

**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE AFRICAN MEMBERS OF THE  
EXECUTIVE BOARD OF UNICEF**

**H.E. AMBASSADOR TAYE ATSKE SELASSIE AMDE, PERMANENT  
REPRESENTATIVE OF ETHIOPIA AND VICE PRESIDENT OF THE  
BOARD**

**FIRST REGULAR SESSION OF THE UNICEF EXECUTIVE BOARD**

**8 FEBRUARY 2022**

*Check against Delivery*

**Thank you, Mr. President!**

1. I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of the African Members of UNICEF Executive Board.

2. Allow me at the outset, on behalf of the African Group of the Board Members and myself, to extend my heartfelt congratulations to Ms. Catherine Russell as she begins her role as the Executive Director of UNICEF. The African Group would like to assure you of its support and constructive engagement as you step into the role in these challenging times.

**Mr. President,**

3. Education remains a prerequisite to realize the Sustainable Development Goals. Even well before the pandemic hit, a staggering number of children in Africa lacked access to basic learning. The added challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic would mean decades

more before achieving eradication of learning poverty for millions of children in Africa.

4. Millions of school children in Africa have been affected due to school closures. Prolonged absence from schools had multiple consequences as they were exposed to exploitation of various forms. Girls have been disproportionately affected and returning to school has been proving much more difficult for them. The time lost for children will be far-reaching and will have generational implications. This will add to the vulnerabilities of countries that have been spending their meager resources to improve their social infrastructure.

**Mr. President,**

5. The pandemic has revealed a fundamental digital divide between countries; those that were better connected were able to resort to ICT solutions to support children's education while countries lacking the infrastructure have been left further behind. The lesson drawn for us is, therefore, there should be no time wasted in enhancing digital connectivity to improve the education of children. Additionally, well-coordinated efforts to respond to the health and socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 must be our priority to get the SDGs back on track and ensure the continuity of learning.

**Mr. President,**

6. We are also encouraged by the commitment of UNICEF to take the leadership in the coordination of vaccine delivery. In Africa, vaccine

supply continues to be the most important topic with only 11 per cent of the population vaccinated. On the other hand, we see a trend where administrating the vaccines, or more specifically, putting the vaccines in people's arms have become a challenge. Only 64 per cent of the total vaccine supplied has been administered to date. This suggests there remains much to be done in enhancing vaccine infrastructure in Africa. This should in fact be one of our strategic focus areas because investments in vaccine infrastructure can have a positive effect of enhancing the structural health facilities in Africa. We, therefore, encourage UNICEF to explore a path of collaboration with the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.

7. I would also like to point out the importance of effectively implementing the Humanitarian Review Recommendations which can help UNICEF steer its momentum in the right direction. The work that UNICEF has already started in adapting its business model to prepare it to effectively respond to future humanitarian contexts is commendable. It should, however, be noted that a lot of effort has to go into the process as the success of this exercise would understandably be a long-term result.

8. Finally, **Mr. President**, the African Group would like to hear more from the Executive Director on how she plans to broaden and improve the scope of UNICEF's operations in Africa.

I thank you!