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Executive Board
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Thank you, Mr. President, for your statement.

We approach a significant milestone for UNICEF — our 75th anniversary.

In the coming months, we will have a number of opportunities to recognize everything that our organization has achieved for children and young people over the decades. And to take pride in our UNICEF family — from our dedicated staff members, to our National Committees who do so much to support our work, to our UNICEF volunteers around the world.

But this year is not only a moment of reflection.

It is also a moment of re-dedication to our mission.

As we look to the past, we must also look to the future, and the work ahead. And to do so — always — with optimism and hope in what we can achieve together, with our partners and donors around the world, with the members of our Executive Board, and with children and young people themselves.

COVID-19 has reminded us how fragile our world can be. And how quickly all the systems that support children's development and wellbeing can be overwhelmed and upended. From health, nutrition, protection, and education, to transportation and supply chains, to national economies and household incomes.

The world is still coming to terms with the full extent of the damage wrought by COVID-19, because the damage is still happening. We see it in the dwindling income of families. In the global economy, which has suffered a deep recession and now faces a long recovery. In countries and communities alike. And across all the systems upon which human development depends.

In a few moments, I want to discuss what this means for UNICEF, and the vital role our organization will play as the world recovers from the catastrophic effects of COVID-19 on nearly every aspect of life.

At the same time, humanitarian emergencies continue to spread and worsen. Humanitarian law is being ignored and human rights are being abridged with impunity. Children are being killed in their homes, in their schools, in their neighbourhoods.

In these conflict-plagued countries and regions, peace remains a distant dream as the fighting continues and deepens, seemingly without end.

At this moment in history, we should be fighting the virus, and making our world healthy for our children. We should be planting the seeds of recovery and development. We should be looking to the future to make life better for every person in every country.

I know this is possible, because I have seen this dedication and hope first-hand when I speak to UNICEF staff members in our offices around the world.

From our colleagues in Yemen and Syria. To South Sudan and Myanmar. To Afghanistan and the State of Palestine. To our colleagues across Central America. And to India, where the virus continues to spread at a rate far greater than our ability to respond.

Despite the challenges facing our world, these committed women and men are not giving up hope. Through their example, they are reminding us that we can overcome barriers to serve and support children and communities alike. That we can work together, draw partners to our cause, and make the world a better place.

Because amidst the devastation, the pandemic showed us what we can achieve through global solidarity. By working together. By investing together. And by keeping our focus on the most vulnerable people in every country.

Faced with the gravest global crisis in generations, UNICEF, our staff members, our family of National Committees, and of course, our Executive Board, made sure that children did not face COVID-19 alone.

Together, we rose to the challenge.

We quickly adapted our services and programming to overcome the barriers imposed by lockdowns, and transportation and logistics constraints.

With our sister UN agencies, NGOs, and public and private partners alike, we adjusted to all of the challenges on the ground. We pooled our knowledge and strengths to provide the best data, research and evidence-informed advice and policy solutions for our offices, governments and partners.

And we stayed and delivered, helping communities contain the virus — while protecting health workers and children alike as they faced this challenge.

Across 153 countries¹, we reached:

- 106 million people with WASH services and supplies;
- three billion people with information on how to stay safe during the pandemic;

¹ Results from Executive Director's Annual Report for 2020.

- 2.6 million health workers with personal protective equipment; and
- four million health workers with training on infection prevention and control.

We quickly translated our longstanding vaccine experience and expertise into a key role in the COVAX facility. We are working with manufacturers, and transportation and logistics companies to procure and transport vaccines, supplies and equipment — and with communities and health workers to prepare them to deliver and administer the vaccines across 92 low and middle-income countries.

And we are working shoulder-to-shoulder with governments and communities to rebuild systems shattered by the pandemic — and make them stronger.

Health systems. Vaccination campaigns. Education systems, with new models of delivery, including online. Protection services — including counselling for mental health, which has been a key area of work this year. Water and sanitation systems, which are so crucial to every aspect of life. And new data collection and analytics to track and monitor the impact of COVID and our programmatic response to it.

COVID-19 is a challenge like no other.

But UNICEF is an organization like no other.

And with your support, we continue to rise to the challenge — quickly and effectively — while also continuing our vital work to serve and support all of the needs of children over the short and long-terms.

Today, we will discuss the Executive Director’s Annual Report, which outlines all that we achieved last year. Results that include, but also extend far beyond, our COVID-19 response.²

Thanks to our programming, over 30 million live births took place in UNICEF-supported health facilities.

By end of 2020, we have helped 38 countries implement plans to strengthen primary health care for mothers and their newborns — including more district hospitals with care units for sick newborns, and more with stronger water, sanitation and hygiene systems.

