Today I would like to discuss the growing number of humanitarian crises facing our organization and, most importantly, children and their families all over our world.

I could begin by sounding yet another alarm about these crises. But there is already a cacophony of alarms that have been ringing about them for years.

It’s not that the world is not hearing or heeding these alarms, or is deaf to the cries of those suffering. It’s not that people cannot see for themselves the carnage these crises have wrought. Newspapers, television screens, computers, mobile devices — our windows to the world are filled with a never-ending scroll of bad news and devastation.
But the overwhelming number and intensity of these crises mean that watchfulness may be giving way to weariness. Because despite the world’s attention and efforts, the news grows worse, not better, each day — the list of crises grows longer, not shorter. While some emergencies capture that moment’s public attention, others do not. Even those that do so are soon pushed out by the next crisis. And as the Secretary General indicated last month, the world — including governments and the United Nations — seems incapable of preventing or resolving conflicts or even adequately dealing with their consequences.

As the list grows longer, attention becomes aversion. Indifference overtakes outrage. Indignation fades to a sense of impotence — a sense that nothing can stem the tide.

Perhaps emboldened by this indifference, parties to conflict — including in some cases, official government forces — are ignoring international humanitarian law, and engaging in acts that result in massive civilian casualties.
The numbers of civilian deaths in these conflicts can be numbing. In Iraq, an estimated 130,000 civilians have been killed since 2003. In DRC, over five million have died as a result of the armed conflict there since 1998. Sri Lanka’s civil war claimed almost 100,000 lives. The Syrian crisis has claimed an estimated 191,000 lives between March 2011 and April 2014, and almost certainly many more. In Gaza, over 500 children have died in the conflict since July. While consolidated estimates of civilian casualties from the conflicts in Central African Republic, South Sudan or Afghanistan are difficult to obtain, we know they number well into the many, many thousands. And, for the first time since the Second World War, the number of refugees has topped 50 million.

No matter how overwhelmed we are by the scope of these and so many other losses, we must not ever forget that each life lost — each future extinguished, whether by conflict, disease or disaster — is a personal tragedy. A heartbreaking loss for a family. And a singular shadow cast over our collective hopes for the future.

But the reverse is also true. Each life saved is exactly that — a child who will survive and, with the right support, go on to contribute to his community and country.
A child suffering in a war, a disaster, an epidemic, a famine or a drought doesn’t know — doesn’t care — about the wider global context…about whether we are gaining ground or losing ground in meeting global challenges. He’s looking for immediate support…help…and the fulfillment of his rights to health, protection and opportunity.

This imperative — to save and nurture every child we can, whatever the context — drives those UNICEF staff members, and our partners, who continue to serve in some of the most dangerous and difficult places in the world.

Those who overcame daunting access and operational challenges to provide more than 16 million people with access to safe water in Syria — including across conflict lines — and to over 100,000 refugees at the camps in Za’atari and Azraq in Jordan.

Those in Central African Republic, who have delivered therapeutic care to 17,000 children suffering from severe acute malnutrition this year — and measles vaccines to over 700,000 children under five since last year.
Those in South Sudan, who have scaled up nutrition services and reached over 53,000 children with therapeutic care since the beginning of the crisis, and who are seizing every opportunity to deliver vaccines, psychosocial support, emergency education kits, and access to water for tens of thousands of children — including many outside UN protection sites.

Those in Iraq, who continue to find creative ways to provide children with water, hygiene items, food packages and vaccines, sometimes in locations where receiving assistance seemed impossible.

Those in the Philippines, who helped restore access to safe water for more than 200,000 people within a week of Typhoon Haiyan, and who continue to strengthen water networks in rural and urban areas alike.

Or our colleagues in Gaza, helping children and families cope with the trauma of the violence they’ve witnessed, while trying to cope with it themselves.

The passion of our staff members — and their personal anguish at the devastation caused by these crises — is palpable. We admire and applaud their commitment — their competence — their courage.
They are neither deterred nor discouraged by the multiple — and multiplying — crises darkening our world. Their response is to go to work and find practical ways to make a difference.

