Anthony Lake, UNICEF Executive Director  
Executive Board Meeting  
New York, NY  
February 4, 2014

Before I begin my formal remarks, I’d like to pay tribute, as best I can find the words, to the memory of our colleagues — our friends — Nasreen Khan and Basra Hassan, who lost their lives in Kabul on January 17th.

Each dedicated her life to children — to their rights. Nasreen to improving the lives of newborn children and pregnant mothers…and Basra to helping children get the nutrition they need, including as one of the architects of UNICEF’s Nutrition in Emergencies programme.

We should neither see, nor remember, Basra and Nasreen as simply “victims” of this terrible attack.

Rather, they should be remembered for the people they helped…the young lives they saved in Afghanistan and elsewhere…their passion for serving others.

Gandhi said that: “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”
Nasreen and Basra — like other UN colleagues so cruelly taken from us over the years — will never truly be lost to us. Because their lives — their legacies — can be found today in the irrepressible smiles of the children they served…the children they saved.

Please join me in a moment of silence in their memory.

***

I’d like to begin my remarks today by thanking the outgoing members of the Bureau — President Viinanen, and Vice Presidents Hoxha…Talbot…and Khazaee. Without their leadership over the last year — and the work of the Board — we could not have achieved what we did, including two interrelated blueprints that will guide UNICEF’s work over the next four years: the Strategic Plan and the Integrated Budget for 2014-2017.

As we bid farewell to the outgoing Bureau, we also warmly welcome those who will carry on this work — our new President, Macharia Kamau, and Vice-Presidents Tafrov…Petersen…Régis…and Khan. All of us look forward to working with them and this Board during a period of challenge, change and opportunity at UNICEF.
As we navigate these challenges, changes and opportunities, we can never lose sight of our primary goal — results for children.

Focusing on results drove the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review.

From UNICEF’s efforts with other agencies to focus on results over process, and now work with greater coherence among ourselves through the Standard Operating Procedures…

To our role in helping develop a single results-based monitoring framework for the Review…

To our efforts to reduce operational costs at country level by consolidating support services, where it makes sense to do so…

The QCPR will help UNICEF — and our partners across the UN family — target our resources in a more organized, coherent way.

Internally, UNICEF’s Effectiveness and Efficiency — or E & E — Initiative is finding new efficiencies to best focus our resources in the years ahead.
This includes the recent launch of a two-year process to form a single integrated Global Shared Service Centre. It will carry out business transactions such as invoices, payments, payroll and some HR and IT support services. After an initial expenditure of $29 million to establish the Centre, we will save an estimated $20 million annually — funds that can be devoted to our mission to help children survive and thrive.

As we informed the Bureau, the decision to create the Centre is the result of an inclusive, transparent, evidence-based process involving people from across the organization. In particular, I thank the Global Staff Association for its ongoing and constructive participation from the very start…advocating and advising…helping develop the mitigation measures for affected staff…and then offering their support. UNICEF is our staff, and we cannot succeed without working together.

Nor, of course, can we succeed without partnering with others, including our donors, who make everything we do possible. We enjoy a particularly broad donor base — with 91 national governments and 36 national committees raising funds from individuals and the corporate world alike — and we’re making every effort to expand our support among emerging economies.
Today, we’re joined by one of our strongest partners, the EC’s Development Commissioner, Andris Piebalgs. The EU has long been a leading voice for protecting children in Europe and around the world — for combatting violence, exploitation, abuse and trafficking. This includes a framework to help EU countries develop strategies to integrate Roma children… and an action plan to protect unaccompanied, stateless minors found within the EU.

And I welcome the EU’s strong and ongoing commitment not only to immediate relief efforts, but to creating the long-term conditions necessary to build a better future for the children of Central African Republic, which I just visited.

The EU is also one of UNICEF’s largest donors — including its recent, and much appreciated, allocation of €320 million (US$431 million) to improve the health and nutrition of women and children in 15 developing countries. The EU makes what we do on behalf of the world’s children possible — and is one of our closest partners in the field.

