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Thank you, Madame President, for your inspiring words.

On behalf of all of us at UNICEF, across 190 countries, welcome to the first regular session of 2020. And congratulations to you and our new Bureau.

We need your advice, support and oversight as we continue putting the needs of children and young people first in our plans and deliberations.

Madame President, among your other priorities, I am particularly glad that you are planning to focus on girls' empowerment and education.

Everywhere I travel, I have the opportunity to meet girls and young women.

In refugee camps, in urban slums, in rural areas — they tell me of their dreams to become scientists... doctors... entrepreneurs... innovators... leaders...presidents...prime ministers.

But their dreams demand our unwavering support.

We have a duty to uphold their rights in a world in which these rights continue to be undermined by discrimination, violence and abuse.

Their education, their safety, their protection, their skills and their training matter to all of us.

So does their health.

Addressing the health of girls and women has been at the core of our work for 70 years — and remains at the heart of our programming and Strategic Plan.

This includes SRHR. Guided by internationally agreed frameworks, we are supporting the needs of adolescent girls across all of our programming, and in all contexts. From maternal health and nutrition...to HIV prevention, care and support...to adolescent girls' health and wellbeing...to menstrual health and hygiene...to gender-based violence prevention and response.

The rights of, and opportunities for, girls and women are fundamental to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

So as we mark the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, let us pledge to do more to give one half of our population the tools, support and opportunities they need to make their dreams come true.

I look forward to working with you, Madame President, and with all Board members, as we open even more doors for girls and young women everywhere.

Achieving more results for girls is just one example of how we must accelerate our progress in making all children's rights real. Boys and girls. No matter where they live.

The 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child has passed — but our commitment remains strong as we enter 2020.

This year is the fifth anniversary of the adoption of the SDGs.

Every day, we must remind ourselves that child rights and the SDGs go hand-in-hand.

Investing in children is the key for addressing the SDGs. We need to close the gaps between their lives and the challenges they face.

Poverty, conflicts, poor health, discrimination, exclusion, violence, natural disasters, the locust invasion that is devastating crops and livelihoods in Eastern Africa, outbreaks like the coronavirus — the world is not standing still for girls and boys.

But neither are we. Thanks to the generosity of donors, our partnerships around the world, and, always, the vision, oversight, and vital support of the members of our Executive Board, we are taking action.

In country after country, UNICEF staff members are standing side-by-side with children and young people. Working for them and with them to overcome obstacles to the health, nutrition, protection and education they deserve. And creating new opportunities that place their dreams and aspirations within reach.

But we also know that their dreams — and more broadly, our dreams of a sustainable future — will remain out of reach if we do not accelerate our progress on a number of fronts.

The Secretary General has called for the coming decade to be a decade of action towards the Goals.

It must also be a decade of acceleration.

UNICEF, through our Strategic Plan, must drive this acceleration.

Guided by the Strategic Plan, we are focusing on our 2020 priorities that will help speed-up our progress for children and young people — and towards the SDGs.

The mid-term review of the Plan is in full swing.

In recent weeks, all of our field offices have reported on their 2019 results, and we are now using that data to start adjusting our course so we can deliver on the Plan and the SDGs.

This course correction requires an accelerated focus on a number of priorities.

- Better linking **humanitarian and development programming**.
- Our **Generation Unlimited partnership** for quality, modern education and job skills.
- Revitalizing **community-based primary health care**.
- Smarter programming around the **mental health crisis** and **climate change** — both are children's crises.

- Putting a special emphasis on the needs of **girls and women**.
- Identifying and scaling-up new **innovations** — the evaluation of which will be discussed this week.
- Becoming a “**real time UNICEF**,” in which data on children’s needs and results is instantaneously collected, analysed and shared across our organization and with our partners.
- Providing **intellectual leadership** on every aspect of children and young people’s lives — as we did last fall, with our first-ever Leading Minds conference at our Innocenti Office of Research in Florence. The latest example of the 30-year partnership between UNICEF and our generous friends in the Italian Government.
- More and better partnerships with our **family of national committees**, the **private sector**, our **sister UN** agencies, and always, with **governments**.
- **Modern and simplified business processes across UNICEF.**
- **A people-centred human resources system.**
- And an **organizational culture** defined by meaningful work, supportive management, and a respectful daily work environment that places our organizational values front and centre.

