

**U.S. Statement during UNICEF Executive Board First Regular Session  
Agenda Item 7 – UNICEF Response to COVID-19**

**Wednesday, February 10, 10:00 am – 1:00 pm**

*full statement for the record*

The COVID-19 pandemic represents an unprecedented challenge to decades of hard-won gains in childhood vaccination coverage; fighting HIV, tuberculosis, malaria, malnutrition, maternal and child mortality, and poverty; protecting and advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights; and so much more.

In the wake of a world altered by the global COVID-19 pandemic, we must be proactive and prepare for lasting changes to the development and humanitarian landscapes. This requires adapting policies, programs, and operations to ensure success in the medium to long-term.

The United States welcomes UNICEF's detailed report and commends UNICEF for its expanded, prompt, and partnership-focused response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We urge UNICEF to fully leverage the investments and lessons learned from its ongoing response to continue equitable access to life-saving health, nutrition, education, WASH, and child protection services. We know UNICEF, in light of the long-term development impacts of COVID-19, will ensure that these lessons learned are reflected in its ongoing response and next Strategic Plan.

We welcome UNICEF's close collaboration with WHO and other critical partners. We are pleased to highlight that on January 20 President Biden retracted the notification of the United States' intent to withdrawal from the World Health Organization underscoring the commitment of the United States to multilateral engagement on this very critical issue. This will enable the United States to assist in strengthening the capacity of partners around the world, including UNICEF, to respond to the surging health and humanitarian COVID-19 response; support global vaccine distribution and research and development for treatments, tests, and vaccines, including through supporting the COVAX Facility and the COVID-19 ACT Accelerator; and doing what we can to help address the enormous socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic.

Ensuring every child is protected, healthy, and educated is at the core of the COVID-19 response worldwide and we welcome further information on UNICEF's commitment to addressing protection needs related to COVID-19 and outbreak mitigation measures, including protecting against documented increases in violence in the home, acute distress, closure or reduced access to social services on which the most vulnerable children and families rely, and precipitous closing of residential facilities for children without adequate support for family reintegration.

With an anticipated increase of 9.3 million children under five years of age experiencing wasting globally due to COVID-19, UNICEF will play a critical role in responding to these needs by ensuring access to treatment, managing supply chains for life-saving treatment commodities and supplies, and coordinating implementation partners, and think broadly about providing such services in conflict settings.

UNICEF has a critical opportunity in its future COVID-19 response to elevate and reposition immunization as the backbone of primary health care delivery, primarily in communities that are disproportionately affected by COVID-19 without access to primary care. We encourage UNICEF to proactively identify and analyze the factors and underlying inequalities that increase risk amongst affected populations and expose them to greater harm.

Risk communication and community engagement on COVID-19 needs to be strengthened, particularly in conflict settings, and we still need to do more on addressing vaccine hesitancy. We encourage UNICEF to work closely with IFRC and other humanitarian partners to build trust, combat rumors and myths, and strengthen community engagement. Communities are not monoliths, and we would like to see how UNICEF is addressing these different groups within communities and their concerns.

We appreciate UNICEF's support to education in responding to COVID-19 and concur with UNICEF's lessons learned on the importance of mitigating school closures to strengthen the resilience of education systems against future shocks. We note the need to bolster the crisis preparedness and response capacity of education authorities, as well as data systems to support localized response strategies.

Women, girls, men, and boys have different vulnerabilities to COVID-19 exposure due to underlying socio-cultural norms and gender inequalities. Women's leadership and meaningful participation in COVID-19 prevention and response are critical to the success of immediate lifesaving and humanitarian measures, interim resilience strategies, and longer-term recovery and we encourage UNICEF to include of gender equality, women's empowerment, and gender-based violence issues in all analyses and interviews. The roles that women play within community networks and families makes their participation especially crucial as access to resources become even more limited.

The pandemic has underscored the indispensability of reliable, up-to-date, quality data that is sex-disaggregated and can be made available to policy makers, health systems leaders, clinicians, and the general public. We urge UNICEF to prioritize investments in quality, reliable data across all its COVID-19 strategic priority areas.

We appreciate the challenges COVID-19 has placed on monitoring. What implications have pandemic restrictions had on UNICEF's monitoring and observation activities. What adaptations and contingency plans are being used to maintain oversight, especially of local sub-partners, as well as monitoring, particularly end-use monitoring? Does UNICEF have a minimum set of internal controls in place to ensure appropriate oversight of activities?

We look forward to continued close partnership with UNICEF in its critical humanitarian and development efforts to respond to the COVID-19 crisis.