We reached nearly 244 million children with services to prevent, screen and treat malnutrition — including reaching four million children in humanitarian settings with treatment for severe acute malnutrition.

Despite lockdowns and transportation constraints, we kept vaccination campaigns up-and-running in many countries around the world — including immunizing 17 million children in humanitarian emergencies against measles.

² Following statistics from the Executive Director’s Annual Report for 2020.

In the face of school closings and interrupted learning, we reached 48 million out-of-school children — including 33 million in humanitarian settings — with education.

On top of our COVID-related WASH response, 17 million more people gained access to safe water services last year. We are on-track to reaching our target of 60 million people in four years. And on the emergency side, we provided over 30 million people with emergency water services like water trucking.

We delivered a range of vital child protection services — including registering the births of over 21 million children across 57 countries.

Through our partnership with UNFPA, we reached nearly six million girls with child marriage prevention and care interventions.

Our prevention efforts around gender-based violence reached over 17 million people across 84 countries, and we trained more than 210,000 staff members on partners in this important work.

Ninety-one countries now have safe and accessible reporting channels for people to report sexual exploitation and abuse. We remain committed to ending this scourge and ensuring that countries have detailed action plans in place.

And we reached more than 130 million children with cash transfers across 93 countries, to help keep their families afloat during this economically devastating time.

We do development — and we do humanitarian emergencies. We are staying and delivering within these fast-moving crises.

Conflicts and disasters did not rest because of COVID — neither did we. Our programming remains essential — not only to support children and communities in the short term, but to sow the seeds of lasting development and resilience in parts of the world that have seen too little progress.

As we will discuss tomorrow, we responded to 455 new and ongoing humanitarian situations in 152 countries. Providing health, water, sanitation, protection, nutrition and education — providing hope — in some of the most dangerous places in the world in which to be a child.

Result after result — child after child — community after community — system after system. Our UNICEF family, with your oversight and guidance, is overcoming significant barriers to respond to the biggest global crisis in nearly a century, while building stronger, more resilient systems for the future.

This is what we do. This is who we are. We can all be very proud of our collaborative work and the work of our teams around the world.

We are also very proud of the trust that our generous donors — public and private — continue to place in UNICEF.

Last year was a record-breaking year. We saw increases in both public and private sector funding — primarily earmarked funding for programmes related to the COVID-19 response.

We are concerned about the continuing decline in our regular resources — our core, flexible funding. Because last year was also a record-breaker in terms of our expenditures.

Last year, we crossed — for the first time — \$6.5 billion in expenditures, or about four per cent higher than 2019. This increase was largely driven by higher programme expenditures in response to COVID-19.

So clearly, flexible, un-earmarked funding remains absolutely critical to our ability to mount an effective and lasting response to the devastation caused not only by the pandemic, but to the fast-changing needs in humanitarian contexts, like disasters and conflicts.

Our work to support the socio-economic development and long-term resilience of countries and communities depends on flexible resources. We must help families and economies recover and we need the sustained generosity of our donors more than ever.

As part of this, UNICEF is also creating our first-ever global innovative finance strategy, which will help us accelerate and direct financial flows to support children's needs, at every stage of their development and growth.

We are exploring a number of solutions, including blended financing instruments that combine public and private funding and impact investment funds that will link activities and investments for children to measurable impacts.

Innovative finance will be an important part of UNICEF's work in the years to come, and we welcome this Board's thoughts as we move forward.

I also look forward to our discussions this week on how our new Strategic Plan is progressing.

As we discussed last session, the Plan reflects how we will adapt and strengthen our programming in key areas, based on the lessons learned during the pandemic.

COVID-19 has reversed many of the hard-won gains countries achieved in recent decades. But even before it struck, the world was already off-track in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals. As a world, and as an agency, we need the benefits that innovation can bring. From solar powered water systems at the local level, to global innovations like our GIGA initiative to connect every school in the world to the internet.

COVID-19's lingering effects on communities around the world have accelerated this need. The pandemic has exacerbated poverty, inequality and the effects of humanitarian crises, while making it harder for countries to re-build shattered systems. Especially in the poorest and most vulnerable communities. And especially for children and young people.

Our warning earlier this year of a two-tier recovery — in which poorer countries are last in line to receive vaccines, are most constrained in securing financial resources to protect households and businesses, and are most vulnerable to unrest and further shocks — looks increasingly likely today.

Our new Strategic Plan is an opportunity to turn this around, and achieve the necessary acceleration of progress children, young people and their communities need to see.

