Henrietta H. Fore, UNICEF Executive Director
Executive Board
February 9, 2021

• Ambassador Plepytė — congratulations, once again, on your election as Board President.
• Vice-Presidents, members of the Board, observers, UNICEF staff — welcome everyone.
• This year, UNICEF marks its 75th anniversary. A milestone opportunity to highlight the role UNICEF has played in serving and supporting children.
• It will also be an opportunity to continue changing and adapting for the future.
• Because we begin this momentous year faced with a number of unprecedented challenges.
• Before COVID-19, the world was already off-track in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals.
• Children were threatened by worsening humanitarian emergencies… continued violence…poverty, exclusion and discrimination… a changing climate…a denial of their rights to health and education…and inequalities that limited their futures.
• And now, they face the impacts of a prolonged recession, reduced social spending, and growing humanitarian needs.
• In short — the number of children needing UNICEF’s support will multiply.
• Countries will need unprecedented levels of assistance to rebuild shattered systems. To build them back stronger than before. And to support their populations as households struggle.
• People will need help to climb out of rising poverty. The World Bank recently reported that the number of people plunged into poverty since last year could rise to between 143 and 163 million. And UNICEF estimates that the total number of children living in poor households globally could reach over 725 million. Nearly two-thirds in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.
• And a two-tier exit from COVID-19 — marked by vaccine nationalism, over-contracting, and supply hoarding by the richer countries — could make this situation even worse.
• Dr. Tedros recently reminded us that the world is on a brink of a catastrophic moral failure if we vaccinate the world’s richest countries at the expense of the world’s poorest.
• He is right. But this failure would also be a catastrophic practical failure. A new study commissioned by the International Chamber of Commerce finds that if wealthy nations are vaccinated while low-income countries are not, the global economy could suffer a loss of up to $9 trillion.
• Because vaccinated or not, wealthy countries whose economies depend on the global manufacture, purchase and movement of goods and products originating in poorer countries will feel the pain. And

1 Long form version has been shared with Member States.
2 “Updated estimates of the impact of COVID-19 on global poverty” — WB, Jan. 11, 2021
3 https://iccwbo.org/media-wall/news-speeches/study-shows-vaccine-nationalism-could-cost-rich-countries-us4-5-trillion/
they will be called upon to support not only their own citizens, but potentially historic levels of need as poorer countries struggle, too, and face an even harder struggle.

- In short — COVID-19 could be the largest disruption to global progress for children in modern history. One that will cause pain for all countries.
- But amidst this darkening picture, UNICEF is hard at work.
- This session, we will update you in detail on our progress in responding to the needs of this historic pandemic.
- That includes our leadership role in the new COVAX facility to purchase, transport and deliver the vaccine. This is an inspiring vote of confidence in our expertise and abilities — and the global trust UNICEF has earned over the decades to deliver in times of great need. We can all take pride in this.
- As we respond to COVID-19, we also want to set the stage for a more equal recovery — one that supports the rights of every child, while helping communities recover, rebuild, and strengthen systems for the future.
- And we need your support to do it. UNICEF appreciates this Board’s continued support and stewardship, and our ongoing discussions around working methods, evaluation and our financial picture.
- We value your guidance as UNICEF continues to constructively engage on many elements of UN reform. Including the implementation of outstanding mandates around the Regional and Multi-Country Office Reviews, system-wide evaluation and the Management Accountability Framework.
- UNICEF particularly welcomes the new Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review, which gives the entire development system strategic guidance on how to intensify our SDG implementation efforts.
- Within UNICEF, we are analyzing how best to take forward all relevant QCPR mandates, including as we develop our new Strategic Plan.
- We also appreciate your support of our interagency collaboration to translate UN reforms into practice. From our Blueprint for Joint Action on protection, water and education with UNHCR. To our work with WFP to simplify and streamline our work on child wasting, to prevent malnutrition, deliver school meals, and harmonize and scale-up our social protection work in the Sahel. To our collaboration with UNDP on the socio-economic response to COVID-19, supporting young people and innovations. To our new Strategic Collaboration Framework with WHO, to expand primary health care for vulnerable populations as we respond to the pandemic.
- This week, we will also discuss a series of country programme documents. All are aligned with the new UN Sustainable Development Co-operation Frameworks and our commitments under the Convention on the Rights of the Child — the most widely ratified human rights instrument in the world.
- And we will update you on our new Strategic Plan, which is shaping up well. Because just as UNICEF has been there for children, we will continue to be there in the years ahead.
- We have reconfirmed our key priorities for the near-term — distance learning to save futures, immunization to save lives, water to save communities and mental health to save families.
- In the medium-term, we are reimagining all of the systems children need. For example, the pandemic underscored the importance of primary health care at the community level. People need ready access to a full suite of health services where they live. From pre and antenatal services, to vaccinations and nutrition, to services that support SRHR. We need to make this a reality.
- We will continue adapting our child protection programming to meet the unprecedented needs of COVID-19, like school closures, financial hardships and reduced protection services. Online counselling, digital protections, hotlines for support — these are all areas in which UNICEF can lead.
- We will expand our work on social policy and protection, to ensure that national budgets prioritize children in the recovery.
Across our programming, we will reflect our commitments on gender. Our new Strategic Plan will incorporate the findings of the recent evaluation of our Gender Action Plan, and plant the seeds for the new plan being developed for 2022-2025. This will include a focus on SRHR.

