UNICEF Executive Board
Annual Session 2013

Item 3: Annual Report of the Executive Director: progress and achievements against the medium-term strategic plan

Statement by Peter Versegi, Minister Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Australia to the United Nations

(Check against delivery)

Thank you Mister President.

UNICEF is to be congratulated for its efforts to protect and promote the rights of the world’s most vulnerable children, including those affected by the continuing crisis in Syria and ongoing humanitarian emergencies around the world.

Let me start by strongly supporting the focus of both the Executive Director and the President this morning on meeting the needs of children with a disability. The head of the Australian aid agency had the honour of jointly launching the State of the World’s Children report - focused on children with disabilities – with the Executive Director in Viet Nam last month. We look forward to the opportunity to work together further with UNICEF to achieve the rights of people with disabilities at the High Level Meeting of the General Assembly on disabilities in September, and in the development of the Post-2015 agenda.

Australia remains a strong supporter of UNICEF. Over the past four years Australia has almost doubled its core contribution to UNICEF from AUS19.6 million in 2009 to AUD38.3 million in 2013.

In line with this scale up, Australia is increasing its focus on UNICEF’s governance.
Australia strongly endorses continued reform in audit and investigation processes, results-based management and greater transparency, and in this regard, we welcome yesterday’s posting of additional details of programme activities and funding in line with International Aid Transparency Initiative standards.

Strengthening the quality of results monitoring, measurement and reporting must remain a focus UNICEF. We welcome the work UNICEF is doing to develop a strengthened results framework as part of the new Strategic Plan for 2014-17 and look forward to tomorrow’s Board session on the new Plan.

Let me turn now to several areas of the annual report that are of particular interest to Australia.

**Young child survival and development**

Australia welcomes UNICEF’s ongoing efforts to promote young child survival and development. We encourage UNICEF to focus on improving access to routine immunisation, and strengthening health and immunisation systems. We also welcome the close collaboration with the GAVI Alliance.

We note the focus in the report on results achieved in Africa. We welcome these results, and encourage UNICEF to continue its efforts in Africa as well as the Asia Pacific region where 900 million people still live in poverty and where up to 50 per cent of children are stunted in some countries.

Australia supports UNICEF to help ensure high levels of vaccine coverage across Pacific Island Countries. Whilst achievements have been made in this area, challenges remain, particularly in Samoa, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands. Australia urges UNICEF to actively engage in sector coordination and work to build national health systems.

Australia welcomes UNICEF’s efforts to prevent stunting and reduce micronutrient deficiency.

We encourage UNICEF to support national efforts to address malnutrition and support cross-sectoral (not just vertical) interventions like Vitamin A supplementation.

Lastly on the topic of health, Australia welcomes the launch of the UNICEF / UNFPA Commission on Life-Saving Commodities for Women and Children. The timely and appropriate distribution of effective and qualified life-saving commodities is particularly important in the Asia Pacific region where supply issues have a significant impact on healthcare delivery.

**Education**

Australia encourages UNICEF’s engagement in the Secretary General’s Global Education First Initiative, of which the Australian Prime Minister is a champion. We support UNICEF’s focus on
the unfinished business of providing equitable access to school for all children. And urge UNICEF to strengthen its focus on education quality.

We also support UNICEF’s efforts in the Pacific on education and encourage UNICEF to support Australia’s advocacy to prioritise attention on quality of basic education in the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and PNG.

Australia values UNICEF’s pilot studies and projects, which can provide an important demonstration effect of good practice. Australia sees UNICEF pilot studies as a key way that UNICEF can bridge its ‘downstream’ and ‘upstream’ activities.

**HIV/AIDS and children**

Australia strongly supports the principles of knowing your epidemic and the use of an investment approach to effectively allocate HIV resources. Australia supports UNICEF’s efforts to refocus on an investment approach to reducing HIV risk, transmission, morbidity and mortality. Australia also encourages further development of cost effective evidence-based interventions targeting populations at higher risk.

**Humanitarian action**

UNICEF has an important role in humanitarian responses, particularly in child protection, water and sanitation, and nutrition. As one of the largest and most effective humanitarian agencies, UNICEF carries a particular responsibility to ensure that its own practices are of the highest possible efficacy, and to contribute UNICEF resources and experience to the reform of the humanitarian system as a whole.

Australia wishes to highlight three issues that we consider to be at the heart of UNICEF’s ability to deliver effective and accountable humanitarian assistance.

First, we believe that the time has come for rapid implementation of the tools and mechanisms that have been carefully developed by the IASC and member agencies. There are still too many reports of patchy implementation and a lack of cooperation and support for Humanitarian Coordinators. Reforms agreed to in New York and Geneva to improve coordination and accountability are not always resulting in improved service delivery in the field.

UNICEF needs to ensure that its commitment to the Transformative Agenda is translated into concrete action across all humanitarian operations. Further, greater efforts must be made to communicate the intent of the Transformative Agenda to national governments, and for their role and capacity to engage in the reform of the humanitarian system to be recognised and supported.

Secondly, there is high demand on the global funding available for humanitarian action, and it has never been more important for agencies to be able to clearly demonstrate
results. We strongly support the proposal to better integrate UNICEF’s humanitarian results into the new strategic plan and results framework. Further, we welcome UNICEF’s response to the *Thematic Synthesis report on evaluation of humanitarian action* that will see action taken on each of the reports four recommendations. We look forward in particular to a quantifiable increase in results-oriented, inter-agency evaluations, in line with the Transformative Agenda.

Quality evaluation, and – most importantly - systematically incorporating evaluation findings into future programming, will require strong leadership by UNICEF and dedicated resourcing. We look forward to observing progress on this vital issue.

Finally, Mr President, Australia would like to draw attention to a particular issue that is at the heart of UNICEF’s mandate and an ever more urgent dimension of contemporary humanitarian response.

That is the issue of Protection.

As the crises in Syria and the DRC highlight, traditional forms of humanitarian assistance are rarely enough if the safety and security of beneficiaries is not protected. Too often, there is no safe haven from the impacts of armed conflict, sexual violence, exploitation and abuse. These aspects of protection deserve greater priority, alongside the delivery of material goods.

We acknowledge UNICEF is being forced to make ever more difficult decisions about the allocation of scarce resources, however we strongly advocate for dedicated protection activities and for protection to continue feature across UNICEF’s humanitarian response.

UNICEF’s co-leadership of the gender-based violence area-of-responsibility is commendable. Concerted efforts and on-going resourcing of this aspect of the UN’s humanitarian response is critical if we are to offer meaningful protection to the most vulnerable in emergencies.

Thank you.