

Statement of Save the Children International CEO, Inger Ashing
First Regular Session of the UNICEF Executive Board, 8 February 2022
Agenda Item 2: Opening statements by the President of the Executive Board and the Executive Director of UNICEF

Mr. President, Executive Director Russell, Distinguished Members of the UNICEF Executive Board, the reality children face today is a stark one. COVID-19, conflict, and climate change threaten not just the lives and livelihoods of today's children, but that of generations to come. These concurrent and existential threats have exacerbated the inequalities and discrimination faced by millions of children, making it harder for us to conceive of a world in which the rights of all children – irrespective of who they are and where they live – are fulfilled.

UNICEF's mandate to promote and protect the rights of all children is now more important than ever in its 75-year history. But circumstances have changed, and new strategies and approaches are needed. I'd like to highlight two areas where shifts are necessary.

First, humanitarian operations and localization. We welcome UNICEF's review of its approach to humanitarian operations and its commitment to take forward its recommendations, particularly in relation to partnering with and supporting national and local response capacity.

As was made particularly clear during the pandemic, local and national actors are always on the frontline in a crisis. They play a critical role in delivering responses, not least because they have access and trust of the communities they serve. Working with – and learning from – national and local civil society organizations in the delivery of humanitarian assistance remains a core goal for Save the Children. We stand by to support UNICEF in its partnerships and collaboration with these vital organizations for the benefit of the children and communities we all serve.



Second, children's participation. Children around the world tell me over and over that they want to be part of shaping decisions that affect them. When they do, they are powerful agents of change. This is a right guaranteed to children in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Yet, children are rarely invited to represent themselves at the UN and other global forums, and when they do, they have told us they do not always feel listened to.

UNICEF showed extraordinary commitment to engage children towards the development of the 2022-2025 Strategic Plan by consulting more than 200,000 children and young people. We encourage UNICEF to deliver this strategy – informed by children – and leverage its extensive network and expertise to facilitate more frequent and systematic opportunities for children's participation. This includes engagement with Member States during decision-making processes at the national, regional and global levels, in development as well as humanitarian contexts as part of UNICEF's ongoing commitment to support accountability to affected populations.

Let me conclude by asking the Executive Board to support to UNICEF in these endeavors.