When Commissioner Piebalgs joined our UNICEF representative in Myanmar on a school visit to see the results of our partnership — a partnership that has seen school enrollment nearly double since 2007…
When Peter Salama, UNICEF’s former representative in Zimbabwe, joined his European counterparts there to distribute textbooks to children in that country — now the first country in sub-Saharan Africa in which every primary school student has his or her own textbooks in all core subjects…

When over 28,000 Ghanians in two communities now enjoy clean water, thanks to UNICEF and the EU’s project to construct steel water tanks and over 20 kilometers of pipe…

We not only make a concrete difference in the lives of the children affected. We also, through this visibility, build public support for our development efforts. Because as our work together gains visibility, we send the message that not only governments, but the citizens who provide the necessary political will and financial resources, are part of our common effort to improve the lives of the youngest and most vulnerable children around the world.

Our annual meeting in June will include a special focus session on African children, and our common determination to help realize their rights to health, education and protection.
Having Commissioner Piebalgs here today reminds us of the responsibility we all share to take every step...make every investment...to protect children in an ever more dangerous, violent and turbulent world. Because no issue cuts as closely to the heart of children’s rights — in every society — as protection.

But is child protection receiving the attention it deserves? The answer, I regret to say, is “no.”

As we approach the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, more children are no doubt better off than ever before — more are immunized, more are receiving an education, more have access to nutrition, water and sanitation.

But how well are we, as a global community, meeting the basic right of every child to be protected from violence, abuse and exploitation?

When 150 million children between five and 14 years of age — 16 per cent of this age group — are engaged in child labour?

When a third of women in the developing world are married before the age of 18?
When boys and girls are recruited by armed groups, given guns and made to fight?

When an orphaned girl — officially “invisible” because her birth was not registered — is taken from her village and trafficked…imprisoned in a dark world of violence and abuse…one of an estimated one million children who are trafficked each year?

When more than 125 million girls and women have been subjected to female genital mutilation — or “cutting” — with 30 million more girls at risk of being cut within the next decade?

When millions of Syrian children are out of school, or fleeing their homeland in search of safe harbor in neighbouring countries…having witnessed acts of violence and even death, things no child should see?

When children in Central African Republic are being forced from their homes, recruited into armed groups, mutilated, killed — even beheaded?

When a brave Pakistani girl is shot simply for speaking out about the importance of girls’ education?
Abuses of children’s rights can be found in every society — from the school massacre in Newtown, Connecticut in 2012…to the orphaned children around the world languishing in institutions instead of thriving in foster care or at the heart of a loving family…to daily bullying on the schoolyard and in cyberspace.

And yet, child protection issues were not part of the Millennium Development Goals — a serious omission. And too many countries that have made progress in cutting child and infant mortality…in battling malnutrition and illiteracy…are still struggling to protect children from violence, abuse and exploitation.

The post-2015 agenda presents an opportunity to correct this — to draw more global attention, focus, investment and action to this vital issue…to respond to and prevent violence against children…and to set a target that must be pursued, if children’s rights are to be upheld in a more meaningful way.

Today, I’d like to explore briefly some of the challenges and opportunities inherent in this critical and universal issue.

The first is as important as it is obvious: that child protection must be a part of all of our programme areas — from child health and education, to nutrition and sanitation.
Second. We must not only protect children in immediate danger. We must also advocate for long-term change, helping governments develop and adopt child-friendly laws and policies.

Third. Special attention must be paid to children in emergencies — in conflicts and natural disasters — where the risk of violence, abuse, exploitation and trafficking rises. Since children are literally the future of these societies, nurturing them in these difficult environments is an inherent part of building stable, resilient nations.

Fourth. If we fail to innovate, we will fail to do all we can do.

And fifth. Not only partnerships, but broader movements can multiply our influence in working for children’s rights.