We are implementing the specific recommendations of the independent reviews on sexual exploitation and abuse, harassment, gender discrimination, and abuse of power.

Our staff members deserve no less — and they require no less — as they carry out our programmes around the world.

We have discussed these priorities at previous sessions.

But today, I would like to emphasize one in particular, that is critical to our work: **UN reform**.

As we pursue these opportunities together, I want to be clear: none of our goals or targets will be reachable without reforming how our agencies work together...how we support countries together...how we maximize efficiencies...and how we build trust in and within the UN system.

And do so at a time in which all countries, and all agencies, are under intense pressure to deliver results.

Working as a more efficient and effective “one UN” development system is, in many ways, the most important accelerator of all.

Five years in, Member States are now focused on scaling-up and accelerating their SDG commitments.

The UN Development System must support them by working seamlessly together, to ensure that each country receives the integrated and targeted package of support they need.

I have spoken to many of you about your high expectations and desire for real, tangible results from the reform.

For UNICEF, this is of paramount importance.

After all, the SDGs — economic, social and environmental alike — have a critical impact on children. We are fully committed to full implementation and universal achievement. In every country.

In the same way that governments are working together across ministries to reach the SDGs in an integrated way, the UN system must do the same.

I am pleased to report that we are now close to having all of the necessary architecture and instruments in place to bring this commitment to life at the country and regional levels.

For example, we are working on more comprehensive common country assessments under the leadership of reinvigorated Resident Coordinators. One example — our Common Country Assessment in Mali is showing how humanitarian, development and peace organizations can join forces to measure and address needs in a complex operating environment.

The new UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework is also important for UNICEF. Our respective Country Programme Documents — including the ones being discussed at this session — are all developed in alignment with this new Framework.

To build stronger UN Country Teams, UNICEF is fully behind the Resident Coordinator system. We must ensure that the needs of children — and by extension, the needs of our organization, are fully reflected across the RC system.

Under the leadership of RCs at country level, the joint SDG Fund is bringing together a number of agencies around common themes like social protection. With thanks to many of your countries, so far, UNICEF has received funds for 33 out of 36 countries, to scale-up social protection programming in vulnerable communities.

I assure you that, as we review the mid-term review of our Strategic Plan — and lay the groundwork for the next Plan — we will continue looking at more changes to achieve better system-wide results towards the SDGs.

In fact, as we seek out efficiencies across the system, we are entering a new era of accelerated partnerships with our sister agencies.

Inspired by the collaborative spirit of UN reform, these partnerships are tapping into each other's strengths and advantages as agencies.

For example, we are working on joint solutions with **UNDP** built around two main areas of need: youth programmes and innovations. This includes jointly funding solar energy systems. It includes the second Gen-U Youth Challenge to give young innovators a platform to showcase their work. It includes using technology like Blockchain to better link young people to jobs.

And last week, we held a “Big Think” challenge — also known as the “Shark Tank” — to assess the top five proposals out of 190 joint solutions that were put forward. The final five were all very exciting and hold great promise to reach children and young people with the support they need. The winner was from South Africa — “Linking Youth to the Future of Work” — but all are now receiving cash prizes and technical expertise from both agencies.

With **WFP**, we are jointly investing in the nutrition and health of children to support them across all ages and stages of growth.

We are not only working to prevent and reduce child wasting in the child's early years through integrated interventions, and better detection and treatment. We are also scaling-up school health and nutrition programmes in the child's later years.

And we are streamlining and strengthening the supply chain for ready-to-use foods through a number of actions, including joint tendering, which we believe could generate cost savings of about 35 per cent. With this initiative, we hope to reach 50 per cent more vulnerable children with the lifesaving nutritional support and treatment they need.

