

Annual session of the UNICEF Executive Board, 14–17 June 2022

**Opening statement by the President of the Executive Board
H.E. Mr. Rodrigo A. Carazo, Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the
United Nations**

14 June 2022

Personally speaking, fellow Bureau members, Executive Director Catherine Russell, UNICEF officers, who are always welcome at these Board sessions, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to extend a warm welcome to you all to the annual session of the UNICEF Executive Board. I am heartened, as I have said, by the fact that we are able to gather in person here today after more than two years of virtual meetings.

UNICEF, here and everywhere, continues to deal with the unprecedented circumstances and challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic and instabilities around the world. The leadership of the administration and the cooperation with Member States is, as always, essential for these high-minded endeavours.

I extend appreciation to my fellow Bureau members – H.E. Mr. Michal Mlynár, Permanent Representative of Slovakia; H.E. Ms. Amal Mudallali, Permanent Representative of Lebanon; H.E. Mr. Taye Atske Selassie Amde, Permanent Representative of Ethiopia; and H.E. Ms. Marie-Louise Koch Wegter, Deputy Permanent Representative of Denmark. I thank them for their collegial manner and dedication to the work of the Executive Board and UNICEF.

More than two years into the pandemic, the incremental harms to children's well-being are increasingly evident. Half of the world's children – more than 1 billion –

were living as of 2021 without access to essential services such as health care, adequate nutrition, clean water, sanitation or safe housing. The past year also saw increasing humanitarian needs, with escalating conflicts and protracted crises disrupting people's lives and livelihoods, leading to grave violations of children's rights and forcing children and their families to flee their homes in many cases. The ensuing violation of fundamental human rights has continued in 2022 and, coupled with the higher levels of hunger and poverty, is affecting an increasing number of children.

Over the past year, progress towards quality education for all children and young people was further derailed due to continued interruptions to schooling. At least 24 million children were estimated to drop out of school in 2021, on top of the more than 260 million children who were already out of school prior to the start of the pandemic. Added to this is the fact that almost half of all refugee children do not have schools to attend. Children who are internally displaced or in fragile settings often have even fewer educational opportunities.

UNICEF is working across all of these sectors to support the safe reopening of schools and has helped children to recover from learning losses by scaling up digital learning solutions tailored to their needs and contexts. Throughout 2021, UNICEF helped nearly 49 million out-of-school children to access education, including 6.4 million children on the move and 31.7 million children in humanitarian settings. The School-in-a-Box kits are salient icons of such dedication.

As we prepare for the Transforming Education Summit which will take place in September this year, we must continue to put children at the centre of all of our efforts

and renew our commitments to their education as a fundamental human right to be assured by all. Together, we can help to mobilize action and solutions for children to have the knowledge and skills needed to thrive in our rapidly changing world, and reinvigorate global efforts to deliver on the education-related targets of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

Distinguished colleagues, we have a full agenda to cover over the next few days. Among the items for today's session, we will learn more about the work and the achievements of UNICEF over the past year as we consider the annual report of the Executive Director. We will also hear an update on the Integrated Results and Resources Framework of the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, as well as consider the annual report of the evaluation function and the evaluation of the UNICEF role as cluster lead/co-lead agency, and the respective management responses.

Among the items for the second day (for tomorrow), we will consider the financial report for 2021 of Private Fundraising and Partnerships and the annual reports on the implementation of the UNICEF Gender Action Plan for 2018–2021 and on the internal audit and investigations. We will also consider the annual report on UNICEF humanitarian action, and take stock of the progress achieved through the COVID-19 Vaccine Delivery Partnership, which is an inter-agency endeavour under UNICEF's leadership and know-how.

The third day of the session will include, among other items, consideration of country programme documents for Kenya, the Syrian Arab Republic and the United Republic of Tanzania. On the last day of the session, the Staff Team Awards will be

presented. On behalf of the Executive Board, I would like at this time to acknowledge and commend all of the UNICEF staff worldwide for the dedicated efforts to their work. Their ongoing commitment to “stay and deliver” during the long months of the pandemic and conflict has enabled UNICEF to deliver on its mission in the face of unprecedented challenges.

A special note of appreciation goes to the Executive Board secretariat for ensuring the smooth functioning of the Bureau and of the Board. I thank the United Nations Conference Services and the technical teams supporting this session. Representing a Spanish-speaking country and as current President of the “Grupo de Amigos del Español” at the United Nations, I wish to express my appreciation for the availability of simultaneous interpretation, as I said before – a fundamental component in the modalities of multilateralism.

I invite us all to maintain this spirit of inclusive participation as we begin consideration of the substantive items on the agenda for this annual session, and appreciate your attention.
