Thank you, Madam President, for your leadership — and your support in organizing this Annual Session during these extraordinary times.

And thank you to our Board members, calling in from all over the world. I hope you, your teams, families and loved ones are all safe, well and healthy.

The support of each and every one of you — as Board members, as representatives of your governments, and as part of the UNICEF family — is always appreciated and valued by our organization.

Our staff members across around the world know they can count on you to help them carry out their vital, lifesaving work, and support countries as they pursue their targets under the Sustainable Development Goals.

Like them, you understand that the world is not standing still for children.
Neither are we.

Our Annual Report for 2019 shows what we can accomplish when we join forces.

Last year, we reached 307 million children under age 5 with services to prevent malnutrition.

17 million out-of-school children with education.

18.3 million people with access to safe drinking water.

15.5 million with basic sanitation services.

51 million children with cash-transfer programmes.

21 million with birth registrations in 47 countries.

And we provided urgent humanitarian assistance in 281 emergencies in 96 countries.
As we continue with the mid-term review of our Strategic Plan and begin planting the seeds of our next Plan — including through early planning and consultation with the Board — we have an important opportunity. We can reimagine together how UNICEF will deliver even more results for children and young people. We look forward to your guidance, advice and stewardship.

This includes our important work to support the reform of the UN Development System.

Charlotte will brief you in more detail on our first-ever survey of our Country Representatives on this issue.

Nearly two-thirds of our Representatives believe that the roll-out of the reform has been largely positive. And they are identifying new opportunities for UN teams to work together — including on joint advocacy.

To carry out this important work, they have asked that we ensure continued access to governments, including at the highest level, and donors, as outlined in the Management and Accountability Framework.
At the same time, all of our future plans at UNICEF cannot help but be affected by our work to respond to COVID-19 and what we are learning along the way.

This is truly a global emergency — the effects of which will be felt for years to come. And one that will require significant global generosity — and UNICEF’s programming around the world — for decades.

Children’s health, education, protection, communities and futures — everything UNICEF fights for, day in and day out, is at risk.

As we have discussed before, COVID-19 brings into sharp relief the importance of everything UNICEF does as an organization.

Not only to support children and young people.

But to help their communities build stronger health, education, protection, nutrition, and water and sanitation system for the future.
Thanks to your unwavering support, we are staying and delivering for children and young people — and their communities — around the world.

The report we are discussing this week on UNICEF’s COVID-19 response details how we quickly adapted our programming and scaled-up to support children amidst the worst global pandemic in a century.

We are delivering lifesaving water, handwashing supplies, soap, and hygiene and medical kits to schools and clinics, and in shelters and camps.

Despite extreme market conditions, our Supply Division is maintaining a growing pipeline of vital supplies like gowns, masks, gloves, oxygen concentrators, and diagnostic tests. In total, we have completed more than 1,400 air shipments since March — including shipments of COVID-19 supplies to over 95 countries.

We are scaling-up our community engagement to promote simple but effective health interventions, like handwashing and physical distancing.
We are providing distance-learning for children who cannot access school — including using online, radio, television and mobile platforms — including for those living in refugee camps and in conflict areas.

We are providing mental health and psychosocial support for children and young people to support and protect their mental wellbeing.

We are helping governments protect women and girls from violence, abuse, teenage pregnancy and child marriage.

Across 70 countries so far, we are working with governments to rapidly expand social protections — like cash transfers — reaching over 40 million households so far, so they can better afford food, health care and other basic needs.

We are also adapting our programming for humanitarian contexts.

Our work in Yemen is a good example.
We are supporting health facilities and hospitals. We are delivering immunizations and water and hygiene kits. We are screening for and treating malnutrition. We are reaching people with information on how to stay safe. And we are working around the clock to bring in essential supplies — including airlifting testing kits.

We are also adapting our work to fit this complex environment.

We are pre-positioning supplies to ensure that we can deliver them where they are most needed — even if supply routes get cut off from the fighting.

We have engaged volunteers across the country to help us share information about COVID prevention.

And we have adapted our monitoring efforts to fit the context — including through the use of third-party monitors and phone interviews with beneficiaries to ensure we are reaching the right people with the right services.