This session, we will discuss the next steps of the Plan's development — including the integrated results framework, and how the QCPR is helping to shape the Plan as it progresses. Our organization's role has never been more important in helping families, communities and countries recover. As these populations are counting on us, we will not let them down.

The Plan is also an opportunity to renew our organizational focus on key areas of work.

Gender is an excellent example. While gender equality has always been a core focus of UNICEF, the pandemic reminded us how much work we have to do.

The lives of girls and women were quickly and dramatically affected by the effects of COVID-19. In an instant, they faced the brunt of job and household income losses.

At the same time, many of the support systems upon which they rely — including maternal health, sexual and reproductive health, childcare and education — were shut down.

Adolescent girls faced a renewed risk of violence, child marriage, early pregnancy, and dropping out of school.

Women of all ages faced an increasing burden — to care not only for their own children, but elderly and sick relatives. Women were heavily represented on the frontlines of the outbreak — accounting for about 70 per cent of health workers globally.

And women everywhere faced an increase in violence — with some estimates showing a 30 per cent increase in some countries since the pandemic's start.

Today, we will discuss the annual report of our Gender Action Plan, with a focus on last year's progress in weaving gender equality across all of our programming.

This includes health programming, which has been hit so hard during the pandemic — from HIV and nutrition programming, to sexual and reproductive health and rights.

It includes education and skills programming for girls of all ages, so they can build their own futures. Together with partners — and girls themselves — we will work to make sure the digital revolution does not widen divides, but instead gives every girl the opportunities, the confidence and the benefits offered by these innovative tools.

It includes protection programming and services, to push back against the spike in physical and sexual violence, child marriage and early pregnancy we have seen as a result of the pandemic.

It includes our work around climate change. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by a changing climate — forced to cope with dwindling access to natural resources, and spending more time securing water, food and fuel, exposing them to potential violence and exploitation.

It includes working within communities to end discriminatory practices and outdated views about what girls and women “should” do, while chipping away at the root causes of gender inequality. Girls and women can and should do everything.

And we will continue investing in data and evidence, across both development and emergency contexts, to shape and inform our work.

As an organization, we are fully committed to making UNICEF a gender champion not only within the UN family, but in all the countries and communities in which we work. We are counting on this Board’s support, and I look forward to our discussion on this during this session.

We also appreciate your support of our work to embrace innovations and digital transformation across every aspect of our work — both internally, within UNICEF, as well as within the countries we work. This, too, will be woven throughout our new Strategic Plan.

We are not standing still and relying on the old ways of delivering support. We are pushing ahead in a number of exciting ways.

From using satellite data and machine learning to recognize water bodies and water table levels in Somalia, and predict population movements and malnutrition levels in fast-moving humanitarian situations.

To developing and scaling-up digital technologies to reach children during the pandemic — with online education, with counselling, with health care — while balancing the opportunities and risks they face in the digital world.

In fact, our response to the pandemic represents the most “digital” response in UNICEF’s history. We used digital tools across a range of areas — from real-time monitoring of the pandemic and the needs it created, to case-management of child protection cases, to online education and cash-transfer programmes.

The GIGA initiative spearheaded by UNICEF and ITU to connect every school in the world to the internet is picking up speed. We have connected nearly 3,000 schools so far and mapped hundreds of thousands more. The project has raised over \$22 million so far, and we are working on an ambitious donor-backed bond worth \$3-5 billion to massively grow this amount.

We are exploring opportunities with our private sector partners to develop Artificial Intelligence-powered products that can improve education, support children with disabilities in new ways, and match young people to jobs.

And our Generation Unlimited partnership to modernize learning and skills to reach 1.8 billion young people between the ages of 10 and 24 has now reached 100 million young people across more than 40 countries.

Throughout our work, we are finding new ways to gather more funding and support to developing and scaling-up child and adolescent-focused innovations.

From our fast-growing Innovation Fund, to digital fundraising, to using blockchain technology for fundraising and resource-mobilization, to our work around cryptocurrency, including UNICEF's CryptoFund — the first of its kind in the UN.

Internally, we are using common services — including Cloud technologies — to work more efficiently together, while also addressing cybersecurity risks.

To increase efficiency and save costs, we are transitioning our ICT division to a lower cost location, using technology centres within the broader UN family, and relocating our Innovation Team and hubs from headquarters.

All important steps as we design, test, deliver and fund innovations that can improve outcomes for children and young people. Once again, thank you to this Board for your support of this important work.

And we are in the midst of discussions with the UN family as a whole to work together around three flagship initiatives aligned around key Sustainable Development Goals.

The first is “Reimagining Education: Digital Learning and Skills for All Children and Youth” — a plan to end the learning crisis by enabling every child and young person to access world-class digital learning and training solutions.