Yet their ability to do so is hampered not only by the immensity of today’s emergencies, but by their complexity. Because so often emergencies are caused not by a single factor, but by a toxic mixture of them — competition for scarce resources…the impacts of climate change…economic injustices…divided societies and the fraying of civil compacts that once fostered social cohesion…irresponsible governance and corruption…and aggressive ambition. All long-term, endemic challenges that resist easy answers.

Over time, and with each new humanitarian catastrophe, these complex, intersecting roots entwine and tighten. The international community cannot cut just one strand of this Gordian knot — we must slash through them all. In a sense, that is what the post-2015 agenda is all about.

But our immediate priority must be to address the current carnage — and meet our global responsibilities…all of us…each of us.
Responding to emergencies is a responsibility that belongs primarily to the governments and societies of the countries directly affected by crises.

But it’s also a responsibility belonging to other governments — those who can use their influence, expertise and resources to help countries not only find and insist on peace and respond to conflicts or natural disasters, but to put in place measures to prevent future ones…or at least mitigate their impact on children and their families.

It’s a responsibility belonging to the Security Council and the UN General Assembly.

And it’s a responsibility belonging to humanitarian organizations like ours.

Last year, UNICEF and its partners responded to 289 humanitarian situations in 83 countries. These included persistent humanitarian crises resulting from conflict and instability — Syria, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Afghanistan — as well as natural disasters in places like the Philippines. It also included working with others to provide assistance to the millions of refugees — about half being children — fleeing deadly situations, facing uncertain futures.
And just last month, UNICEF shipped 1,000 metric tonnes of life-saving supplies for children affected by crises around the world — the largest one-month supply operation in our organization’s history.

We must also consider the new crises confronting us in Ukraine and potentially in Somalia, which is facing drought and rising numbers of malnourished children.

Or most urgently, the Ebola emergency. This is very, very serious — far more than we hear about in the press. It has quickly become UNICEF’s top priority, despite other competing emergencies. In affected countries, Ebola is not only a health crisis in itself. It is also having and will have serious effects on vaccination programmes and under-five mortality; on education; on protection; on nutrition and other areas of child welfare in affected countries.

But we know how to defeat it. We know what to do. We will defeat it. The question is how long it will take and at what human cost. So there must not be panic. In this emergency, one of the enemies to fear is fear itself.
Except for a few organizations — such as Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) — the world has been far too slow to act. UNICEF is continuing to work with our partners to inform and educate communities, equip health facilities, support infection control and protect health workers battling this disease. But it has not been — and is not now — nearly enough. We are working hard to rapidly scale up our response in every way possible.

I repeat: this is a global challenge, requiring an urgent, massive and practical response from all of us. Our primary responsibility must be to help governments and community workers in affected countries on the ground dealing with this crisis. Heroes like Josephine Finda Sellu, a deputy nurse matron in Sierra Leone profiled recently in the New York Times1. Despite losing 15 of her nurses to Ebola, Josephine remains on the front line of the battle against this disease.

But as we take action against Ebola and other emergencies — as we work to support children and families in desperate need around the world — we cannot ignore the fact that we are increasingly stretched as an organization.

Our staff is stretched. We’re being forced constantly to shift them from one critical area to another, as we scramble to cover gaps in new and chronic emergencies alike. This is particularly worrying because — by all accounts — we can expect to see more people affected by humanitarian crises in the years to come.

Staff members across the organization — especially in non-family duty stations — are not only stretched; they are stressed. They’re working in extremely difficult, dangerous conditions on issues that seem intractable, living in isolated compounds, seeing wars destroy what they helped build.

In particular, we too seldom recognize the anguish of our national staff, when they see their beloved homelands battered by natural calamities or fatal diseases — or, worse, torn apart by conflicts.

