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STATEMENT

BY

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AMBASSADOR AND PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
OF THE REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

ON BEHALF OF

THE AFRICAN GROUP DURING THE
UNICEF SECOND REGULAR SESSION 2014,
SEPTEMBER 9TH – 12TH 2014

New York
9th September 2014
Mr. President,

I thank you for giving me the floor. I have the honor of delivering this statement on behalf of the African Group. The Group continues to affirm its confidence in your leadership and wishes to thank you for your skillful steering of the work of this Executive Board. We assure you and the Bureau of our continued support throughout our engagements.

Mr. President,

The African Group thanks the Executive Director, Mr. Anthony Lake, for his opening statement highlighting UNICEF’s work in support of children in emergencies. We commend him and his team for their tireless work and commitment towards children. The African Group supports UNICEF’s initiatives on children in conflicts and natural disasters as well as those in other disadvantaged and marginalized circumstances. The Group commends the Executive Director for his insightful remarks on integrating long-term development and short-term emergency response. We welcome the organizational changes at UNICEF aimed at better integration and efficiencies. We believe this will ensure resilience and enhance long-term development.

Mr. President,

The African Group is heartened by the Executive Director’s call for renewed commitment to children’s future to mark the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

This anniversary presents an opportunity for the celebration of achievements in improving the welfare and wellbeing of children around the world. Africa has made significant achievements in the reduction of under-five mortality, percentage of underweight children, number of out of school children as well as increased access to drinking water and sanitation. The anniversary equally calls for reflection on challenges, the unfinished business and the way forward into the future. It is time for the international community to double and reinvigorate efforts to innovate and respond more effectively to children’s needs.
Mr. President,

This Executive Board session comes at an opportune time, with the much-anticipated adoption of the proposed Sustainable Development Goals and the Post – 2015 Development Agenda. It is expected that this agenda will include targets to end preventable deaths of all children, and hunger and malnutrition and reinforce the principles of quality education for all. The success of the Post-2015 Development Agenda in Africa will, among other factors, depend on effectively empowering children and communities to demand results in key areas of their fundamental existence. The achievement of these goals would require investing more in programmes and interventions that benefit children, while building capacities to effectively deliver, and strengthen social protection networks of children.

Mr. President,

UNICEF is uniquely positioned to be a champion of these goals by strengthening partnerships with Africa in realizing the promise and future of her children. Africa is the world’s youngest continent. 40% of her population is under 15 years and 200 million are between the ages of 15 and 24. Africa is also home to 6 of the 10 fastest growing economies. These statistics demonstrate the great promise of the continent’s children.

It is worth noting that 53% of UNICEF programme expenditure is in Africa with a quarter of that going to emergencies. With the rise in number, intensity and impact of these emergencies, UNICEF confronts new challenges to adapt fast and effectively. The African Group has confidence in UNICEF’s ability to respond accordingly to this changing scenario. We take this opportunity to recognize the commitment of UNICEF staff working in difficult circumstances in danger zones. The African Group is encouraged by the work of the Supply Division in sending a record amount of medical supplies to West Africa to fight the Ebola outbreak and, in Central Africa Republic, distributing more than half a million mosquito nets to protect families from malaria.

In spite of this, with the Ebola crisis continuing to spread throughout West Africa, we must pause and ask ourselves why the international
community has been caught flat-footed after previously grappling with HIV and AIDS, and SARS? What lessons have we learnt?

The Ebola crisis brings into sharp focus a failure of the international community to invest in systems capable of handling the ever-increasing complex emergencies of our times. More than 3000 people have been infected, more than 1900 dead and WHO projects of tens of thousands more infections and deaths before the scourge is brought under control. There is dire need for proactive interventions in the areas of prevention, to avoid the ravages witnessed when ad hoc reactive measures are used instead. The funding required to build new treatment centers, avail vaccines, hire more staff and provide safe burial for victims has fallen woefully below expectation. Have we failed to appreciate the transnational threat of these emergencies? Do we not realize that none of us is safe and that we need to step up our intergovernmental and international support to all actors in order to stem the tide of this emergency? The African group is hopeful that this time, the test of multilateralism, international solidarity and national capacity will be met with more robust responses than has been seen before.

Mr. President,

While commending the Executive Director's remarks on the Strengthening Humanitarian Action initiative, we recognize that in Africa, the gap between the demands of crises and ability to respond is keenly felt. As you noted in your remarks at the Annual Session, during the Special Focus Session on Africa, the gap between Africa and the world needs to be addressed in a forceful and transparent manner. The African Group remains committed to work with UNICEF and other development partners to bridge the equity gap, thereby contributing to attaining meaningful accelerated, sustainable development for children and the most vulnerable.

The African Group commends the inclusion of important themes in the agenda, among them, the synthesis report on nutrition programmes and UNICEF cluster lead agency role in humanitarian action and UNICEF programmes to protect children. The African Group remains fully engaged and ready to work with UNICEF to
move forward the agenda of realizing the full potential of children. We look forward to fruitful deliberations and concrete proposals in this regard.

Mr. President,

As we anticipate the 25th anniversary of the CRC, the Africa Group recognizes UNICEF’s leading role in championing the rights of children by strengthening its policy, data, research and focus on equity. In the spirit of continued partnership for the welfare of children, the African group would like to propose the following:

1. UNICEF should define a Comprehensive Strategic Plan of Action for engaging on matters related to Africa’s children with a clear objective of accelerating results.
2. Increased collaboration between UNICEF and the African Union with the goal of ending stunting, malnutrition, protection of children in conflict, birth registrations and child marriage and the scourge of preventable killer diseases.
3. Further refining of the Results Framework, taking into account the Post–2015 Development Agenda and its ambitious focus on eradication of overall poverty and the welfare of children.
4. Improved technical cooperation including evidence based policy advocacy and better development programming and results-oriented delivery, while building resilience and national capacity to better respond to humanitarian emergencies.

Mr. President,

In conclusion, we reiterate that in line with the current global agenda for development, for the sustainable realization of the future we want, children and the most vulnerable must remain at the center of any development agenda. Africa remains highly engaged and optimistic that we can deliver accelerated, inclusive and equitable development for the welfare of children. The African Group commends UNICEF for their work and will continue to support the organization as it adapts to new ways of doing business to execute its mandate.

I thank you.