UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell

UNICEF Executive Board Special Focus Session on Africa
‘An Africa Fit for Children and Young People: What investments are needed for Africa’s Human Capital?’

September 7, 2023

Excellencies … thank you for joining us for this Special Focus Session on Africa, and its children and young people.

By the middle of this century, Africa will be home to a billion children and adolescents, accounting for 40 per cent globally. And by the year 2100, there will be more children in Africa than anywhere else in the world.

Africa’s young and vibrant population, and its rapidly growing private sector, are tremendous resources for both the continent and the world.

Across Africa, we see inspiring examples of innovation, economic development and human resilience. In the decades to come, a new generation of African entrepreneurs, innovators, civil servants and philanthropists, can play a leading role in shaping a greener and more sustainable world for us all.

But this future is contingent on every child receiving the support they need NOW… through equitable access to quality services … so that they can reach their full potential in the years to come.

This means investing in key systems that children rely on – like education. Investing in quality education will help to ensure that children and young people gain the skills and expertise needed to lead the continent through this century and beyond. Education also helps to break the cycle of intergenerational
Given the intensifying global climate crisis, and its outsize impact on Africa, investing in children also means investing in climate mitigation and adaptation strategies. We need systematic and rapid scale-up of climate-resilient services and investments for children and women to mitigate climate risks.

Excellencies … UNICEF remains deeply committed to our partnership with the African Union. Last year, UNICEF allocated more than 40 per cent of our total programmatic expenditure to our humanitarian and development work in Africa. In the days and years to come, we look forward to continuing our work with African governments to protect and uphold the rights of all children.

With that, it is my honor and pleasure to hear from the President of the Union of the Comoros, and Chairperson of the African Union, His Excellency President Assoumani.