Mr. President, distinguished Members of the Executive Board, our Executive Director, colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure, Mr. President, to address you today on behalf of all UNICEF staff and to congratulate you on your election. UNICEF staff around the world welcome your leadership. As the Chair of the Global Staff Association, recently re-elected for a second term, I look forward to a close collaboration with the Bureau and the entire Executive Board membership.

I would first like take this opportunity to apprise the Board on where we stand in the efforts made by the organization to address the issues raised at the Annual Session of the Executive Board meeting last year and thereafter talk about new issues since then.

Firstly, on the follow up to the Global Staff Survey

The Global Staff Survey provides the evidence of how we are doing as an organization and helps us to strategically work towards change. It reflects UNICEF’s desire to seek staff inputs and ideas for achieving an optimal work environment that enables the organization to produce better results for children. It also ensures personal and professional satisfaction for staff. Last year, I had reported that in response to the findings from the 2014 global staff survey, our Global Management Team (GMT) had put in place action plans to address areas of weakness in their respective Regions and
Statement of Scholastica Madowo  
Chairperson, Global Staff Association  
Annual session of the UNICEF Executive Board  
15th June 2017

Divisions. As a follow up to these efforts, another Survey was conducted from 15th March to 7th April 2017. I am thrilled to report that the survey had an overwhelming response rate of 79% — a 22% increase over the 2014 response, and the highest in the history of such surveys in UNICEF. This success rate is attributed to the concerted efforts of both management and Staff Associations at all levels of the organization in mobilizing participation.

The survey results have just been released and at the outset, it shows improvements since the 2014 survey, for example, on work-life balance (+10%), diversity (+5%), office efficiency (+6%), information sharing (+4%) and staff security (+3%). However, the survey shows that the organization must continue to improve on - personal empowerment, career development, and in recruitment and promotions.

While efforts have been put in place over the last years to address the issues raised in the staff surveys, these efforts have mostly been led by management and lacked staff ownership. A new approach has been agreed upon that gives staff equal ownership in identifying, designing and implementing appropriate actions to address the issues raised in their respective offices. Staff Associations will play a catalytic role in this process to ensure active participation of staff in the process. The Global Management Team including the Global Staff Association will continue to have oversight in the process.
Secondly, on the Global Shared Services Centre or GSSC.

Last year, I reported that the Global Shared Services Centre was up and running in Budapest, Hungary. Currently, close to 300 positions have been filled. Many of the staff at the Centre are very young and extremely talented, bringing youth and dynamism into the UNICEF workforce. I visited the Centre in December 2016 and supported the establishment of a Staff Association which is now up and running.

As you are aware, the main objective for establishing the Global Shared Services Centre was to drive transactional efficiency and cost savings by removing routine repetitive transactions throughout the organization. It was envisaged that a consequence would be to free the time of support staff to take on upstream work in improving overall programme delivery, and results for children. In this regard, the Global Staff Association has initiated discussions with the Field Results Group to pursue this agenda further.

The GSSC has the potential to grow and we will all endeavor to continue to leverage the potential of the GSSC to further increase efficiency and effectiveness for the benefit of children.

Thirdly, on staff safety and security.

The 20th of April 2017 marked the second anniversary of the horrific attack on UNICEF staff in Garowe in Somalia which resulted in the deaths of 4
staff members and the injury of several others. This incident, and others in the past, continue to demonstrate the vulnerability of staff serving in high-risk environments. UNICEF currently operates in five Level 3 and seven Level 2 emergencies. The Executive Director (Mr. Tony Lake) has continuously assured staff that every effort is and will continue to be made to assure their safety and security, and we have no doubt that management is doing what it can to ensure this.

Related to this, as reported last year, the Global Staff Association jointly with the Division of Human Resources established an in-house Committee that reviewed the conditions of service of staff serving in emergency duty stations. The report contains a number of recommendations that are under consideration for implementation in a phased approach. In addition, the Global Staff Association is also glad that the Division of Financial and Administrative Management has put together a Task Force to review the living conditions in emergency duty stations towards developing minimum standards. The Global Staff Association is a member of this committee.