Our staff must be as safe as possible. A central priority is to keep our staff — national and international alike — “secure amidst insecurity,” in the world’s most dangerous contexts. Especially when the UN is increasingly targeted and our resources to protect them are being strained.
Conflicts also force our staff to walk a thin line: both to strongly advocate for children’s rights in all contexts, and to do so in ways wholly consistent with our non-political mandate and tradition — yet often in highly political contexts.

And of course, there is the factor that fuels but also limits our ability to respond to all these challenges — resources.

We’re leaving no stone unturned to meet UNICEF’s corporate commitment to children in emergencies. However, despite a 62 per cent growth in our income for emergencies in 2013, the escalating demand for resources — both human and financial — is fast outstripping our current capacities.

With our Emergency Programme Fund, or EPF — supported by core resources — nearly depleted this year by requirements in underfunded emergencies such as those in CAR and South Sudan, I have had to allocate discretionary regular resources to scale up our response to the Ebola emergency, with more to come. Similarly, we’ve been mobilizing staff throughout UNICEF to surge capacities for emergency responses not only in West Africa but also in the Middle East.
This approach of “robbing Peter to pay Paul” is not sustainable. We cannot continue with this stop-gap approach without it negatively affecting our long-term development work — particularly in fragile states where tomorrow’s emergencies may lie in wait if we fail to take steps today to strengthen institutions and build the resilience of families and communities…if we fall short, in other words, in our development mission.

We must always remain committed to our development mission…to saving children in emergencies…to serving our universal mandate in high, middle and low-income countries…and to improving our management practices. Because of the emergencies, it gets harder to do so.

At the most fundamental level, these pressures and management challenges raise a question about UNICEF itself…about who we are. To what degree are we a humanitarian organization…and to what degree a development organization?
This question has been at the heart of our history from the start. When the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund was created in 1946, it was charged specifically with helping children in the aftermath of WWII — bringing them, in the words of our first Executive Director, Maurice Pate, “milk and some fat, to be spread on bread.” In fact, he only agreed to the job on the condition that UNICEF would help the children of “ex-enemy” countries. Thus began our long tradition of not politicizing humanitarian aid — of saving and improving children’s lives as a moral and practical obligation, never as a political tool.

Throughout the 1950s and onwards — especially under the leadership of Jim Grant through his “child survival revolution” — UNICEF moved closer to becoming primarily a longer-term development agency.
Our name change in 1953 presaged this: the word “emergency” was dropped, and we became, simply, the United Nations Children’s Fund. A small change, perhaps — but also one that reflected a growing global recognition that responding during emergency contexts wasn’t enough. That keeping children healthy, protected and educated in all contexts offers the best path forward for countries climbing the development ladder, with each generation assuming responsibility for the generations to come.

Today, it’s time to make a strategic decision to stop the pendulum from swinging between the two. Emergencies and development are inherently linked. So rather than balancing long-term development and short-term emergency response, we should be integrating the two, without sacrificing either.

We can, should — and indeed, are — beginning to do so: conceptually, programmatically and organizationally.

Conceptually, we’re working to change our mind-set. We cannot keep “development” and “emergencies” in separate boxes. Humanitarian action must be designed to support not only recovery, but also long-term development. And the other way around — long-term development efforts must be built around the goal of helping countries prepare for, withstand, recover from, and prevent humanitarian crises in the future.
And so *programmatically*, as we respond to emergencies, we’re also putting in place systems and tools that will benefit people over the long term.

Following Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, UNICEF has been working with our many partners and donors to “build back better” — not just restoring what was there before, but putting in place new systems that can improve the health and well-being of those communities today and tomorrow.

Working with Philippine authorities and other organizations, UNICEF helped equip 50 health centres with solar-powered refrigerators, to keep vaccines at the correct temperature, even in case of emergency, and provided training to local health care workers to manage the cold chain. We’ve also supported better, safer designs for schools that can withstand floods…and the use of better pipes to protect water systems in case of a future disaster.

