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Executive Board Statement
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Thank you, Mr. President, for that introduction. On behalf of all of us at UNICEF, across 190 countries, welcome, once again, to our Executive Board. And congratulations to you and our new Bureau.

And thanks to all of our Board members — incoming and outgoing — for all of your support, advice and most of all, vision, since my arrival.

On a personal note, I value the meetings and conversations I’ve had with you, and look forward to our work together in the year ahead.

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I would like to begin by briefly noting a few upcoming changes in our senior leadership team.

First — this week’s Board meeting marks the first for Charlotte Petri Gornitzka, our new Deputy Executive Director for Partnerships. Welcome, Charlotte, to the UNICEF family. We all look forward to benefitting from your ideas and experience going forward.

Second — Shanelle Hall, our Deputy Executive Director for Field Results, has informed me that, after 20 years of service to UNICEF, she will start a new chapter in her career in May.

She will work with UNICEF, the private sector, foundations and the UN to influence and scale-up the innovations and ideas emerging from the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and help ensure they make a positive impact on society.

Those of you who know her know that this area of work has long been a passion for Shanelle. We are so pleased that UNICEF will continue benefitting
from her expertise and dedication, and that she will stay connected to us, representing us on strategic business engagement and innovation.

And third — as you may know, Fatoumata Ndiaye, our Deputy Executive Director for Management, will retire on February 22.

My sincerest thanks to Fatoumata for her leadership and her many achievements in shaping a stronger organizational culture on a number of fronts. From human resources management, to her tireless work to bring our financial and administrative management to a new level, focused on results.

While Fatoumata may be retiring from our daily work, she will remain a valuable member of our extended family.

Please join me in applauding Fatoumata and Shanelle for their outstanding service — and welcoming Charlotte to the UNICEF family.

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As the President noted in his remarks, this Board has accomplished a great deal in a number of areas — including progress in strengthening its working methods. The concrete proposals being discussed provide an important pathway forward.

I am also happy to see the work being done through the core group. This work will be important as you navigate discussions on improving your working methods, including the possible streamlining of the number of sessions.

We also appreciate the work you have done in conjunction with the Boards of our sister agencies — including the adoption of decisions on working methods, the most recent being just a few weeks ago.

Through this collaborative work with our sister agencies, I know that you will find ways to focus on the areas and needs that are unique to UNICEF. As we create space to discuss joint issues with other Boards, we must not stall our own efforts to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of this Board.
Across all of this work, please know that all of us at UNICEF stand ready to support you, and strengthen your vital strategic guidance and oversight functions.

This includes constant, fluid communication with you — through constructive briefings, and engaging and interactive dialogue and consultations. And it includes the provision of timely and relevant information as you need it. All of the necessary ingredients to achieve better results today and build a stronger foundation for future Executive Boards.

I have every confidence that, under Ambassador Mohamed’s leadership, this important work will continue.

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As you know, we are preparing to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child — the cornerstone of our work at UNICEF.

Of course, we will rightly celebrate the progress that our staff members have achieved over the last three decades since the convention — and indeed, over the last seven decades since UNICEF’s founding.

But we will also look forward to the next 70 years, to continue translating these rights into results.

This means looking closely at how we work as an organization. How we use our human and financial resources. How we manage, nurture and retain talent. And how we work with our partners — all of them — across our work.

So today, I would like to focus my remarks on how we are strengthening UNICEF from the inside, to help us better address the challenges outside. And how we are working ever-more effectively across our organization — and with our partners to accelerate our work on behalf of children and young people.
Central to all of these efforts is our commitment to the Secretary General’s reform efforts — both the reform of the UN Development System, but also our commitment to broader reform across the UN family.

While Carla Haddad Mardini — our Director of Public Partnerships — will speak in more detail about this today, I’d like to underscore how important these efforts are for me, and for people across our organization.

Accelerating our progress towards the SDGs means being as efficient as possible across every UN programme, and keeping our focus where it belongs: not on processes, but on results, especially at the country level.

On the UNDS reform efforts, UNICEF’s staff are engaged across a wide range of reviews and processes to drive change across the system.

I am committed to expanding our partnerships with our sister agencies not because it is demanded of us. But because these partnerships can help us achieve more results in a concrete way.

From reducing malnutrition with the World Food Programme…to our work with UNFPA to end child marriage… to our partnerships and sharing of common premises with a range of sister agencies in countries facing humanitarian emergencies, like Syria and elsewhere.