Fourthly, on staff mobility and rotation.

Last year, I reported that the first round of the staff rotation exercise was underway. The objective was to move staff who had completed their tours of duty and as of 30\textsuperscript{th} December 2014 in family duty stations and 30\textsuperscript{th} June 2015 for those in high-risk, non-family duty stations. The first round of the
rotation exercise has ended and 55 of the 88 staff that were in the exercise moved. Lessons learned from this first round have been used to improve the second round which has just kicked-off. GSA has been actively involved in discussions through membership in the Rotation Reference Group and the Special Constraints Panel to assure transparency and fairness in the exercise.

Fifthly, on continuing appointments.

In 2009, the General Assembly approved the implementation of open-ended continuing appointments. Mr. President, I am very happy to report that continuing contracts are currently in the process of implementation. It is projected that approximately 1,500 staff members who meet the eligibility criteria will benefit this year. The good news is that this will be an annual exercise. Effective 1st September 2016, UNICEF also introduced longer fixed-term contracts of up to 5-years (up from the limit of 2 years). These two policy changes will enhance job security and improve staff morale overall. The Global Staff Association wishes to express its appreciation to UNICEF management for taking these steps in the right direction for staff. The fruits of these decisions will definitely be felt in the coming years.

Next, on health care and medical insurance

Inadequate, and in some cases, the total lack of health care services in hardship duty locations, was and still is, of great concern to staff and their
families. And as Chair of the Global Staff Association, this is an issue that causes me sleepless nights. The situation is dire in conflict countries like Yemen, Syria, Somalia, Central African Republic, and in many remote and hardship locations where health systems have collapsed altogether.

As reported last year, there is also an increase of sudden deaths in the organization. While no studies have been made on the causes of these deaths, poor health care services (preventive and curative) cannot be ruled out. As this is a common system issue, the Global Staff Association has intensified its advocacy to highlight this predicament at different levels and to help find solutions. It has recently sought membership on the UN Health and Life Insurance Committee which is an advisory body for all issues relating to health insurance.

I had reported last year that the UN Joint Medical Service planned to review health systems in all duty stations and to make recommendations to the General Assembly. This does not seem to have happened yet. Since UNICEF is one of the few agencies with a large staff presence in conflict and remote duty stations, we welcome your intervention to ensure that the UN Joint Medical Service undertakes this important exercise and establishes minimum health standards to be applied in all duty stations.
Within UNICEF, we have proposed the establishment of in-house standing-committees on Health and Life Insurance at the global, regional and country levels to provide a structured mechanism for quality assurance.

While improvement of curative services is key, **investment in preventive systems** is also necessary and smarter. As a self-insured organization through the Medical Insurance Plan, it makes sound business sense to invest in measures that delay or eliminate the onset of preventable diseases. This would not only reduce overall healthcare costs but also simultaneously increase staff performance through reduced absences from work for medical reasons. In this regard, I am happy to report that Staff Associations at all levels have continued to promote healthy and active lifestyles through the promotion of a range of physical and mental exercises ranging from in-house gym and fitness facilities to organized sports, yoga, periodic health checks, and more. The annual UN Inter-Agency Games is a popular sporting event that keeps staff active all-year round as they prepare for the tournament. The GSA wishes to reiterate that a dollar spent on the wellbeing of staff translates into multiple dollars spent on results for children.

**Finally, on the issue of mental health**

At the end of 2014, the UN conducted a system-wide mental health survey among staff of all agencies (including UNICEF). The results of the survey
indicate very high levels of work-related stress among staff - critical for those in conflict environments, but just as alarming for those in non-emergency duty stations. This is a cause for concern and I trust that the UN will address the report with the seriousness that it deserves. Within UNICEF, a positive development is the recent increase in the number of staff counsellors. Almost all regions now have at least one staff counsellor at regional level and a few emergency countries also have staff counsellors to provide support at the country level. The Staff Counsellors are working closely with Staff Associations globally and at country level and are already strengthening the Peer Support Volunteer mechanism as a first-line support mechanism for stress management in offices.

Mr. President, I have concluded the updates from my report of last year and will now talk about a number of current issues touching on staff welfare.

