Good morning, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

It has been an honour and a great pleasure to serve as President of the Executive Board. I welcomed the opportunity to work with distinguished colleagues in the Bureau and Executive Board, Government representatives, observer delegations, the UNICEF Secretariat, and all others who are striving to make the world a better place for children.

A special note of appreciation is due to the Vice-Presidents of the Executive Board, who contributed so much time and effort to making the Bureau effective: Her Excellency Ms. Sanja Štiglic, Permanent Representative of Slovenia to the United Nations, His Excellency Mr. Chitsaka Chipaziwa, Permanent Representative of Zimbabwe to the United Nations, and his predecessor on the Bureau, His Excellency Mr. Boniface Chidyausiku, Ms. Lilián Silveira, Minister Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Uruguay to the United Nations, and her predecessor on the Bureau, His Excellency Mr. Gustavo Álvarez, Deputy Permanent Representative of Uruguay to the United Nations, and Mr. Paul Klouman Bekken, Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Norway to the United Nations.

On behalf of the Executive Board, I was especially fortunate to be able to welcome Mr. Anthony Lake as the Executive Director of UNICEF. This is a man of tremendous leadership and compassion for children, who will continue to hold the Equity banner aloft in global efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed and national goals for children. I would like to pay tribute to him and to his extremely capable staff stationed throughout the world.

My delegation witnessed the remarkable dedication and hard work of many staff members during the field visit of the Bureau to China and the joint field visit of Executive Boards to Rwanda. The visits made an indelible impression on us. It demonstrated, one the one hand, the similar hurdles children face in different contexts and, on the other hand, how much can be accomplished when government bodies, UN agencies, civil society and others work in concert to improve children’s lives.

I would also like to give special thanks to the Deputy Executive Directors Mr. Omar Abdi, Mr. Saad Houry, and Ms. Hilde Frafjord Johnson for their expert guidance and support during the year, and to the UNICEF technical focal points for decisions for their timely assistance. Warm thanks are extended to the Secretary of the Executive Board, Mr. Nicolas Pron, and Assistant Secretary, Ms. Christine Muhigana, who made sure all that Board-related sessions, meetings, interactions and field visits were engaging and productive and who kept us very well informed and involved. Credit also goes to the staff of the UNICEF Office of the Secretary of the Executive Board, the United Nations conference officers, the interpreters, and other staff who worked behind the scenes to make our meetings run so efficiently.
Thanks to this excellent support and our own vigorous spirit of cooperation, we made important strides in 2010. We helped UNICEF to further promote the rights of children and women, improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its operations, and contribute even more effectively to system-wide coherence. We can take pride in our accomplishments, including the adoption of key decisions in a number of areas, including: the evaluation of gender policy, the integrated budget, audit, evaluation, private fundraising, the in-depth review of the medium-term strategic plan, human resources, the approval of country programmes, the allocation of resources for programmes, reporting by the Office of Ethics, the extension of cooperation with Rotary International and the extension of the Vaccine Independence Initiative. The smooth adoption of these decisions was made possible through the tact and guidance of our facilitators, to whom I extend our gratitude.

In addition to the Bureau members and facilitators, I would like to thank all the Executive Board members for the tremendous amount of preparation and thought they put into each session – to such good effect. I am confident that the extremely capable Bureau and Board members elected for 2011 will carry on the good work accomplished by this Board and Bureau in 2010.

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, despite impressive gains made for children in the last few decades, serious challenges continue to threaten past and future progress and to widen the gaps between rich and poor. These challenges include the continuing global economic downturn, food insecurity, the effects of climate change and environmental degradation, armed conflict and natural disasters. They include HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other rampant diseases as well as the lack of quality education for millions of children, which prevents them from reaching their full potential. Less visible but equally pernicious is the widespread violation of the rights of children and women, including discrimination based on gender and ethnicity. The list goes on.

In the face of the global economic downturn, UNICEF has managed to steer a steady course, maintaining for 2010 its previous level of resources for programmes. However, with donors and governments facing severe constraints, the future for many children, particularly the poorest and most vulnerable, remains uncertain. This means that smarter choices will need to be made on using the resources that exist.

It is in this context that we so enthusiastically welcomed the Executive Director’s call for a renewed focus on equity. This focus on the poorest and most vulnerable is essential. It will help us to achieve goals for children in a manner that is faster, more economical and more sustainable than many current approaches. We have seen the value and practical application of this focus in many examples from around the world – in developing and middle-income countries alike. Indeed, equity has underpinned UNICEF’s work for decades.

Many of these applications in the field came to life last Friday when countries shared their experiences during the presentation on “Equity: narrowing the gaps to push for achievement of the Millennium Development Goals” at the Joint Meeting of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP. The session, co-coordinated by UNICEF and UNDP and attended by Miss Helen Clark, Mr. Anthony Lake, and other heads of organizations, generated fresh ideas for adapting the focus on equity to myriad contexts.
We are in the final push to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed goals for children. With time running short and much to accomplish, accelerated action is imperative. As Executive Board members and decision makers, we must use our influence to champion the focus on equity so that we can make good on our promises to children – for 2015 and beyond.

Thank you and all best wishes for 2011.