Statement by Ambassador Manjeev Singh Puri,
Deputy Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations
at the First Regular Session 2013 of the Executive Board of UNICEF
(5 February 2013, CR – 4)

Mr. President, Permit me at the outset to congratulate you on your election as President of the Bureau. I wish you all success in navigating the Board in implementing its agenda, in what promises to be an eventful year.

We would also like to place on record our appreciation to the outgoing Bureau, which was so ably presided over by Ambassador John Ashe for his commendable role in guiding the work of the Board last year. My felicitations to the Executive Director Mr. Anthony Lake, his insightful statement and well crafted report on the TCPR of operational activities, for transmission to the ECOSOC.

Mr. President, 2012 was the year, when we successfully completed the second running year in which no fresh case of polio was reported in India and WHO declared that polio was no longer an epidemic in India. This is a major achievement, and a fascinating story to narrate:

The oral polio vaccine was introduced in India in 1978, a year before this neck of the woods (USA) was declared polio free! Till 1988, there were about 350,000 child deaths due to polio globally, and within India by 2009, we were able to bring it down to 741 cases. In 2010, it dropped to 42 and by 2011, only one, and last two years NONE. Today, officially 71% of children in
India are immunized against polio, with 98% of children in the highest-risk areas having been immunized. And all this was possible, by the determined efforts our Health Ministry and the MoWCD, who through the National Polio Surveillance Project, and with support from UNICEF and WHO made it a sustained and unending mission. And today, from being the world’s largest victims of polio, we have transformed ourselves to a polio free nation and become one of the world’s largest donors to the global polio eradication campaign.

We have therefore in UNICEF, a trusted and reliable partner, who we are sure, would continue to place children at the heart of achieving the ‘future we want’, as we agreed to in Rio. As a country that has one of the longest relationships with UNICEF and with home to the largest number of children in the world, we have an abiding interest in UNICEF’s success and its efforts in ending preventing all preventable child deaths. In June last year, we partnered with UNICEF, and the US and Ethiopian Governments to successfully launch the ‘Child Survival: Call to Action” event which had one ambitious yet achievable goal: to end preventable child deaths. We have since then left no effort unspared in reaching the most disadvantaged and hardest to reach children, in pursuit of this exercise.

Mr. President, having flagged our success stories with UNICEF let me also submit a few points for your consideration in view of the MTSP (Medium Term Strategic Plan) that UNICEF is embarking upon:

One, we welcome the strong focus on promoting greater equity in the development process by investing in the health, education and protection of
the most disadvantaged and excluded children. These investments are critical in breaking the intergenerational transmission of poverty and help in creating more stable societies and promote sustained economic growth.

Two, within the context of the MTSP, all the "actionables" that the UN Development System and its agencies have been called upon by member states to pursue by the QCPR Resolution, may not just be incorporated but also implemented as part of the MTSP being so developed. It would also be prudent to dovetail these actionables into those UNICEF country programmes, which are synchronous with the time period of the QCPR.

Three, another welcome development that we see, is the emphasis on 'partnerships' across the board, and with all stakeholders. This is a positive tiding and a force multiplier in the development domain. Your partnership with the World Bank, a theme that you elaborated in the first session today, has resulted in concrete success through the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, the School Fee Abolition Initiative, Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) as well as the WASH initiative. In all of these, you deserve, our compliments and more power to your elbows.

Four, an area that we would like you to focus further upon is what we discussed yesterday, on leveraging South South cooperation for the larger benefit of children in the developing world. Even though South South Cooperation is being singled out as a new buzzword in the evolving narrative of the developmental discourse, much more remains to be done to give it the 'muscle' it needs from the UN system. Countries of the South, including
India, have several ongoing initiatives including our joint initiative with Brazil and South Africa, under the IBSA Trust Fund, and we have already implemented some extremely critical projects with special focus for children using this TF. These include a construction of a Hospital for Children with special needs in Cambodia, delivery of safe drinking water in Cape Verde and construction of a football stadium in Ramallah. We therefore, hope that you would continue to partner with countries of the South in complementing them achieve their goals, especially in those projects which have an explicit 'children friendly' focus.

**Fifth**, we have also noted with deep concern the issue of decline in thematic funding of the UNICEF that has been flagged in your report to the ECOSOC. As members of the Executive Board, we pledged US $900,000 last year, and would be committing another similar amount at the pledging conference on Thursday. We hope that a comprehensive resource mobilisation strategy that addresses this decline in thematic fund, and enables UNICEF to use programme resources more flexibly and responsively would soon be worked out.

To conclude Mr. President, the Executive Board Meeting is very timely and important as it provides an opportunity to reaffirm our collective commitment to fulfill the hopes and aspirations of children all over the world.

As home to one fifth of the children in the world, we are steadfastly committed to ensuring protective and nurturing environments for children to reach their full potential. We would like to once again express our sincere appreciation for UNICEF’s efforts in fulfilling our common vision of an early realisation of children friendly environments universally. I thank you, Mr. President.