STATEMENT

By Ambassador Stephan Tafrov
Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to the UN

at the Second Annual Session of the Executive Board of UNICEF
during the special focus session on Children with Disabilities

New York, 3 September 2013

Mr. President,

It gives me enormous pleasure to address the special focus session on children with disabilities today. I commend UNICEF for picking a theme which is particularly relevant and profoundly resonates with the renewed equity focus of the new mid-term strategic plan (MTSP). By no means, the call for inclusion places children with disabilities at the core of UNICEF’s work and future activities in this field merit more in-depth discussion. Fully in line with this priority UNICEF has recently launched the first global report “The state of the world’s children” dedicated to the rights and the potential of children with disabilities to live fulfilling lives in an inclusive environment and without discrimination of any kind.

Mr. President,

Bulgaria highly appreciates the impressive work done so far by UNICEF and its Disability section, in particular the concrete results achieved in the past three years. The information provided today by the Senior Advisor Ms. Rosangela Berman Bieler once again attests to the highly pragmatic and forward looking approach followed by UNICEF and confirms its leading role among the UN system in mainstreaming the rights of children with disabilities in program activities at various levels. I wish to warmly welcome the statement made by Mr. Yannis Vardakastanis, Chair of the International Disability Alliance and the invaluable work done by his organization as a key UNICEF partner in promoting the rights of disabled children worldwide. As an important stakeholder under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the disabled people’s organizations (DPOs) have a special role to play in monitoring its implementation and in identifying future measures to advance the rights of persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities.

Mr. President,
Bulgaria supports the main elements of the Disability Action Plan just presented by Ms. Berman Bieler which will serve as a tool to reinforce and operationalize the QCPR and the strategic plan provisions in the specific area of children with disabilities. By building upon the QCPR recommendation and specific references to these most marginalized children in the new MTSP, the Action Plan is expected to foster greater cohesion among the UN system, member states and civil society in mainstreaming children with disabilities, in accordance with their respective mandates and objectives. Bulgaria believes that in order to be effective in transforming lives of people living in poverty, the new post-2015 developmental agenda should be guided and informed by a human rights-based approach to ensure that the commitments made are honored and effectively implemented on the ground. Bulgaria is of the view that development policies and programs should be in line with states' legal obligations to respect, protect, and fulfill human rights. In this regard, my country will consistently promote the integration of human rights as one of the core cross-cutting principles of the post-2015 developmental framework. In particular, we strongly favor mainstreaming the rights of persons of disabilities, including children with disabilities, across the new SDGs, in accordance with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Mr. President,

Bulgaria greatly values and benefits from the ongoing fruitful partnership with UNICEF in reforming and modernizing the child protection sector. This innovative partnership is specifically focused on the most disadvantaged children, including those with disabilities. In the context of the Strategy Europe 20 20 the Bulgarian government approved a National Goal for Social Inclusion along with specific measures aiming, inter alia, to improve the quality of life of vulnerable children and to promote their social inclusion. Wide range of measures have been developed and enforced, including for gradually closing institution facilities, improving the social service network both at community and family level as well as for promoting early child development and providing increased support for families of children with disabilities. Bulgaria remains committed to close all child-care institutions in the course of 15 years in accordance with the National strategy and replace them by a network of community-based services similar to a family environment. Priority in this process is given to the closure of institutions for children with disabilities and of medical and social homes for children of up to 3 years of age. Currently, five projects related to the implementation of the National strategy for deinstitutionalization are being implemented. Since the beginning of 2013,
twelve (12) special care institutions have been closed with a view to keeping up with the projected deadline. In the meantime, my country is in a position to support the UNICEF call for a moratorium on new admissions of children with disabilities in institutions as the process continues.

In addition, a national program focused on equal access of children with special needs to high quality education and training with a view to their social inclusion has been executed. The objective is to integrate children with disabilities in the mainstream schools and reduce the number of the special education facilities. In 2012 a total of 84 pilot inclusive schools were approved as part of the “Inclusive Education” project.

Mr. President,

In conclusion, I would like to express my government’s gratitude for the policy advice and expertise provided by UNICEF through its Office in Sofia and the regional Office in Geneva which is extremely helpful in ensuring sustainability of the reform process in child protection sector and for enhancing national capacities for social inclusion.

I thank you, Mr. President.