

**Statement of Noma Owens-Ibie  
Chairperson, UNICEF Global Staff Association  
Annual Session of the UNICEF Executive Board  
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Mr President, your excellencies, distinguished Members of the Executive Board, our Executive Director, colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is my pleasure to address you today on behalf of all UNICEF staff. Let me also join in expressing the pleasure of being able to interact with you all in person and to especially welcome, again, our amiable Executive Director, Catherine Russel!

The commitment of staff to the UNICEF mandate has been unwavering in the last year, in spite of global and local challenges. We have continued to be driven by our obligation to pursue realization of the rights of children and women, in the face of difficulty, whether in Afghanistan or in Ukraine and other locations. Ukraine has been a rallying point for colleagues, and the solidarity expressed to colleagues is unmistakable and this shows in the number of people supporting them in programme delivery, on-site and remotely. I thank Member States for their strong support, their appreciation of the work of UNICEF staff and their endless advocacy for global support to our brand.

While there may be lessened apprehension globally about COVID-19 and many countries are removing restrictions, UNICEF staff have continued to support the delivery of vaccines, and education on the importance of vaccination. Our colleagues continue to make huge sacrifices in ensuring that programme delivery is not compromised, even in the face of increased workload, mental health challenges and a blended work modality that provides some flexibility, but also comes with undefined work limits and schedules. We continue to experience COVID infections among colleagues and their family members. Thankfully, health complications, hospitalization and fatalities linked to COVID are almost nil. This is one reason that, while we would not stop promoting vaccination for our colleagues and their families, we would also recommend discretion in the pursuit of compelling adherence, but, rather, the adoption of measures that would enable informed decision-taking by our constituents.

UNICEF is still undergoing several internal processes. The Global Staff Association continues to insist on a re-engineered staff engagement process that is not tokenistic. We continue to advocate for the practice of democratized and open conversations, that acknowledge the immense talent that the organisation has and that promotes harnessing these resources to ensure that the best decisions are taken. The gap between principles, perhaps intentions, and practice, could be bridged even further.

We would never cease to acknowledge the numerous steps taken by senior management to ensure that processes are inclusive across offices. We ask for more vigilance and drive to ensure that this vision is represented everywhere UNICEF is present. As we have said in the past, our colleagues are always on standby to jump aboard all platforms for engagement and make their voices heard, as we jointly define the bold future that we all desire.

Our partnership with senior management is mutually beneficial and reinforcing of our joint belief in continued improvement in pushing the agenda of children. Our leaders have demonstrated passion and tenacity. Our Executive Director has hit the ground running, achieving a lot of country and office visits in just a few months. Colleagues appreciate the energy that our leaders demonstrate in the pursuit of our mandate, as well as support to staff wellbeing. UNICEF response to the situations in Afghanistan and Ukraine are commendable, and we appreciate the leadership at global, regional and country office levels. But there is still a lot to be done!

The ongoing change management processes have come with predictable apprehension among staff, especially those in the General Services category. Many measures are being put in place to mitigate the huge concerns and queries, but the tensions are not helped by the differential interpretation and application of guidelines and recommendations on how these changes would be implemented. We are working with senior management to harmonise the operational framework for these ongoing changes and to reassure colleagues that their welfare remains a core consideration in the implementation of decisions.

Our partnership with the Division of Human Resources and other stakeholders aims to strengthen staff-friendly policies and practices, especially linked to Recruitment, Career Development, Mobility and Rotation, Performance Management and Duty of Care. We welcome the ongoing repositioning of the HR function in UNICEF and look forward to less cynicism on claims of

transparency and accountability in HR processes. We also look forward to a speedy and timely roll-out of the Global Staff Survey for 2022, an exercise that staff take very seriously and about which there is great anticipation. The Global Staff Association stands ready to provide partnership on this exercise, ahead of the distractions of end of year processes.

UNICEF staff continue to demonstrate that they are among the best that any employer could ask for, in the quality and timeliness of work output, adaptiveness, creativity, enterprise, sheer energy and drive! It would be a grave mistake to bypass such enviable personnel in sourcing talent for emerging opportunities and openings. We commend the measures of management to invest in capacity development and learning, using several modalities, and encourage that these be strengthened, spread-out and made equitable. Staff have a hunger to diversify their skills and competencies, to be able to give more to the organisation.

We acknowledge the commitment of the organization's leadership to continue to promote culture change and an environment of zero tolerance for all forms of harassment and abuse of authority. Implementation remains challenging. The Global Staff Association continues to encounter contrasts between existing data and reality on ground, with concerns about retaliation not abating. We value our partnership with various units in the organisation in continually seeking solutions that would address existing obstacles to the internal behaviour change project. The Deputy Executive Director for Management, Division of Human Resources, Ethics Office, Principal Advisor on Culture Change, Office of Internal Audit and Investigations and the Ombudsman, as well as Heads of Regional, Country and Headquarter locations are on board in ensuring that all barriers are removed, desired behaviours are promoted and support structures are accessible. Our Staff Association representatives at all levels are doing their best to act as champions in promoting our core values in their locations.

The Global Staff Association has strengthened its advocacy for ensuring that there is a comprehensive revision of the National Staff category. We have ensured the formation of a Working Group on National Staff issues in the Coordinating Committee for International Staff Unions and Associations (CCISUA), a working group that we also Chair. In the most recent CCISUA General Assembly, we ensured that national staff issues were among the key recommendations from the meeting. For the first time in history, UNICEF was also elected to the

CCISUA Executive Council, with the GSA Vice Chairperson, June Onguru, elected as one of the Vice Presidents. On the sidelines of the meeting, the GSA leadership interacted with the Chairperson of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) on staff matters. We count on the support of Member States to pursue our key requests from ICSC, all bordering on more fairness to all categories of staff on conditions of service and more sensitivity to the changing work landscape and the needs of our colleagues, who continue to ensure that the mantra of delivering results is not compromised.

Mr President, your Excellencies, distinguished members of the Board, the Global Staff Association is very proud of the UNICEF brand. We are proud of our hardworking leaders. We are immensely proud of our colleagues globally, people that continue to deny themselves comfort and convenience, just to ensure that results for children, our reputation and global ranking would make you all always proud. We kindly ask that you also always keep them in mind in all deliberations, decision-taking and action. They are an enviable pool of talent!

Mr President, your Excellencies, distinguished members of the Board, distinguished colleagues, I thank you, once again, for the opportunity to speak to you on behalf of UNICEF staff worldwide.