Excellencies,

In this complex present, we hope that the commitment of societies and Member States with the best interest of the child, will be translated into a shared effort to make Latin America and the Caribbean a place where children grow and develop knowing and feeling that freedom is not an enemy of security, that social justice is not opposed to the fight against impunity, that equity is not a restraint on economic development, nor do human rights and gender equality destroy ethics of human dignity, real democracy and the rule of law.

Excellencies,

Since the last time we saw each other, in this region of contrasts and challenges, we continue to walk the path towards equality, which is neither linear nor unhindered; that it is not a guaranteed success in advance, nor does it exempt us from being innovative in our ways of thinking and acting, especially in these turbulent times where confusion seems to win the game of dreams and steal children’s childhood.

Although, we have reasons to be optimistic!

After Cuba, 7 countries and territories have eliminated the vertical transmission of HIV/AIDS. 10 countries have passed laws that prohibit physical and humiliating punishment. This year we have exceeded one million individual donors, which commits us as UNICEF to continue working tirelessly so that the rights of the child are not only legal but real, everywhere, “leaving no child behind”.

We have reasons to be optimistic. But we also have the responsibility to be realistic.

In Latin America and the Caribbean:

- one child dies every 3 minutes
- only 6 out of 10 children receive education in early childhood.
- 11 million adolescents are out of high school.
• the region registers the second rate of global adolescent pregnancies
• 6.3 million migrant children, who flee from poverty, discrimination or violence, are often caught in the risks of pilgrimage, the inclemency of borders or the marginalization of returnees.
• 1 out of every 2 children is subjected to corporal punishment in their home.
• 1.1 million adolescent girls are victims of sexual violence.
• The adolescent homicide rate is 5 times higher than the global average.

Excellencies,

In this context, cooperation programs are inserted, according to what was agreed for the period 2019-2023 between UNICEF and the Governments of Ecuador and Nicaragua.

Both Programmes are aligned with the respective National Development Plans (2017-2021), the 2030 Agenda, the Strategic Plan (2018-2021) and the Gender Equality Action Plan of UNICEF (2018-2021).

In the case of Ecuador, the Programme will concentrate its territorial interventions in 4 Provinces - Esmeralda, Imbabura, Manabí and Sucumbíos - due to the prevalence of violence affecting children, migratory dynamics and natural and anthropic threats. These models on education for peace, reduction of chronic malnutrition, risk management and local protection systems for children and adolescents will be consolidated, evaluated and scaled-up models.

The Programme proposes two articulated components: equity for children and children growing up without violence.

In terms of equity: UNICEF will contribute to the reduction of malnutrition and childhood obesity by promoting norms to regulate food labeling and the prohibition of selling non-nutritious food in schools. We will also provide technical assistance to the national plan for the reduction of chronic malnutrition, which affects 48.4% of indigenous children.

Strengthening accessible and quality health services, maternal and child health, prevention of adolescent pregnancy and attention to mental health in adolescents will be priority issues.
Regarding the right to education, UNICEF will promote a comprehensive early childhood development policy as well as accessible, relevant and quality initial education services, contributing to strengthening teacher’s competencies.

In secondary education, we will support the Government’s efforts to improve the quality of education and scale classroom mentoring systems in the areas that are lagging behind the most. It will support flexible educational modalities in order to incorporate adolescents who are out of school today.

In connection to children growing without violence component, we will support the Integral Protection System to reduce family separation, sexual abuse, physical punishment and children and adolescent’s institutionalization.

UNICEF will continue working with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to strengthen the protection services for migrant children, with an emphasis on unaccompanied children.

We will provide technical assistance to prevent and address sexual violence at school, while incorporating life skills and a culture of peace into the educational curriculum.

Within the UNDAF framework, “UN-Women, UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF” will jointly act to eradicate multidimensional poverty, reduce adolescent pregnancy, eradicate gender violence and reduce child malnutrition.

Three components are prioritized in Nicaragua’s CPD: survival and child development, equitable and quality education, and protection of children against violence.

In order to reduce maternal and infant mortality, improve nutrition, increase the coverage of early childhood services, prevent adolescent pregnancy, improve the quality of care for pregnant adolescents and promote positive parenting patterns, UNICEF will work with different Governmental areas, with children, their families and communities. This action will be focused on the most disadvantaged children under 6 in order to help them reach their full development and equal access to services, even in emergency situations.
In coordination with PAHO, WFP and UNFPA, UNICEF will provide technical assistance for the implementation of policies to improve the nutritional situation, as well as plans for the reduction of child and maternal mortality within the health sector.

In **education**, UNICEF will support the capacity building of teachers, technical and management teams to improve the quality of education at all levels. Key elements of this strategy rely on the contribution to update teacher’s scientific and methodological knowledge, emphasizing on the adequate use of technologies, violence prevention, gender equality and natural disaster risk management.

Innovative and flexible educational modalities will be proposed to expand educational coverage, especially in rural populations and to favor the permanence and reinsertion of adolescents in the education system.

Regarding the protection of children against violence, UNICEF - together with the World Movement for Children and other civil society organizations - will collaborate so that Governmental institutions guarantee that children and adolescents, especially the most vulnerable, will thrive in a protective environment. Taking into account the authorities responsibility to ensure the restitution of children’s rights against all types of violence, abuse or exploitation.

One of the main objective of UNICEF is fostering that national policies for the protection of children against violence be implemented in an equitable manner in all the municipalities of the country.

Excellencies,

We appreciate the enormous trust you place in UNICEF.

Your trust and support encourages us to imagine that maybe, the next time we meet, this region of contrasts and challenges, may have left behind heartbreaking inequalities, intolerable violence, unnecessary suffering.

Because we all know that when the world is doing well, boys and girls do better.

But when the world is doing poorly, boys and girls are doing much worse.
Thank you very much.