Stronger collaboration is about each agency lending its comparative advantages and specialized expertise to building stronger, more effective Country Teams that can focus on common goals.

In this, I appreciate the Board’s support of our work to operationalize our Common Chapter with UNDP, UNFPA and UN Women in regional, country and field offices, through a series of new initiatives to better align our work around the world.

We are also working closely on the effort to reinvigorate the resident co-ordinator system. This includes finalizing the country-level part of the new Management and Accountability Framework, and ensuring that it is aligned with the job descriptions of our representatives.
And as Carla will explain, in addition to doubling our cost-share of the RC system, UNICEF is moving forward on operationalizing the 1 per cent levy, following close consultation with the transition team.

We are also deeply involved in developing the new **UNDAF guidance**. This is a key opportunity to better align the work that the UN is doing with the specific needs of governments as they bring their SDG commitments to life — and to ensure our Country Teams are all moving in the same direction, and reporting results in an integrated way.

On **partnerships and funding**, UNICEF has been at the centre of discussions around the new Funding Compact, and I’m co-chairing the UNSDG Partnerships Strategic Results Group with Guy Ryder, Director-General of the International Labour Organization.

These discussions include best practices around how we can pool funding to focus on common areas of need — including a Joint Fund to help us bring to life the 2030 Agenda.

This work also provides an opportunity to bring the UN family together around partnerships with outside partners that align with SDG targets. We are now exploring a proposal for a common UN framework and platform to support these efforts.

Throughout these discussions, UNICEF is making the case for flexible funding — so critical to all that the UN system must do at country level, as we deploy funds where and when they are most needed.

And UNICEF is supporting the work of UN reform through a number of **business innovations and efficiency gains**. Savings that will boost our programme investments, especially in least-developed countries.

These efficiencies and savings are in addition to the resources we continue to save following the establishment of the Global Shared Services Centre, which produced initial savings of $25 million. To build on this, we are now looking at outsourcing specific tasks under the Centre to other UN entities to save even more.
From UNICEF’s perspective, these efforts not only contribute to the UNDS reform specifically — they also go to the heart of broader principles like decentralization, shared services and accountability. Principles that our Board members expect us to live up to — but also principles that will help modernize UN operations over the long term.

As the Secretary General has made clear, the UN is committed to constantly demonstrating the value, relevance, responsiveness and effectiveness of the multilateral system to the world.

UNICEF is proud to contribute to this important work — and to bring these principles to life across our organization.

We are also proud to lead by example in other ways.

During this week’s session, you’ll have the opportunity to examine and discuss UNICEF’s financial report and audited statements.

In particular, we are very pleased — and very proud — that the independent auditors gave UNICEF an unqualified audit opinion for our 2017 financial statements. Over the course of that year, UNICEF recorded over three million financial transactions relating to approximately four thousand active grants or programmes.

I am committed to upholding this standard — and to going even further.

Travel is a good example. I have asked all of UNICEF’s directors and representatives to reduce their travel by 15 per cent over 2018 figures by using different means to achieve their objectives.

Across UNICEF, I have asked that we individually and collectively embrace a new mindset that focuses on value for money, and finding new, innovative ways to make meetings and conferences happen internally — including through video conferencing. I am committed to following through on this, as we make UNICEF more efficient, effective and responsive to donors, and our first and most important clients: children and young people.
As we continually seek out ways to improve how we manage our financial resources, I’m committed to doing the same for our human resources. Our people.

Our staff members around the world represent UNICEF’s human capital — each person bringing individual strengths and expertise to our work in service of children and young people.

Supporting them requires a constant re-evaluation of our work, to align our programming as closely as possible to the needs of — first — countries as they pursue their SDG goals and — second — the targets we have set under our Strategic Plan.

This need to evaluate and examine our programming is the driving force behind our re-alignment exercise.

The realignment team, led by our Deputy Executive Director for Programmes, Omar Abdi, is now reviewing improvements to our planning, monitoring and results-reporting, and cause framework initiatives. We want to reduce the “process and paperwork” burden for our Country Offices and staff members, and make us nimbler across offices, as our staff members respond to emerging challenges.

In a similar vein, we are continuing to streamline our processes across the organization to reduce paperwork, save staff members’ time and increase efficiencies.

One example is the use of cloud computing as a cornerstone of our information management system. This is allowing staff members to connect directly to the information and tools they need from anywhere in the world, on any device, in a safe and secure way.

And we launched a new phone-based system in Country Office warehouses to reduce manual processes and duplication of work, while improving accuracy and tracking of our inventories of lifesaving supplies. The
system was launched in November in three Country Offices — with 20 more planned for 2019.

