

**Joint Statement Executive Board of UNICEF**  
**First Regular Session 2021**  
**UNICEF response to COVID-19**  
**10 February 2021**

Madame President,

I am very pleased to make this statement on behalf of the four co-leads of the UN Financing for Development Initiative “Recovering Better for Sustainability”: Rwanda, Fiji, the EU as a donor, and my own country, the United Kingdom. It is also made on behalf of Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Finland, France, Japan, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Republic of Korea, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States.

We appreciate today’s presentation and welcome the participation of Dr Tedros and Dr Ryan. We commend the close coordination and partnership between the World Health Organisation and UNICEF, which will continue to be critical for the successful global rollout of vaccines under the COVAX facility. We would like to express our appreciation for the staff of UNICEF, WHO and all other aid agencies on the frontline of the response, and to offer our sincere condolences to the families and colleagues of those aid workers who have lost their lives in the pandemic.

I. UNICEF Response

Let me start by commending UNICEF’s COVID-19 response and signalling three areas where we felt UNICEF showed particular leadership:

1. Firstly, UNICEF reacted **with speed**, quickly releasing an appeal document and becoming one of the largest suppliers and distributors of PPE.

2. Secondly, UNICEF worked tirelessly to support the **continuity of basic essential services**, adapting and pivoting programmes through innovative solutions to reach millions of women and children.
3. Thirdly, UNICEF consistently advocated to **mainstream children's rights and needs** into global, regional, national and local response plans, thereby ensuring widespread recognition of the immediate and long-term consequences of the pandemic on children.

## II. Recommendations

Let me now turn to recommendations for the way forward and how UNICEF might build on its response to date. We feel that the international community must prioritise and collectively work together to build back better and greener. This means investing in the immediate health, economic, and human aspects of the response. It also means designing and implementing ambitious policies and programmes to lay the foundations for healthier, more resilient and environmentally sustainable societies. Failing to do so could undermine progress towards the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement.

With the building back better principle in mind, we encourage UNICEF to prioritise the following three areas:

### 1. Inclusion.

UNICEF should continue to embed and prioritise inclusion in all areas of its work, including in its own operations as well as in partnerships with governments and other actors. Using a human-rights based and gender and disability-sensitive approach, it should expand support to reach the most vulnerable and hardest to reach children

with social and financial protection, education and health systems, so that no-one is left behind. UNICEF, as the official procurement agency and coordinator for the COVAX facility and member of the GAVI Alliance, has a critical role in ensuring an equitable distribution of vaccines and supporting country readiness, especially in marginalised and conflict-affected states.

## 2. Resilience

Crisis Resilience is a critical part of the recovery. We have seen that where social protection systems were stronger to begin with, crisis response was more efficient. We encourage UNICEF to systematically bring together its humanitarian, development, and gender expertise to improve the use of social protection approaches in crisis. Improved integration will contribute to continued reform of the humanitarian system away from short-term external assistance to a focus on sustainable recovery, resilience and preparedness, and early action through national systems.

Resilience in education means maintaining learning for millions of children in vulnerable situations and low-income countries, and supporting the most marginalised to access and catch up on lost learning. UNICEF can support government partners to rebuild and strengthen systems to respond flexibly and promptly to shocks, ensuring greater preparedness and more adequate responses to future crises – including the increasing climate-related risks.

## 3. Sustainability

Finally, UNICEF should strive to ensure its response is sustainable and climate-friendly, and does not exacerbate existing environmental challenges. In line with the quadrennial comprehensive policy review guidance, UNICEF should reduce its

environmental footprint and ensure its operations are consistent with low emissions targets, particularly in the realm of procurement and supply delivery.

### III. Close

In closing, the response to COVID-19 is an opportunity to increase UNICEF's ambition when it comes to shaping a better world for current and future generations of children. It is also an opportunity for it to demonstrate strong willingness to address the pandemic through a robust collective effort, inclusive of other UN entities, aid agencies, governments, civil society, the private sector and affected populations. Success will require continued reform and increased coordination based on expertise and comparative advantage to drive well-coordinated delivery that avoids duplication and competing policy and programmatic activity, and maximises the efficient use of limited resources.

We thank UNICEF for its continued global leadership to protect the rights of each and every child. UNICEF can count on our support and engagement as it strives to build more resilient systems and safeguards for children impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thank you.