

**Statement of H.E. Ms. Rabab Fatima, Ambassador & Permanent  
Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations at the  
Annual Session of the UNICEF Executive Board, 2021  
Tuesday, 01 June 2021**

Mr. President – congratulations on assuming this important position. You can count on my delegation’s full support.

I thank the Executive Director for her comprehensive briefing on the annual report on the state of children globally. The pandemic has compounded the vulnerability of children everywhere; and at high risk are children in conflict and humanitarian situations; those driven into extreme poverty, or affected by disasters. And girls are at greater risk in every situation. Such children must not fall from our radar of attention and action. This pandemic must not turn into a children’s crisis.

We welcome the three flagship initiatives that UNICEF is rolling out; and we are reassured to see that core areas such as WASH, education, nutrition remain at the center of UNICEF’s activities. It is imperative that regular programmes such as essential immunization, do not suffer because of the pandemic.

We also commend UNICEF for moving towards adopting an innovative financing strategy. While welcoming the record amount of funding received

by UNICEF during this crisis period, we also underline the importance of ensuring flexible and un-earmarked core funding.

Let me highlight two specific priorities as we consider our future course of action:

**First**, is vaccination. Equitable and affordable vaccines to all are our top priority now. UNICEF is doing a commendable job distributing Covid-19 vaccines through the COVAX facility. However, vaccine divide is acute between the global south and global north. Less than 2% of the combined LDC population has been vaccinated. We call upon UNICEF to prioritize LDCs and other low coverage countries; and in this regard it would be useful to get the breakdown by region and countries of its COVAX distribution.

**Second**, is education. An estimated 1.6 billion children were affected by school closures and one third of them do not have the resources to join online classes. With schools closed, many children are also missing the greatest source of their daily nutrition, their school meals. The pandemic exposed the gaping global digital gap and its impact on the education sector. Access to online and distance learning; digital inclusion universally of children to education should be a top priority now for UNICEF. Initiatives such as GIGA should be expanded for greater geographical coverage.

I wish to conclude by reiterating that core, regular areas of work and essential services of UNICEF should not suffer because of the pandemic. It would be

important to ensure continuous assessment of the impact of the pandemic on regular programmes, such as essential vaccination programmes, which have been suspended or scaled down because of Covid-19. We cannot allow to turn this pandemic into a children's crisis.

I thank you.