

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

Opening statement by the President of the Executive Board
H.E. Mr. Ernest Rwamucyo, Permanent Representative of Rwanda to the United Nations

11 June 2024 *(as delivered)*

Excellencies, members of the Executive Board, Executive Director Russell, Deputy Executive Directors, Secretaries, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

We are meeting at a time of unprecedented circumstances and challenges all around us and, because of this, the UNICEF mission to help make a real difference in the lives of millions of children around the world is increasingly important. In this regard, the work of the Executive Board during this session – which has a packed agenda – is essential to helping to steer the organization and ensure our shared commitment to saving and improving the lives of children.

Globally, children continue to face numerous challenges. These include severe malnutrition, limited access to health care and education, and limited access to clean water and sanitation, to mention but a few.

First, malnutrition – including both undernutrition and childhood obesity – remains a critical focus. Addressing this issue is not only important for global health but also an important part of UNICEF’s work. The effects of malnutrition can have devastating effects, including stunting children’s physical and mental potential from the earliest stages of life. UNICEF’s mandate aims to give every child the best possible start in life and break cycles that keep families and communities trapped in poor health.

Second, we need to continue harnessing education as a tool for change. By increasing access to quality education for all children, we open doors for opportunities that can potentially break cycles of poverty and marginalization. More so, we must leverage technology as a force multiplier to enhance access to affordable and quality education. Digital platforms and digitalized curricula have the potential to transcend physical classroom boundaries and bring educational experiences to learners everywhere, including remote or underserved areas.

Third, climate change continues to be an existential threat, with its impacts being acutely felt by the most vulnerable communities, including children. Boosting resilience and equipping young people with the knowledge and skills to address this crisis must remain a priority for us.

Distinguished delegates and colleagues,

Underpinning all the above-mentioned efforts is the need for innovative resource

mobilization strategies to fully fund UNICEF's important work. Today, more than ever, the mandate of UNICEF is vital and pressing in addressing these challenges and ensuring that every child is protected and thriving.

Turning to the important work that lies before us during this annual session, I look forward to engaging discussions over the course of the week as we consider the 20 items on the agenda, including 13 draft decisions. This morning, we will consider the annual report of the Executive Director, learning about the work of UNICEF in 2023 and taking stock of progress made against the targets of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 at the midpoint of its implementation.

In the afternoon, we will take up the annual report on humanitarian action, which will include an overview of the UNICEF response to humanitarian crises in 2023 and identify priorities in 2024. Updates on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, and on organizational culture and diversity, will provide insights on progress and challenges in those areas.

Tomorrow morning, we will focus on key evaluation and oversight matters that are pivotal to our work, including the annual report on the evaluation function and evaluations of UNICEF work in the areas of advocacy and social and behaviour change. We will consider the assessment of how the Executive Board executes its governance and oversight functions – an important exercise that we have been undertaking together with the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS and UN-Women – as well as deliberate on the UNICEF evolved enterprise risk management framework. We will also hear updates on ethics and audit, and consider the financial report for 2023 of Private Fundraising and Partnerships and the report on the midterm review of the UNICEF integrated budget.

On Thursday – the third day of the session – we will consider the extension of several ongoing country programmes – including for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Rwanda, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic – which will provide continuity of UNICEF operations in those countries. We will also hear an update on implementation efforts on the repositioning of the United Nations development system and consider the annual report on the UNICEF Gender Action Plan.

On Friday, the last day of the session, the UNICEF Staff Team Awards will be presented. We thank the UNICEF teams, who are always on the front lines, working hard to help children all over the world. On behalf of the Executive Board, I would like to acknowledge and commend all those efforts and the dedication of those who work in very difficult circumstances.

I extend appreciation to my fellow Bureau members – Ambassadors Lachezara Stoeva of Bulgaria; Jonibek Ismoil Hikmat of Tajikistan, who is not here with us today but is represented; and José Alfonso Blanco Conde of the Dominican Republic, who is also away due to official

functions, but is represented in this room; and Mr. Stefan Pretterhofer of Austria. I thank them for their collaboration and support to the work of the Executive Board and UNICEF. The Bureau works really hard – they put in a lot of time and a lot of commitment, and that has to be recognized. I thank you all.

I also thank the Executive Board secretariat for ensuring the smooth functioning of our sessions, as well as the United Nations Conference Services and the technical teams for their support. Without their technical inputs and hard work, an annual session like this would not be possible.

I look forward to chairing this meeting with the other members of the Bureau, who have kindly agreed to share the responsibility so that the burden does not fall on the President alone. I invite all of you – Executive Board members – to uphold a spirit of inclusivity and active participation throughout this annual session. Thank you very much.
