Remarks by
H.E. Mr Christian Friis Bach
Minister for Development Cooperation of Denmark

UNICEF Executive Board’s Annual Session
18 June 2013

New York
Wednesday 20 June 2013

Check against delivery

E-mail: nycmis@um.dk
http://www.fnnewyork.um.dk
These are exciting and encouraging times for us in the global development community.

We have come far in the vision we agreed upon with the Millennium Development Goals and are now in the final push to achieve them. And we are about to shape a historic vision to eradicate poverty before 2030 and ensure the basic human rights for each and every individual on the globe.

I am here also to participate in the meeting of the SDG Open Working Group, taking place right now next door, and have this very morning listened to passionate statements by young people on the importance of children and youth, and the importance of quality education for all.

Indeed human rights should guide the strategy and direction also of UNICEF. And we have the strongest possible foundation to stand on: The Convention on the Rights of the Child provides each and every child with a strong set of rights. It also guides our investments in education by setting out the right of all children to receive a quality education that can enable them to realize their talents and full potential, learn respect for human rights, and prepare them for their role as adults. This is the foundation we should build upon.

For Denmark, this also means a strong emphasis on a human rights based approach as the normative and operational basis for all our development cooperation, and human rights as a core value in all our partnerships. In particular, the principles of equality, non-discrimination, participation, transparency, and accountability. It also means a continued unwavering focus on gender equality.

We have noted that UNICEF has made progress on both these fronts, and ask you to keep pushing forward – and especially to address gaps on the programme side.

We especially encourage UNICEF to sharpen its focus on education. This is a key role, and responsibility, for UNICEF. It is not least important to support education in post-conflict and humanitarian contexts, to tie together education and resilience building, and to explore the synergies between education and peace-building.

We strongly encourage the shift in focus towards fragile states and conflict affected countries and regions, and appreciate that the new Strategic Plan clearly signals that this focus will continue to expand. We believe that UNICEF – due to the ‘twin mandate’, large capacity, and considerable expertise in both humanitarian and development situations – is uniquely well-positioned to handle these critical efforts.

We are aware of the considerable difficulties and risks that come with operating in challenging contexts. But the risks should not be allowed to stand in the way of necessary action. The UN High Level Panel report on the Post-2015 Development Agenda identified five big, transformative shifts in order to end poverty and promote sustainable development. The first is to ‘leave no one behind’. This shift will only be possible if children and young people in fragile states are at the top of the agenda.

As a member of the donor community, Denmark is ready to engage in a frank and open discussion on how to deal with risk. Without such a discussion our renewed emphasis on fragile and post-conflict situation will not be effective.
As co-chair for the International Dialogue on Peace-building and State-building, I am strongly committed to implementing the 'New Deal' for engagement in fragile states. Education is a critical component because it is not only crucial to each individual child and family. Schools are crucial to build social cohesion and cooperation in communities. Schools are crucial to establish a social contract between a state and its citizens. Letting communities feel the positive presence of the state by providing quality education to all children builds state legitimacy and paves the way for progress, reduced inequality, peace and democracy.

Fortunately, awareness of the crisis of education in fragile states has increased over the past several years. In 2010, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution on education in emergencies; the Global Partnership for Education has, since November 2012, adopted policies that will allow education funding to flow even faster to fragile states and humanitarian crises; and the Secretary General’s Education First Initiative identifies sustaining education in humanitarian crises, especially conflict, as a key action to addressing the global education emergency. We applaud these efforts.

In this effect, we welcome the increased focus on UNICEF’s humanitarian efforts, including greater inclusion of humanitarian issues in the Executive Board’s agenda. We are particularly supportive of the comprehensive incorporation of humanitarian efforts and the emphasis on resilience building in the draft Strategic Plan and the results framework. We believe this will be an important driver when it comes to building stronger operational bridges between the humanitarian and development ‘arms’ of UNICEF.

Going forward, we expect UNICEF’s enhanced humanitarian focus to encompass more and better humanitarian evaluations with a clear focus on results for children and women, and on bringing new actionable learning into the organization. We ask UNICEF to sharpen its’ evaluation tools and their strategic usage accordingly.

We are highly supportive of UNICEF’s increased emphasis on innovation, and the establishment of an Innovation Unit to track and promote innovation efforts in a systematic and strategic way. The ability to think ‘out of the box’ has always been important to move forward - and even more so in the current rapidly changing global context.

Innovation happens in methods but also in partnerships, including public-private partnerships. One inspiring aspect of innovation, we think, is the way technology can be used to empower and give voice to people, thereby enhancing not just participation, but also transparency and accountability in a society.

Technology, if used right, can democratize development in an unprecedented way. And that lies at the very heart of Danish development cooperation.

Thank you for your attention and - in closing - let me also extend a thank you to UNICEF for the receptive manner you have engaged with all of us regarding the draft Strategic Plan 2014-17. We still have a few key tweaks we want to see in the next draft for September, but overall we believe we have come far.

I wish you all the best in your deliberations over the coming days.