Item 8 and 9 Annual report on evaluation and revised evaluation policy of UNICEF

President,

I am pleased to deliver this statement on behalf of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden, Thailand and my own country Norway. Pakistan and El Salvador also share elements of this statement.

We thank and commend UNICEF for the Annual Report on the evaluation function. The report responds to the general requests for better reporting that we have made in the past. It is an excellent example of the type of analytical, evidence based and forward looking reporting that provides the Executive Board with a clear overview including useful observations on strengths and weaknesses.

We welcome the frank and self-critical analysis on issues such as coverage, quality, demand, and topical distribution of evaluations, including the particular challenges with regard to evaluation in humanitarian contexts. While the report further substantiates some important concerns; such as quality gaps, inadequate coverage, and resources for evaluation, it also highlights many positive achievements and on-going processes. Particularly positive is progress made on the quantity of management responses, multi-country sharing of M&E officers, global learning initiatives such as “My M&E” and capacity building such as establishment of” EvalPartners”.

We also appreciate UNICEF’s active engagement in the UN evaluation group (UNEG) as well as in joint evaluations. However, we note the reference to weaknesses in inter-agency evaluation leadership and governance arrangements across the UN - a matter which warrants further discussions. As a concrete step moving forward, we would welcome discussions on joint evaluations in the Executive Boards.
All in all, the report seems to indicate a healthy shift in how evaluation is used as a strategic tool in a systematic manner and forms an integral part of the work of the organisation to support organisational-wide learning for improved performance and results. We are supportive of further strengthening the evaluation function and we encourage UNICEF to now take further steps to sharpen its evaluation tools and strategic usage.

Let me now move on to comment on the revised evaluation policy which makes efforts to address many of the issues raised in the annual report on the evaluation function. In this regard, we particularly welcome the policy’s focus on evaluation planning, utilisation and disclosure.

The evaluation policy clearly states its link to UNICEF’s mandate and mission on child rights. However, we would also welcome further elaboration on the explicit link between the policy and the strategic plan.

When it comes to the guiding principles, we encourage UNICEF to make it clear that it follows a human rights based approach to development and to this effect, include an explicit reference to the United Nations Evaluation Group guidelines on the integration of human rights and gender equality in evaluation.

We would also appreciate information on how the evaluation function links up with the knowledge management function to strengthen UNICEF as a genuine evidence-based organisation for more effective programming and advocacy. In addition, we would appreciate further elaboration on the process leading up to the revised policy. How have the different internal and external assessments and reviews of the evaluation function influenced the revision of the policy?

We welcome the way in which roles and lines of accountability are spelled out. It is also important that the policy clarifies at the outset its applicability to UNICEF’s humanitarian responses. In this regard we would like to make two points related to the role and responsibilities of the Executive Board. First, the UNICEF Audit Advisory Committee report 2012 mentions “the possible effect on the independence, or appearance of independence, of the Evaluation Office under the current structure by which it reports to the Executive Director rather than to the Executive Board.” Second, we would have liked to
see that the draft policy mentions the inclusion of thematic/global evaluations in the agenda of the Executive Board.

Another issue related to roles and accountabilities is the senior management responsibility to present a management response to the annual report of the Evaluation Office which we think is important to ensure a coherent and organization-wide follow up of the evaluation policy. Furthermore, we support the proposal of an allocation of minimum 1% of programme expenses for evaluation. We also agree that evaluation should be funded separately from studies, research etc. It is equally important that evaluation expenses can be tracked by enterprise management systems.

Concerning independence, we would have liked the revised evaluation policy to clearly spell out the establishment of a separate budget line to ensure predictable and untied funding.

Regarding the funding of decentralized evaluations we would encourage UNICEF to consider including evaluation expenses in programme budgets already at the planning stage.

We understand that the policy will be complemented by a strategy/plan of action. We would like to emphasize that this document should only contain details of implementation guidance, whereas all key policy issues should be included in the evaluation policy itself. This also applies to time limits, such as management responses to evaluation reports.

While we note the consultation between UNICEF’s evaluation committee and the peer review panel, we believe that the consultative process with the Executive Board should have taken place before the document was finalized considering the Board’s role in presiding over and approving the evaluation policy. We would welcome UNICEF’s suggestions on how the feedback of the Board will be taken into account.

Thank you, President