Just as the pandemic has united the UNICEF family, it has also brought inter-agency collaboration to a new level. Showing how we can deliver as one.
From our work with the WHO and the IASC to shape contextualized health and mental health responses that fit the needs of each community.

To our joint work on supplies, including leading a UN-wide joint tender process to urgently access critical items.

To our work with WFP to deliver school-feeding programmes and provide malnutrition treatment and prevention. We are working together with governments to ensure that, when schools re-open, the most vulnerable students can access health and nutrition programmes. We want to reach 10 million children across 30 low-income or fragile countries. We are also simplifying and co-ordinating our work with WFP to procure, deliver and distribute ready-to-use food to reach even more children with this vital source of nutrition.

To our work with UNDP to bring together our social policy and analytical tools to ensure that the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable are at the heart of recovery efforts and any financial stimulus. This builds on our close collaboration in recent years on innovation — including our “Big Think Challenge,” which resulted in a number of innovative ideas that can help us reach more people around the world with services and support.
To our work in Argentina and Moldova, where we are working with UNFPA and WHO to ensure that data around COVID-19 surveillance and response systems are disaggregated by age, sex, pregnancy status and disability.

To our work with UNOPS to train health workers.

To our “blueprint” for joint action with UNHCR, launched in January, to expand refugee children’s access to protection, education, and water and sanitation services. Work that we are now adapting to help these children through the pandemic.

To our work with UN Women in Honduras, Papua New Guinea, Liberia and elsewhere on data and programming to address the rising threat of gender-based violence during the pandemic.

To our work with UN Women and ILO to develop guidance for employers on family-friendly policies and other good workplace practices.
And of course, to our work to draw more funding to our responses through a number of joint vehicles — including the Secretary General’s Multi-Partner Trust Fund for COVID-19, the Solidarity Fund launched by the UN Foundation and the Swiss Philanthropy Foundation, and of course, our Humanitarian Action Appeal for COVID-19, which is part of the Global Humanitarian Response Plan.

This work builds on all of our work to work with our UN partners to draw more public and private funding to the multiple needs of children and young people — including growing needs like skills and training through the Generation Unlimited partnership.

These are just a few examples of many. Our work to bring our agencies together in new and effective ways will continue.

Just as the pandemic is revealing new ways to work together to achieve results for children and young people, it is also revealing — in stark terms — a huge barrier to our dream of a better, fairer sustainable world.

Inequality.
Inequality exists in every society.

And COVID-19 has exposed this in a number of ways.

People and communities are not fighting COVID-19 on a level playing field.

Handwashing is critical to staying safe. But what about communities that lack running water? Or households that lack even a basic toilet?

Testing is essential. But what if you cannot afford a test — or there is no medical clinic nearby?

Masks and other forms of personal protective equipment shield people from infection. But in many poor areas, these vital tools are not even available to health workers, let alone children and families.

Physical distancing can keep you safe from COVID. But what about crowded slums? Refugee camps? Children on the move? How can they avoid infection when they share a tiny room or a tent with 12 or more other people?
Women under lockdown face an increased risk of abuse and violence at the hands of their partners — tragically witnessed by their children, who will come to see this behavior as normal.

Children are out of school, and many can benefit from online learning tools. But what about children who do not have access to the internet? Or a mobile phone to log in to classes? Or even electricity?

As the world begins to recover, inequality will reveal itself once again.

Businesses are closing. Jobs are disappearing. Opportunities in the informal economy — the economic engine of the developing world — are dwindling. People and countries — rich and poor alike — are under a crushing burden of debt.

Against this backdrop, governments will be under enormous fiscal pressure, and may not be able to support children’s most basic needs, like health, education, water and nutrition.
The poor will grow poorer. The ranks of the poorest will grow larger. And the ability of governments to support people — and the private sector to create new jobs — will weaken.

This represents a huge threat to social stability — and even peace.

As a global community looking ahead to lasting — and hopefully, sustainable and peaceful recovery — we are at a crossroads.

While we cannot end the virus, we can work to reduce its impacts — especially on children.

This is an opportunity to reimagine what the recovery will look like, and shape the world in a new, more equal way.

UNICEF has always done this. Through our programming, generations of staff members have fought to break down the stubborn barriers of poverty, distance, disaster and discrimination to reach those in greatest need.

