

**Statement by Minister Israel Choko Davies
Deputy Permanent Representatives/Chargé d'affaires a.i.
Permanent Mission of the Republic of Liberia to the United Nations
During the General Debate of the First Regular Session of
UNICEF's Executive Board
Tuesday, February 9, 2021**

Thank you, Madam President:

Liberia is pleased to participate as a member, in the Executive Board's First Regular Session for 2021. My delegation congratulates you and members of the Bureau on your election. We assure you of Liberia's unflinching support and cooperation towards the successful implementation of your mandate.

We thank Executive Director, Henrietta H. Fore for her leadership, especially during this difficult and unparalleled global health crisis.

My Statement is aligned to the Statement delivered by the Permanent Representative of Morocco on behalf of African Members of the Executive Board of UNICEF.

We share the concern that the coronavirus pandemic continues to have adverse impacts on all sectors of society. It has deepened pre-existing inequalities and exposed vulnerabilities in social, political, and economic systems. It is evident that the virus has had a regressive effect on gains made in the protection of the rights of children. In short, it has worsened the living conditions of children across the world, especially in developing countries, which are among the hardest hit.

The psychological impact from the pandemic is appalling and alarming. The closure of schools, the processes to adjusting to virtual learning technologies; lack of access to basic health such as routine immunization; lack of outdoor activities, domestic violence, and sexual exploitation are but a few examples to mention.

Additionally, in Liberia, Pregnant mothers and babies birthed during COVID-19 pandemic are continuously threatened by an over-stretched health system and disruptions in services.

And as we confront these worsening conditions, it is disheartening to inform about a National Public Health Emergency due to the recent outbreak of Polio in Liberia; the first since 2008.

The Liberian Minister of Health, Dr. Jallah has further informed that the virus detected in Monrovia has spread throughout the Country and that swift intervention is needed to curtail further harm. Under the National Health Emergency, the Government of Liberia is expected to commence a door-to-door polio vaccination campaign in every community across the Country; as well as enhance surveillance to beef up the fight against the virus.

In the same vein, the President of Liberia, Dr. George Manneh Weah has official commissioned the first-ever state of the art National Polio Emergency Operations Center for the nation.

Despite the challenges mentioned supra, Liberia recognizes and commends UNICEF's active role in advocating for and supporting the protection and welfare of children during this pandemic. In Liberia, UNICEF's partnership with other Governments and institutions, continues to facilitate Birth Registration and the provision of quality essential social services for children.

We hail UNICEF's gallant efforts in the provision of much-needed information and supplies, essential health services, remote learning support, mental health counseling, and psychosocial support, among others. We also applaud UNICEF's leadership role in the new COVAX facility to purchase, transport, and deliver COVID-19 vaccines across the world; specially to developing Nations.

Madam President,
Excellencies,

This week, we will be preoccupied with considering various relevant agenda items for this First Regular Session. These items border on enhancing the crucial work that UNICEF has been doing for children for the past Seventy-five years. They are also critical to reversing the setbacks created by the pandemic to build back better and accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); especially child-focused goals.

Hence, to build back better, we must enhance the way we work and involve children in consultations about decisions that affect them; we must be innovative and adjust to new challenges; we must be resolute in our actions and strengthen partnerships and implementation at the national, regional, and global levels.

Madam President,

In Liberia, we have enacted laws, policies, and programs, such as the Children's Law, the Liberian Children Manifesto, and Child Protection Policies; all geared towards ensuring the protection of the rights and welfare of children across Liberia.

The Government of Liberia's National COVID-19 Response dedicates a pillar to the most vulnerable—women, girls, children, and people living with disabilities. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection drives this pillar. As part of the response, the Ministry provides capacity building for all Child Protection and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence actors at the national and community levels. In partnership with UNICEF, the Ministry operates a Care facility for children separated from families affected by COVID-19 and provides psychosocial, educational, and recreational services.

In recent years, Liberia has made education accessible, especially at the elementary and secondary levels. Recent declaration of tuition-free education in all public universities in Liberia has further increased the number of girls' enrolment. Despite this progress, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the huge digital divide and social inequalities faced by children in developing countries like ours.

We have an anti-trafficking taskforce and have achieved Tier 2 in the fight against human trafficking, significantly reducing trafficking in persons; especially children, and increased internal investigation on cases of trafficking.

Going forward, Liberia commits to continuing its engagement with UNICEF, especially in the formulation of its 2022-2025 Strategic Plan. We once again pledge our support and cooperation to ensure that we build back better and stronger for children; as we maintain a focus on our programme document (2020-2024) which endeavors to ensure that “more children from birth to adolescence exercise their rights to survival, development, protection and participation.”

I Thank You.