Statement to the UNICEF Executive Board

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Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates,

It is my pleasure to address this Executive Board Session and submit for your approval the Country Programme Document (CPD) for Bosnia and Herzegovina¹.

I am pleased to report that the CPD has been developed in close collaboration with, and with full participation of, national and local authorities and stakeholders, including children and young people. I am also very happy to note that the quality of the CPD has been acknowledged by the Members of this Board, as no comments have been received since the document was shared in late June.

Mr. President,

Bosnia and Herzegovina is an Upper Middle Income Country and, like most of them, the situation of children is still characterized by marked disparities. The country is also vulnerable to internal and external shocks, as demonstrated by the economic crisis of recent years and the flood emergency that devastated Bosnia and Herzegovina last May.

The CPD in front of you adds critical value to the government’s own efforts to accelerate the universal realization of child rights, as it clearly supports key national and sub-national priorities, and its results are aligned with the goals and targets identified with partners at various levels of governance.

¹Executive Board Document E/ICEF/2014/P/L.12
From a strategic point of view, the Country Programme represents well UNICEF’s evolving engagement in the CEE/CIS Region and our roles in middle income countries.

First, the approach, focus and strategies contained in the CPD do reflect the foundational normative principles of the human rights-based approach to development. They also closely match the implementation strategies of the 2014-17 UNICEF Strategic Plan. Moreover, the CPD has been tailored to work coherently with other UN agencies: the new Country Programme is derived from the 2015-19 UNDAF, and will contribute to the achievement of 10 of the 13 UNDAF Outcomes.

Second, the Country Programme has clearly identified groups of vulnerable children who will be the focus of our cooperation: children with disabilities, children of minorities – especially Roma – and children living in impoverished communities.

Third, the new Programme of Cooperation is firmly rooted in four complementary strategies:

1. Moving forward the national dialogue regarding child-friendly social norms, through communication for social change, to trigger positive behaviours and attitudes towards children of all backgrounds; promoting civil society engagement in adopting inclusive and tolerant attitudes; and increasing the number of people supporting the social inclusion of children with disabilities.

2. Enhancing the national child rights monitoring system, through supporting the systematic gathering, analysis and use of disaggregated data, and by strengthening the capacities of relevant ministries, the ombudspersons and the media. This will enable
policy design to be based on more solid evidence and robust analysis.

3. Redoubling current efforts to increase essential budgets for children and finding new opportunities to increase investment in key programmes proven to effectively reduce disparities. The next cycle will establish a harmonized approach to equitable minimum social benefits for all disadvantaged children and their families.

4. Securing the most up-to-date policy advice and technical expertise to strengthen the national capacity to reach excluded and vulnerable children. This will be done for example, by modelling and costing innovative and inclusive services and by promoting their nation-wide replication.

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates,

You will remember that a delegation of the Bureau of this Executive Board visited Bosnia and Herzegovina just over a year ago. The new CPD did benefit from the interaction with the Delegation and the shared understanding of key priorities to be addressed that was reached during the visit.

Given time limitations, I will very briefly highlight three key areas of results for children where UNICEF, in partnership with the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina, will be pursuing reductions in equity gaps. These are: early childhood education, inclusive quality education, and child protection.
In early childhood education attendance has doubled since 2006, but remains very low at 13 percent; it is even lower among excluded groups: 1.5 percent among Roma children and 2 percent among children from the poorest quintile. The new Country Programme will support initiatives that promote social change and increase awareness of the importance of early childhood education. It is expected that, by the end of the cycle, at least 10 percent of Roma children and an increasing proportion of children with disabilities will be enrolled in preschool education programmes.

Another critical result area is reducing equity gaps in education. As noted by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in its 2012 Concluding Observations, access to education remains limited for children with disabilities, and ethnic divisions persist. While attendance is high at 92 percent in secondary education, it is only 27 percent for Roma boys and 18 percent for Roma girls. The new CPD will support interventions related to strengthening capacities of teachers and other professionals in inclusive and intercultural education, to foster greater school participation among communities with very low attendance rates.

Regarding child protection, Bosnia and Herzegovina still suffers from a high rate of children in residential care, reaching 276 per 100,000 in 2011, one of the highest in the region. Major bottlenecks to lowering this number include insufficient family support services, weak foster care systems, low awareness of alternatives to institutions and weak capacities among social workers. The new Programme of Cooperation will focus on professional development, as well as social behavioural change, to contribute, by the end of the cycle, to an expected 40 percent reduction in the number of children in institutions and a decrease in the proportion of children with disabilities in residential care from 68 to 40 percent.
Mr. President,

These efforts are especially important and relevant at this particular juncture, when children and their families are facing a period of crisis brought about by the flood emergency. UNICEF will be working towards strengthening local capacity -- fostering clear accountabilities and modern management practices and more equitable allocation of resources at decentralized levels, especially to benefit populations most difficult to reach.

Some of the results areas I have highlighted have the potential to become models for other countries. An important component of the new Country Programme is therefore to evaluate innovative solutions for equity and social inclusion and support the country’s engagement in horizontal and south-south cooperation, and Bosnia and Herzegovina’s contribution to global and regional knowledge.

Thank you, Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates, for your kind attention. I look forward to your comments, questions and guidance.

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