

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
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## **Opening Statement by Henrietta H. Fore, UNICEF Executive Director**

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Let me begin by thanking you, once again, for the guidance, advice and support that you have given to me since my arrival.

Since the last Board session in February, I have had more opportunities to see UNICEF's programmes in action in a number of countries around the world.

I have met with governments...business leaders...NGOs...front-line workers...and over 2,000 UNICEF staff members doing incredible work.

And most inspiring of all, I have met the children and young people we serve — those who are counting on us to support their hopes for the future.

Throughout, one message rings clear: the world is *united* in its commitment to shape a better future for children and young people.

But commitment is only the first step in overcoming the challenges before us.

Conflicts, disasters, distance, poverty and prejudice continue to limit the futures of children and young people.

Among the hardest to reach are children on the move. According to the IRC, the number of refugees and internally displaced people reached 65 million last year.

As an organization — indeed, as a global community — we must face a difficult fact.

If we fail to dramatically accelerate our progress for *all* children, we will not reach the Sustainable Development Goals.

Two examples related to our work:

First: More than five million children still die each year from preventable causes. Without intensified progress, about 50 countries will *not* meet the SDG for under-five mortality by 2030. We must, and *will*, accelerate our progress to reach our ambitious child-survival goals. Especially for the most disadvantaged children — compared to children from the wealthiest households, the poorest children are twice as likely to die before reaching their fifth birthdays...twice as likely to be stunted...and three to four times as likely to be out-of-school.

A second sobering example: The 1.2 billion adolescents in the world are facing a perfect storm of a learning crisis and changes in the world of work. The window is rapidly closing for countries to make the most of their demographic dividend. Their health, their outlook, their education, their ability to access services — this matters to all of us. Again, unless we accelerate our efforts, we will fall far short of not only the SDG to deliver quality primary and secondary education to girls and boys, but also other goals related to health, protection, economic growth and even peace.

The message is clear. We must do *more* to help every child and every young person enjoy her rights to health, education and protection.

Living up to this responsibility requires not just investment, but innovation...not just partnership, but *purposeful* partnership...not just knowing *what* works but *scaling-up* what works.

Today, I would like to set out with you a vision to accelerate progress for children and young people, at every point, throughout both decades of life.

Our vision is grounded in the targets established in our Strategic Plan — a Plan shaped in great part by the people in this room.

And it is grounded in the Secretary General's UN reform efforts. We congratulate Member States for adopting the resolution on UN development reform — an important achievement that will help the UN system support governments as they pursue their SDG commitments.

But our vision *also* recognizes that we need a step-change in how we drive results, by scaling-up our work on **four priorities**.

Our first priority is to **intensify our work to integrate development approaches into our humanitarian responses**.

Our responses to emergencies must not only save and improve lives in the short-term — they must be designed in such a way that helps fragile communities and countries recover, re-build and avoid backsliding in the future.

So often, hard-won development gains are quickly erased by the next emergency, the next crisis, the next conflict.

And so, as we respond to emergencies in a way that also plants seeds of development, we must take bold steps to reduce risks and vulnerabilities in our development programming.

This includes helping communities preserve hard-won development gains by strengthening community schools, health centres, hospitals and water systems, and by improving disease-outbreak surveillance.

This also means establishing durable cash-transfer programmes in emergencies, building on existing social-protection systems where possible.

Delivering cash in the midst of conflicts or disasters is often the most effective response for families — helping them meet immediate needs while putting them on the path to long-term recovery.

In Yemen, over 1.3 million beneficiaries received emergency cash transfers last year thanks to the World Bank's international development assistance. Our monitoring shows that nine out of every 10 used these funds to purchase food... access medical care...or pay debts.

And in Lebanon, I met a group of young people who proudly showed me their special red ATM cards that give vulnerable families — including Syrian refugees — access to social assistance programmes to help them pay for everything from food and transportation, to health care, to education.

As we support children, we support economies. As we support families in emergencies, we support the future resilience of their societies.

Throughout, we must work ever-more closely with governments who will be — after all — the ones to carry support systems like health, water and social support into the future. The end goal must be systems that are sustained *not* by the UN — but by governments and communities themselves.

A last point on funding. As we work with governments, we must also work with donors to advocate for not just *more* funding, but more *flexible* funding. Siloed funding for emergencies can sometimes come at the expense of investments in long-term development needs.

This is short-sighted — especially when investments in development can help communities in crisis recover faster in the long run, and even prevent emergencies from occurring in the first place.

I look forward to working with your governments, and with *all* our generous donors, to serve the needs of children in development and humanitarian contexts alike.

