UNICEF Executive Board
Second Regular Session 2015

Closing Statement by
Ambassador Dr. Maleeha Lodhi, Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations
in her capacity as President of the UNICEF Executive Board
New York, 10 September 2015

Distinguished Delegates, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, we are coming to a close of the Second Regular Session of 2015, which has been a truly engaging and constructive session of the Executive Board.

As this is my last session presiding over this august body, allow me to make a few remarks on some issues that have had deep resonance for the work of the Board throughout this year, before acknowledging the efforts of the many committed individuals and offices that have contributed to the success of this Session.

I would first like to thank the Executive Board members and observer delegations for their networking and advocacy on behalf of the world’s children throughout 2015. The ‘Group of Friends for Children’ and other Member States are commended for their efforts to ensure that child rights were firmly placed at the very centre of the new development agenda and its financing, and in particular for their work during the
drafting sessions prior to the third International Conference on Financing for Development this past July.

In 2015, this Executive Board adopted 16 decisions covering the range of UNICEF’s work – evaluation, audit and oversight, programmes and policy, and resources. The decisions will contribute to a stronger, more flexible, more nimble, more accountable and more responsive organization: an organization that is more fit for purpose.

At the First Regular Session, the decisions adopted by this body aimed to strengthen UNICEF’s procurement capacity and its emergency response; to bolster private sector engagement and advocacy for child rights and to articulate a general policy framework for the development of future country programmes in countries transitioning from middle- to high-income status, thus providing a precedent for a wider discussion within the UN system.

A highlight of the Annual Session was the Special Focus Session on Equity. Several delegations expressed strong support for UNICEF’s focus on the most disadvantaged children, sharing examples of their Government’s efforts – in partnership with UNICEF – to address inequality and to reach those children who are most in need.
Also in June, the Board warmly received and adopted decisions on three annual reports: the report of the Executive Director, including a report on the implementation of the QCPR; as well as reports on the evaluation function and on internal audit and investigations.

The strong spirit of collaboration among the regional groups during this session led to the adoption of five important decisions that will have a significant and positive impact on the work of UNICEF in the months and years ahead. The decisions adopted covering 20 new country programme documents and the extensions of several ongoing programmes will enable UNICEF to continue its constructive partnerships with the Governments of all 7 of the regions in which it operates.

As a result, millions of children will be able to secure their rights to education, to health care, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene and protection, and our collective efforts on behalf of children – particularly those who are the most vulnerable – can continue on a sustained basis.

I am deeply grateful to Member States for the time devoted to providing comments on the documents during the review period. I am hopeful and optimistic that we can expect the same level of energy and commitment in 2016, when UNICEF expects to present an unprecedentedly high number of country programme documents to the Board.
Adoption of the decision on funding issues related to the Strategic Plan will help to strengthen the mechanisms for attracting and optimizing flexible and predictable funding, allowing UNICEF to continue to meet a prudent liquidity requirement while carefully and judiciously determining the level of its regular resources expenditures.

Through its decision to discontinue the annual UNICEF Pledging event, the Board has recognized the existing opportunities in which more strategic discussions of financing of UNICEF’s operations may take place, and has helped to guide the organization’s processes in closer alignment with UN system-wide coherence.

In the synthesis report on the evaluation of cash transfers, we have heard of the positive benefits of these safety nets for children’s well-being. This can only serve to strengthen UNICEF’s ability to improve social protection programming and to measure the impact of transfers on other sectors; to build additional partnerships; and to make the case for further investments in child-sensitive social protection.

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, as we enter the post-2015 era, humanitarian emergencies loom large on the agenda, threatening the current and future stakes for
children. Among other challenges, this year, UNICEF has responded to the terrible and sweeping effects of the 2014 Ebola outbreak; and provided relief and protection support following natural disasters such as April’s deadly earthquake in Nepal.

UNICEF has also continued to respond to widespread conflict and the consequent rising tide of refugees and migrants. We have all seen – and been deeply moved, indeed outraged by:

- photographs of fathers and mothers passing their babies through barbed wire fences, desperately hoping to safely reach to the other side;

- images of bodies packed in dinghies and rickety boats, crushed one against the other as they cling to life amid high waves on perilous seas;

- throngs of men, women and children crossing dusty expanses with only the barest possessions – people made nomadic by the internal conflict and strife that has pulverized their communities.
For many of these forcibly displaced people, their journeys of escape from war or persecution have become journeys of death for them as well as their children.

I urge Member States to step up their diplomatic efforts to end conflicts and to provide humanitarian and development support in the affected areas. Let us not fail to remember that these children are caught up in situations not of their own choosing. We can, and we must do better for these children and families.

As UNICEF looks to 2016 and the mid-term review of its Strategic Plan 2014-2017, its analysis of the challenges ahead must necessarily be viewed through the lens of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Armed with the recognition that development cannot be sustainable unless all children – the future generation – have the opportunity to survive and thrive, let us carefully scrutinize our focus, funding and future programming.

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As the session draws to a close, I wish to thank all of our participants for their presentations, interventions and their questions. The quality of the discussions during the session was excellent, and results achieved were
in the spirit of dialogue and partnership. The broad engagement of
delegations from across the regional groups was also most welcome.

I wish to thank the Vice-Presidents of the Board, namely the
Representatives of Zambia, Panama, Germany and Estonia, for all their
efforts in helping to manage this session. I am grateful for their
collaboration, support, but above all, their friendship.

I would like to thank all the facilitators for their efforts in bringing the
negotiations to successful conclusions during this year’s sessions.

And on behalf of the Bureau, and on my own personal behalf, I extend
sincere thanks to Mr. Anthony Lake, Executive Director and his senior
management team. The Board congratulates Ms. Fatoumata Ndiaye, the
recently appointed Deputy Executive Director (Management), who joins
the other three Deputies in Mr. Lake’s very competent but tight-knit
leadership circle.

Let me thank our Secretary of the Board, Mr. Nicolas Pron and the staff
of the Executive Board secretariat for their seamless operations and for
their unstinting assistance to me, to the Bureau and to the entire
Executive Board. The quiet behind-the-scenes work of UN interpreters,
translators and editors is acknowledged and also appreciated. I take this
opportunity to commend all the UNICEF staff, particularly those who
work in danger zones and risk their lives, in pursuit of their commitment to serve children and to work tirelessly for their welfare.

So, as we reflect on the successes and challenges of the year, as we look towards the dawn of the SDG era – and the 70th anniversary of UNICEF in 2016 – I think we can rightly feel a sense of accomplishment, of gratification.

I wish you all a safe trip back to your offices and capitals. I wish you another year of productive work as we seek to meet the challenges of changing the world and of achieving a truly sustainable global future for all children.

On my behalf – in my national capacity as well as in my capacity as Chair, I would like to say that it has been a profound pleasure to work with you all. I feel a profound sense of satisfaction in seeing all the good that UNICEF does. I thank you all.