Our two-year blueprint with **UNHCR** is bringing together our work in education, WASH and child protection, with an initial focus in 10 countries as a basis for growing to scale. This includes helping refugees and returnees alike access national services, and technical, financial and programmatic support to host countries as they integrate refugees into their education, water, sanitation and protection systems.

Just a few examples of how we can work together to speed-up results towards the SDGs.

But all of this work — within UNICEF and with our partners — depends on resources.

And we are seeing a troubling trend.

While our overall income increased last year by six per cent over 2018 — mainly due to increased earmarked resources — our regular resources, or what we affectionately call “RR,” declined by four per cent.

This is worrying. Flexible and predictable funds are critical to responding quickly to emergencies when they happen, and as they become more complex and fast-moving. We must be able to deploy funds quickly to save children’s lives.

Regular resources also provide seed capital to help us develop new and innovative approaches in delivering results for children and young people through our programming.

And whereas the majority of our funding is restricted by geography or type of activity, regular resources enable UNICEF and our public and private partners to leverage additional funding for programmes that benefit children.

Last year, only 11 per cent of public sector funds were provided as regular resources.

We must work to increase this.

In the Funding Compact, you, as Member States, have committed to 30 per cent of overall donations going towards regular, rather than “other,” resources. We urge all of Member States to continue striving for this important target.

As we renew our call for more resources, we are committed to continuing to earn your trust through the sound management of our finances.

During this week’s session, we will examine together UNICEF’s financial report and audited statements. In particular, we are very pleased — and very proud — that the Board of Auditors gave UNICEF an unqualified audit opinion for our 2018 financial statements.

Thank you again for the trust you place in us. We will continue working to become more efficient and effective.

And we are committed to improving our work together. We want to become nimbler, faster and simpler, while also ensuring that you have the information and briefings you need as our Executive Board.

At your request, we have undertaken a thorough rationalization exercise so that the discussions at the Board sessions could be more effective, focused and comprehensive, and enable you to play your important oversight responsibility.

Throughout, you can count on constant, fluid communication with us — through constructive briefings, consultations, dialogue and information when you need it.

Two-way communication is essential. UNICEF depends on your guidance as we embark on this decade of action and acceleration.

And please come and visit to see our programmes in the field — the best way to fully understand UNICEF's impact on children and young people.

Finally, as we move forward on these plans and priorities and continue building the UNICEF of tomorrow, we must remember those who came before us. Those trailblazing colleagues who, for over 70 years, built this organization.

Twenty-five years ago last month, the children of the world lost their fiercest advocate — James Grant.

From 1980 to 1995, Jim rallied the world around UNICEF's child survival revolution.

It was a simple idea. If we could scale-up low-cost preventative measures like vaccines to prevent disease and water, salt and sugar to prevent diarrhoea, we could save more lives.

The word “impossible” did not exist for Jim. As he liked to remind people: “You don't say “no” to kids.”

And so he built alliances around immunization — rallying public and private funding to the cause.

He negotiated “days of tranquility” — temporary ceasefires that allowed access to children living in the midst of conflict to access the lifesaving supplies and services they needed in a rare moment of peace.

By the time he was finished, he had managed to lift child immunization rates from around 15 per cent to over 70 per cent worldwide.

And his championing of the use of oral rehydration salts to prevent dehydration and diarrhoea has saved the lives of generations of children.

And last month, UNICEF lost Dr. Peter Salama.

From Afghanistan after Taliban rule, to war-torn Syria and the West African Ebola epidemic — somewhere within every health crisis, you could find Pete, working, convening, convincing and innovating to save lives.

He will be always be remembered with great fondness and admiration — not only by his colleagues, but by the entire global health and humanitarian community, and his family, who always came first in his mind, before all else.

So as we open this session, against the backdrop of a new year and a new decade to reach the SDGs, let us be guided by the same spirit of service and commitment that has defined the people of this organization for 70 years.

And let us strive to make our own mark on the children and young people of today — and on our common future. Thank you.
