Thank you, Mr. President.

I deliver this statement on behalf of Australia, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States, and my own country, Canada.

We thank UNICEF for presenting its Annual Report on the implementation of the UNICEF Gender Action Plan 2014-2017. It highlights UNICEF’s achievements in advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, particularly in its four targeted gender priority areas.

We note, however, the findings of recent reviews and evaluations that have identified ongoing shortcomings in UNICEF’s capacity to effectively mainstream gender equality throughout its programmes, particularly at the country level.

The Review of Development Effectiveness, for example, found that while coverage of gender equality in evaluations has increased, less than half of the evaluations report positive findings on UNICEF’s application of gender equality as a cross-cutting theme. This has been largely due to the absence of gender-based analysis during program design and delivery and/or the lack of sex-disaggregated and intersectional data in baselines and monitoring information.

We are pleased to see that UNICEF acknowledges these areas for improvement and is taking action, such as launching a gender capacity and credentialing initiative and increasing gender support at the regional and country levels.

However, in the context of the strategic planning process underway, which includes the development of a new Gender Action Plan 2018-2021, we urge UNICEF to be more ambitious in its efforts to strengthen gender mainstreaming.

As per the ECOSOC definition: “gender mainstreaming is ... essential to achieve gender equality and to ensure that no girl or boy is left behind.” As such, we strongly encourage UNICEF to prioritize three key areas for improvement:

1) Strengthening institutional capacity and accountability systems to undertake comprehensive gender-based analysis of all projects and programmes at all levels. This should include staff training, further increasing the availability, resourcing and leverage of gender equality specialists, and more rigorous gender equality requirements for project and programme approval and monitoring;
2) Strengthening institutional capacity to collect, monitor and report on data disaggregated by sex, age, disability, ethnicity, income, geographical location, and other relevant characteristics, particularly at the country level, as well as capacity to contribute UNICEF data to global indicators for SDG measurement; and,

3) More systematically reflecting men and boys as an integral part of a gender perspective, acknowledging their roles and responsibilities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, including in addressing the root causes of gender-based discrimination and transforming harmful social norms and attitudes.

Improvements in these areas would help UNICEF better align with the UN system's approach and commitment to advancing gender equality, including the next generation of UN SWAP and corresponding country level scorecard, as well as its own Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls.

We would like to see these three areas more clearly reflected in the new Strategic Plan, Results Framework and Gender Action Plan for the 2018-2021 planning period. This means including specific results statements and indicators, reported upon annually and cumulatively over the planning period. It means a greater allocation of resources, reaching the 15 per cent target, to support these priority areas. And, it means articulating gender equality as a more prominent outspoken guiding principle across all the Goal Areas.

We expect these documents to be firmly grounded in a strong human rights-based approach and gender-responsive approach, acknowledging lessons learned and affirming the potential leverage capacity of gender mainstreaming for achieving truly transformative interventions.

And lastly, it is important for UNICEF to further align its work on gender equality with other UN agencies, particularly UN Women and UNFPA, to reduce duplication and pool expertise, on common areas, such as child, early and forced marriage, adolescent girls’ health and rights, ending violence against children, and education in emergencies. We attach great importance to UNICEF explaining specifically how it plans to work together with other agencies, with clear indicators to measure the behaviour of individual agencies’ contributions towards achieving common results.

We again congratulate UNICEF for its achievements in 2016, and look forward to productive discussions on this important issue during Executive Board sessions.

Thank you, Mr. President.