And in eastern Congo, the voucher fairs supported by UNICEF helped people displaced by the conflict start businesses, and strengthen local economies over the long term.

When done right, humanitarian assistance is about more than immediate, short-term response. It’s *inherently* about development.
And development is inherently about investing in children. Vaccinations, treatment for malnutrition, child protection services, education and WASH facilities are not only investments in keeping children alive today — they’re investments in the future development of countries. For without these efforts, we risk losing generations of children who will grow up not only unprepared but unwilling to assume the tasks of recovery and reconciliation. Hence the No Lost Generation campaign, dedicated to supporting the children of Syria, who, we hope, will one day return and re-build that shattered society.

But just as humanitarian action supports development, development must strengthen a country’s ability to withstand — and recover from — a future emergency, by addressing underlying vulnerabilities. The investments that Ethiopia and Niger made in community-based health and nutrition programmes following previous droughts helped many more children survive the 2012 drought than would otherwise have been the case.

Indeed, a DFID study in Kenya found that, over a 20 year period, every $1 invested in long-term disaster resilience would result in $2.90 gained in reduced humanitarian spending and overall development gains. Almost a threefold benefit.
UNICEF is taking these lessons to heart. For example, our multi-hazard risk assessments in Nepal — a country prone to natural disasters including landslides, floods, droughts and earthquakes — are resulting in increased local budget allocations for disaster and climate-change related measures to reduce risk.

And organizationally, as you’ll recall from our last session, we’ve made structural changes in UNICEF’s Headquarters to better integrate our humanitarian action with our long-term development goals, and more closely align immediate actions with those aimed at longer-term results. This includes bringing together our Office of Emergency Programmes and Programme Division under one Deputy Executive Director and creating a new Deputy Executive Director position — now filled, I’m happy to say, by Omar Abdi — to help drive more efficient accountability for results, and improve our reporting in support of our regional and country offices.

But this is just a start; much more must be done. Our Strengthening Humanitarian Action initiative aims to continue closing the gap between the demands of burgeoning crises and our ability to respond, including:

- a proposed Humanitarian Learning Strategy and Framework to provide minimum humanitarian training for all staff, and to improve the skills of managers to lead in an unexpected crisis;
• an expansion of UNICEF’s Emergency Response Team to improve our standing response capacity and reduce the burden on staff; and
• renewed partnerships with rising humanitarian actors to expand the pool of available human and financial resources for humanitarian responses globally.

Human resources policies and staff benefits — such as danger pay and housing allowances — will also remain of fundamental importance, not only for staff welfare, but to strengthen the incentives for UNICEF staff members to serve in emergencies. This includes measures to help staff members spend more time with their families…an improved rotation policy that will make it everybody’s responsibility to serve in humanitarian situations…and an “office and residence in a box” initiative, so that staff members enjoy a minimum standard of accommodation, hygiene and safety when serving in challenging environments.

And to deal more effectively with staff stress, we’re creating four additional staff counsellor posts in the regions in greatest need.

Our UNICEF colleagues in the field deserve this support, because they show us — each and every day — that while crises may increase around us, our commitment to children will never decrease.
In November, we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Each new bout of conflict…each outbreak of a deadly disease…each unexpected natural disaster…has the potential to roll back the great progress the world has made — and to which our staff members have contributed — in reducing child deaths and improving access to nutrition, safe water and education in recent decades.

So what better way to mark the 25th anniversary of the CRC than to re-dedicate ourselves to those children most marginalized…most excluded…most trapped? Those living in — or fleeing from — areas of conflict? Those struggling day by day to survive following a natural disaster — shaken by what they’ve endured, but hopeful that tomorrow will be better than today? Those suffering from a deadly disease that is cruelly spread through the simplest, yet most vital gesture — human touch?

For the child we help today in the midst of an emergency will one day grow to become the adult who will carry her country along the path to future development, and assume the responsibility for the following generations.

She cannot shoulder that burden alone. Her fate is our fate. Her future, ours.

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