The second is “Water Security for All” — a plan to provide safe and affordable drinking water, climate resilient WASH services, early action to prevent water scarcity crises, and water co-operation for peace and stability.

And the third is “No Time to Waste” — a proposal to improve diets, services and practices to prevent, detect and treat wasting in early childhood.

As we have discussed at previous sessions, UNICEF is already strengthening our focus across all of these priorities — education, water, sanitation and hygiene, and nutrition — including in our new Strategic Plan. They will continue to be top priorities for our organization.

But we also see an exciting opportunity to gather the respective strengths, ideas and experience of the UN as a whole around these issues as well. Especially now, as we seek to

help communities and countries alike re-build systems for the future. We will keep you updated as these flagship initiatives are discussed with our sister agencies.

We also appreciate your guidance as we continue supporting the repositioning of the UN development system.

We remain squarely focused on collaborating with our sister agencies to ensure that UN reforms have a measurable and transformative effect in countries as they recover from the pandemic and re-build and strengthen systems that support human development.

With our sister agencies, we're collaborating to find efficiencies in cost and operation, while reducing duplication.

From our ambitious Blueprint for Joint Action with UNHCR to help 10 million more refugee children and their families access protection, water and education. To our efforts with WFP to prevent malnutrition and ensure that every school child has the health and nutrition they need. To our work with UN Women and others on Generation Equality, to support girls' empowerment, particularly in technology. To our commitment with WHO to tackle the adverse effects of COVID-19 on mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of millions of children and young people.

We are also joining forces with UNDP on a joint socio-economic response. We are joining-up our assets, expertise and partnership networks in three key areas — financing for development, adolescents and young people, and climate change resilience and adaptation.

Our two agencies are also jointly supporting a “big bet” global initiative on financing for development. Sustainable financing is critical to strengthen national systems and build resilience and preparedness for future crises. This work builds on UNDP's strengths on innovative financing, and UNICEF's experience and expertise in designing and delivering children's programming, as well as our longstanding engagement with the private sector. And we will join it up with the work we are already doing with the World Bank and other IFIs.

With UNFPA, we are co-leading the Business Innovation Group to guide the global roll-out of joint business operation strategies and common back offices. Thanks to this work, last year alone, 12 agencies — including UNICEF — reported savings of about \$100 million. Savings that we can reinvest in our programming.

Our UNICEF Regional Offices are leading or participating in 30 coalitions discussing specific issues at the regional level, as well as regional knowledge-management hubs.

And as you know, the internal UN negotiations around the new UNSDG working arrangements and the Management and Accountability Framework are ongoing.

From UNICEF's perspective, we feel it is important to maintain the consensus-driven approach of the UNSDG, which allows agencies to have collective ownership. The MAF needs to be a balanced guidance tool which reflects rights and obligations of RCs and agency representatives as we progress towards the SDGs.

Like our sister agencies, UNICEF has developed a strong brand, a robust partnership approach and an invaluable network with the private sector. These are vital assets, not just for UNICEF but for the wider UN system. We must encourage them to flower.

The upcoming RC system review will be a good opportunity for member states to provide clear guidance for the system to consolidate the important reforms, while also preserving each agency's respective advantages, operational footprint and partnerships.

And as we collaborate with our partners outside of UNICEF, we are continuing our important work to modernize, simplify and streamline our operations inside our organization.

From country programme planning, to partnership management, to managing travel, services and consultants — the work we are doing will result in significant time savings for our staff members and reduce costs.

We are on track to completing most of our improvements by the end of the year, and we will keep you updated on our progress as we move forward.

And we are continuing our journey to strengthen UNICEF's culture, and end racism and discrimination across our organization. I have received the final report from the Anti-Racism and Discrimination Task Team, and we are currently discussing and implementing their recommendations.

Throughout all of this work, we will continue to rely on you — our Executive Board. Your oversight and guidance of our organization's work, your efforts around working methods, and your comments and reflections on Country Programme Documents — like the one we are reviewing today for Argentina — are all appreciated and valued by everyone at UNICEF.

As a UNICEF family, we will come together and support children, young people, and their communities and countries during this challenging time.

Recovery will likely take decades, and the full socio-economic impacts are still unclear. But with your guidance and support, we will work with children every step of the way.

And as we look to the work ahead, in our 75th year, we will also take this opportunity to look back on all that our UNICEF family has accomplished over the decades.

We are planning a global children's event at the end of the year. It will bring together public and private partners — and of course, children and young people themselves — to focus the world's attention on the evolving needs of our youngest generation. We hope to see you there.

Thank you. I look forward to our discussions this week.