The first one is the ongoing Human Resources reforms initiative that was introduced by the Division of Human Resources last year. The HR reform is hinged on three pillars: performance management, recruitment and business partnerships. As a result of these reforms, we now have very positive initiatives that staff welcome. One of these is ACHIEVE – a new performance management system that entails ongoing supervisor-supervisee discussions and continuous feedback to address performance
issues. Decentralization of recruitment is another reform initiative that places more authority on the hiring managers, hastens the hiring process and allows for lateral movements. However, with regard to the decentralized recruitment, the Global Staff Association has asked that hiring managers be held accountable for their decisions through a clear reward-and-sanction mechanism.

Next is on review of compensation package for International Professional staff, post adjustment and salary survey methodology. At the end of 2015, the General Assembly approved a proposal by the International Civil Service Commission to reduce the entitlements and benefits for International Professional staff. The changes were implemented in two phases: phase one in July 2016 and phase two in January 2017. The full impact of the reductions will be felt at the end of this year, but the most hit are staff in emergency duty stations. There is no doubt that these measures have affected staff morale. The UN Staff Unions and Associations raised concerns about the impact of these cuts on attracting and retaining staff generally, and especially, in emergency duty stations.

The International Civil Service Commission has now embarked on the review of the compensation package for national Professional and General Service staff. Given the fact that national staff do not have any
benefits or entitlements other than salaries, we hope that this will be an opportunity to address existing disparities and introduce some entitlements, namely: education grant, relocation grant, leave allowance, residential security allowance, harmonized Danger Pay, Rest and Recuperation, among others. The Executive Board is urged to stand by staff when the time comes. The first part of the exercise has already started and involves the review of the National Professional Officer category of staff to understand the types and range of work they are being assigned, and also review the recruitment policy in view of the changing global labour market. The GSA is playing an active role in the process given the high number of National Professional staff in UNICEF and the success in using this system as a career path to IP positions.

The other issue linked with the compensation review exercise is the progressive reduction of salaries for national staff due to the application of the new local salary survey methodology which results in salary decreases; and also reduced post adjustments in headquarter locations. An example of this is the current, austere reduction of more than 14% in post adjustment which equates to a roughly 7.5% cut in overall staff salary in Geneva and is slated for implementation in August 2017. The Global Staff Association is urging UNICEF management to continue exerting its influence at all levels to delay this implementation.
The next is on the Pension Fund

I am happy to report that there have been considerable improvements in dealing with the backlog of claims of UNICEF staff at the Pension Fund. However, more effort still needs to be put, in particular, on resolving the complex cases that require more in-depth analysis.

Finally, on staff-led initiatives

I cannot finish without touching on staff led initiatives that are being undertaken in various UNICEF offices. One of them is the **greening initiative within UNICEF**. With the introduction of the 3% levy on all air travel to fund greening initiatives and accessibility of offices for persons with disabilities, we have seen an increased awareness and uptake of environment-sensitive initiatives in all offices and Staff Associations have been active players. Our flagship staff-led **Greening Team** of the New York Staff Association has continued to champion the cause within New York and we are proud of them.

Another staff-led initiative that I am pleased to report on is the **support group for UNICEF staff who are parents of children with disabilities** that was jointly established by the Global Staff Association and the Division of Human Resources. The forum has proved helpful in informing and guiding colleagues on issues of special education and special medical allowance and on navigating the complex claim processes. The group is coordinated
by staff on a voluntary basis. The success of this group has led to requests from staff to establish a support group for staff with disabilities.

A final staff-led initiative is a *fund-raising* initiative in partnership with the Private-sector Fundraising and Partnership Division to raise funds from staff towards the different emergencies that UNICEF is responding to. The initiative is in its infancy and we hope that it will soon gain momentum.

Mr. President, on behalf of all UNICEF staff, thank you for giving me the opportunity to address you. Let me assure you that the Global Staff Association maintains a close and cordial working relationship with senior management at all levels and is striving to nurture a culture of fair and transparent engagement which enables the voices of staff to be raised in the spirit of collaboration and partnership.

I look forward to your feedback and comments.

Thank you for your attention.