



Estonian Statement at the Annual session of the UNICEF Executive Board

17 June 2022

Mr President, Madam Executive Director,

At the outset, I would like to commend UNICEF for their continuous efforts and dedicated work in addressing the needs and protection of children, especially during these challenging times. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected millions, especially children, and the effects of the Russian invasion in Ukraine only amplifies challenges by accelerating food insecurity, inequality, mental health issues and learning gaps of children.

Mr President,

In Estonia, we offer various evidence-based programs for parents as well as kindergartens and schools **to help children develop basic self-regulation and social skills** such as the Incredible Years Program and the VEPA Behavioural Skills Program among others. These services combined with other local and community based services can contribute to a positive change.

Estonia has **invested into mental health** specialists and child psychiatrists in order to provide support and ensure children well-being. We place great attention on **guaranteeing equal access to quality education for all children and moreover** we invest 12 million euros to mitigate learning loss due to the pandemic.

This week in Tallinn, **Estonia is hosting the annual European Congress of the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse & Neglect. Focus is on Child Protection for the Most Vulnerable Children and Families.**

Mr President,

Every child has a right to a safe and happy home. Yet, the crime scene that has unfolded in Ukraine has caused unimaginable suffering. The Russian aggression against Ukraine has been characterised by systematic violations of international law and **grave violations against children in conflict.** We must do everything we can to ensure that every child is protected.

Estonia has welcomed over 40 000 Ukrainian refugees, including many children with open arms and solidarity. This represents 3% of Estonian population. There are over 13,000 children and young people from Ukraine in Estonia today. **It is essential to give these children and young people the skills to first cope with their worries** and then provide timely and efficient help.

Providing quality education for children and youth is a cornerstone for both UNICEF and Estonia. We ensure that **childcare and basic education is available to all children fleeing the war** from Ukraine. Moreover, our Ministry of Education and Research is creating 1,000 additional places in general and vocational **education for Ukrainian refugee children by opening up a new school - Freedom School.** The Ukrainian teachers and other educational staff

will be involved to support the students. **These young people will be building up Ukraine** one day.

Mr President,

We also find the deteriorating human rights situation in Afghanistan extremely concerning, especially for children, girls and women. **Estonia continues to support the humanitarian response in Afghanistan by supporting the education of children and girls.**

Finally, the children all over the world deserve a peaceful and happy childhood. It is crucial to strengthen our efforts ensuring the dignity and well-being of every child in the world. Estonia would like to reiterate our strong support to UNICEF for its tireless work in protecting the rights of the children.

Thank you!