Opening statement of the President of the Executive Board

Ambassador Dr. AK Abdul Momen

June 1, 2010

Good morning Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, ladies and gentlemen. On behalf of the Executive Board I would like to express appreciation to all of you for your participation in this session, especially those of you who have travelled from various capitals and other distances to be here.

Allow me to extend a very special welcome to Dr. Anthony Lake, the new Executive Director of UNICEF, as this is the first Executive Board session he is attending. We are fortunate to be able to benefit from Dr. Lake’s considerable leadership skills and decades of experience working in development, specifically for the cause of children. I have a special connection with him. I met him first nearly 37 years ago when he was involved in helping the post-liberation poor people of Bangladesh. Sir, we very much look forward to working with you.

Dr. Lake joins UNICEF at a time when the organization’s dedication and expertise are needed more than ever, especially in the context of continued global economic downturns, armed conflicts and natural disasters, challenges of food insecurity and climate change plus widespread violations of the rights of children and women. UNICEF continues to act as a beacon for fulfillment of their plights and their rights, and it is particularly fitting that during this session we will celebrate the extraordinary global work being done in this area during the Commemoration of the Tenth Anniversary of the adoption of the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

During this session, we will consider several topics of major importance to UNICEF and its contribution to achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. This year’s annual report of the Executive Director focuses not only on progress and achievements in the year 2009 but also on the extensive in-depth review of the medium-term strategic plan for 2006-2013 undertaken by the organization and indications of the way forward. The Executive Board will also be presented with a key report on gender issues, covering progress in the implementation of the management response to the gender policy evaluation. Another important report on progress made will be presented in the update on the organizational improvement initiatives being implemented by UNICEF to make its work even more efficient, effective and transparent. An oral update will be given on the work of UNICEF in humanitarian situations.

The Executive Board will have a chance to closely view the work of UNICEF at the field level during the presentation of 13 draft area and country program documents and the reports of the field visits of Executive Board members to China, Rwanda and Tajikistan.
All of this work highlights the importance of partnership to UNICEF, including collaboration with other United Nations organizations in support of system-wide coherence, with the private sector and civil society. In this regard, the special focus session on the role and work of National Committees for UNICEF will underscore the crucial role the Committees play in UNICEF work - not only in fundraising but in the increasingly important area of advocacy for the health, development and well-being of the world’s children and for protection of their rights. We must continue to work closely together to champion these precious rights.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen;

Although almost 50 years have elapsed since the UN Declaration on the Rights of Child was adopted on November 20, 1959, the lives of billions of children till to-date are uncertain and neglected. Out of total global population, more than 1/3rd is children and half of them still live in poverty and deprivation. They have yet a guaranteed future and opportunity to grow. Rather, over 1 billion live in poverty and an overwhelming majority nearly 86% are in the developing countries.

There are over 250 million child laborers worldwide and the Asia-Pacific region has the highest child laborers. Nearly 22,000 children die each year due to work-related accidents. A large number of children are being subjected to flesh trade trafficking and they suffer cruelty and deprivation. Nearly 130 million children cannot enroll in primary schools and more importantly, dropout rate is staggering.

And in times of crises, whether it is global financial meltdown, or erratic climate change, or war and conflicts, it is women and children that are most affected. No wonder, out of 8 MDG goals, 6 are relevant to children and therefore, the Bureau of the Executive Board has decided to arrange a Special Event on Children Issues and MDGs during the upcoming High Level Plenary Meeting on MDG in September 2010 with a view to remind the global community to come forward with more innovative and effective means to fulfill our dream, our dream to have a world where a healthy mother gives birth to a healthy child, where schooling is guaranteed to every child, where abuse of children becomes a history, where opportunity to grow and a decent living is a norm rather than a privilege. As your representatives in the Bureau we strongly feel that MDGs are very closely linked to UNICEF’s mandate and ultimately an important task for this Board is to maximize UNICEF’s contribution towards accelerating achievement of these globally agreed crucial goals. The UNICEF Secretariat has been working on this special event for last few months and I am confident that under the able leadership of the current Executive Director Dr Anthony Lake the Secretariat will soon finalize all necessary arrangements for this. I also call upon all member countries and observer delegations to be actively involved with the special event. Let us UNITE for the children at this critical juncture. We must not, I repeat, we must not, fail to our children.

Thank you all.