Joint Statement
First Regular Session of the UNICEF Executive Board
Update on UNICEF humanitarian action: the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic (Item 7)
February 10, 2021

I am very pleased to be delivering this statement on behalf of Australia, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Panama, the Republic of Korea, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States and my own country, Canada.

Madam President, Executive Director, thank you for your leadership in these challenging times. We welcome the encouraging results from the presentation. We commend UNICEF’s resilience and commitment in responding to the critical humanitarian and protection needs of children, adolescents and their families during this global pandemic—this past year has not been easy. In particular, we would like to acknowledge and thank your staff on the front lines of the response efforts.

The pandemic has exacerbated the challenges faced by vulnerable populations, complicated our response efforts, and further strained the humanitarian system. However, it has also encouraged innovation and is altering conventional programming methods. In fact, COVID-19 is demonstrating that we can deliver results using different and perhaps more effective work modalities.

We welcome UNICEF’s efforts in applying the lessons from the pandemic to develop new strategies and reposition, in order to deliver for crises-affected populations. The pandemic will continue to offer numerous opportunities to examine our humanitarian system and to consolidate a predictable response to health-related crises—efforts in this regard must continue.
With this in mind, we would like to highlight a few of the areas we consider of particular importance:

First, data collection. In order to deliver equitable humanitarian programming, the differentiated needs and priorities of vulnerable populations must be understood. As such, we welcome the action and progress made by UNICEF to date and encourage you to prioritize the collection and use of sex, age, disability and location-disaggregated data throughout the response.

Second, gender equality and the rights of children are core pillars of UNICEF program. We commend you in this regard, particularly in the area of gender-based violence, and re-emphasize the importance of sexual and reproductive health and rights, and integrating gender-transformative programming and a rights perspective in all of UNICEF’s humanitarian action. This needs to happen in the early programming stages and have a long-term perspective. We welcome the ambition to strengthen the integration of humanitarian action in your Gender Action Plan.

Third, localization. UNICEF is emerging as a strong contributor to the localization agenda, with over 25% of its direct humanitarian funding allocated to local and national responders. However, this support must go further to advance local and national expertise, advocate for their protection and strengthen their capacities to respond - instead of simple sub-contracting arrangements for service delivery, as highlighted in the Humanitarian Review. Such equal partnerships must also include risk-sharing which is key to building trust with local partners.

Fourth, accountability to affected populations. Affected populations must be meaningfully included in the design and delivery of assistance, and in the decisions that affect them first and foremost. The voices of women and girls, refugees and migrant populations, persons with disabilities, and other
marginalized persons must be included at every stage. The evidence shows their inclusion will enhance COVID-19 responses, including vaccine uptake and delivery.

To this end, we are pleased that UNICEF has developed, with the IFRC, the outline of the Risk Communication and Community Engagement concept to meaningfully engage communities and understand the intersectional needs of individuals and the barriers they may face to access services. To ensure success, this must be rooted in a qualitative understanding of the communities served.

Fifth, strengthening the nexus. We support a coordinated, comprehensive and coherent global response to COVID-19 that leverages the strengths of all partners across the humanitarian-development-peace spectrum. We encourage UNICEF to use its dual mandate effectively to build bridges between humanitarian and development initiatives, while continuing to respect the humanitarian principles, even as resilience and recovery mandates increase. We welcome broader, contextualised risk assessments, and encourage a true transformative approach to enhance the nexus. We look forward to seeing this reflected in the Strategic Plan and its monitoring framework.

Finally, innovative financing. We appreciate the importance of broadening the donor-base, particularly during this year where domestic pressure on finances for traditional donors has increased. Ensuring humanitarian funding predictability and flexibility is an issue that we collectively support through our engagement in the Grand Bargain. With predictable and unearmarked funding, we have seen examples of how UNICEF and other humanitarian actors have been able to re-adjust their priorities and respond to new challenges. We encourage UNICEF to
work with member states to identify and communicate good examples of these efforts.

In closing, we congratulate UNICEF on its 75\textsuperscript{th} anniversary this year. Your commitment to deliver on your mandate is unwavering. We consider you a vital partner and we will continue to support the advancement of our shared commitment.

Thank you.