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Report of the Field Visit to Burkina Faso by Members of the Bureau of the UNICEF Executive Board, 26 April to 2 May 2014

Presentation of the Report by H.E. Mr. Stephan Tafrov, Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to the United Nations, and Vice-President of the UNICEF Executive Board

New York, 11 September 2014

- I had the honour to lead the Delegation of Members of the Bureau of the UNICEF Executive Board for the field visit to Burkina Faso that took place from 26 April to 2 May 2014. The Delegation comprised of H.E. Mr. Denis Regis, Permanent Representative of Haiti to the United Nations and Vice-President of the UNICEF Executive Board; H.E. Mr. Bo Jensen, Ambassador of Denmark to Burkina Faso; H.E. Ms. Koki Muli Grignon, Deputy Permanent Representative of Kenya to the United Nations; H.E. Mr. Sahebzada A. Khan, Deputy Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations; Ms Nina Nordstrom, Secretary of the UNICEF Executive Board; and Mr. Guy Hubbard, Reporter.

- The field visit allowed the Bureau members to gain first-hand knowledge of UNICEF work at the country level and to better understand the challenges facing children and women in Burkina Faso.

- The delegation had the opportunity to meet high-ranking officials at central and regional level and to discuss important issues related to children’s rights and well-being.

- The delegation was honoured to be received by the First Lady of Burkina Faso Mrs. Chantal Compaoré, who is also a Goodwill Ambassador for the worldwide ban on female genital mutilation/cutting.

The Bureau members were received by the President of the National Assembly who gave a detailed account of child protection legislation.

Fruitful meetings were held with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and with high-ranking officials from other ministries (Education, Health, Water and Sanitation, Mines and Energy, Social Affairs, Justice, Home Affairs), as well as with parliamentarians and parliamentary commissions.

The ministries expressed satisfaction with their cooperation with UNICEF.

- During field visits the delegation met with governors of Sahel and Nord regions and was briefed on the challenges different regions face and the steps being taken by local authorities, in collaboration with UNICEF, to address them.
- The Bureau had a fruitful meeting with UNICEF Regional Director for West and Central Africa Mr. Manuel Fontaine who shared his insights on some of the main challenges facing the region.

- Discussions held with civil society organizations underlined the various domains of collaboration with Government and other partners, emphasizing also three main bottlenecks impeding progress: insufficient funding, weak logistical capacity and heavy disbursement procedures.

Field trips.

- The delegation visited a UNICEF-supported project run by a non-governmental organization aimed to protect vulnerable children without parental care. The number of children living on the streets of Burkina Faso continues to grow at an alarming rate. Emergency support is provided to children retrieved from the streets, including education, healthcare and family reunification.

- The Bureau members visited an artisanal gold mine in the Northeast where mostly children and women were employed. The delegation is very concerned about the magnitude of child labour in artisanal mining. Although child labour is illegal in Burkina Faso, the powerful social and economic pressures driving this phenomenon have thwarted government attempts to eradicate it. Some positive initiatives have been introduced, including vocational training for children who have worked in the mines; a new mining legislation is also being considered.

- The delegation visited a primary school and Early Childhood Development (ECD) centre in a village in the Northeast. The school and the centre are positive examples of the significant results achieved in the education sector over the last decade by the Government of Burkina Faso in close partnership with UNICEF.

- Bureau members visited a Malian Refugee Camp hosting some 11,000 refugees in the Northeastern part of Burkina Faso. UNICEF plays a key role in addressing the humanitarian situation in refugee camps through the provision of accommodation, food and drinking water, health services and education. Still, the situation in the camps remains precarious.

- The delegation visited a UNICEF-supported nutritional health centre in the Nord Region run by a non-governmental organization. Severe acute malnutrition remains a major problem for the country. The main challenge for nutrition programming is predictable and long-term funding.

Key issues facing children in Burkina Faso.

- The country is far from meeting goals to eradicate extreme poverty, improve access to sanitation, promote gender equity and decrease under-fives and maternal mortality.

- Children and women still face a number of challenges, including access to healthcare, education, protection, water, hygiene and sanitation services, etc.
- Burkina Faso has been experiencing grave demographic challenges in recent years with the rapid population growth of more than 3 per cent per year that has practically cancelled the benefits of the relatively high economic growth of 6–7 per cent per year.

- The Bureau noted with deep concern that child labour in gold mines remains a major problem in Burkina Faso that needs urgent action by all stakeholders, and commends UNICEF efforts in this regard.

- Despite being legally banned Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting is still widespread with more than 75 per cent of the country’s girls still being subjected to this harmful practice.

The existing high-level political commitment should be further galvanized to build a broad-based movement to end FGM/C, child marriage and related discriminatory practices in the next generation.

- Malnutrition continues to be a major concern: Burkina Faso has achieved significant progress in reducing both acute and chronic malnutrition but still more than one million children under 5 are affected by stunting annually.

- There are approximately 35,000 Malian refugees in Burkina Faso and the number is increasing.

Conclusions and recommendations.

- The Bureau noted with satisfaction the positive collaboration among United Nations agencies for the protection of children in Burkina Faso and encouraged their coordinated efforts under the framework of delivering as one.

- It was evident from the meetings and discussions that UNICEF has taken a very strong position in terms of protecting children and their rights in Burkina Faso.

- The members of the Bureau appreciate the crucial role UNICEF plays in support of the Government to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and to advance the rights of children.

- The delegation observed with satisfaction that the Government and local authorities were open to ideas and willing to commit resources to advance the cause of children.

- Finally, I would like to express our gratitude to the Government and people of Burkina Faso for their warm welcome, the hospitality and the constructive engagement, as well as to the UNICEF country management team in Burkina Faso and the UNICEF staff in New York for making all the necessary arrangements for the success of the visit.