Mr. President,

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

Let me begin by expressing our deep respect for the staff of UNICEF and its partners in Yemen: They are making tremendous efforts in one of the world’s most challenging environments. The role of UNICEF and its partners in responding to cholera is crucial and impressive, despite the deficiencies pointed out by the evaluation. We thank UNICEF management for its thorough response to a discerning, and for that very reason useful evaluation. We call on UNICEF to swiftly and thoroughly implement the promised actions.

Epidemics in Yemen are primarily due to conflict and the collapse of public services. With continuing conflicts worldwide, the risk of epidemics, not only but particularly in Yemen, remains high and is projected to increase globally due to climate change, increasing population density and movement of people, among other factors. Let me thus focus on a few issues of wider relevance to the organization.

**Preparedness** is key, in Yemen and beyond. The issue of *timeliness* of response had also been raised regarding the Ebola response. We welcome UNICEF efforts to improve timeliness of responses, including by strengthening rapid response capacities and rolling out preparedness measures, as documented also in the June Humanitarian Action Report. These efforts must be accelerated and expanded and be comprehensive to accommodate not only preparedness for cholera but for all potential risks. We ask UNICEF to continue to report to the Board on lessons learnt, progress and challenges in this regard.

Why did the humanitarian system underestimate or fail to adequately act upon the risk and potential scale of a second outbreak of Cholera in Yemen after 2016? How has the new Emergency Preparedness Platform proven useful in practice, including in Yemen?

Another finding linked to timeliness is **imperfect coordination and collaboration with WHO**. Clear agreements on mandates, division of labor and the sharing and use of data are crucial. Plus, as the evaluation points out, agreements at HQ must be practical for country contexts, or operationalized in a given context *ahead* of a disaster. The management response remains thin and vague on the structural side of this finding, even if personality issues were involved. Have UNICEF and WHO reviewed roles and relevant agreements? How will the system globally improve and draw lessons? Could a systematic, early and coordinated lesson learnt exercise become the norm in this type of response? With a UN system aiming for more and better collaboration, these are important lessons that go beyond the cholera response in Yemen. Particularly, we request that UNICEF examine these lessons in relation to the relevant system-wide recommendations made after the Ebola crises.

Furthermore, the evaluation attests **insufficient capacities at various levels of the organization** and its partners. The need for proper and comprehensive training of local partners is crucial and we welcome UNICEF’s efforts in Yemen, but also in its humanitarian work in general, to strongly increase corresponding activities. We would appreciate clarification on UNICEF’s plans to build the capacity of partners over the coming years, including specific targets and steps to meet those targets. The evaluation also points to a lack of country office staff for monitoring and programme oversight, including capacities to
gather and adequately use data. Given the continuingly high prevalence of global emergencies as well as increasingly stretched capacities at HQ level, what are UNICEF’s plans for adapting staffing to current demands?

In addition, having strong country systems in place and channeling response through them in corporation with local authorities, where possible, remains fundamental to preventing large-scale outbreaks of epidemics. UNICEF’s work with Yemen’s health system was essential to reaching scale. In Yemen, challenges to strengthen local systems and infrastructure remain immense. Yet despite their more longer-term impact, we call on UNICEF to continue its efforts in system strengthening in the WASH and health sectors in particular.

Lastly, the evaluation shows that work remains to be done to make communication for development (C4D) an effective and integral part of UNICEF’s operations. We call on UNICEF to step up its efforts in improving the organization’s capacity for C4D, addressing also the need for context-specific research, as obviated by the evaluation, for example on the transmission context for cholera in Yemen. We also call for ensuring dedicated staff capacities in all regional offices, as pointed out by the management response itself.

We again thank, thank UNICEF staff in Yemen for their service to the Yemeni people. Until the parties responsible for this appalling human suffering at last live up to their responsibility to protect the people and end this conflict, the work of UNICEF and its partners is a vital life line.

Thank you