We have always worked to level the playing field.
In fact, this week, we will be discussing our Gender Action Plan, detailing our ongoing work to ensure that girls and women have the same opportunities as boys and men. A number of countries now have national plans for adolescent health, including SRHR. And we will work with them to continue unlocking and promoting their rights to education and protection from all forms of violence.

Our work to support children with disabilities is another example. We are helping communities make services and facilities more accessible. We are scaling-up counselling and support. And we are helping schools develop innovative tools and approaches so children with disabilities can gain an education.

So UNICEF has always developed, deployed and invested in programmes and services that help “equalize” opportunities for children and young people.

Today, I would like to discuss with you four other equalizers. Areas that, if we get right, can help ensure that the recovery benefits all people, not just the lucky few.

**First** — we must maintain routine immunizations for all children.
As of last month, 96 immunization campaigns have been postponed — more than half in African countries.

From March to May, UNICEF typically would have made more than 700 shipments of vaccines. This year, we made just over half that amount — 391. And we expect shipments to decrease even further in the months ahead as postponements and lockdowns persist.

This could leave tens of millions of children at risk of preventable diseases like polio, measles, yellow fever, cholera, typhoid and tetanus.

A Johns Hopkins\(^1\) study in the *Lancet* showed a potential increase of 6,000 more children dying each day because of the suspension of health services and malnutrition.

In development terms, this represents a set-back of one-and-a-half decades of hard-won progress.

\(^1\) *Early estimates of the indirect effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on maternal & child mortality in low and middle-income countries*, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Policy, Lancet, May 12, 2020
Please help us turn up the volume on this urgent need, and increase the availability and affordability of vaccines for every child. Just one example to illustrate the effects — immunizations.

This becomes even more urgent as we look ahead to the development of a vaccine for COVID-19.

Once it is developed, the vaccine must be equally distributed and delivered to all people — no matter who they are, where they live, or their ability to pay.

For example, we are a proud partner of the Access to COVID-19 Tools initiative — “ACT” — to accelerate access to diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines.

UNICEF is contributing our experience and expertise to these global efforts. From incentives to ensure sufficient manufacturing capacity for COVID-vaccines. To innovative financing mechanisms to ensure that funding for these vaccines is available for lower-income countries. To the logistics and supply chains required to deliver them.
In responding to a crisis that has revealed the inequalities of the world, we must not perpetuate these inequalities as we roll-out a vaccine, or even diagnostic tests or protective equipment.

**The second equalizer is education.**

Over one billion children are out of school because of the pandemic.

This comes at a cost to their education and futures.

But the costs do not end there. Decades of experience and research have taught us that when children are out of school for prolonged periods of time, their exposure to physical, emotional and sexual violence increases. Their mental health and psychosocial development deteriorate. They are more vulnerable to child labour and less likely to break out of the cycle of poverty.

In fact, for the most marginalized, missing out on school — even if only for a couple of weeks — can lead to negative outcomes that last a lifetime. Children who lack education have a lower life expectancy and poorer health.
So re-opening schools — and doing so safely — is imperative.

Some countries are now easing lockdowns, and may see schools re-open progressively. UNICEF, UNESCO, the World Bank and the World Food Programme are now supporting governments as they safely re-open schools.

At the same time, we must remember those children and young people who are out of learning altogether — who have no access to schools or learning at all. This includes girls, children with disabilities, and refugee and migrant children.

Because even before COVID, the world was facing a serious learning crisis.

One in five school-aged children is out of school.

An estimated 617 million children and adolescents around the world are unable to read or perform basic math — even though two-thirds of them are in school.

In low and middle-income countries, more than half of all children are unable to read by the age of 10.
And in sub-Saharan Africa, 87 per cent of children cannot read or understand a simple story by the end of primary school.

For those children who have little or no access to education at all — who contend with lack of access and poor-quality learning — COVID-19 is yet another barrier to equal opportunities.

Under the pandemic, the gap between the children who have technology at home and are supported by their parents and teachers, and those who do not enjoy these assets, has never been more glaring.

In 71 countries, less than half the population has access to the Internet. In sub-Saharan Africa, that ratio drops to less than a quarter.

