

**Statement of Noma Owens-Ibie**  
**Chairperson, UNICEF Global Staff Association**  
**Annual Session of the UNICEF Executive Board**  
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Mr President, your excellencies distinguished Members of the Executive Board, our Executive Director, colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is my pleasure to address you today on behalf of all UNICEF staff. In line with the guidelines presented, this will be another abridged presentation, since we are still operating a virtual-mode meeting.

UNICEF staff have continued to operate in the COVID era with full dedication to our commitment to children and women all over the world. I thank Member States for their strong support, their appreciation of the work of UNICEF staff, their endless advocacy for global support to our brand and their partnership in navigating the current and emerging terrain, with full assurances of continuous progress and incremental changes in the lives of all children.

Staff members have operated with heightened professionalism, in the context of global challenges, notably those that are COVID-related. Programme delivery, advocacy, partnerships and our basic pursuit of the rights of children have remained consistent, in spite of blended on-site and remote work, coping with numerous personal challenges, the new normal of increased workload and growing incidence of mental health concerns. Staff members have continued to facilitate UNICEF work in emergencies, support the global vaccination drive and even engaged in voluntary public enlightenment on COVID in communities, social events, places of worship and schools. Sadly, we continue to experience COVID infections among colleagues and their family members, as well as some deaths, linked to COVID and non-COVID causes.

UNICEF is currently undergoing several internal processes, including the development of the Strategic Plan, roll out of the Humanitarian Review recommendations, discussion on Organisational Improvement, now in its second phase and discussion on the Future of Work.

In all of these, the Global Staff Association has requested for a re-engineered staff engagement process that is not tokenistic, but that acknowledges the immense value of tapping on our huge internal resources and enviable talents, our staff, and generating even more robust outcomes in paradigms, processes and results for children, in the short, medium and long term. Mr President, we are making steady progress with our Management in this regard. We are also keeping our colleagues on standby to jump aboard all platforms for engagement and make their voices heard, as we jointly define the bold future that we all desire.

Our partnership with senior management also includes our joint pledge to monitor progress on implementation of the agreed recommendations from the Executive Director's Task Team on Anti-Racism and Discrimination, both to strengthen the assurances of our Executive Director to all staff that this would not be an exercise that would be forgotten and to fulfill our pledge to champion a workplace that is inclusive, respectful, fair and equitable. We stand with our Executive Director and our leaders on this and kindly also request that you all join the vanguard of ensuring that UNICEF continues to promote, practice and actively track its zero-tolerance policy for all kinds of racism and discrimination, in our workplace and anywhere in the world!

We continue to work with the Division of Human Resources and other stakeholders to ensure that the work environment for all staff is conducive and that the interests of our staff, General Service, International Professionals and National Officers, are always considered in policy formulation and implementation, especially in processes of Recruitment, Career Development, Mobility and Rotation, Performance Management and Duty of Care. Mr President, I would like to state that UNICEF staff are among the best that any employer could ask for: they are enterprising, creative, adaptive, energetic and resilient, making them an enviable resource that would always be ready to adjust to and embrace innovation. We have told our senior management that our staff are willing, ready and able to embrace the challenges that the future brings and with minimal investment in capacities, would rise to the call of a new order of doing business within UNICEF.

We have continued to listen to the concerns and fears of our colleagues, as well as feel their energy, enthusiasm and pride. Our colleagues continue to sacrifice time, beyond

conventional work hours, to ensure that required deliverables are met. In places like India, our colleagues have been pushed beyond the boundaries of normalcy but are yet dedicated in working to support the cause of children, while dealing with personal hardships and tragedies. In Myanmar, the unending violence has taken a huge toll on the physical and emotional wellbeing of our colleagues, many of them struggling to find a balance between support to the many children impacted by the internal conflicts and their own families also suffering from the fallout of the crisis. In the State of Palestine, the conflict, destruction and violence are reversing the gains of so many years, reopening wounds of inequities and questioning the sincerity of expressed concerns about the future of those children. All of these, and many more crises in other locations, have worsened physical and mental health and imposed untold stress among our personnel. We have never ceased to transmit these concerns to senior management and will continue to work with them to seek solutions that meet the needs of staff, while not compromising our own commitment to deliver results for children. We seek your support in rallying the world to ensuring the cessation of hostilities and entrenching lasting peace in all areas of conflict.

There is commitment in the organization to walking the path towards culture change and an environment of zero tolerance for all forms of harassment and abuse of authority. Implementation continues to be challenging, with our colleagues expressing increasing concerns about fears of Retaliation. We continue to nurture our strong partnership with the office of the Deputy Executive Director for Management, Division of Human Resources, Ethics Office, Principal Advisor on Culture Change, Office of Internal Audit and Investigations and the Ombudsman, in ensuring that all barriers are removed, desired behaviours are promoted and support structures are accessible. Our Staff Association representatives at all levels are doing their best to act as champions in promoting our core values in their locations, working with their Heads of Offices and Human Resources colleagues. We are currently partnering with the Principal Advisor on Organisational Culture on several initiatives, including tracking the development and implementation of the Global Staff Survey action plans, specifically linked to office results, as well as a Pulse Check Survey that rolls out this week.

The Global Staff Association continues to kindly request that the Executive Board and Member States support us in a call to the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) to

review how it determines compensation for national staff. We hope that the ICSC will address the concerns of national staff in areas of persistent negative salary survey results, pay freezes, currency devaluation and unfair comparator criteria set by ICSC, through the existing salary survey methodology. GSA has joined other UN Staff Unions and Associations in demanding reforms by the ICSC, not only on its survey methodologies but also the principles on which the salaries and entitlements for staff are determined. The current inequities should not be allowed to persist, as they pose a huge challenge in motivating national staff and reassuring them of fairness in the acknowledgement of the great work that they continue to do.

As I round-off Mr President, your Excellencies, distinguished members of the Board, let me reiterate the firm confidence that we have in UNICEF staff to support the progressive transformations that we all envisage, to make UNICEF more competitive, more responsive to global changes and the emerging needs of children. Our impressive pool of internal talent is ever ready to take on new responsibilities and adapt to emerging areas of work. Let me also reiterate our commitment to strengthening our partnership with the Executive Director and senior management in our joint vision of continuous organizational improvement and global leadership for children.

Finally, we would kindly request that you all continue to stand with our Management and staff, as we rally the world to place the agenda of children at the centre of all discussions, budgeting and action.

Mr President, your Excellencies, distinguished members of the Board, distinguished colleagues, I thank you, once again, for the opportunity to speak to you on behalf of UNICEF staff worldwide.