Chair/Madame Chair

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

First, we wish to commend UNICEF for the well-structured and evidence-based Gender Action Plan presented to the Board. We recognize that the process has been thorough, and that voices of a wide range of stakeholders have been heard. We believe it clearly outlines the steps needed to incorporate Gender Equality into the five goal areas of the strategic plan.

Accelerated progress will be necessary in order to reach the targets set in the strategic plan, and in the 2030 Agenda. The COVID-19 pandemic, the climate crisis and increasing humanitarian and protracted crises have further entrenched existing gender-based imbalances. It is through this lens we view the current Action Plan. Through this lens, we would have liked to see an even more ambitious plan, emphasizing and mainstreaming transformative approaches to gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, and emphasizing the pressing need for access to sexual and reproductive health and rights’ services and information. We would have liked to see a stronger focus on persons with disabilities and a more consistent human rights based approach in general. We encourage a more consistent use of disaggregated data in plans and reporting. We recognize however that no action plan can unite all positions.

We appreciate that UNICEF places a greater value on their institutional accountability and ownership in all contexts, and that results related to gender equality will be clear and specified from the start of all programmes across all goal areas. We believe a strong focus on gender equality from programme design through implementation and monitoring and reporting is the only way to achieve durable results. We are pleased to see gender-responsive
social protection systems as a priority result area in the plan, given its importance as a means to alleviate poverty, empower women and improve education outcomes for children.

Furthermore, we note the whole of institution approach outlined by UNICEF, where gender equality will be mainstreamed across internal policies, practices and accountability mechanisms at all levels. We appreciate that UNICEF is committed to continue the trend of being among the best in the UN family measured against the indicators of the UN System Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. In this regard, we welcome the strong focus on financing for gender equality results, and on gender parity at all levels of the organisation. We furthermore recognize the commitment to ensure gender expertise in all sectors, which is a key component in mainstreaming, and note the need for sufficient resources, including staff with the appropriate technical competencies and staffing structures that enable their work. We look forward to receiving more information on how UNICEF intends to develop and ensure such expertise, and whether there are lessons to be learned from other partners with whom UNICEF collaborates closely. We will follow with interest UNICEF’s commitment to invest in and advocate for the mandatory reporting of sex- and age-disaggregated data in all contexts, including humanitarian emergencies.

Let me conclude by commending UNICEF, again, for their new Gender Action Plan. We look forward to regular updates at the sessions of the Executive Board.