STATEMENT BY

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PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF JAMAICA

ON

AGENDA ITEM 4: UNICEF STRATEGIC PLAN 2014-2017

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Mr. President,

Thank you for this opportunity to make a statement under this important agenda item.

I thank the Executive Director for his comprehensive Annual Report on UNICEF's work under the current Medium-Term Strategic Plan. We are heartened by the news of progress made in many of the focus areas such as young child survival, elimination of mother-to-child-transmission of HIV, and building partnerships for children's rights. Indeed, as outlined by the Executive Director, the international community should press forward in achieving similar progress in those other areas where challenges have proved stubborn.

In this context, Mr. President, the 2014-17 Strategic Plan will be crucial. It is noted that the Plan will encompass the expected conclusion of the Millennium Development Goals and the initiation of the post-2015 development framework. As such, we are committed to ensuring that the activities and priorities that UNICEF adopts will continue to fulfill the core requirements to enable full realization of the rights of every child.

It is gratifying to see that the plan seeks to leverage a growing partnership between government, civil society and the private sector. This, in our view, is an essential ingredient in making the strategy successful. We encourage UNICEF to build on the solid partnerships that exist at the international and country levels, and to go further by expanding these to include new and non-traditional actors.

In this vein, we call for special emphasis to be placed on creating greater buy-in from stakeholders at the community level. The Organization
should enhance its use of culture within States where it has demonstrated proven results, so that culture can become a positive tool rather than a neutral or even negative one. In Jamaica, as I imagine will be the case elsewhere, the role of the wider community in caring for and raising children is significant. We have all heard the African proverb ‘it takes a village to raise a child’ and for us this has been true since time past. In recent years however, there has been an unfortunate trend where people choose to remain on the sidelines and not get involved. This indifference threatens our efforts to deal with challenges such as violence, abuse and neglect.

This is why we encourage a balance between the push to guarantee the rights of every child, with the imperative of involving parents and the community in this critical undertaking. Let us ensure that the culture we foster and sustain is one where every person takes responsibility for upholding children’s rights; where it is not considered to be a state-only responsibility or something that an international organization will come in and do. The ‘village’ is indeed an essential guarantor of children’s rights.

Mr. President,

We applaud the focus on capacity development in the Plan. Many countries, my own included, have lacked the legislative and policy infrastructure, as well as implementing mechanisms, to fully carry out our obligations to children. In recent years, Jamaica has, through support received from organizations such as UNICEF, established mechanisms and overhauled legislation to address these shortcomings. Only this month, we have set aside scarce public funds to modify the
criminal justice system to ensure that our treatment of children is in compliance with international obligations.

There is need, however, for more work to be done in this area. Our capacity is below optimum in relation to our ability to provide adequate levels of psychological counseling for children that demonstrate uncontrollable behavior, for example. We recognize, too, that our intervention strategies must be holistic in nature so that they address the root causes of such behavior, which oftentimes reside within dysfunctional family environments. Quoting from Consultant Clinical Psychologist Masud Hoghughi's [HOGHOOGIZ] seminal work on the importance of parenting in child health, he stated "Parenting is probably the most important public health issue facing our society." He identified it as the single largest variable implicated in a range of challenges such as underachievement, substance abuse, truancy, teen pregnancy, unemployability, mental health and juvenile crime – all issues which contribute to a cycle of social deconstruction. UNICEF’s focus on capacity building in the social determinants of health and other areas of critical importance is therefore both welcome and necessary. Indeed, neglect by parents and guardians is the number one form of abuse recorded by Jamaica’s Office of the Children’s Registry.

We support the continued focus on gender discrimination, a factor made more tragic when combined with other identified discriminatory markers such as poverty, ethnicity and disability. Jamaica fully supports UNICEF’s global drive to ensure that girls are able to enjoy their rights as children equally with boys. This is in terms of their access to quality education, adequate nutrition, and to protection from abuse. We encourage flexibility in the Plan, however, so that Country Offices will be
able to take into account factors on the ground in making determinations on the support provided for programmes that address vulnerable and at-risk groups.

In this regard, Jamaica has recognized an emerging challenge as it relates to boys, many of whom are also prone to abuse, fall behind in education, adopt unhealthy behaviors and run afoul of the law. We wish to emphasize the need for balance in the approach to undercut and reverse this trend, by creating sustainable interventions to target at-risk youth, especially boys.

Lastly, Jamaica encourages a strategy that is based on securing the participation of children, both in the crafting and implementation of the programmes that directly affect their lives. This will not only increase the likelihood of developing and executing quality programmes, but will also serve to empower children, including those that are disadvantaged. At the very least they will be imbued with the knowledge that their rights are valued, are worth struggling for, and are to be upheld.

Mr. President,

In closing, I wish to convey Jamaica's full commitment to promoting all the rights of all children everywhere. We commend the staff of UNICEF, both here at headquarters and in the field, and encourage them to maintain their professionalism and passion. Jamaica looks forward to continuing to work with UNICEF and others in the promotion and protection of the rights of all our children.

Thank you.