Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen.

As many of you know, UNICEF works for children and children enjoy story-telling.

So, indulge me as I begin my remarks with a few stories!

(Story 1)

Once upon a time, in the aftermath of World War 2, in which millions of people were killed, global leaders realised that children needed special care and protection and created the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund in 1946 for a 5 year period.
Thankfully, in 1950 they decided that the mandate of UNICEF should not end, as there remained much to be done. And for the last 70 years, we have been here to better the lives of children everywhere. Our contribution to a safer world was recognized in 1965 when UNICEF was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for being a “peace-factor of great importance.”

(Story 2)

Once upon a time, two proud, fierce, yet humble, freedom fighters broke the bars of oppression and unleashed waves of hope for a better future in their respective countries.
Through peaceful means and relentless determination, Mahatma Gandhi reminded us that “if we wish to create a lasting peace, then we must begin with the children.”

Here in South Africa, Nelson Mandela noted that: “There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way it treats its children.”

Through their wisdom, compassion and action, Mahatma Gandhi and Madiba ensured that the rights of children were always paramount.

It is indeed fitting to share the words of these men who linked South Africa and India in such a unique way.
However, these powerful messages may have been heard but they were not listened to until leaders of the world endorsed the Convention on the Rights of the Child, known as the “CRC” in 1990. It enshrines, among others, the right to life, the right to dignity and the right to safety and is the most-widely ratified human rights instrument to date.

Story 3

Once upon a time, a young girl named Busi went through a difficult time in her life as she endured the violence that still pervades large parts of our society. Tonight you will hear the story of Busi and how proper care helped her survive violence and thrive.
Ladies and Gentlemen, what these three stories remind us, in different ways, is that every child needs the nurturing of a guardian. And there are many guardians in the room tonight.

Let me recognise our generous sponsors without whom this evening would not be possible as well as our partners in Government, civil society and the United Nations. Allow me to single out the Departments of Social Development, Health and Basic Education as well as the National Association of Child Care Workers, the South African Red Cross and the corporate sector.
I would also like to pay tribute to four remarkable individuals here today (*ask to stand*): Our Goodwill Ambassadors and Celebrity Advocates: Gavin Rajah, Jo-Ann Strauss, Zakes Bantwini and Tsheddi Mholo. Thank you for your ongoing commitment and giving selflessly to make a difference to the lives of children. Individually and collectively, you have been true guardian angels.

Tonight, we celebrate another true guardian angel, someone who’s name is derived from a Sanskrit word which means “she who brings happiness”. Priyanka Chopra, your presence here tonight has broadened the circle of care for children, first in India and now globally.
Anthony Lake, the global head of UNICEF rightly described you as “a force for children and adolescents everywhere.” We are delighted to have you here with us this evening.

Ladies and Gentlemen, having worked in both conflict and post-conflict situations for over three decades, I have seen, first hand, the effect of violence on children. And as Frederick Douglass reminded us “It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men (and women).”

Faced with this reality, UNICEF South Africa shifted its focus to concentrate on three key priorities: Ending violence against children, promoting early childhood development and getting better results for adolescents, particularly girls. I invite you this evening to join UNICEF in our endeavour to realise these key priorities.
In conclusion, I wish to once again call on your generosity to assist UNICEF and our partners as we strive to make the journey of the South African child a healthy, safe and happy one.

Dear friends, tonight is not about statistics, it is not about despondency and pessimism. Tonight, we celebrate children - in all their potential, their strengths, their resilience and their hope.

Thank you for your contribution, your presence, and your commitment.

ENDS