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Executive Board Statement
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In two weeks, the General Assembly will come together to ratify a new consensus, and summon renewed political will, around building a better world. A world defined in large measure by the Sustainable Development Goals. A great moment, the culmination of extraordinary effort.

Much attention will, naturally, be on the “D” in the SDGs — “Development.” But today, I’d like to focus more on the “S” — Sustainable. Because sustainable development is, by definition, development that can be carried on — sustained — by future generations.

But they cannot do so without our support. Today’s children hold “tomorrow” in their hands. Ultimately, they will be the ones to decide whether development is carried forward — or whether it is not. We need to help prepare them.
Making development sustainable requires many things.

It means, for example, confronting climate change — a cause not only of floods and droughts, but food insecurity for hundreds of millions…lost agricultural income…malnutrition…disease…migration…even an estimated 400,000 deaths each year. All concentrated in those countries that can least handle these challenges — and faced by those citizens and communities least able to survive them: the poorest, the most marginalized, and, everywhere, the children.

By the end of the 1990s, climate-change related disasters affected about 66 million children per year. In the coming decades, this number is projected to reach 200 million children — a tripling. More children denied their most basic rights: out of school…facing the risk of trafficking, abuse, exploitation and forced labour.
So carrying development forward means helping communities reduce the risks and impacts of natural disasters like earthquakes, hurricanes and floods. The cost of natural disasters over the last two decades has been substantial: $2 trillion — and up to $1 trillion more in uncounted household and informal business losses. In a matter of moments, disasters not only erase past development gains won over decades, they exact a heavy toll on economies and lives alike.

Beyond confronting climate change, sustaining development means investing in those who must carry it in the future — today’s children. Happily, and thanks in important part to the efforts of the members of the Group of Friends — initiated by Pakistan, and now co-chaired by Luxembourg, Panama and Bulgaria — the SDGs reflect the fact that an investment in children is an investment in their ability to sustain development tomorrow…and build our common future. Because how can they do so tomorrow if we fail them today? If they lack an education? If they go hungry or without basic sanitation or medical care? If they view their world through a lens of mistrust and hopelessness?
And carrying development forward means investing specifically in the most disadvantaged children. Because if we fail to do so, we won’t achieve the truly sustainable economic progress or political and social stability that comes in more equitable societies. As we discussed in June, the best way to end the vicious cycle of inequality is to set in motion a virtuous cycle — a cycle in which every child gets a fair chance to survive, to grow up healthy and protected, to attend school, and to more fully contribute to her future and the future of her society.

Today, I’d like to focus on another pathway, too often overlooked, to carrying development forward and to securing a better, healthier, safer future for children — including children in crisis. It is this: breaking down the arbitrary boxes the world has created for “development” and “humanitarian” action. Conceptual…organizational…operational boxes.

The divide we create between the two is arbitrary, because, on the ground, there is no clear dividing line between them. After a disaster, development progress may continue in some areas of a society while being set back in others.
And just as a lack of development can cause and exacerbate conflicts and natural disasters, so disasters and conflicts can halt and even reverse development progress. Strong development will reduce the likelihood of future crises — and immediate humanitarian action in the midst of a disaster can be an opening to “build back better” and advance development.

The challenge is growing. Last year we reached the highest number of forcibly displaced people since World War II — 50 million. Over half were children. What becomes of their societies tomorrow when they are denied long-term support today?

Reaching them is critical to the future development of their societies — and often to the societies to which they’ve fled. The burden is huge — and not only on the recipient countries in today’s headlines. Last year, 86 per cent of the world’s refugees fled to developing countries — with least-developed countries hosting a full quarter of the total.
Our equity agenda is about reaching the most disadvantaged, the hardest-to-reach, the hardest-to-serve. And as the child migrant and refugee crisis engulfing Europe at the moment so clearly and tragically shows, is there anyone harder-to-serve than a girl trapped by conflict, forced from her home to make the perilous journey to safety in another country? Or a boy left alone in a shattered community after an earthquake — his parents dead or missing, leaving him vulnerable to abuse and exploitation?

We cannot achieve truly sustainable development tomorrow, if we fail to reach precisely these children today.

