On behalf of the Bureau and the Executive Board, I extend a warm welcome to everyone present. A special note of appreciation is given to the Permanent Representatives and the other high-level officials who have travelled to New York from their capitals to show their support for UNICEF and for the millions of children the organization serves.

This second regular session of the UNICEF Executive Board for 2018 comes at a time of great sorrow within and outside the United Nations community as we mourn the loss of Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations.

It is, however, also a time of high activity here in New York, with the 73rd United Nations General Assembly beginning less than a week from today. Children and youth will also be a focus of many of the discussions and debates during the Assembly. And numerous exciting high-level and side events scheduled around the Assembly will chart the way forward on critical issues, including child survival; multidimensional poverty; child marriage; youth and gender equality; and access to affordable treatment and care to end tuberculosis, the world’s largest infectious disease tuberculosis, which kills almost 700 children under 15 each day.
Although not comparable in scale to the General Assembly, we also have a packed agenda for our meeting over these three days. We must take advantage of this opportunity to drive reform processes forward.

I would like to thank the UNICEF staff for their constructive work in preparing the documents for the session. I am grateful for the consultative and inclusive process that has taken place between UNICEF and the members of the Executive Board through the informal briefings held on several of the agenda items.

In this regard, I thank Ms. Hai Kyung Jun, the Secretary of the Executive Board, and her team, for their excellent support in helping us prepare for the session.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the three Vice-Presidents who have recently departed from the Bureau: Ambassadors Alemu (Ethiopia); Bhattarai (Nepal); and Vukašinović (Bosnia and Herzegovina) for their excellent contributions to our work.

And I welcome the new colleagues who will respectively represent those three regional groups and will serve on the Bureau until the next election: Ambassador Atskeselassie Amde (Ethiopia), Mr. Kafle (Nepal) and Ms. Đurbuzović (Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Over the coming days, we will discuss the programme of work for this Board in 2019, which includes new items on issues such as strengthening protections against sexual exploitation and abuse and against workplace sexual harassment. The Board supports UNICEF
in its zero-tolerance initiatives to fight these issues, and urges continued strengthening of its policies and processes so as to be able to fully deliver on its mandate for children.

We will hear reports from two field visits in which members of this Board participated. We will consider 15 new country programme documents from six of the seven regions in which UNICEF operates, spanning from Lesotho to Libya; from Nicaragua to Namibia.

In June, we considered UNICEF’s first annual report on its humanitarian efforts in 2017. In this session, we will receive an update on the organization’s efforts to support national Governments to ensure that children continue to receive the lifeline of education during situations of conflict – despite the challenges posed by insecurity, displacement and poverty.

We will review the report on the evaluation of the UNICEF emergency response to the outbreak of cholera within the broader humanitarian response in Yemen. In 2017, the outbreak infected more than a million children due to lack of access to water and vaccination. The continuing conflict jeopardizes efforts to prevent further outbreaks.

Key to the effectiveness of UNICEF and the other humanitarian and development actors is funding that is adequate, flexible, predictable and multi-year.

As is done every September, we will review the updated financial estimates for the UNICEF Strategic Plan, which provides the basis for the allocation of the core resources that are so crucial to delivering goods and services to children in greatest need and at greatest risk.
The session on the structured financing dialogue is an opportunity for UNICEF to respond to the Board’s request to improve the quality and transparency of funding. I encourage UNICEF and other funds and programmes to learn from the positive experiences of structured financing dialogue in the World Health Organization, and to actively engage with individual donors to better match resources to the outcomes of the Strategic Plan. I similarly encourage all Member States to welcome an increase in such dialogues.

The joint report on cost recovery presents evidence-based proposals for harmonized policies. This document will form a basis for further, interesting discussions on this important topic.

This discourse should all be seen through the lens of the UN reform and financing for development commitments we have made to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals for all. In this context, I anticipate that the upcoming Secretary-General’s High-Level meeting on Financing the SDGs will further build momentum and political support at all levels.

In line with the expectations of the QCPR, and against the backdrop of this year’s resolution on reform of the UN development system and the clear signals received from Member States and leadership of the United Nations, UNICEF and its sister agencies must now start adjusting their policies and guidelines as required. They must pay their share of the cost-sharing arrangement for the resident coordinator system decided by Member States and participate actively in the process to find a well-functioning solution to the 1 per cent levy on strictly earmarked funding.
Ladies and gentlemen,

We, as Member States, have a golden opportunity to proceed with the ongoing efforts and actions necessary to modernize, strengthen and streamline our governance structures.

The Bureau and the Board work with the Secretary-General and – through the common chapter of the Strategic Plans – ever more closely with the principals and Executive Boards of our sister agencies, to responsibly steer UNICEF in its efforts to achieve the vision of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Throughout this year, my ambition has been to “keep the pedal to the metal” as it were, to continue the dialogue initiated by the outgoing Presidents in 2017 on improving our working methods. The recent joint informal briefing, which built on discussions during this past June’s joint meeting of the Executive Boards, has helped to further clarify positions and to inform our negotiations on the draft decision on working methods that we will have before us.

I fully expect that the broad-based, practical changes that will ultimately result from the adoption of this decision will position our Board to be more effective, open and transparent in the future, and to have a more effective and strategic hand in managing our governance agenda.

And I fully expect that, with these changes, the Board will be better positioned to steer UNICEF as it seeks to accelerate results for children and young people.
And speaking about children and young people – UNICEF’s focus will gain additional impetus with “Generation Unlimited”, a new agenda that will be launched later this month in conjunction with the UN Youth Strategy. Through this partnership, UNICEF wishes to co-create and accelerate new programmes to get every young person in school, learning, training or employment by 2030. Expanding opportunities for those most in danger of being left behind will be the focus – girls, the poorest children, adolescents and youth, children with disabilities, on the move, or affected by conflict and natural disasters.

I also look forward to what I hope will be an insightful and engaging special focus session on innovation this afternoon. I anticipate it will provide a unique opportunity to learn about and share experiences and ideas on how we can unlock the potential of emerging technologies to benefit children and young people.

Distinguished members of the Board:

If we fail our children, including the 1.2 billion adolescents who represent the largest cohort in history, we will fail to meet the ambitious Sustainable Development Goals. Let us aim to contribute as best we can over the next three days.