**Second, we will expand our focus on local solutions, such as delivering integrated community-based health care, at scale.**

Experience shows that community health systems are the most effective means of delivering primary care — including nutrition and early childhood development programmes — to under-served populations.

Community health systems require investment. Front-line health workers must be well-trained, paid and integrated into local health facilities.

But community health systems also pay high returns — in the form of both resources maximized *and* lives saved.

As we improve access, we will also work to improve *quality*. No matter how basic the service, quality of care is essential. It builds confidence and improves health outcomes for the children and families we serve.

Our approach in Afghanistan is a good example.

Many rural communities have no access to basic services like vaccinations, health care and antenatal screening.

With the support of Japan and South Korea, our UNICEF team delivered primary health care services to almost one million women, children and newborns last year, through 70 mobile health teams. A great example of what we can do when we combine investment with UNICEF's expertise and reach.

In the years ahead, we will work closely with governments to design and deliver these services through their formal health systems — a critical first step towards universal health coverage and the SDG's vision of "health for all." And a fitting initiative as we prepare to celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Alma Ata Declaration on Primary Health Care.

Our third priority is the partnership around the **Young People's Agenda**. As we strengthen support for children across the first decade of life and consolidate the gains made as they grow, we will not forget the equally important second decade.

As we discussed at our February session, the time is right to gather around the needs of adolescents with the same urgency and sense of purpose we brought to supporting their first decade of life.

In September, we will launch the partnership, bringing together partners from every sector and across the UN family to design, scale-up and deliver the education, training and support that young people need to shape better, more prosperous and even more peaceful futures for themselves, and their societies.

The majority of the poorest adolescents have either never been to primary school, or never completed it. We need to find innovative ways to strengthen systems throughout their education journeys, so that children and young people stay in school and learn skills for life and work.

We see great potential in tapping into the innovations, products and reach of businesses in our work, and co-creating new initiatives that can better reach young people with the support they need. Online learning. Skills development. Tools for remote education. Mentorships. Apprenticeships.

In South Sudan, for example, I saw young people being trained to repair hand pumps. And in South Africa, the Techno Girls programme is matching young women with mentors in the technology industry. Just a few examples of how businesses can make a positive difference in the lives of young people.

The Agenda will help us deliver on our commitments to young people in our Strategic Plan, and support of a generation of young people who can change the future, if given the chance to do so.

Young people like Zahra —a young woman I met two weeks ago at a centre for survivors of violence in Bamako, Mali.

When she was 13, her father tried to marry her off to a much older man. When Zahra bravely refused, her father kicked her out of the house, and threatened the relatives who offered to help her. She lived at the centre for almost three years, before finally moving in with some relatives. Now 20, she is finishing her education and plans to open her own business.

Zahra's story shows that, with the right support at the right time — and the right investments — we can change the course of a young person's life, even in a fragile environment. Our Young People's Agenda is our opportunity to gather our partners around the needs of young people like Zahra — no matter where they live.

Our fourth priority is to **pursue and apply new innovations** in every aspect of our work, and do so *at-scale*, more broadly than ever before.

This includes proven technologies that can deliver services more effectively in hard-to-reach communities — like U-Report, RapidPro, and drone technology.

Or the rapid diagnostic tools being developed to fight diseases like Zika and pneumonia.

Or Primero, which is software to track unaccompanied and separated children during emergencies and link them to local social welfare and protection systems.

Or geographic information technology to predict how and where disease outbreaks will spread.

To explore more innovations like these, UNICEF is now co-chairing, with WFP, the UN Innovation Network. The Network brings together innovation experts from inside and outside the UN to share tools, resources and best practices to plan, monitor and measure our work in the field.

Innovation also means finding new and better ways to directly deliver primary health care to the most disadvantaged, under-served populations — including in conflict areas or regions vulnerable to outbreaks.

This could include delivery of integrated packages of interventions at the same location — from vaccinations and nutrition, to maternal and neonatal care, to early childhood development support for new parents.

UNICEF is well-suited to this, with our deep field presence and expertise at the local level — in both rural and urban communities alike.

Finally, being innovative means developing new approaches to financing — like blended financing — that can tap into a broader range of resources to support children. Everything we do as an organization depends on resources, and I look forward to discussing this with you in the time ahead.

Running through all of these priorities is our determination to expand our ties with governments, foundations, NGOs, non-profits and businesses — including through public-private partnerships.

Each brings different strengths to the table. We want to combine the innovations, market reach and research and development of businesses with the

influence and levers of government, the experience of NGOs and foundations, and the global reach of multilaterals.