As we re-emerge from the pandemic, we must re-imagine better education systems, and make bold decisions and investments to improve access to online learning and address the learning crisis for all children and young people.

This includes skills and training so they can get a job.
By 2030, there will be 3.5 billion children and youth below the age of 25. The current quality and levels of access to education and skills development are insufficient — we must do much, much more.

We are now gathering partners around these intersecting needs through a new initiative called “Learning Unlimited.”

We want to support access to quality learning and skills for every child and young person — anywhere, anytime. Especially the skills they need to gain a job or open a business of their own.

We want to scale-up digital solutions and greater connectivity to reach every child. The goal is to have 500 million children and young people engaged in digital learning by the end of 2021 — and 3.5 billion children and young people by 2030.

To do this, we want to connect every school in the world to the internet.

Through the GIGA partnership, we are working with the ITU to map the location and connectivity status of over 800,000 schools in 25 countries. We hope to have the first million schools mapped by the end of this year.
We are also scaling-up world-class digital tools so children and young people can gain a quality education, no matter where they live.

For example, we have joined forces with Microsoft and Cambridge University on what we call the “learning passport.” It is an online platform that gives children and youth access to their school curriculum online, wherever they are — including textbooks and instructions in their national language.

Throughout, we must focus on enhancing learning outcomes — not just foundational skills like reading, writing and math, but digital and entrepreneurial skills that young people can carry with them as they enter the workforce or start a business of their own.

Now is the time to turn the promise of distance learning into reality, and put quality, education, skills and training into the hands of every child and young person.

The third equalizer is water.
COVID-19 has dramatically exposed the weaknesses in water availability in communities around the world.

Forty per cent of the global population does not have access to clean water and sanitation facilities.

How can we ask people to stay safe through handwashing if they lack a reliable source of water in their communities — let alone vital supplies like soap?

Governments have a role to play, including by investing in stronger water infrastructure for the future for all communities. And through the Sanitation and Water For All initiative, we have joined world leaders to issue a call to action — five concrete measures that decision-makers can take to improve the WASH response around COVID-19.

This must also include bold national commitments to address climate change, which threatens the future of water supplies around the world.

But our work must also include greater private sector involvement and innovation.
I have been speaking to CEOs of leading multinationals as part of the COVID-19 response.

They are stepping-up with offers of funding and contributions in kind.

They are helping us strengthen and speed-up the supply chains for critical items like soap and sanitizer.

They are helping us scale-up innovations for communities in need. Through our partnership with LIXIL, for example, we have designed a low-cost, low water-flow handwashing device that can help more households fulfill this basic need.

And we have launched an initiative with the World Economic Forum, WHO and the World Bank to gather more partners, ideas and funding around the need for greater hygiene.

But we also want to work with businesses to help us invest in stronger water systems in the poorest and most disadvantaged communities. We must help governments build and maintain water, sanitation, and hygiene infrastructure. Not only as a basic need, but as an essential disease-prevention measures.
As Member States, please help us advocate for this collaboration in the boardrooms of business, as well as the halls of political power.

*And the fourth equalizer is to better support mental health and psychosocial programming for children and young people.*

The mental health effects of the pandemic — from lockdowns, to school closures, to increased exposure to online bullying and abuse — will reverberate for years to come.

We are seeing increased depression rates and anxiety. And children and adolescents are at increased risk of suicide — including from isolation, and worries related to poverty, violence or disease.

Reports from several countries indicate calls and texts to crisis and abuse hotlines have quadrupled in some cases since the lockdown.
As we support children’s physical health, let us support government efforts to invest in their mental health, too. From online counselling and helplines, and tools for caregivers to support children’s wellbeing. To designating social service workers as “essential.”

But as we tackle inequality in the communities in which we work, we are committed to doing the same here at UNICEF.

As part of our ongoing work to improve our organizational culture, we have made good efforts on non-discrimination, diversity and inclusion.

Our work to end all forms of harassment and abuse — including abuse of power — in every UNICEF workplace and in the communities we work — continues to move forward.

These discussions have created a new spirit of dialogue at UNICEF. People who have long felt unable to speak up are making their voices heard on various issues around harassment and discrimination.
We want to use this new spirit as a springboard to address another challenge: racism and discrimination in our UNICEF workplace.