We will advance programming around climate. We are now integrating climate actions into our health and water programming, for example. We are working with the private sector to adapt many of our offices to solar power. And we will continue reducing the carbon footprint of our supply chains for vital goods and services.

And everywhere, we will continue to “stay and deliver” within humanitarian emergencies. This will always be a cornerstone of our work.

To draw more funding and support, we will aggressively pursue transactional fundraising and two-way social media engagement. This week, we will also discuss innovative financing mechanisms like the Dynamo Fund and a new instrument we are developing with the World Bank.

And we will discuss PFP’s workplan, as we re-consider our partnerships model and create more space for our private sector partners to help us in our shared endeavours.

But private sector funding can never replace the critical role of public funding. We deeply appreciate your governments’ increased support for our Other Resources and the flexible Regular Resources that have helped us respond to the pandemic swiftly and with agility. We count on your continued commitment to increasing our level of Regular Resources based on the commitments made in the Funding Compact.

UNICEF needs regular, sustained and flexible resources. Our teams must be prepared to act at a moment’s notice, especially as we deal with a fast-moving virus. Please help us amplify this message of urgent need in your capitals.

We will scale-up bold innovations like artificial intelligence and more digital solutions, and help us become a “real-time UNICEF,” informed and supported by data of the highest quality.

Our organizational improvements and streamlining are ongoing. We are reducing paperwork. We have consolidated and moved a number of functions to lower-cost locations. And we are reflecting on our work modalities. We want to give our staff members the modern, agile and efficient systems — and time — they need.

We are continuing our journey to become a more diverse and inclusive UNICEF. This includes the work of our Task Team on Anti-Racism and Discrimination, to help end these scourges that have kept UNICEF from living up to our values.

And we will continue improving our human resources system, to place people at the centre of our systems and policies, and provide the tools, training and career opportunities our staff members deserve, and will need for a fast-moving future.

Throughout, we will match our donors’ generosity with strong financial stewardship and transparency. For the eighth consecutive year, UNICEF has received an unqualified audit opinion from the Board of Auditors on our financial statements. And we continue to monitor our financial estimates, in case further revisions or offsets are needed.

So UNICEF’s 75th year will not be a year of standing still. It will be a year in which we continue to adapt and change to the needs of children. They are not facing this pandemic alone. We are standing with them together. As a UNICEF family.

As we begin a new year, let us both celebrate and build on UNICEF’s legacy. Let us set a bold example of how the world can unite behind children and young people — now and in the years to come. Thank you.

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