UNICEF Executive Board  
9 September 2014  

Statement under Agenda item 1  

Statement by Peter Versegji  
Minister Counsellor  
of Australia to the United Nations  

(Check against delivery)  

Thank you Mr President, and thank you Executive Director for your comments.  

UNICEF remains a valued and longstanding partner of Australia and we expect to provide around $35m in core funding to UNICEF in the 2014-15 financial year. We welcome our close ongoing exchange and were particularly pleased by the visit of Ms Yoka Brandt, UNICEF’s Deputy Executive Director, to Australia in late June.  

The visit provided an opportunity to learn more about UNICEF’s engagement with our development partners, especially in the Asia Pacific, and for us to deliver some key messages on Australia’s new aid policy and performance framework, which underscores the importance of delivering prosperity and stability in the Asia Pacific region, engaging the private sector and being able to demonstrate better the results we’re achieving together.  

Mr President,  

As we approach the 25th anniversary of the Convention of the Rights of the Child, we reaffirm our commitment to protect and promote the rights and interests of children, in our development efforts, through our humanitarian support and during conflict.
Natural disasters and conflict wipe out hard won development gains and stall development progress, often for generations. Children affected by these crises feel the impacts for the rest of their lives, but we know that early responses that protect children from violence and exploitation, that assure their health and nutrition and that preserve their access to education will help mitigate these impacts and speed recovery for their whole communities - the focus on children is critical if we want to have any hope for sustained recovery. And UNICEF is a core partner in this work.

We thank Ms Brandt for her comments at yesterday's Security Council Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict, in which she highlighted the tragedy that too often playgrounds are becoming battlefields. We must maintain our efforts to end the recruitment of children by non-state armed groups, to protect schools, students and teachers during conflict and to ensure accountability for those who violate children's rights during conflict.

Australia is deeply concerned at the increasing complexity, magnitude and number of humanitarian situations around the world, and at the grave violations of children's human rights in multiple crisis situations. We must consider whether the current humanitarian landscape represents a shift, perhaps permanently, to a new norm. And we need to ask "Are our current approaches, structures and responsibilities still relevant, effective and efficient?" We encourage UNICEF to be bold, and innovative as it tackles this question, and we stand ready to be a partner in this process.

We welcome UNICEF's already strong leadership in innovation, particularly in the context of the World Humanitarian Summit. Innovation will be critical as we look for ways to improve our early warning, response and recovery approaches.

Mr President,

There is a need to better integrate humanitarian and development fields, breaking down silos between development and humanitarian funding and expertise. We know that rapid and effective humanitarian responses contribute to development progress and that development that builds resilient, stable and inclusive communities in turn helping
to lessen the impact of disasters and reducing the likelihood of conflict. We encourage UNICEF to explore ways to coordinate and where appropriate, integrate, its humanitarian and development activities to maximize impact.

Australia welcomes the findings of the Evaluation of UNICEF’s Cluster Lead Agency Role in Humanitarian Action. We commend UNICEF on the work it has done to improve its global leadership of clusters, including the establishment of the Global Cluster Coordination Unit. We are pleased with the results that the GCCU has yielded in its first year in improving global coordination and leadership in UNICEF’s cluster operations.

Australia is deeply concerned about the prevalence of gender-based violence in humanitarian contexts. We are strongly supportive of UNICEF and the UNFPA’s co-lead of the Gender Based Violence sub-Cluster. Australia has contributed a total of $1.2 million over the past two years to the Gender-Based Violence sub-cluster, and we are pleased that the report finds that thematic coverage within the cluster has improved.

Mr President

I'd like to acknowledge the work of UNICEF staff on the ground who are carrying out vital work in often very challenging and dangerous environments. We encourage UNICEF to prioritise building and maintaining human resource capacity and to find way to make sure the fund can draw quickly and effectively on this capacity when most needed.

As a global community, we are facing serious challenges in the humanitarian system. Australia is encouraged that UNICEF is preparing to face these challenges head on and engaging in frank discussion on how to adapt to the changing landscape. We stand ready to support UNICEF meet these challenges.

Thank you.