

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

**Statement of Noma Owens-Ibie
Chairperson, UNICEF Global Staff Association
Annual Session of the UNICEF Executive Board
15 June 2023**

Madam 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.

In all statements in the last few years, we have consistently reiterated the unwavering commitment of staff to the UNICEF mandate, despite unending challenges. UNICEF personnel have continued to deliver, for women and children everywhere, including in Afghanistan, Ukraine, Turkiye, Myanmar, Yemen, Central Africa, Iran, Syria, Sudan, Haiti, and other locations. These acts of selflessness and astute sacrifice would not be possible without the strong support and solidarity of Member States. Your strong support and appreciation of the work of UNICEF staff remains a great source of inspiration and motivation for all of us.

The strong commitment to service that we see in the UNICEF workforce continues to also be accompanied by untold physical, mental and psychological strain. As staff representatives, we continue to listen informally to the lived experiences of mental health issues of our staff. The low levels of disclosure through formal channels are often linked to concerns that the affected staff members may be adjudged unfit to keep up with work demands, making them vulnerable to any untoward measures that may negatively impact on their abilities to keep their jobs.

As you know, UNICEF is implementing some far-reaching change processes, notably the Headquarters Locations Efficiencies Initiative (HQEI). We see, very frequently, some of the pressures that these changes bring to affected staff, especially those who are uncertain about their future, notably our esteemed General Service personnel. We acknowledge the support structures in place for these colleagues and continue to work with management to make the consequences of these measures lighter on our colleagues. The implementation is not without its pains and uncertainties and some questions remain unanswered.

As an organisation, we are re-modelling our staff engagement paradigm. Progress is being made, but there is much ground yet to be covered, especially in locations that are away from Headquarters. While we push for our core values to be demonstrated (and our Executive Director has championed this steadily), we are concerned by a few reports of colleagues having perceived retaliatory backlash after speaking up, including post abolishment. On the whole, psychological safety and trust continues to be an area requiring more attention and nurturing. There are examples of good practices from offices, but a lot is still required to reach the level of comfort that aligns with UNICEF's expectations. We shall keep advocating for platforms for engagement, so that voices of staff are heard and care is given when needed.

The Global Staff Association continues to enjoy good partnership with senior management. We continue to appreciate the energy that our leaders demonstrate in the pursuit of our mandate, as well as support to staff wellbeing.

We are also concerned about the several change processes in offices across the world, some of which are a result of dwindling resources, that threaten the long-standing abilities of staff to be retained to do the good work of realizing the rights of children. We continue to work with senior management to ensure consistency in the interpretation and implementation of principles, guidelines and timelines and also ensure that we jointly work to minimize distractions to staff focus and maintenance of the momentum of drive and motivation to deliver results.

We welcome the new OneHR Strategy that has been released in UNICEF and consider it a breath of fresh air, as it positions Human Resources services in the domain of people-centredness. We hope that it will be complemented with the desired investment in the staff that would drive its implementation. As in the past, key areas like Recruitment, Career Development, Mobility and Rotation, Performance Management and Duty of Care continue to require critical reviews and rethinking. The most recent Global Staff Survey highlights shaky confidence of staff in how these processes are managed. We look forward to full response of the entire organization to the voices of staff raised in the recently completed Survey.

UNICEF staff globally continue to demonstrate incredible commitment, energy, resilience and unshakable zeal in delivering results for children. Our Annual Report is testament to the hard

work of this cream of excellent personnel and the Staff Awards that would be celebrated in a short while is an effort to acknowledge some of them!

We stand with the organization's leadership in its stance of zero tolerance for all forms of harassment and abuse of authority. UNICEF's organisational culture is work in progress and has seen strong efforts at transformations, but also continues to reveal incidents of infractions. We are still worried about perceptions of retaliation by staff in some offices. While proof of retaliation continues to be really challenging, we are convinced that this is a reality that needs both an innovative and a firm response. We continue to count on partnership with management, at all levels, in ensuring that all barriers are removed, desired behaviours are promoted and support structures are accessible and functional.

The work of the Global Staff Association in promoting more attention to the National Staff category is gaining momentum. At the recent General Assembly of the Coordinating Committee for International Staff Unions and Associations (CCISUA), we got the commitment of the Chairperson of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) to take this agenda forward and, as usual, we ensured that national staff issues were among the key recommendations from the meeting. We continue to 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, no matter their categories and job classification.

Madam President, your Excellencies, distinguished members of the Board, the Global Staff Association is always very proud of the UNICEF brand. We are immensely proud of all UNICEF personnel globally, people whose work impact goes beyond quantification, and who steadily work at ensuring that the quality of our work matches the volume. We ask, again, that you prioritise us in all deliberations, decision-taking and action. We shall continue to appreciate your advocacy for our brand and the invaluable support that we receive from you.

Madam 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.