National Statement by Ireland

Mr. President, Executive Director, distinguished delegates, in taking the floor as a member of the Executive Board, let me say what an honour it is for Ireland to serve on the Board this year, working with other board members to contribute appropriate and effective oversight and guidance to UNICEF during a turbulent and challenging period for multilateralism and when the importance of UNICEF’s work is as critical as it has ever been in the 70 years of its existence.

Ireland is pleased to note the progress achieved for the world’s children in so many key areas and UNICEF’s contribution to those achievements, such as the decline in under-five mortality 1990 – present, near-universal primary school enrolment across low and middle-income countries and the continued fall in the number of new HIV infections among children under the age of 14 years. However, many challenges remain, both between and within countries. For this reason, it is essential that UNICEF keeps innovating, adapting, and further improving its performance. Across so many areas, much has been achieved but the challenges remain formidable. Take HIV/AIDS for example, where impressive progress has been made in reducing the numbers of young people living with HIV, but the stark reality remains that adolescents between the ages of 15 and 19 still account for almost 40% of new infections.

And the HIV example also underlines the interconnectedness of the challenges: the linkage, for example, between health, education, gender equality – just as strengths in different programmes are mutually reinforcing, a weakness in any one area will undermine prospects of progress in others. These linkages underline the importance of the integrated approach envisaged in the 2030 Agenda and of UNICEF working closely with other relevant partners to ensure most effective support for national SDG implementation.

In moving this agenda forward, Ireland would like to highlight three priorities that we hope to see reflected in the work of UNICEF and other UNDS entities, and in the Strategic Plans when they are finalised:

- Evaluations: Given the acknowledged need for evidence-based responses that engage local communities and draw upon relevant data, we would
strongly UNICEF to step up its efforts in the sphere of evaluations, and ensure that it not only meets the expenditure target of 1 per cent, but also puts in place the human resources to enable the 1 per cent to be spent properly. Evaluations play a vital learning purpose and it is important that not only is evidence generated in sufficient quantity, but also that the appropriate lessons are drawn from it.

- **Partnerships:** We would again encourage UNICEF to set out in detail how the proposed partnerships with other institutions will work and what specific roles will be played by each agency, so that duplication is eliminated and the strengths of the respective agencies are leveraged to create synergies that help the UN system as a whole to better meet the needs of the world’s children, under whatever banner. For example, Irish Aid is now funding the UN SUN Network/REACH initiative improving UN agency coordination for nutrition on the ground.

- **Gender equality:** Given the slower than expected progress on mainstreaming, it is to be hoped that the focus on priority mainstreaming results, articulated in the Gender Action Plan, 2018-2021, will help to quicken the pace of progress, a fundamental without which the SDGs simply will not be achieved.

In addition, Ireland will continue to push for greater transparency, improved data sharing and clear reporting on results. We would also like to emphasise the important benefits that can be brought to children in developing countries by information technology, and would like to explore with UNICEF the possibility of assisting its efforts in this regard, particularly in the context of our priority countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

Finally, Mr. President, effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda at all levels will require a broad and integrated policy response across the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development. In this regard, Ireland attaches the highest importance to ongoing work to make the UN Fit for Purpose and we look forward to working with other colleagues in the context of the quadrennial compressive policy review of the workings of the UN Funds and Programmes to provide focussed guidance on how the agencies will operate in the new development framework.

Accordingly, the UN Development System needs to become “fit for purpose”, so that scarce resources can be allocated where they are needed the most, that the
UN is able to help governments reach the poorest and most vulnerable countries and people.

We encourage UNICEF to play a strong leadership role throughout this process and look forward to UNICEF’s contribution to a whole-of-system approach, building capacity for partnerships and innovation, seeking synergies across entities and across pillars, and achieving tangible results to ensure that No Child is Left Behind.

Thank you.