Statement to the Second Regular Session of the UNICEF Executive Board
Agenda item 1: Opening statements by the President of the Executive Board and the Executive Director of UNICEF
New York, September 8, 2015

Thank you, Madam President. Distinguished Delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

The NGO Committee on UNICEF welcomes the progress achieved for children in 2015. In May of next year, the World Humanitarian Summit will be held in Istanbul, Turkey. Coming on the heels of the new Sustainable Development Goals, the World Humanitarian Summit has the potential to, for the first time, link the humanitarian and development agendas in a positive, child-focused manner.

Children alone make up at least half of those impacted in all humanitarian emergencies, and they are disproportionately affected. During an emergency, children are at greater risk of separation from their families, disruption to their education, unlawful recruitment, physical and sexual violence, trafficking or other forms of exploitation, and early marriage. They lack access to quality health care, nutritious food and clean water. Children are among the most vulnerable but they should not simply be viewed as victims. They must also be recognized as agents of change. They know best how to articulate their needs and they want their voices to be heard, their priorities acted upon and their rights achieved.

Last year, a group of child-focused agencies came together to ensure that children’s perspectives are included in the preparations for the World Humanitarian Summit and their rights are addressed in the outcomes. With the generous support of UNICEF, the inter-agency group released a report, “Putting Children at the Heart of the World Humanitarian Summit,” which represents the views of more than 6,000 children in risk-prone, fragile and emergency settings over the last ten years. The report examines children’s perspectives, ideas and solutions related to the four Summit themes.

Key findings and recommendations include:

• Children are agents of change: They want to participate in risk reduction, preparedness, relief and recovery activities. They have ideas and solutions to offer. They want their views to be taken seriously and have their priorities addressed.
• Humanitarian agencies and donors should commit to strengthening child participation and accountability to children in all phases and aspects of the response. Governments should commit to consulting with children in post-disaster needs assessments and recovery plans.

• Children have the right to be protected at all times and call for this repeatedly. A recent report, published by the Child Protection Working Group, entitled A Matter of Life and Death, demonstrates that when implemented well and at right moment, child protection interventions can save children’s lives. Child protection should be mainstreamed across all sectors and integrated programming must be strengthened.

• Children consistently prioritize their education and protection in all types of emergencies. Children expressed concern about disruptions to the education and how this impacts their futures. In the immediate aftermath of an emergency and in situations of conflict, children prioritize their safety, security and protection; however, education quickly becomes the main priority. In conflict settings, children view protection as necessary for continuing their education.

• Child protection and education in emergencies must therefore be prioritized and adequately funded in the first phase of humanitarian response.

• Donors should make available flexible, multi-year funding to ensure children’s rights are met in protracted crises.

• Development actors also have an important role to play in supporting children and families in protracted crisis settings.

• Humanitarian actors must develop indicators to measure the impact of humanitarian action on children across all sectors.

• Children themselves stated that they want the views of the most marginalized to be heard, including street-connected children, orphaned and unaccompanied or separated children and child heads of households.

• Data informing prevention and response actions, such as risk and needs assessments, must be disaggregated by age and gender, as well as disability, ethnicity and other social and economic inequalities faced by children.

It is clear that children see themselves as actors and influencers in humanitarian crises. We as the international community must listen to them and honor their intelligence, passion and abilities.
The report was submitted to the World Humanitarian Summit secretariat as input to the Synthesis report, and we are hopeful these messages will carry forward to the report of the Secretary-General. As champions for children, members of the NGO Committee on UNICEF will conduct the advocacy necessary to ensure children are at the heart of the World Humanitarian Summit. We invite you to be champions for children in this agenda and invite you to join us.

Thank you, Madam President.