

UNICEF Executive Board
First Regular Session of 2024, 6–8 February 2024

**Opening remarks by the President of the Executive Board
H.E. Mr. Ernest Rwamucyo
Permanent Representative of Rwanda to the United Nations
6 February 2024**

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, Executive Director Catherine Russell, ladies and gentlemen:

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to deliver this opening statement in my capacity as President of the UNICEF Executive Board. Let me begin by congratulating my fellow Bureau members who were formally elected a few weeks ago and will join me over the coming months as we leverage our collective experience and wisdom to provide UNICEF with oversight and strong intergovernmental support. And the Bureau members are Ambassador José Alfonso Blanco Conde (Dominican Republic); Ambassador Lachezara Stoeva (Bulgaria); Ambassador Jonibek Ismoil Hikmat (Tajikistan); and [Mr.] Stefan Pretterhofer (Austria).

I am particularly pleased to be able to work alongside you, Executive Director Russell, and your four Deputies: Mr. Omar Abdi, Ms. Hannan Sulieman, Mr. Ted Chaiban and Ms. Kitty van Heijden. I would also like to extend my appreciation to the entire UNICEF staff for their work, often in difficult conditions, on behalf of children.

This is a very important year for UNICEF as it undertakes a review of its four-year Strategic Plan at the midterm. Since the Plan's endorsement in 2021, we have seen the situation of children around the world being challenged: there are conflicts all around the world...we have issues of climate change; and the impact of infectious diseases are driving humanitarian emergencies and continue to threaten to roll back years of progress for children.

In its unwavering efforts to improve the lives of every child, UNICEF continues to look for and seize opportunities to strengthen its systems. This year, let us continue to support the

organization's life-saving efforts for children experiencing these emergencies. We must also continue to support the organization's accelerated strategies to achieve the goals of its Strategic Plan and the Sustainable Development Goals, placing a special emphasis on severe malnutrition, adolescent girls, climate change and primary health-care delivery through community health workers.

In the coming months, this Board will review the findings and recommendations of a recent seminal assessment by the Joint Inspection Unit of how the Executive Boards of the three New York-based UN agencies execute our governance and oversight functions. This is a very important function for us, and we will review this Joint Inspection Unit report carefully. I am optimistic that our Board will join the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS and UN-Women to review and find consensual ways in which we can respond pragmatically to the 10 formal recommendations and the 21 informal recommendations made in the report.

Let us now turn to the agenda of the current session.

Of the almost 20 new country programme documents that are expected to be considered by the Board this year, 7 will be adopted at this session. So, it's a very packed session. I look forward to the related panel discussion on the issue of disability inclusion – an important area that has been integrated into the work of UNICEF through its Strategic Plan.

A primary accountability for UNICEF is to ensure that robust systems are in place so that it mitigates risks to the attainment of its key objectives; impactful and sustainable results for children are key in this respect. I commend the organization on receiving an unqualified audit opinion from the UN Board of Auditors on its financial statements for 2022, which is demonstrative of the commitment by UNICEF to ensuring these robust systems and internal controls, and transparency and accountability in managing its resources. This is very important because resources are scarce and they need to be used effectively, and it makes it easier for the Board when UNICEF is compliant. I welcome the update on the development of an overarching enterprise risk management system, which I understand builds on longstanding efforts in this area but will now provide a portfolio view of risks – at the different levels of the organization –

and facilitate a coordinated approach to mitigating those risks. I think risk management is key and it is important that the organization is planning for that.

In considering the Private Fundraising and Partnerships workplan and proposed budget, we will hear about the targets in terms of private sector revenue and influence in 2024 and also receive an update on the innovative financing instrument on which UNICEF has partnered with the World Bank to successfully implement since its inception three years ago.

Other key items on the agenda for the first regular session include evaluation reports and responses from the UNICEF management on important programmes: the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage, and UNICEF social protection responses towards universal child benefits, as well as interventions across the humanitarian-development nexus, such as the Level 2 response to the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing transition and recovery efforts.

Ladies and gentlemen. The agenda is rich, but our time is short. So, we have a lot of work cut out for us. We should be ready to roll up our sleeves and be ready to deliberate on this elaborate agenda over the next few days. I look forward to working with you all. In my capacity as the President of this Executive Board, I pledge that I shall do my utmost to chair the Board in a spirit of openness and constructive dialogue to serve our organization's *raison d'être*: that is the children of the world. Children are our key brief and I thank you for your commitment towards that. Thank you very much.
