



Estonian Statement at the Annual session of the UNICEF Executive Board

13 June 2023

Madam/Mr. President, Madam Executive Director,

First, I would like to congratulate Executive Director, Ms. Catherine Russell, for her excellent work in her role and thank for the UNICEF annual report of 2022.

Climate change and environmental degradation is affecting millions of children around the world. We appreciate that UNICEF has elevated climate action as a priority across the organization. We also appreciate the annual report on UNICEF humanitarian action. The past year has been extremely challenging for many regions, not least in Ukraine, Sudan, Afghanistan, Türkiye and Syria as also mentioned by the Executive Director in her opening remarks. And the fact that millions of children are living in conflict areas and almost 37 million children worldwide are displaced due to conflict and violence, is heart-breaking. We also find the deteriorating human rights situation in Afghanistan daunting, especially for children, girls and women. Therefore, Estonia highly values the global role of UNICEF in improving the conditions and defending the rights of children and adolescents around the world and UNICEF's direct interventions in response to war in Ukraine.

Madam/Mr. President,

With more children in need than at any other time, allow me to focus on children of Ukraine, as this is the most urgent crisis in our region. Every child has the right to a safe and happy home and school. Yet, the crime scene that has unfolded in Ukraine has caused unimaginable suffering. Since the war in Ukraine began, 484 children have been killed, over 1,000 injured, and more than 19,000 have been

abducted and deported to Russia. We underline the need for accountability for all violations against children in Ukraine.

Providing quality education for children and youth is a cornerstone for both UNICEF and Estonia. Estonia has dedicated to support the re-building of the education system in Ukraine. On June 2, Estonia opened a kindergarten in Ovrutsi, Zhytomyr region. This kindergarten comes complete with a bomb shelter and training for education managers, kindergarten teachers, and psychologists.

In Estonia, we ensure that childcare and basic education is available to all children who have fled the Russian aggression in Ukraine. Estonia has received almost 18,000 Ukrainian refugees aged up to 19 who have remained in Estonia. Our Ministry of Education and Research opened up a Freedom School for Ukrainian children last autumn, where the teachers and children have done a great job. These young people will be building up Ukraine one day.

Madam/Mr. President,

Finally, on COVID-19 implications. Although last autumn all countries had lifted pandemic-related nationwide school closures, disruptions to education and learning losses have remained. This is the reason we strongly believe in connecting the communities with the Internet. Estonia is very impressed with UNICEF GIGA's accomplishments to date and we are proud to contribute 100,000 euros to GIGA efforts and we invite others to join this promising initiative.

Estonia would like to reiterate our strong support to UNICEF for its tireless work in protecting the rights of the children.

Thank you!