Annual Session of the UNICEF Executive Board

13-16 June 2023

Joint statement on Item 8 - Organizational culture and diversity

Thank you, Madam President. I deliver this statement on behalf of Australia, Argentina, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Luxembourg, Malta, the Republic of Moldova, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, United States and my own country, Austria.

Allow me to start by appreciating the opportunity to discuss the important issue of organizational culture and diversity and we thank UNICEF for the update provided. As a global organization with offices and staff throughout the world, representing a multitude of cultures, backgrounds, and perspectives, it is essential that we create and continuously promote an organizational culture that reflects this diversity and allows all individuals to feel welcome, respected, and valued.

We appreciate the work done so far and the compiled information, outlining progress achieved over several areas, as well as identifying where there is still room for improvement. We would like to highlight the following points:

First of all, data is key to enable an evidence-based and data-driven approach, to identify strengths and weaknesses and to further improve organizational culture and diversity, equity and inclusion. In this regard, we recognize and welcome UNICEF's broad engagement, including through the internal Task Team on Anti-Racism and Discrimination, the recertification process by Economic Dividends for Gender Equality (EDGE), and internal employee surveys and reports such as the Pulse Check, the Global Staff Survey or the first-ever annual employee separation report.

We applaud UNICEF for the indications of progress, underlining that UNICEF is well-positioned to accelerate and expand its work to build a more respectful and inclusive organizational culture. We welcome the support of the organization for employee's own initiatives in the form of resource groups focusing on employees with disabilities, racialized and younger employees or employees from the LGBTIQ+ community, to help to contribute to inclusion.

However, we note with concern the areas where data highlights the need for further improvements, such as:

- A persistent low level of psychological safety and trust experienced in UNICEF offices;
- The low share of respondents who felt comfortable to speak up or to support the affected person where they had witnessed a situation of discrimination;
- Low confidence that underperforming staff members are given relevant feedback and support to improve their performance;
- Or low agreement that UNICEF management had taken effective action in response to the Global Staff survey;

- We are gravely concerned to note that women are disproportionately represented among those resigning, with most frequent reasons including lack of career opportunities as well as incompatibility of the job with personal responsibilities such as family or caregiving.

Based on these findings, which measures is UNICEF taking to equip employees with the knowledge, skills and confidence to intervene when they witness discrimination? How is UNICEF planning to build psychological safety and trust? How is UNICEF planning to enhance performance management and people management skills in a structural manner? And with regards to the four new policies to provide more flexibility for staff with family care responsibilities, how do you ensure they become established practice?

Furthermore, creating a safe, respectful and trustworthy workplace culture clearly requires a whole-of-system effort. We commend UNICEF for taking on a leadership role on this issue among the UN system, including by co-leading the working group on diversity, equity and inclusion which was established in spring 2022. In this regard, how does UNICEF concretely contribute to enabling system-wide coordination, including on comparability of data across entities, particularly at the country level? How is inter-agency collaboration, sharing and system-wide learning on organizational culture and diversity institutionalized and measured?

We look forward to an update on the follow-up and monitoring of the impact of these measures in the future.

In conclusion, we thank UNICEF's Culture and Diversity team for their efforts and ensure you of our full support to the ongoing work to strengthen the organizational culture of UNICEF, improve the practice of its core values and become a more diverse and inclusive workplace.

Thank you.