

**UNICEF EXECUTIVE BOARD
2022 First Regular Session
8–11 February 2022**

**Opening remarks for H.E. Mr. Rodrigo A. Carazo,
Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Costa Rica
(8 February 2022)**

Ladies and Gentlemen, I again warmly welcome you to the session.

Distinguished Executive Director, Ms. Catherine Russell, I am very pleased that your arrival has coincided with the beginning of our presidency, and I look forward to working with you, with this honourable Executive Board and with your Bureau, to guide and accompany this great organization in search of the best achievements for children. For me, and for Costa Rica, it is a great honour and responsibility, an honour that we share with the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States and their delegations on this Board, namely Argentina, Cuba, Grenada and Paraguay.

I would like to present my colleagues on the Bureau: Excellencies Michal Mlynár (Slovakia); Amal Mudallali (Lebanon); Taye Atske Selassie Amde (Ethiopia); and Marie-Louise Koch Wegter (Denmark). I would also like to thank those who presided over the work of the Board in 2021, which was ably led by Ambassadors Plepyté and Paulauskas of Lithuania as Presidents in 2021, and the other members of the Bureau, the Ambassadors of Morocco, New Zealand and the Republic of Korea.

UNICEF is an organization that is admired in Costa Rica. For many decades, it has been the benchmark for an increasingly solid cooperation, which includes the areas of nutrition, health, education, protection against all forms of violence and the defense of the rights of children and adolescents. I remember that when I was a child in Costa Rica, my four brothers and I, and many other children in my extended family and in my neighbourhood, unfortunately not all of us, were lucky enough to avoid being victims of polio during the outbreak in 1954 when there were more than 1,000 cases and 159 deaths in my country. Today, UNICEF – present then and present now – together with its partner organizations, continues to work to prevent children from contracting diseases by providing vaccines against polio and other diseases. Later on, when I became the first Ombudsman of Costa

Rica, UNICEF provided its full support and guidance to establish a very solid framework for defining and guaranteeing the rights of the child in my country and throughout the region.

The truth is that this commitment, which I have experienced over many years in my country, makes me feel very proud in this position, in this very important year for our Executive Board of UNICEF, where to respond to the major challenges facing children around the world, we have a new Strategic Plan for the period 2022–2025, which reflects the universal mandate of this organization to reach every boy and girl, leaving no one behind.

In developing this Strategic Plan, UNICEF has taken a major step forward to ensure that the organization truly focuses on achieving far-reaching and sustainable change. In moving from a short-term vision to a long-term vision, the bar has been raised for all of us, asking us as never before to identify and support the children who are most at-risk of being left behind. A multisectoral and cross-cutting focus will ensure that, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Decade of Action, UNICEF is focused on the child and all of his/her needs, enabling the organization to provide much more than the sum of its parts, through, among other things, new and existing partnerships between the Member States.

The kind of systemic changes that UNICEF is prioritizing require commitment, imagination, hard work and smart decisions – all of which UNICEF has the capacity to bring to bear. But it will also require support from partners in the form of a collaborative spirit, political space, and an investment of resources that is commensurate with the ambition of our shared agenda. We, the Member States have endorsed the Strategic Plan; now, from UNICEF, we are being called to be part of its roll-out and implementation.

During this session, we will consider 14 country programmes that are expected to begin in 2022. These country programmes are the outcome of the joint work of the respective Governments with the organization, and are based on an analysis of the situation and on-the-ground learning; they reflect national ownership of that cooperation, and implement the UNICEF commitments, principles and mandates. We welcome in each of our countries, and in my country in particular, the cooperation that is being implemented through UNICEF.

For the first time in several decades, child poverty has increased considerably. One hundred million more children have been deprived of their basic needs, such as health, education, nutrition, which are not being fully met. One hundred million more children than in 2019, this is a 10 per cent increase. We all know the causes, which are not only related to situations currently in existence, they basically [also] stem from widespread inequality and exclusion. In this session, a number of speakers and experts from UNICEF will discuss the role of social protection as a fundamental strategy to reduce poverty. We believe that social protection should be one of the fundamental pillars of the response to the prevailing conditions and current levels of inequality that cause so much damage in this society. Social protection can have far-reaching impacts that can change the lives of children in many areas. In addition, it allows you to provide them with rapid support, with a high degree of efficiency. It is a central element of the Strategic Plan, which reflects the growing commitment to support Governments to prevent and combat poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion, and to protect children and their families against these threats.

