Honorable Ministers, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentleman, I call to order the Second Regular Session of 2015.

On behalf of the Bureau and the Executive Board, I extend a warm welcome to everyone. A special note of appreciation for the Permanent Representatives and other high-level officials who have travelled to New York from their capitals to show their support for UNICEF and for millions of children the organization serves.

Few people are as dedicated to the cause of children as the person sitting to my right: UNICEF Executive Director Mr. Anthony Lake. He has been an indefatigable champion of children – of their strong claim to realizing their rights, to equity, and to fulfillment of their potential and their dreams. I can tell you Tony Lake does not sit in his New York office for long: instead, he is constantly on the move, travelling to wherever the situation of children demands. I’m told he even reads Executive Board documents on planes and trains.

Tony Lake is supported by a talented team of Deputies, whom I also greet and thank for their excellent collaboration with the Executive Board: Mr. Omar Abdi, Ms. Yoka Brandt, Ms. Fatoumata Ndiaye and Ms. Geeta Rao Gupta.

Words of appreciation are also due to the National Committees for UNICEF, who fundraise and advocate so effectively for children.

To my fellow members of the Bureau: my profound gratitude for being such a cohesive and supportive team this year. You have consistently attended Bureau meetings, informal consultations, and Executive Board sessions – even when your schedules were tight. And you enthusiastically participated in the Field Visit of the Bureau to Malaysia, as well as the Joint Field Visit of the Executive Boards to Jordan, the report for which we have before us this session.
You have scrutinized and commented on Executive Board documents and draft decisions so that you could ably guide UNICEF.

Similar words of appreciation go to the rest of our Executive Board members and observer delegations. Thank you for advocating for children in international forums, for attending many Board-related meetings and for sharing your advice as well as valuable experience from your countries. Thank you also for your active participation in the Executive Board field visit to Madagascar, where you saw first hand how much was being done to improve the lives and well being of children. Please continue this sterling work.

And of course, I tip my hat to the Secretary of the Executive Board, Mr. Nicolas Pron, to the Assistant Secretary of the Executive Board, Mr. Gilles Fagninou, and to their team working behind the scenes to support the mutually rewarding relationship between UNICEF and its Executive Board. I also convey our gratitude to the United Nations Conference Services, interpreters and others who contribute to the smooth running of Executive Board events.

It is because of all of you that Executive Board sessions are so productive and collegial -- and that children, not politics, remain our real concern.

Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, this is a momentous Executive Board session, as it takes place on the cusp of a historic milestone: the adoption of the United Nations post-2015 development agenda at the Sustainable Development Summit later this month.

The post-2015 agenda, with its 17 sustainable development goals and 169 targets for the year 2030, seeks to end extreme poverty, equitably promote prosperity and well-being for the world’s peoples, and protect the environment for ourselves and future generations. It is the most ambitious human endeavor of its kind, transformative in its goals and envisaged implementation.

We must thank all of you who have spent months, if not years, negotiating this agenda and related outcome documents. As a result of your efforts, children’s issues are boldly and directly addressed as never before.

conference broke new ground in stating, in no uncertain terms, that investment in children was necessary for development.

The post-2015 agenda also promises to contribute to meaningful consensus on key environmental issues at COP21 in Paris, in December. And it will no doubt influence other global initiatives for decades to come, including the next quadrennial comprehensive policy review, already under discussion.

The post-2015 agenda will be sustainable not only because it champions justice, equity and peace but also because it translates these lofty ideals into concrete action on the ground. During this second regular session, we will see how UNICEF has already seized opportunities to work with Governments, UN and other partners to incorporate the SDGs into country programmes of cooperation, some 20 of which are presented at this session.

It is up to all of us -- Governments, Executive Board members, United Nations organizations, civil society, the private sector, local communities and children themselves -- to make sure this agenda is implemented fully and on schedule. This will be a challenging task.

The Millennium Development Goals opened up a new path in proving that profound change could take place through the setting of an international agenda and ensure close follow-up.

According to the Secretary-General’s 2015 report, the MDGs cut by half the number of people living in extreme poverty and helped millions of children to survive their first five years, to eat more nutritious food, to obtain better health care and reduce their exposure to major diseases, to go to school, and to live in a more cared-for environment. The Goals chalked up substantial gains, even though not all of them were fully achieved by 2015.