Let me begin with the importance of thinking and acting holistically. Protection transcends any one sector. After all, a child who is immunized, well-nourished and attending school but is beaten or sexually abused at home is not living a healthy life.

And so protection must be woven into our programming for children’s health, education, nutrition and sanitation.
When we build separate toilet facilities for girls in schools, we increase the odds not only that she will attend school in the first place, but will be safer and less vulnerable to violence.

When we help children learn in a child-friendly school or space, we’re not only enriching their minds — we’re giving them a safe haven, protecting them from abuse.

When we register children’s births, we’re not only providing them with the benefits of an official identity, we’re giving them a “passport to protection,” making them less vulnerable to trafficking, early marriage and recruitment into armed groups…and easier to trace in the chaos of disasters or armed conflicts, so they may be reunited with family.

But these programmes must also be accompanied by advocating for long-term, systemic solutions — legal frameworks, regulations and policies that can prevent such abuses.

For example, China recently confirmed that its draft Family Violence Law — for which UNICEF and other partners had been advocating — will be adopted in the next session of the National People’s Congress that begins this March.
In Malawi, we urged the enactment of the National Birth Registration Act, which makes birth registration mandatory for all children.

And in Georgia, UNICEF’s long-standing advocacy helped convince its Parliament to declare 2014 to be the “Year of the Protection of the Rights of the Child” — with planned legislative changes, including a mandate to end the use of institutional care for all children under six by the end of 2015.

All of these decisions are a credit to those governments. We were glad to play some small part.

Effective, enforceable, child-centred laws not only protect children, they send a powerful message to every child: you are important, you are protected, your rights matter.

This is in a nation’s best interests. A generation of children who grow up cherished by a society are not only more likely to lead healthy, fulfilling lives — they are more likely…more able…and more willing…to assume the responsibility of guiding these societies in the future.

Which brings us to the importance of child protection in humanitarian emergencies.
What happens to children who lose their homes…their families…their security...everything they once knew…in the blink of an eye?

What happens to them when order and the rule of law break down…when children are torn from their parents, relatives and homes?

The risk of violence, exploitation and trafficking rises.

And there’s another risk.

New research demonstrates how it’s not just a lack of nutrition or stimuli that can slow early brain development. Abuse and neglect, especially during infancy and early childhood, can have lasting effects on brain development and future cognitive capacity.

As their minds are at risk — so too, are their spirits. Especially in armed conflicts, we risk more children growing up viewing the world through a lens of mistrust and violence — more likely to perpetrate on others the suffering they endure today.
Violence begets violence. We know that a child experiencing abuse is more likely to see violence as normal, even acceptable…and more likely to perpetuate violence against his or her own children in the future. If the trauma for children of societal violence is not addressed, we open the door to problems that can last a lifetime…and spawn negative attitudes that can reverberate across a generation.

Our challenge is to nurture a generation of children not only able but willing to create stable, peaceful and prosperous societies. A generation healed, not hardened.

Which is why protecting children in emergencies remains a central focus of UNICEF’s recent work.

This includes family reunification services in the Philippines…and providing safe, child-friendly spaces in 48 locations in Democratic Republic of the Congo, where every year, along with our partners, we provide care and services to more than 10,000 children who are survivors of sexual violence, primarily girls.

And, notably, it includes the “No Lost Generation” initiative. Because an entire generation of Syrian children is at risk of becoming a lost generation.
“No Lost Generation” was recently launched by dozens of governments and NGOs, with our support. The EC, with DFID, has been in the lead from the start.

It’s not too late to rebuild the skills and spirits of Syria’s children…to repair their broken hearts…perhaps even foster a generation committed to transforming tragedy into a renewed and revitalized home for all Syrians.

We mend these lives not just with food, water, vaccinations and shelter. But with education, to put them on a path of opportunity…with child-friendly spaces to give them a safe harbour in which to heal their spirits…and with counselling, to help them cope with the horrors they’ve witnessed, and understand that they carry the power to rebuild their shattered country in the coming decades.

