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البعثة الدائمة لدولة إريتريا لدى
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**PERMANENT MISSION OF THE STATE OF ERITREA TO THE UNITED NATIONS
NEW YORK**

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**Statement delivered by H.E. Sophia Tesfamariam, Permanent Representative of Eritrea to the
United Nations**

Item 4: UNICEF programme cooperation

UNICEF Second Regular session

2 September 2026

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Executive Director,
Distinguished Delegates,

Today is a particularly meaningful occasion for Eritrea.

As UNICEF celebrates its 80th anniversary, Eritrea is commemorating 50 years since the establishment of Bet Timhirti Sewra , affectionately known as the “Zero School”.

Established in 1976 by the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front, in the midst of the bitter war for independence, the Zero School was created to ensure that Eritrean children would not become victims of the war around them. They were to be protected, nurtured and educated, despite the extraordinary circumstances in which they were growing up.

It embodied a profound conviction: a people fighting for its future must protect and prepare the children who will inherit that future. That commitment continued with independence. Among the first international conventions Eritrea signed was the Convention on the Rights of the Child, firmly anchoring the rights and wellbeing of children in the country’s national journey.

Since independence, Eritrea has made important progress in advancing the survival, health, education and wellbeing of its children. Child mortality has declined significantly, while immunization and access to essential health services have expanded. Eritrea has also made progress in expanding access to education and strengthening systems that reach children and families, including in remote communities.

These achievements reflect not only the efforts of government, but also the contribution of families, communities, schools, health workers and partners, a whole-of-society commitment to ensuring that children survive, are protected and nurtured, receive an education, and have the opportunity to develop to their full potential.

UNICEF has been an important partner in this journey. Its partnership with Eritrea dates from the early years of independence, supporting the country's efforts to address the needs of children and families emerging from war. The new Country Programme Document represents yet another chapter of this partnership.

The CPD recognizes that progress brings new responsibilities. In education, the focus is increasingly on quality learning and the foundations laid in early childhood. Eritrea is investing in this next stage, including the training of 7,000 pre-primary teachers and plans to establish kindergarten centers in nearly 2,000 communities.

This is precisely where the whole-of-society approach matters. Education and protection begin long before a child enters a classroom and extend far beyond it. Families, communities, teachers, health workers, government institutions and partners all have a role in creating an environment in which children are safe, healthy, supported and able to learn.

The CPD was developed through a participatory process with Eritrean institutions and stakeholders, grounded in evidence and aligned with Eritrea's national priorities, including Vision 2030 and the forthcoming National Development Plan 2027–2031. It builds on national systems and community-based approaches, strengthening what already exists.

As we move into implementation, Eritrea looks to UNICEF to continue walking with us in this effort, supporting the strengthening of national capacities and systems, expanding quality early childhood education, improving foundational learning, and reinforcing integrated child protection, particularly for children and communities that remain underserved.

Fifty years ago, the Zero School demonstrated this commitment under the most difficult circumstances. Today, we carry it forward through our institutions, communities and partnerships.

The children protected and educated during the liberation struggle became the generation that built an independent Eritrea. Our responsibility now is to prepare the next generation to build its future.

Eritrea therefore welcomes the endorsement of this Country Programme Document and looks forward to a stronger, deeper and results-oriented partnership with UNICEF , grounded in national ownership, mutual respect and a shared commitment to every child.

As UNICEF marks 80 years and Eritrea marks 50 years since the Zero School, these anniversaries remind us:

Protecting children is protecting the future.

Educating children is building the future.

And building that future is a responsibility we share as a society.

Thank you.