

Joint Statement by the bureau of the UNICEF Executive Board

First Regular Session of the UNICEF Executive Board

Tuesday February 6 2024 at 10 a.m.

Mr. President, Executive Director Catherine Russell, Distinguished members of the Executive Board, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to deliver these remarks on behalf of the Executive Board bureau members – Bulgaria, Dominican Republic, Rwanda, Tajikistan, and my own country, Austria.

Allow me to express our sincere gratitude to the Executive Director of UNICEF, Madame Russell, for her comprehensive presentation, which underscores UNICEF's unwavering commitment to the well-being of children worldwide. We extend our heartfelt appreciation to all UNICEF staff, both at headquarters and in the field, for their tireless dedication to fulfill its mandate, especially in dire circumstances.

As bureau members, we are deeply committed to ensuring seamless coordination across boards to bolster UNICEF's efforts in reaching every child. We recognize UNICEF's tireless efforts in transcending barriers and delivering lifesaving support and opportunities to children globally.

UNICEF's impact spans generations, advocating for childhood immunization, safeguarding the rights of vulnerable populations, and creating a more equitable and inclusive world for children. We stand in solidarity with its vital mandate and in support of advancing its Strategic Plan.

Mr. President,

Children worldwide face myriad challenges, including poverty, limited access to quality education and healthcare, violence, exploitation, discrimination, displacement,

trafficking, lack of clean water and sanitation, digital disparities, and the list goes on. Children, sadly, are often the first to endure the consequences of any hardship.

Reflecting on the state of the world's children in 2023, we cannot overlook the significant challenges posed by humanitarian emergencies in regions such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gaza, Haiti, Sudan, and Ukraine as described by Executive Director Russell.

Moreover, many children, especially in conflict-affected countries, lack educational resources, infrastructure, and qualified teachers, perpetuating cycles of poverty.

Food insecurity, malnutrition, fragile healthcare systems, preventable diseases, and mental health issues also threaten countless children's lives, particularly in marginalized communities.

Despite these challenges, efforts prioritizing sustainable development and children's rights, are crucial for fostering inclusive societies. By embracing opportunities, we can create a world where every child is protected, educated, and empowered to reach their full potential.

Challenges such as vaccine hesitancy, inequitable distribution and the emergence of new infectious threats persists. But, UNICEF's dedication to championing immunization efforts, advocating for increased access and resources, and building a healthier future for every child is commendable and inspires us to redouble our efforts in this critical area.

Mr. President,

Promoting and protecting the rights and well-being of adolescent girls is crucial for their holistic development and the future prosperity of societies. This involves ensuring access to quality education, addressing gender-based violence and discrimination, providing comprehensive healthcare services, and creating economic opportunities. Therefore, we

pledge our continued support to UNICEF's efforts in this critical area, including through its Adolescent Girls Program Strategy.

We recognize the importance of UNICEF's climate action plan, anchored in resilience and sustainable services, enhancing the voice of children around solutions to the crisis and looking to its environmental footprint. As climate change continues to pose significant risks to children's lives and futures, collaborative efforts like that of UNICEF are essential in safeguarding their rights and promoting their well-being.

Forging innovative partnerships and leveraging resources is very critical. As bureau members of the UNICEF Executive Board, we are dedicated to maintaining – and where necessary – also improving efficiency and effectiveness. In this context, we welcome the JIU report and its review of the Executive Board's governance and oversight functions, which will be discussed during the Annual Session.

The delivery of UNICEF's mandate hinges crucially on the availability of core resources, which serve as the foundation upon which UNICEF can effectively implement programs and initiatives that address the diverse and complex needs of children in various contexts. Therefore, it is imperative that UNICEF can count on adequate and sustained core resources to ensure that it continues its lifesaving and life-changing work for children.

The upcoming Summit of the Future also presents a crucial opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to children's rights and collectively address the challenges they face.

Finally, as bureau members of the UNICEF Executive Board, we are committed to supporting and empowering UNICEF in fulfilling its vital mandate.

Thank you.