Such work is not only about addressing emergencies — it is inherently about development and resilience.

As we re-build these young spirits, we also build a society’s future resilience. Each boy in a child-friendly space, saved from potential recruitment by armed groups…each girl learning in a classroom, safe from exploitation and abuse…can help communities, societies and nations gather strength, and become the next generation of teachers, entrepreneurs and leaders.
In this and all of our work on protection, innovation can play an ever stronger role.

UNICEF’s RapidFTR — Rapid Family Tracing and Reunification initiative — is a data-storage system that collects, sorts and shares information about unaccompanied and separated children in emergencies. This SMS-based system has helped reunite Congolese children in Uganda with family members, and is now being used in the Philippines to trace children affected by the typhoon.

SMS technology is also helping streamline and speed up birth registration in Uganda and Kosovo, allowing children to have all the benefits — and protection — of having an official identity.

So I’m pleased to inform you that we’re forming a new Innovation Centre in Nairobi to help develop more innovative solutions like this in all sectors across UNICEF. It will be led by Sharad Sapra, our outgoing representative in Uganda, whose work there has inspired and informed many of our innovations around the world.
Innovation and technology can also give us better tools to track and report results. This can often be particularly challenging in our work on protection. We’ve made some real progress in measuring violations against children, with recent data reports on female genital mutilation and birth registration.

We’re developing new standards to measure the impact of psychosocial counselling on children’s lives. We’re preparing a data compendium on violence and children…and a report on child marriage. And we just released our new State of the World’s Children data report, with the theme “Every Child Counts,” which highlights the critical role data plays in exposing the unequal access to vital services and protection endured by too many of the world’s children.

Finally, let me circle back to the point with which I began: the power of partnerships and movements. Violence against children is a problem shared by whole societies — and the solutions must be shared, too.

By the family…as parents or guardians are not only the single greatest protection available for children, a first line of defense — but also a source of potential danger themselves.

By the community…which must take responsibility for addressing harmful practices that endanger children.
And by the broader society…including governments, media, civil society organizations, religious leaders and businesses, whose actions influence everyone in that society.

Social movements like the #ENDviolence campaign can help bring greater attention and broader support to the vital cause of child protection. By raising awareness, this campaign is generating increased support for protecting vulnerable children — shining a light on this too-often hidden issue…making the invisible “visible.”

In Algeria, to use one example, its launch saw UNICEF and six government ministries join with leaders from across Algerian civil society to discuss the issue. As a result, four working groups are now developing initiatives to address violence in schools, violence at home, child victims of sexual abuse and the particular needs of disabled children.

I would ask you, as you leave the room for lunch, to pause and get this — erasable, I hope — tattoo to show that you are part of this campaign. If I can’t persuade you, perhaps Liam Neeson can.

[Shows #ENDviolence video]

So from our work with civil society partners like TOSTAN in Senegal, to end — once and for all — the practice of “cutting…”
To our partnership with Together for Girls, to prevent violence against children…

To our collaboration with other UN partners, including the SRSGs on violence and children and armed conflict…

UNICEF will continue working with our partners to accelerate progress and keep the issue of violence at the top of governments’ agendas.

Working in partnership…working to help movements grow in strength…is not only effective — it’s a way to transform our collective outrage at the most outrageous abuses of children and their rights into taking positive action.

The great abolitionist and statesman Frederick Douglass said that: “It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.”

If the world invests in protecting girls and boys today — putting their needs, present and future, first — we not only give them a chance at having a future, we give them a chance at building a future, for themselves, their families, and their societies. A future filled with love, laughter and hope.
We best achieve this dream by working closely with those who share it with us. Committed partners like Commissioner Piebalgs, who is here with us today — a man whose voice and vision are at the forefront of global development efforts today, including as a member of the Lead Group of the Scaling-up Nutrition movement and the UN High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

I look forward to listening to — and learning from — him this morning.

***