This week, we will also review the financial reports of this organization. I would like to underscore that in 2020, UNICEF allocated \$5.8 billion to programmes from its overall budget of \$6.4 billion. This is a huge organization – almost 91 per cent of its total budget is dedicated to these programmes that address the rights and the needs of children.

There is a need to accelerate fundraising efforts, and digital means have been used cleverly to attract more donors. The organization is using alternative and innovative financial mechanisms to obtain more resources, it is using new financial instruments – or using existing ones in a new way. It is innovating in financial mechanisms. In 2021, for every United States dollar that was invested in fundraising [and the administration of partnerships], \$20 was generated in revenue, an increase from the previous year when for every dollar invested, \$18.20 was generated.

Famine remains a real and horrifying possibility in many countries. In particular the ongoing conflicts and the effects of climate change and the pandemic are worsening a food crisis which is now serious, very serious, in many countries and for millions of families in many parts of the world. UNICEF continues to call upon interested parties at all levels to increase their programmatic contributions in a cross-cutting way. They are working with partners and Member States to ensure

access to urgent, and I emphasize, urgent financing, which is flexible and predictable, which would allow us to help to mitigate hunger and famine, both today and in the future, and in protecting children.

In Afghanistan, for example, as the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate, UNICEF is working tirelessly to protect children and their families. The organization is assisting health centres with medical supplies and heating materials to face the winter. UNICEF-supported community-based schools are reaching 246,000 children – more than half of the attendees are girls. These families continue to receive support during the winter – as well as heating or cash contributions – to ensure that there are no interruptions to their schooling despite the difficult weather conditions. Cash transfers continue to operate and reached 160,000 families [in 2022] but the process and the risks are enormous. We have been told that this winter, more than 1 million children in Afghanistan could die of hunger. The time factor is of great importance. Winter is already halfway through, or maybe a little more, and if to reach these children funding is required, we have to find a heroic way to get that much-needed funding. As I said, more than half of the winter has gone by, and undoubtedly that heroism is required at this time to be able to attend to the needs of the millions of children who are at risk of perishing. Unfortunately, many of them are dying as we speak.

Despite the inequitable provision of vaccines in different countries, UNICEF has played a leading role in a task that this organization can do better than any other. In 2021, UNICEF was entrusted with leadership in vaccine procurement and supply processes, from start to finish of the process, and is now being asked to lead the process of supporting vaccine distribution within countries. The organization is also providing specialized support in humanitarian and fragile settings, including the use of the Humanitarian Action for Children appeal to finance the distribution of vaccines to populations that would otherwise be deprived of them. As at 26 January, UNICEF, in cooperation with the Pan American Health Organization, for example, had shipped 1.1 billion doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to 144 countries. And it has supported the distribution of vaccines in 145 countries.

In 2021, a limited and unpredictably supply of COVID-19 vaccines for low- and middle-income countries resulted in a disproportionate, inequitable supply of vaccines. However, this process of coordinating the distribution of vaccines has become an urgent need that UNICEF is already addressing, at least since the beginning of December, through a coordination structure for the global distribution of vaccines. In pursuit of this goal, which is an enormous challenge of reaching 70 per cent

vaccine coverage by the middle of 2022 – as recommended by the World Health Organization – it is to join forces at every level of society to reach the last household in those 34 countries where the process of distributing these vaccines is urgent. UNICEF has once again been called upon to lead this process with its technical capacity at the global and regional levels.

We have great ambitions for 2022 and we hope that they will rise to the challenges. I look forward to working with you all, and to learning from you all, over coming months. I will preside over this Executive Board in a spirit of openness and constructive dialogue. I encourage all of us to continue this organization’s laudable tradition of keeping the rights, well-being and needs of children at the centre of our deliberations and discussions, and to unite behind the goal of achieving meaningful results for all children, adolescents and young people.

I’d like to conclude my remarks with gratitude, with gratitude for the trust that has been placed in me, and in Costa Rica, and with a great deal of optimism based on the fact that we are going to participate in the common tasks of this organization with a clear vision, with a renewed active leadership of the organization. We are proud to play this role alongside this Executive Board that is meeting today for its first regular session. Thank you all for working for the boys and girls of the world. I would like to close by putting on my UNICEF hat, and I am very honoured to do so.

Thank you very much indeed.
