UNICEF Executive Board Annual Session 2013

Item 3 - Annual Report of the Executive Director, 18 June

National Statement - delivered by Mr. Yahav Lichner
Adviser, Mission of Israel to the UN

Mr. President,

At the outset, allow me to thank UNICEF's Executive Director, Mr. Tony Lake, for his insightful and comprehensive statement on UNICEF's progress and achievements, as well as the challenges ahead of us.

I would also like to thank UNICEF management for the report before us. It includes useful analysis and information on UNICEF performance and results over the past year.

Let me also take this opportunity to personally thank Mr. Nicolas Pron, the Secretary of the Executive Board and Ms. Christine Muhigana, the Assistant Secretary, for their hard work in preparing this session.

Mr. President,

Israel commends UNICEF's extraordinary efforts to deliver tangible results to children across the globe.

The Annual Report 21012 covers the 7th year of UNICEF Mid-Term Strategic Plan 2006-2013. To borrow a term from the Bible, we have seen "seven good years" for children around the world because of UNICEF's interventions and operations. But there is still much work to do. The "unfinished agenda," as rightly acknowledged by the report, demands increased attention and efforts. We must therefore redouble our efforts to ensure that the next few years will not just be as good as the last seven. They must be better.

With this in mind, let me briefly say a few words on the efforts to develop the new Strategic plan, 2014-2017. UNICEF truly created an inclusive, consultative and participatory process for developing the next strategic plan. Israel benefited from several rounds of consultations, during which we were given the opportunity to provide input as the work progressed.
The draft before us today offers a coherent vision and good structure for UNICEF's future work in programs, operations and advocacy.

First, we are encouraged by the centrality given to equity in this plan, and its focus on the most disadvantaged and excluded children.

UNICEF's commitment to children's rights is evident in the plan's new vision and equity strategy. We appreciated the plan's focus on the unfinished agenda for children, outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Millennium Development Goals, and in the future of even the post-2015 agenda, and the SDGs, which Israel hopes will endorse, among other things, early childhood education.

Second, we welcome UNICEF's emphasis on innovation and information and communication technologies. Israel knows from its own experience that innovative tools and approaches are required to better deliver results, respond quickly to different contexts, and scale up successful interventions. We thank the Executive Director for his elaboration on this, this morning.

Third, on gender. Although the annual report indicates that gender mainstreaming was an important focus of UNICEF Programming in 2012, there is still much work to be done.

This is a top priority for my delegation. Israel appreciates the continued focus on gender equality as an integral part of the next strategic plan, and UNICEF management's commitment to advancing gender. We believe, however, there is room for further thinking and fine-tuning.

Later this week, the board will discuss UNICEF's report on gender equality work. Without preempting this discussion and without repeating previous colleagues, let me simply say this: Israel believes that the next strategic plan can benefit from strengthening gender mainstreaming, via gender-sensitive performance. The organization's next gender equality strategy should be adequately funded, and clearly connected with the next strategic plan – rather than being a separate, standalone plan.

Fourth, on health issues, we encourage UNICEF to pay more attention to health systems and health infrastructure. We see this as a gap in the plan, especially in light of the work currently being done in the context of the global campaign to ensure universal health coverage.

Mr. President,
There is overwhelming evidence that the strategic areas in this plan are interlinked. Recently, for example, one report—based on studies of thousands of children in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam—found that children are at risk of underperforming in school because of malnutrition. A poor diet, the study found, can severely damage a child's ability to read and write. Given this, Israel would like to know more about how UNICEF intends to work across these areas - while also keeping them separate.

Fifth, we note that UNICEF has expanded from five focus areas in the current strategic plan to seven. Israel would welcome more information as to the rationale for these new areas.

Mr. President,

There is a Jewish story about an elderly man who planted a carob tree – a tree that only bears fruit after seventy years. When asked why he is planting a tree whose fruits he will be unable to eat, the man replied: "I am doing as my ancestors did. Just as they planted a carob tree for me, I am planting one for my children."

The commitment of one generation to the next is the foundation of a strong and healthy society. Every single one of us has the obligation to protect, integrate, and empower our children and youth.

UNICEF's mission is to create a world in which no child goes hungry, no child goes uneducated, and no child goes wanting.

We cannot rest until this dream becomes a reality. We cannot rest until every member of the next generation is cared for and nurtured. We cannot rest until every young person is empowered – and given the ability to achieve their potential. Only then can we truly say that the seeds of our work have borne fruit.

Thank you, Mr. President