Our commitment to partnerships includes strengthening ties to our sister UN agencies, as we continue supporting the Secretary General’s efforts to reform the UN system. Accelerating our progress towards the SDGs depends on being as efficient as possible across every UN programme, and keeping our focus where it belongs: not on processes, but on results, especially in the field.

This commitment to collaboration is the driving force behind our efforts to operationalize our Common Chapter with UNDP, UNFPA and UN Women, at both the technical and leadership levels. This is an important *collective* opportunity to contribute to the Secretary General’s UN reform efforts. All four agency heads have outlined to staff our expectations in this area.

We also outlined to staff our expectations on joint actions and accelerators to translate the commitments in the Common Chapter into results on the ground. Since January, 14 new initiatives have commenced, and we are working together to develop new funding mechanisms to scale-up our work.

As an organization, UNICEF must also explore new opportunities to collaborate with businesses through public-private partnerships.

Since January, I have had a number of opportunities to speak to business leaders across a number of sectors.

They increasingly understand that shared value — the idea that “doing good” is “good business” — is best created through supporting healthier, better educated and more prosperous populations.

They do not need to profit at the *expense* of communities — but they can profit *because* the communities in which they operate, and the people who live there, are well-served and well-supported by the local business community. By reducing risks for the children in the communities in which they operate, they can enhance their own corporate reputation.

And in fact, businesses have long been an important part of our work, through their products and technologies, and their distribution and transport systems.

As businesses continue transcending their traditional role as donors, I want to send a strong signal that UNICEF wants to work with them, and with all our partners, to find new and more effective ways of reaching the children and young people still being left behind.

This is an ambitious agenda, and there is much work ahead of us. And we cannot carry it out without UNICEF's single greatest asset, and single greatest resource: our people.

Since my arrival, I have been inspired — time and time again — by the dedication of our staff members. Meeting them and seeing the results of their work in the field has been a highlight of my job. Through their work, they're bringing to life our core values of integrity, respect and diversity.

I want them to know that UNICEF's leadership team is equally committed to these values.

Our ongoing efforts to make *zero tolerance* a reality for harassment and abuse of authority of all kinds, as well as for sexual exploitation and abuse, are critical not only to staff well-being but, by extension, to our work on behalf of children and young people, and our global reputation and credibility.

For example, we have strengthened and simplified reporting mechanisms, enhanced our investigation process, and are committed to improving screening for new hires.

These efforts must continue. And they will.

Two weeks ago, I announced the creation of an Independent Task Force to review our current practices and provide recommendations to prevent and address gender discrimination, harassment and abuse of power at UNICEF.

This represents an important step in our broader journey to end discrimination and abuse of any kind.

Over the next six months, the Task Force will consult with experts and resources outside of UNICEF — including our sister UN agencies — and provide recommendations. The recommendations will be presented to the Board, and a follow-up Action Plan will be swiftly developed and implemented.

And we just learned that UNICEF has achieved something that no other UN agency has achieved: EDGE certification.

EDGE — or Economic Dividends for Gender Equality — is the leading global assessment and business certification standard for gender equality. It includes a review of our data, policies and practices, and a system-wide survey on employees' experiences.

UNICEF has achieved the second level, “EDGE Move” — which puts us in the top 11 per cent among all EDGE-certified companies.

There is more work to do. Despite having reached overall gender equality in UNICEF, we are committed to improving the organization's culture in every office and workplace. This includes exploring flexible working arrangements, yearly gender pay-gap assessments, and improving communication around the recruitment and promotion process. We will also invest in mentor programs.

We are committed to our pledge to gender equality, and making “zero tolerance” for discrimination and harassment a daily reality in every UNICEF office and workplace. *Finally.*

We are equally committed to a culture of accountability, excellence and learning throughout UNICEF.

This includes supporting our staff members in their training needs, producing a cadre of excellent managers across every team, and recruiting people to the UNICEF family to lend fresh perspectives and expertise to our mission across every office.

For example, to help bring new perspectives to our work, we are launching a structured Senior Fellows Programme to bring talented individuals from the public and private sectors to work on UNICEF programmes around the world for a fixed period of time.

This is a great opportunity for our organization to benefit from the skills, ideas and energies of people from outside of our organization. And to develop new ways to learn from one another and accelerate progress towards the better, more sustainable future that we all want.

A final word of thanks, to all of you — our Board members.

Everything we do — from our Strategic Plan, to our work with sister agencies, to the work we do in the field — is because of your support. Because *you* have carried the needs of children back to your capitals.

On behalf of everyone at UNICEF, and as we take the next steps in our organization's proud seven-decade history — *thank you* for all you have done, and will do.

I look forward to a productive session.

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