

UNICEF Executive Board Annual session 2024, 11–14 June 2024

(Item 2: Opening Statement by the President of the Executive Board and Opening Statement by the Executive Director)

Thank you, President, and I thank the Executive Director, Ms. Catherine Russell, for her report earlier today and her continued commitment to regular, comprehensive and frank dialogue with the Executive Board.

Executive Director, your remarks this morning clearly set out the devastating impacts that the numerous conflicts and crises around the globe are having on children's wellbeing. As you have said previously, *Children suffer first and suffer most in such conflicts*. I want to assure you that Ireland acknowledges and sincerely appreciates the essential work of UNICEF in tackling these unprecedented challenges.

It's clear that UNICEF's strategic plan is delivering well for children across its five goal areas. However there is still some distance to travel in relation to delivering systemic change in pursuit of key SDG targets. Multiple, interlocking crises have impacted the delivery of the strategy since it was agreed, including significant shifts in the geo-political environment; rising costs due to inflation; and challenges to the multilateral system. It is especially worrying that children's rights are increasingly under threat and, as a member of the Executive Board in 2024, we are fully committed to supporting UNICEF as a key partner in protecting children as the most vulnerable members of society.

This annual session of the Executive Board will be critical in ensuring that UNICEF remains adaptive and resilient under such trying circumstances. Ireland takes this opportunity to highlight the following areas of UNICEF's essential ongoing work:

First, with regard to UNICEF's humanitarian action, we recognize the work by the agency and its partners in delivering life-saving aid to those most in need. We are appalled at the suffering of children in Gaza. The situation on the ground is becoming increasingly desperate. The level

of civilian deaths and casualties, particularly among children, is wholly unacceptable and, as reflected in your report, the amount of humanitarian aid and supplies reaching children in Gaza is, frankly, inadequate. International humanitarian law must be respected by all actors and meaningful humanitarian access granted immediately. We also emphasise that other crises should not be forgotten. Children continue to suffer in Ukraine, Afghanistan, the DRC, Ethiopia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen. Their needs must be met and no child should be left behind.

Second, with regard to the funding environment, Ireland acknowledges that these humanitarian crises have created an ever increasing demand on budgets. We know that this places a significant strain on UNICEF and other agencies in terms of the delivery of their core mandate and their ability to respond flexibly to emerging crises.

Despite this environment, Ireland has increased its ODA budget in response to the complexity of the challenges we face. Ireland contributed over €38 million across core, project-specific funding and funding through our overseas missions to UNICEF's important work. We were particularly pleased to be able to increase our core funding by €500,000 last year to €7.7 million and to maintain that contribution for this year too. We recognise that core funding enables UNICEF to leverage additional resources and facilitates fast and effective responses to crises and emerging needs. Ireland encourages others to explore greater flexibilities in their funding to UNICEF with regard to unearmarked or soft-earmarked funding.

We are also aware that there are other important factors for consideration in terms of funding. We know that consistency, reliability and predictability are essential in being able to implement strategic priorities. As such, I am pleased to say that Ireland and UNICEF are in the final stages of agreeing a multi-year funding arrangement that will serve to reinforce our long-standing cooperative relationship.

Third, I want to underscore Ireland's strong support for UNICEF's important work on gender issues and protecting and promoting the rights of adolescent girls. We are pleased this remains a cross cutting priority for UNICEF 2024, particularly in areas such as social protection, WASH and nutrition. We are interested in further exploring together how gender analyses and the application of a gendered lens, as well as utilising disaggregated data can

help to better inform policies, programmes and resource allocation in order to deliver better results for children.

Fourth, I would like to emphasise the importance Ireland places on Governance, ethics, evaluation and audit functions within UNICEF. In particular, we have championed the need for increased momentum and long term commitment to embedding safe and supportive workplace practices, including strengthening the accountability structures for protection from sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. Ireland is actively engaged on the Joint Inspection Unit review of governance and oversight of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF and UN-Women. We are keen to ensure we take a collaborative approach with the secretariat and management of the different agencies in addressing the recommendations in the report.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge your remarks on the importance of the United Nations development system reform. Ireland is a committed supporter of the reform agenda, which we see as crucial to our global capacity to deliver on the SDGs. With serious global challenges, it is only through collective action that we can achieve Agenda 2030 and deliver for the most vulnerable. The reforms are critical to this and, in particular, the strengthening of the Resident Coordinator office function. We also heed your call to action in the lead up to the important summits taking place this year, including the Summit of the Future, and will work to ensure that the interests and rights of children are not only protected but championed in these spaces.

Thank you.