We are also in the midst of a number of important changes to our management processes — how we manage staff, how we nurture their careers, how we report on results and performance, and how we balance critical factors like gender and geography across our management team.

This includes a move towards matrix management. This will help lighten and simplify our processes, provide balanced supervision, and increase staff versatility, while fostering a more collaborative working style, in which expertise and resources are shared across the organization.

We are also sharpening our performance culture. We want to measure not only the results managers achieve, but how they achieve them. To do this, we will roll-out more 360-degree evaluations — including for every member of the senior management team, myself included — to help us all become better managers for people and programmes.

And we are committed to bringing a better balance to our management team, at all levels, in terms of both gender and geography.

I’m proud that we have achieved UNICEF’s first-ever gender balanced appointments of senior staff. In 2019, for the first time in our history, we will have the same number of women as men in our senior staff group — at Headquarters, and in our Country and Regional Office.

As we improve gender balance, we want to do the same for geographic balance, starting with the senior leadership team. Currently, only 40 per cent of our senior staff are from programme countries. I am committed to full parity after the next three rotation exercises.

We also continue to infuse our core values across our organization — in every programme, every office, and every community in which we work.

These are more than words. They represent what UNICEF has stood for, from the very start. Moreover, they are the driving force behind our ongoing work to address sexual abuse, exploitation and harassment.

As we have discussed at previous sessions, sexual exploitation and abuse by those who are mandated to assist and protect the rights of people in need — especially the most vulnerable…especially children — betrays these core values, and erodes trust in the entire aid sector.

At this session, we will examine a report that was prepared following an independent review of our system for handling allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse around the world.

Over the last year, we have taken a number of steps to end sexual harassment and all forms of exploitation and abuse — including abuse of power — both within our workplace and in the communities in which we work.

This includes strengthened and simplified reporting mechanisms, enhanced investigations and better screening.

It includes the work being done through my additional role as IASC Champion for protection from sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment to work with other agencies and partners to improve reporting mechanisms, scale-up assistance for survivors and increase accountability.

And it includes the report being prepared by the independent task force on gender discrimination, harassment and abuse of authority. The report is slated to be finished by June, and we will share its findings with the Board soon after that.

These are all important steps as we build the UNICEF our staff members need and deserve — an organization at which every person feels safe, respected, empowered and able to speak up.

But we must do more — both within UNICEF and with our donors and with our NGO and implementing partners.
As a next step, UNICEF has developed a new strategy to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment around the world.

The strategy is built around the principles of accountability, prevention and deterrence, and gender equality.

To bring this strategy to life, we are taking five key steps.

First — we are creating an organizational culture of zero tolerance for sexual abuse, exploitation and harassment. A culture in which rights are recognized, promoted and protected.

Second — we are enhancing our reporting mechanism, so they are both safe and trusted. We want staff members, individuals, communities and our partners to feel safe in coming forward, knowing that their reports will be handled in a manner that respects both due process and human rights.

Third — we are taking steps to ensure swift, fair and credible investigations and sanctions. People will not come forward unless they have confidence in the system.

Fourth — we are committed to providing survivor-centred assistance and support that is timely, predictable, sustainable and resourced.

And fifth — we will continue engaging our partners in the fight against sexual abuse, exploitation and harassment. We want to equip communities, staff members and our partners with the right tools and processes to end these harmful practices, both in the workplace, and in the communities in which we work.

I look forward to working with Member States, civil society groups and other partners to find ways to build this capacity in the years ahead, and send a clear signal: sexual abuse and exploitation will not be tolerated…it will be thoroughly investigated…and perpetrators will face punishment.

As we continue this important work, we will also continue relying on your advice, guidance and support as we move forward on the programmatic priorities I outlined at our June session.
This includes **planting the seeds of development into our humanitarian responses**, as we are doing through our enhanced risk assessments in humanitarian emergencies, and cash transfer programmes for children and their families in countries like Yemen, Lebanon, Nepal and Mauritania.

This work also includes supporting local efforts to strengthen school buildings and other vital infrastructure to help them withstand natural disasters like hurricanes in the Philippines, earthquakes in Chile and floods in Bangladesh.

It includes our work to ensure that Syrian refugee children in Lebanon, for example, receive an education through the national education system, so they can continue shaping their minds for the future.

And we are working with governments to strengthen policies and legislation to ensure that communities can quickly recover following the shock of a conflict, natural disaster or drought.

Our work on **community-based primary health care** for every child is also being scaled-up.