And in fact, children living in countries affected by humanitarian crises — conflicts, health emergencies or natural disasters — comprise a significant portion of the world’s most disadvantaged.

To illustrate the importance of reaching these children, let us consider the great task before us in implementing the SDGs, and all it will take to complete this task.
This morning, I’ll outline some statistics that capture the lives of millions of children living in countries where UNICEF has issued a humanitarian appeal, as their societies cope with conflicts or natural disasters. I will use this statistical grouping simply to illustrate my point. But we could use other groupings of countries in crisis and come to the same conclusion.

The point is this: *We cannot reach the Sustainable Development Goals without reaching the millions of children living in the midst of humanitarian emergencies. Period.* The SDGs depend on this.

Children in these countries account for nearly half of all under-five deaths. In the most practical terms, how can we reach SDG 3 to secure healthy lives for all ages if we don’t reach these children?
Four-fifths of these countries have stunting levels above 20 per cent — nearly two-thirds have stunting levels above 30 per cent — and two-thirds have unacceptable levels of wasted children, above five per cent. How can we reach SDG 2 to end hunger and all forms of malnutrition if we don’t reach these children in emergencies?

These countries account for 43 per cent of all out-of-school children at the primary and lower-secondary levels. And how can we reach SDG 4 — inclusive and equitable quality education for all — if we don’t reach these children?

As we mark the start of the SDG era, the challenge before us to implement the goals is enormous — faced with the effects of climate change and natural disasters, conflicts growing in number and scope, and the migrant and refugee crisis reverberating across borders.

Given these challenges and the clear need to reach the children of emergencies, we cannot afford to be unclear or confused in our approach.
We must not continue perpetuating the artificial distinctions between humanitarian and development action.

But in so many ways, our actions continue to keep these efforts apart. Separate funding appeals. Separate advocacy campaigns. Separate conferences. Separate initiatives — with, for example, a World Humanitarian Summit process underway while we launch the new Sustainable Development Goals. As if development and emergencies existed in different worlds.

These are all vital, worthy efforts — but kept within separate boxes that fail to recognize what is, in fact, an integrated reality.

I do not mean to say that the separation is complete. We are, of course, acting in a more integrated way in some areas.
When we educate a girl displaced by conflict, we’re not only giving her immediate sanctuary and protection. We’re helping her shape her mind…build her own future…contribute to her family and society when she becomes an adult…and perhaps even become a voice of peace and reconciliation in her community and country. That’s development.

When our No Lost Generation campaign supports today’s children of Syria, it’s also supporting the future of Syria — built by today’s children who, we hope, will one day re-build and reconcile. And the campaign has been supported by both Humanitarian and Development funds.
In Nepal, in the humanitarian response following the recent earthquakes, we used the government’s social assistance programmes as a platform to disburse cash transfers to about 400,000 of the most vulnerable people there. In doing so we not only supported the immediate needs of the survivors — we also helped establish a new, rigorous monitoring system within the government’s programmes that can strengthen its social assistance efforts into the future.

Development.

And when we and our partners worked together during the worst of the Ebola crisis, we not only built new Community Care Centres to help care for Ebola victims, we worked to revitalize existing Primary Health Care Centres to treat those suffering from other ailments.

These marriages of immediate and future needs also help build and strengthen local capacity — from strengthened national health care and education systems, to effective national social protection programmes.
And building community capacity is critical — in both emergency and non-emergency contexts. For without having these capacities in place where they’re needed — and, always, designed around local needs — these communities will be less able to withstand future emergencies, and more reliant on foreign assistance, and development plans designed from afar.

Even, or especially, in the urgency of a large-scale emergency response, we must support governments at all levels — and communities — rather than substitute our efforts for theirs, as they continue on their journey to greater development.

But despite the inherent connections between the “humanitarian” and the “development” that should exist in our work, the boxes in our mindsets and institutions remain. Nor will they simply vanish over time. Some things cannot easily or quickly be changed. UN entities and structures within governments do not lend themselves easily to reform.
But we can see a number of new opportunities to break down these boxes and think — and act — anew. If we think differently, we can “do” some things relatively easily. And soon.

