Madam President,

Congratulations on your election as President of the UNICEF Executive Board for 2021. Also, allow me to congratulate my colleagues that have been elected to the vice-presidencies.

Madame Executive Director Fore, thank you for your thorough presentation of UNICEF’s response on the ground for COVID-19 relief. This moment calls for the acceleration of efforts to tackle the profound challenges that all Member States are facing in guaranteeing that children’s rights are promoted and protected. According to the information provided to us, more than 150 million children live in multidimensional poverty today, without proper access to education, health, sanitary infrastructure, clean water, adequate nutrition, or a place to live in. This is a 15% increase of what the levels were before the pandemic. We must act now.

This pandemic has shown that domestic violence indicators and the co-habitation of children with their abusers have risen exponentially in almost every country where confinement measures have disrupted daily life and family dynamics, including our own country in order to protect human lives.

These disruptions will cause profound consequences for children in a post-pandemic world if actions to put their rights first and continue their education are not taken now.
Virtual education and the digital divide have left children without socially stimulating spaces, impacting their mental health and preventing them from developing necessary interactive skills.

At this stage, Member States and cooperation agencies must raise their voices and speak for children. The Convention on the Rights of the Child states that we are to be their voices, but we are also responsible to ensure adequate financing in our institutional budgets to implement public policies that respond to their needs. Children are not just numbers or statistics, that is why Panama is taking concrete actions to ensure their future.

Thanks to the cooperation of UNICEF, NGOs specialized in children and other essential actors, the Government passed in the middle of the pandemic in October, legislation directly focused on safeguarding early childhood development from a child’s first one thousand days, when 87% of their brains are developed, until they turn 8 years old. This legislation aims to protect children and ensure that their nutrition, skillsets and stimulation become a priority to be handled by the State, private sector, academia, civil society and all relevant actors. Our Government understands the complexity that is entailed when delivering to children.

Early childhood development is positive for children but also for the design of modern and efficient education systems. These are areas we would like to see further developed on the upcoming Strategic Plan for the period of 2022-2025, a critical blueprint to respond to the post-pandemic reality.

Furthermore, Madame President, Panama, sees with great concern the challenges that mass migration is making on safeguarding the children’s rights during the pandemic. Systems are being overwhelmed and we must all contribute to deliver the same treatment to migrant children and their caregivers.
These are devastating challenges that we face as the international community, and where International Cooperation and capacity building is vital to deliver concrete results on the ground. In this sense, Panama is one of the countries in the region to have developed a Multidimensional Poverty Index focused on children, which expands the government’s scope and improves delivery of public policies focused on children based on demographical regions.

We believe that UNICEF is on the right path with financing and support to deliver global solutions and assistance as Panama has been at the receiving end of some of that cooperation. In that same vein, it is significant for Panama that the agency and the system recognize that GDP and income classification is not the only measure of success or economic capacity to deliver results on the ground. Panama still very much requires the cooperation received from UNICEF. We are looking forward to the formal adoption of the Country Program Document this Thursday.

Madame President,

We sincerely hope that innovative solutions to these complex problems will continue working to have an impact, because if our children are not safe, we cannot rest until they are. Our collective responsibility is to mobilize efforts for a call to action, to address the severe consequences that guarantee children’s rights.

I thank you, Madame President, Madame Executive Director and Colleagues.