Our Country Offices are developing medium-term strategies to work with local governments and other partners to do far more work in this area.

And in our country programmes, we are now directly linking health systems strengthening to various programmatic sectors like immunization, nutrition and early childhood development.

We must work to ensure that children and their families have access to an entire range of integrated services at the community level through these systems. All critical steps in bringing to life our commitment to universal health coverage and the SDGs’ vision of “health for all.”

Partners around the world are taking advantage of the new **Generation Unlimited** platform, and making commitments to help us identify, design and scale-up new solutions for young people.
Diverse partners like the Government of Ireland, Dubai Cares and Unilever have already made commitments. And we have together identified a first group of nine frontrunner solutions that can be implemented at scale — more will follow, all linked to national systems. We look forward to discussing more — and planning our next steps — at upcoming solutions summits this year.

As we discussed in September, our work on innovation is expanding every year. From scaling-up Primero, to help countries better manage data, so they can better target and serve children. To developing new pneumonia interventions, like diagnostic and oxygen systems. To investing in expanded HIV testing and care for infants. To new platforms to reach adolescents with lifesaving vaccines, like HPV vaccines. To exploring the possibilities of digital identity for all children — including those on the move.

Our next step on innovation is to develop a new, organization-wide vision and strategy on innovation — one that not only responds to the changing world around us, but that balances the opportunities of innovation and technology with a number of inherent risks.

One example of an innovation that holds great potential, if managed correctly: artificial intelligence, or AI.

AI can help us develop a number of exciting solutions for young people — from personalized learning tools, to “big data” insights to help us track diseases, to instant-translation technology that can improve learning, to a project in Kenya in which AI is being used to track the nutrition status of babies.

But AI also comes with a number of risks — the privacy and security of information and identities, and the potential for this technology to eliminate a number of different jobs.

Which is why we are working with the World Economic Forum and partners like Microsoft on the “Generation AI” initiative, to shape the global agenda on artificial intelligence, and work with partners to balance the risks with the real opportunities of AI.
Just one example of the kind of thinking that will guide our innovation strategy as it is being developed.

And running through all of our work is our continued determination to expand ties with the **private sector**.

Businesses of all sizes have much to bring to the table beyond funding and supplies. Their operations have consequences for children. And they are an important source of innovations, market reach, and research and development.

We also know that businesses see themselves as critical to achieving the SDGs. They tell us they are keen to apply their ideas and vision to improve the world in a sustainable way. And to measure their value not only by profit, but by **purpose**.

This is a big opportunity for UNICEF. Our long history of working with private sector, our remarkable network of National Committees — who will be presenting at this session — our deep knowledge of programmes, our strategic engagement in market influencing, all make us an ideal partner for businesses looking to help shape a better, more sustainable future.

Which is why I have asked our Partnerships and Fundraising team to lead the development of an overall strategy for boosting fundraising and creating shared-value partnerships that can make this long-term vision a reality.

As Charlotte and Gary Stahl, Director of Private Fundraising and Partnerships, will explain in their presentation, we have made a good start. Last year, with support of UNICEF and National Committees, 115 companies changed their business behaviour and introduced practical measures to address their impact on children.

But we want to do more. We have set two ambitious goals:

First — 650 companies integrating practical measures that respect children’s rights into their operations and practices.
And second — developing 100 Shared Value Partnerships that contribute to at-scale programming by the end of 2021.

To do this, we are working with our network of National Committees to build larger teams of highly skilled and connected senior prospectors and relationship managers to seek and retain new partners for our work.

At UNICEF, this means changing our mind-set, and seeing businesses not just as “donors” or “suppliers” or “gift-in-kind providers” — but genuine partners in improving the lives of children and young people.

This is especially critical when we consider the amount of funding and support governments will need to live up to their SDG promises.

We will continue working closely with our family of National Committees to seek out new sources of support for this effort.

And if we get it right — and I believe we will — this is an opportunity for UNICEF to lead the UN family in bringing new partners to our cause, and helping governments live up to their SDG commitments.

Taken together, this work — both inside UNICEF and with our many partners — will help us achieve more results for children and young people. And build on the incredible progress made over the last 30 years, since the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted.

You are all part of this progress — past, present and future.

Millions of children and young people are counting on us. They need your ideas and vision — and your continued good stewardship of this Board.

Let us meet their needs with our best efforts. With new ideas and new partners. And with a constant dedication to strengthening this important organization, and keeping it on the right path for the future.

I look forward to a productive session today.

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