Excellencies,
Executive Director of UNICEF,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honor for my country and a great privilege for me personally to serve as President of the UNICEF Executive Board for 2011. In this regard I wish to express my special thanks and gratitude to the Eastern European Group, which nominated me as their representative to the Board, and the Executive Board for giving me an opportunity to serve the Executive Board as its President for the current year. Promotion and protection of children’s rights is one of the priorities of the Slovenian foreign policy in the field of human rights and development cooperation. I can assure you that we will strive for an open, transparent and constructive presidency of the Executive Board, one that will contribute to improving the situation of children around the world.

Allow me at the very outset to thank the outgoing President, Ambassador Abulkalam Abdul Momen of Bangladesh, for his able leadership and his important contribution to the work of the Executive Board. I have been privileged to cooperate closely with him and benefit from the wisdom with which Ambassador Momen was guiding the Board. Special thanks goes also to the members of the outgoing Bureau for their commitment to the goals of UNICEF. At the same time I would like to congratulate members of the Bureau of the Executive Board who were just elected. I look forward to working with them in the year ahead.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the Executive Director of UNICEF, Mr. Anthony Lake, for his vision, leadership, personal devotedness and dynamism, particularly in championing the equity focus in achieving the MDGs. I have really enjoyed working with Mr. Lake last year during my term as Vice-President, and this year I very much look forward to continuing our excellent relationship as President of the Executive Board.

We are also fortunate to have an experienced team of committed and skilled professional staff headed by the Secretary of the UNICEF Executive Board, Mr. Nicolas Pron and I count on your support and guidance during the year.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When it comes to the realisation of children’s rights, the achievement of Millennium Development Goals is of utmost importance. Accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals with equity remains an extraordinary challenge – but one that we have to pursue as an essential means to sustainable socio-economic development.

UNICEF’s leadership contributes to our collective efforts to building a world fit for children, in a world that is becoming increasingly insecure. The latest Progress for Children report shows that we still have a long way to go. Although we have made significant strides towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals, thanks in large part to the collective effort of the international community, it is increasingly clear that our progress is uneven in many key areas. We must try to do better in ensuring the survival and health of children, especially in adverse circumstances.
Our main challenge is to further strengthen the quality and relevance of UNICEF - building on our successes and tackling the challenges at hand, to promote a stronger, more cost-effective and result-oriented organization.

In these uncertain times, as countries – developing and industrialized alike – are still struggling to recover from the global financial crisis, we must try to get better results through collaborative efforts and other kinds of partnerships – with Governments, with other United Nations agencies, with civil society and, not least, with the private sector. I also hope that pledging event, which is scheduled for later this week, will be successful and will bring expected results.

By providing intergovernmental support and overall policy guidance, the Executive Board offers an excellent venue to address the multiple dimensions of poverty and their implications for sustainable development. Our discussions are also an opportunity to solicit concrete initiatives to help alleviate the impact of disasters on the most vulnerable groups, particularly children and women.

The annual report to ECOSOC, which we will be discussing later this morning, provides an excellent overview on the important work of UNICEF, highlighting the whole range of the organization’s recent activities.

This year, we continue to guide the joint effort among the Funds and Programmes in the development of an integrated budget, which we are discussing at this session. It is hoped that this step toward greater UN coherence will facilitate guidance and oversight and bring greater transparency to the allocation and utilization of funds. Another interesting item on our agenda is the oral report on the knowledge management and research functions of UNICEF. These functions are crucial in sustaining the organization’s global leadership as an advocate for children.

Private fundraising, also discussed at this session, is another field where UNICEF has been developing new kinds of partnerships – with the active and dynamic support of its network of National Committees – to increase its relevance and reach within a changing world. We will also have a special focus session on the collaboration between the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and UNICEF. This partnership continues to be a vital element of UNICEF’s efforts to achieve the MDGs. On a national level, Slovenia recognises important role of the Global Fund and is a strong supporter of its activities.

Looking beyond this first session of the Executive Board, we are also looking forward to a busy and rich programme of work, with fifty (50) country programme documents to be discussed and approved by the Executive Board this year, and the initiation, starting at this session, of a dialogue that will lead to the development of the next medium-term strategic plan of UNICEF.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am confident that with your support and our combined efforts we shall be able to achieve the goals we have set for ourselves this year. I hope that you will all help me in making this a fruitful and successful year.

Thank you.