Just a few examples:

We can insist on closer co-ordination among humanitarian and development organizations by inviting both groups to planning meetings where specific crises are being discussed.

We can make deliberate efforts to amplify development issues through the World Humanitarian Summit process…to keep humanitarian action front-and-centre as we implement the SDGs…and to champion Disaster Risk Reduction as another means to address climate change through the COP 21 process.
We can better integrate appeals for funds for specific crises for both immediate humanitarian and long-term development needs, and develop donor incentives to help us do so.

We can use more cash transfers in humanitarian action — not only as short-term support for families before they deplete their own assets, but as a means to strengthen social safety nets for the future.

Through these and other practical measures, we must continue making the case for equity — for investing in countries in crisis not only to support emergency response in the short term, but as a practical, cost-effective path to protect and support the most disadvantaged and marginalized over the long term, thus striking a blow against future extreme poverty.

Of course, humanitarian and development efforts are not the only silos we must break down. We must also look for synergies in other ways.
The SDGs, for example, recognize — as the MDGs did not — the inherent connections among economic development, social development and environmental protection.

And in our own work, UNICEF is starting to break down silos within our programming, and to work with our partners on common solutions that transcend individual sectors like health, nutrition, education, WASH or protection. We can see clearly, in a refugee camp, the urgent need to address all of the refugees’ needs in a co-ordinated fashion. We should bring that understanding, still more than we do now, to our longer-term development work.

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A final note: ultimately, none of our efforts will succeed if we fail to address the humanitarian crises themselves.

Of course, there will always be natural disasters. We cannot prevent earthquakes or tsunamis, or every flood.
But are conflicts inevitable? Are protracted civil wars that tear nations and families apart the inevitable product of the worst instincts of human nature?

Or are we able to summon the collective political will — indeed, the courage — required to end the conflicts that inflict so much misery? Are we able, in the words of President Abraham Lincoln, to summon the “better angels of our nature?”

Because ending conflicts would open the single-greatest pathway to broad-based global development…the single-best way to save lives…the single-best way to foster a generation of children ready, willing and able to sustain development into the future. Especially when approximately 246 million children live in countries or areas affected by armed conflict. And especially when the world is faced with what can be described as a “children’s crisis” — the young migrants and refugees fleeing conflict and seeking refuge in Europe.
We should make greater efforts to end conflicts not only for the sake of these millions of children — as if that were not reason enough — but in the interests of every country in the world. The cost of a civil war can be equivalent to 30 years of GDP growth, with trade taking about 20 years to recover once a conflict ends. Last year alone, conflicts cost the global economy an estimated $US14.3 trillion — over 13 per cent of world GDP.

How can we sustain future development when we also sustain these losses, year after year? Can the world afford to lose over 10 per cent of its productivity year after year? How can we lift children out of poverty, poor health and despair when any progress made is so quickly — so brutally, so needlessly — erased?

Wouldn’t ending these conflicts be the best possible contribution to reaching the Sustainable Development Goals?
And what of the losses to our humanity year after year? Are we becoming desensitized to the brutality around us? Or worse, indifferent? What kind of future does humanity have when communities are battered by conflict after conflict, seemingly without end? When children fleeing these conflicts drown at sea...or suffocate in the backs of trucks crossing borders...in a desperate attempt to escape the fighting?

Before we declare calls for meeting that challenge to be Quixotic, or peace to be beyond our grasp, let us consider the words of nine-year old Ali, from Sa’ada, Yemen — one of 1.8 million Yemeni children affected by the ongoing conflict there. He recently asked: “What did we do wrong? Why can’t we live like other children in the world?”

Ali is reminding us that the children in conflicts bear no responsibility for their plight, and have every right to plead for a better life.
The world owes him an answer. The world owes him a determined, non-polemical, consistent, common attempt at peace. Every government represented here today owes all children trapped by conflicts to do all it can to end the carnage that is not only holding back and erasing lasting development gains, but which is eroding our common humanity…our very soul…and the souls of children like Ali who dream of nothing more than to live as other children do. Every child has a right to the quiet blessing of a normal childhood.

Nelson Mandela’s words counsel us: “There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children.”

Or no keener measure, as the world’s leaders gather in two weeks, of the collective soul of our generation.

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