facilitated financial support to staff through early payroll processing and salary advances, provided links to staff on managing emergency health situations, including COVID exposure and medical evacuation and engaged with specific offices on matters peculiar to them. We have reached out to colleagues stuck in emergency locations and those stranded in several country offices, away from families for 4-6 months in the context of the COVID pandemic. We have continued to listen to their concerns and fears, as well as feel their enthusiasm and pride in being a part of the energetic workforce of UNICEF. We have contributed to ensuring the duty of care that has enabled increased focus on making sure staff are able to telework from their homes and take care of their families, especially children who have needed home schooling in various parts of the world. It has been encouraging to share the stories of UNICEF staff from all over the world, coping with the stresses of working from home and still positively striving to deliver results for children. The elaborate business continuity plans in UNICEF offices has enabled a seamless transition for staff from office base to working from home, and in some cases, alternating between locations and managing the attendant challenges courageously and graciously.

We would also like to note that, in spite of all the effort to support staff, the COVID context has created increased workload for staff, who have had to sacrifice conventional work hours to ensure that required deliverables are met; some have experienced physical and mental health challenges and untold stress, linked to work; some have expressed uncertainties about post-
COVID job security and family wellbeing. We have never ceased to transmit these concerns to senior management and will continue to work with them to seek solutions that meet the needs of staff, while not compromising our own commitment to deliver. Let me also take time to acknowledge that several colleagues have experienced the harsh fallout of the COVID pandemic, in terms of being infected or having family members who have been infected. Some of our colleagues have passed away, due to COVID and non-COVID causes. We grieve these losses and hope to continue to deliver for all children and women in their memory. There is commitment in the organization to walking the path towards culture change and an environment of zero tolerance for all forms of harassment and abuse of authority. While implementation has been challenging, we are happy to report our strong partnership with the Principal Advisor on Culture Change in ensuring that all barriers are removed and desired behaviours are promoted. Given the opportunity, we would like to share more on this during the September meeting. The Global Staff Association has worked with management in ensuring a successful EDGE survey process that led to UNICEF recertification. We shall continue to partner with senior management to ensure that areas requiring attention are addressed. We also contributed to finalizing the instrument used in the ongoing Global Staff Survey and are actively supporting completion by all staff. No doubt, the results of the Survey will provide guidance on determining areas of need for more attention and also allow for joint plans of action with management to address emerging issues.
As a follow up to an earlier request by my predecessor, GSA kindly asks again that the Executive Board and Member States support us in a call to the International Civil Service Commission to review how it determines compensation for national staff.

We hope that ICSC will address the concerns of national staff in several countries where they are demoralized by negative salary survey results, pay freezes, currency devaluation, and unfair dual salary-scales imposed by ICSC through the existing salary survey methodology. The Global Staff Association has joined other UN Staff Unions and Associations in demanding reforms by the ICSC not only on its survey methodologies but also the principles on which the salaries and entitlements for staff are determined. The current inequities are in urgent need of correction.

As I round-off Madam President, your Excellencies, distinguished members of the Board, let me join our Executive Director and senior management to condemn all forms of racism and discrimination against black people in the US and other parts of the world. We condemn discrimination against any groups, based on race, ethnicity, socio-economic group, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, and other factors, wherever they may be. These are alien to our core values as UNICEF and deserve no place in our work locations, communities and the larger society. We restate our commitment to working with senior management to remove all manifestations of racism and discrimination in UNICEF and in the wider UN system, and enthusiastically welcome the Task Team and Engagement Group, recently set up by the Executive Director, to address the issues comprehensively.

Madam President, your Excellencies, distinguished members of the Board, distinguished colleagues,

I thank you, once again, for the opportunity to speak to you on behalf of all UNICEF staff worldwide.