But it should be remembered that the post-2015 agenda will be launched in a very different setting. One of greater inequality, of more damaging environmental degradation linked to natural disasters and other crises, and of more widespread and brutal conflict, to name a few examples. At the same time, the post-2015 agenda’s goals and targets are even more ambitious and wide-ranging than those of the MDGs, and encompass countries and communities of all income levels.

Therefore, this new agenda will require changing old ways of doing business and embracing innovation. It will require reaching every child, especially the most
disadvantaged and vulnerable. It will require strengthening the capacity of the least
developed countries, and other low-income countries, to gather and analyze data
and track progress, so that they have a better chance of reaching the goals and
targets. It will require working in new ways in middle- and upper-income countries
to reach children who are overlooked in data that are based on national averages.

Such work will be helped by UNICEF’s acknowledged leadership in these areas,
by its refocus on Equity, and by tools such as UNICEF’s Monitoring Results for
Equity System and deprivation analysis. It will be helped as well by UNICEF’s
strengthened operations, audit and evaluation functions, and related management
responses. One instructive example from this session’s agenda is the synthesis
evaluation report on cash transfer as a social protection intervention, and the
the corresponding management response.

The post-2015 agenda will require that UNICEF and other implementing partners
are ‘fit for purpose’. First and foremost, UN agencies will need to continue to
deliver on the QCPR and standard operating procedures. They must work towards
achieving even more coherence on the ground to support Governments in
achieving meaningful and lasting results.

This is not to say that individual mandates and capabilities will be ignored. In
helping to achieve results through coherence, UNICEF must draw on its
considerable comparative advantages and strengths -- including its diverse funding
base and its acknowledged leadership in helping children realize their rights.

Being fit for purpose includes being ‘fit’ through adequate funding. In this regard,
we have both good news and bad – as delivered in the three reports on finances for
this second regular session. In the financial report for 2014, from UNICEF’s
Private Fundraising division, we learn that UNICEF’s private-sector revenue for
last year was the highest-ever recorded, $1.28 billion, exceeding all expectations;
and just 25 National Committees were able to raise $1.2 billion. Yet, in the report
on financial estimates for implementation of the UNICEF Strategic Plan -- a plan
closely aligned with the SDGs -- we see that regular resources, which are the
backbone of UNICEF’s funding, continue to shrink as a proportion of total
resources.

The third report, providing background to the Structured Dialogue on financing
results of the Strategic Plan, indicates that the funding of UNICEF are not keeping
pace with the demands placed on the organization by burgeoning emergencies.
Consider this shocking figure, from UNICEF’s emergency operations: in 2014, the
organization responded to 294 humanitarian situations in 98 countries. What’s more disturbing: too many emergencies are grossly underfunded.

We must give urgent attention to these and other issues. These issues include, to name a few: One, the escalating brutality against children, women and other civilians in humanitarian situations. Two, they include rampant violence against women. As Mr. Anthony Lake and Ms. Geeta Rao Gupta noted in their recent news story, an estimated 1 woman in 5 will become a victim of rape, or attempted rape, in her lifetime.

And three, they include the equally horrific global refugee crisis. This humanitarian catastrophe involves nearly 60 million people driven from their homes by war and persecution – half of them children. The numbers involved and suffering experienced in this crisis are unprecedented.

Just last week the harrowing and heart breaking image of a three year old toddler lying dead on a beach after his parents’ desperate flight from conflict has reverberated across the world. This should shake our collective conscience and prompt a call for urgent action.

We must not flinch in our responsibilities to address these desperate situations in which children are tragic victims or they will derail our best-laid plans.

Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, this is our chance to make history. The post-2015 agenda proves to the world once again that we in the United Nations do more than talk.

In crafting the post-2015 agenda we have set aside our differences to reach consensus on a shared vision of human progress – for ourselves and future generations. And we have proven that we are ready to take decisive, collaborative action to make that vision a reality.

It has been said many times that the poor will always be with us. For the first time in history, we are challenging this assumption. We are challenging it through the SDGs and post-2015 agenda, using every rational and inspirational means at our disposal.

We are tackling persistent inequality, gender violence, the brutality of war, and a host of other blights on humanity, which were taken for granted for centuries. We
are placing children front and center of the development agenda – recognizing, finally, that attention to children is a driver of development, not an afterthought.

For all of you who wish to join us in supporting this groundbreaking, visionary post-2015 agenda, make no mistake: Our aim is no less than to change the world.

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