The recent protests against racism and intolerance we see around the world are being echoed by our UNICEF staff.

Some staff members have told me about feeling discriminated against in our UNICEF workplace. Others have spoken up about hurtful and disrespectful comments or actions that betray our core values.

We will not accept this.

Two weeks ago, we launched an internal Task Team on Discrimination. We want to provide an open space for free and safe conversation for all staff members to make their voices heard on this critical issue.

And we want to enact new measures to ensure that we end, once and for all, the scourge of racism in every UNICEF office.
As Board Members, I know that you all share our deepest gratitude and respect for everything that our UNICEF staff members do, year and in and year out. And you are as committed as we are to giving them the tools and resources they need to continue carrying out this vital work.

We will end discrimination in the UNICEF workplace, and we look forward to your ideas and advice on this issue.

We also need your input on our financial picture.

We are now assessing the full impact of COVID-19 on our current and future income estimates. We are being realistic about the need to revise some of our work given any potential downturn in resources. And we look forward to providing you with a more detailed report on this in September.

But in the meantime, we are seeing a decline in regular resources — on both the public and private sides. A situation that COVID-19 may make far worse.
While we are faring better than other agencies, this is an important concern — especially as we require these resources to respond to rapidly evolving needs for both COVID and non-COVID programming.

Flexible, unearmarked resources are critical to everything we do at UNICEF.

We understand that the economic downturn is hitting both the public and private sectors hard.

But it is for this very reason that UNICEF’s work is so important. Governments will continue requiring our support — indeed, global support and generosity — for years to come, for the recovery.

To make up for the current shortfall of regular resources, we need funding support in a few specific areas:

- To implement a new platform for decision-makers to access real-time, on-demand data;
• To develop a new online tool to help our partners and National Committees identify companies and foundations in every country to help us;

• To maintain the momentum on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse in the countries in which UNICEF works; and

• To help UNICEF continue our “culture change” journey — including training and tools so we can end discrimination and racism across our organization, once and for all.

At the same time, we urge all governments to continue prioritizing funding in specific programmatic areas — like digital connectivity for every school and every community…water, sanitation and hygiene for all…and mental health programming to support children in this critical area.

While we hold the line on the approved institutional budget, we are also committed to finding more efficiencies across every corner of our organization.
We have already saved millions in airline and eco-efficiency costs. PFP has saved nearly $1.7 million through joint procurement processes with other agencies. Last year, our Supply Division achieved $363.3 million in savings thanks to market influencing, and strategic and local procurement. The Global Shared Services Centre has saved an additional $4 million in global transaction costs over the last two years. And we continue to streamline management and HR processes, saving thousands of staff days per year.

This work will continue, so we can focus every available resource not on processes and paperwork — but on children.

As our partnerships teams continue locking-down more commitments from our public and private partners, we are also proposing the creation of a revolving Working Capital Fund. This would be an important opportunity to provide much-needed flexible funds to address programmatic needs as they arise.

And we are in discussions with the World Bank and other international financial institutions, as well as other public and private partners and individual donors, to summon more funding to support children’s needs throughout this crisis and as communities “build back better.”
While the global financial future is uncertain, we cannot afford to stand still. We will continue seeking out new ways to serve and fund children’s needs, even in the current volatile operating environment.

In many ways, our ability to meet this great challenge demonstrates our strength and agility as an organization, and where we need to take UNICEF in the years ahead.

We must support countries through and beyond the recovery.

But what will a “new normal” look like?

Will it be more of the same? A world riven by inequality and injustice? Where some children gain an education, while others do not? Where some can survive a pandemic because they have access to supplies and water, while others do not? Where the cost of even the most basic preventative measures — a vaccine, good nutrition and hygiene — can be borne by some, but not others?

At UNICEF, we are already re-imagining our programming and services for children and young people.
But we need your help. With your support, we believe UNICEF can shape a better, more equal world in which every child and young person gets the support and help they need.

As we begin this session, and plan for our next Strategic Plan, let us make sure that equality — equality of access to services and equality of opportunity — is embedded throughout every aspect of our work.

Thank you.

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